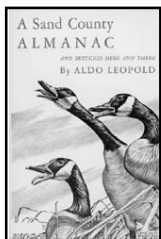


Books on Corporate Environmental Destruction & the Rise of the Grassroots Solutions

by Jim Tarbell

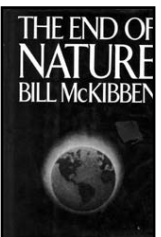
As the American commercial empire grew to global hegemony after World War II, a parallel movement took root to counter the horrendous environmental costs of the empire. Five books outline this history. Aldo Leopold, writing in the late 1940s in his prescient book, *A Sand County Almanac*, pointed out that human superiority lies in our ability to see the future and understand the cost of lost species, “not in Mr. Vannevar Bush’s bombs or Mr. DuPont’s nylons.” He early recognized that the increasingly rapid “disappearance of plants and animal species...must ...be regarded as symptoms of sickness in the land organism.” He emphasized the need to create an ethic that embraces “land” as a broad biotic community of which we are part and dependent upon, and rejected “land” as simply property.



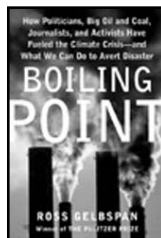
Fourteen years later, in the early 1960s, Rachel Carson in her seminal book, *Silent Spring*, alerted the world to the fact that our intervention into the natural biota with herbicides and pesticides had broad systemic impacts on multiple layers of species including ourselves. Her connection of the poisoning of the planet to corporate policies laid bare the extent of our environmental and political catastrophe.



Then writing in the late 1980s, Bill McKibben in *The End of Nature* pointed out that wild nature could no longer be separated from human society. His premise is that we cannot control nature, but our changes to nature are out of control. Climate change threatens to unsettle the balances that the natural biota has used to maintain stability on our planet for eons.



Ross Gelbspan’s *Boiling Point*, published earlier this decade, makes the connection between the public denial of global warming and specific policies of the oil and coal industries that saw their future threatened by the climate crisis. He points out that, “What began as a normal business response by the fossil fuel lobby—denial and delay—has now attained the status

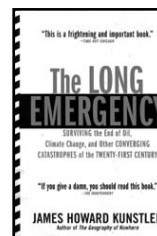


of a crime against humanity.”

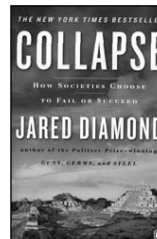
Published this month, *Blessed Unrest* by Paul Hawken adds to this history and more. It covers 200 years of environmental and grassroots activist thinking that has led to the creation of thousands of grassroots social justice, environmental and indigenous groups. Hawken sees this as the largest movement in global history, yet one that is largely unseen by politicians and unreported by the media. “The diversity of this movement, its brilliant ideas, innovative strategies and centuries old histories...is...humanity’s genius and the unstoppable movement to reimagine our relationship to the environment and one another.” As a decentralized organism this movement “is the most complex coalition of human organizations. the world has ever seen...What will emerge is a living intelligence that creates miracles every second.” It is this movement that will save the planet.



Others looking at the impending catastrophe brought on by the perfect storm of resource depletion, climate change and the breakdown of multiple natural systems caused by the corporate pollution of our oceans and soils are not quite so optimistic. James Howard Kunstler in *The Long Emergency: Surviving the End of Oil, Climate Change, and other Converging Catastrophes of the Twenty-First Century* looks at population growth and profligate consumerism as the drivers behind the grim future. He feels that corporate executives have simply been misled by economists and that the “consequences of their action ranging from the destruction of local communities to climate change” were merely “unintended consequences.” In the end he figures we will all have to go local.



Finally, Jared Diamond’s *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* is a look at the long history of the collapse of various human civilizations. Then in the final section he applies these lessons to our present plight. Herein he points out that what makes money for a business...may be harmful to society as a whole. In the end he is cautiously optimistic, but it all depends on what we do.



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