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Let's Help Our Home

The big blue planet is in grave danger. The climate and environment are changing drastically and human interference is part of the problem. However, people could become part of the solution. Unfortunately, the initiative of 'Going Green' to protect the planet took a long time to fully develop into the movement it is today. Much damage had already been done to the environment. The main consensus in the United States was that there were more important issues to worry about than the environment, but a shift in beliefs motivated by specific events led people to view the Earth as a gift that needs to be nurtured before it's too late.

The early rise of environmentalism started in the 1900s with a limited scope. A narrow focus on the environment began when Teddy Roosevelt became president because he was an outdoorsman and saw that certain species of animals were declining in numbers (Theodore Roosevelt and Conservation 1). He visited California in 1903 to see Yosemite, expressing concern for animals and the condition of the habitat that they live in. Motivated by the beauty he witnessed, Roosevelt created the United States Forest Service, 150 national forests, 51 bird reserves, 4 national game preserves, and 18 national monuments(1). By the end of his presidency, Roosevelt preserved approximately 230 million acres of land(1). However, this shows that the main substance of the movement at this time consisted of the protection of land and animals. Problems like pollution and climate change were excluded. The movement

weakened after Roosevelt's accomplishments and the problems he missed wouldn't be considered for a long time.

The movement Roosevelt sparked became overshadowed by the Great Depression and the World Wars. The events caused Americans to lose interest in fixing the problems with the environment. During the Great Depression, people needed to find a way to survive and make it through the worst economic crisis of all time. There was simply no fervor for cleaning up the environment. When both of the World Wars occurred, the main focus was to contribute to the war effort (Kruper 1). The importance of all other aspects dwindled away because winning the wars was completely necessary to protect American ideals. Also, a massive consumer economy caused by a combination of the Great Depression and the World Wars devastated the movement and the environment. People began to see the connection between consumption and prosperity. In a consumer oriented culture, the use of natural resources is required (Shelley 1). The factories built to adjust to the increase in consumption produced pollution and waste (Shelley1). People didn't acknowledge this because they wanted the economy to succeed at all cost and consumption led to success. However, the Cold War put the environmental movement back on track.

The Cold War Era caused new environmental concerns, going beyond preservation of forests and parks, to emerge because it brought previously unknown issues into the picture. Towards the end of the Cold War, Al Gore pushed for the Department of Defense to spend money for broad environmental research (Science and Technology 1). The outcome brought about the creation of the Strategic Environmental Research and Development Program in 1990 (1). This program provided \$35 million for a project that involved the Scripps Institution of Oceanography and other institutions(1). They established a global network of transmitters and receivers underwater.

This technology would detect if the ocean was getting warmer by measuring how fast signals would travel. The time would get progressively shorter because sound travels faster in warm water. This shows that the concern for the climate is now emerging, which would help to prove global warming. However, this idea of global warming wasn't truly accepted by the public yet. Also, during the Cold War, the Arms Race, which started in 1949 between Russia and United States, made the U.S. focus on producing bigger and stronger nuclear weapons (Krupe 1). To accomplish this goal, the U.S. had to conduct a multitude of tests. The U.S. performed around 1,054 nuclear tests between 1945 and 1992 (Nuclear Testing 1). This caused the people to fear the idea of nuclear fallout and its destructive effects on the environment and general health. The ideas of climate change and nuclear fallout were added to the green movement, but these ideas and other issues still needed to be exposed and clearly communicated to make the movement stronger. Rachel Carson did just that. In 1994, Former Vice President Al Gore even said,

For me, personally, *Silent Spring* had a profound impact. It was one of the books we read at home at my mother's insistence and then discussed around the dinner table. . . . Rachel Carson was one of the reasons why I became so conscious of the environment and so involved with environmental issues. Her example inspired me to write *Earth in the Balance*. . . . Her picture hangs on my office wall among those of political leaders. . . . Carson has had as much or more effect on me than any of them, and perhaps than all of them together. (Coulter 1)

One of the most influential books that brought about policy changes and more enthusiasm for the movement was Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. Published in 1962, the book represented an emergent ideology and became massively popular, selling more than 500,000 copies in 24

countries (Coulter 1). It raised public awareness and made people worry about the connection between pollution and public health. Her book became so widely accepted among the citizens of the U.S. that it put pressure on the government to pass laws to eradicate these problems. Policy changes soon followed. As a result, all of the toxic chemicals named in the novel were either banned or severely restricted in the United States. Some of the policies enforced were The National Environmental Policy Act, The Clean Air Act, and the Water Pollution Act. The book revealed the so called “scientific experts” that the public trusted to keep society healthy (1). “Carson showed how experts trusted their own creations too greatly and how they themselves were implicated in a vast complex of private and public interests designed to produce profits for chemical manufacturers and the growing agribusiness sector” (1). In reality, they were just puppets to help to make money for chemical manufacturers and the agribusiness sector. In a broader sense, Silent Spring provided the groundwork and helped the green movement to become an emergent ideology, which would soon grow into the modern environmental movement.

People who opposed the beliefs expressed in Silent Spring resisted the emergent ideology and started personal attacks of Rachel Carson. They denounced her because they believed she was exaggerating the facts and being unscientific. Since the book was published during the height of the Cold War, any person that had ideas that went against the United States’ ways was seen as unpatriotic and communistic (1). Former Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson wrote a letter to former President Dwight Eisenhower that Carson was “probably a communist” (1). Others thought that if pesticides and other chemicals were banned, “our food supply will be reduced to East-curtain parity” (1). In other words, again relating Carson’s

findings to communism, the food supply would be as unproductive as the communist nations east of the 'Iron Curtain' and would put the U.S. in a tough economic position. It would take more than Rachel Carson to completely shift the public consensus because mainstream America remained oblivious to the environment. However, Carson was instrumental in providing the first step for putting environmentalism in the public eye and influenced many other events and works.

Earth Day was established in 1970 by Senator Gaylord Nelson from Wisconsin to stimulate community involvement, causing the green movement to gain more momentum (Rogers 1). It helped show that there is only one earth and humans need to take care of it. Senator Nelson, came up with the idea for a national day to focus on the environment. He saw the disasters like the 1969 oil spill in Santa Barbara, California and realized that he could force environmental protection into the political agenda by pushing this new emerging ideology set up by Rachel Carson (Rogers 1). Senator Nelson proposed the idea to national media as a "national teach-in on the environment". April 22, 1970 was the chosen date (Webber 1). When that day came around, 20 million Americans formed gigantic rallies across the country to promote a healthy environment. Thousands of colleges and universities protested against the harmful practices being done to the environment like "oil spills, polluting factories and power plants, raw sewage, toxic dumps, pesticides, freeways, the loss of wilderness, and the extinction of wildlife" (Rogers 1).

Suddenly, America realized that they were beginning to reach a common ground about the environment. "Earth Day 1970 achieved a rare political alignment, enlisting support from Republicans and Democrats, rich and poor, city slickers and farmers, tycoons and labor leaders" (Rogers 1). Everyone supported the creation of Earth Day. It was a colossal success.

Earth Day led to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency and other acts to help clean up the environment. Nelson received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest honor given to civilians, in 1995 from President Bill Clinton for his role in pursuing the growth of this emergent ideology (Webber 1).

During the second Earth Day in 1971, a nonprofit organization called “Keep America Beautiful” debuted what would be considered one of the “50 greatest commercials of all time” and would help to continue the emergent ideology’s path to becoming dominant (Christopher 1). The commercial shows a Native American man passing in a canoe down a river, polluted with trash. He pulls the canoe onto the shore covered with litter. A bag of junk is tossed at his feet and explodes. The camera goes to his face and a single tear can be seen rolling down his cheek. The ad, which meant to fight pollution and destruction of the environment, became extremely successful at completing this goal. It won two Clio awards and commenced an onslaught of community action (1). Litter in 38 states was reduced by 88% (1). The actor in the commercial became “the face of Native Indians” (1). He was easily the most recognizable Native American figure of the century and became forever linked to the environmentalism movement. However, one pivotal idea was still missing from the movement, which will have the biggest and most lasting effect on the world if not fixed.

With the making of Al Gore’s documentary An Inconvenient Truth in 2006, the emergent ideology reached its ultimate goal and shifted to the dominant ideology because Gore brought research and legitimacy of global warming to the public (Sumner 1). Former US vice president Al Gore made a documentary that discussed the threat of climate change. It resonated with the public and left an incredible mark in minds of Americans. The film accomplished what many

researchers and scientist could not add to the environmental movement. It made citizens fear the words “global warming” (Ken 1). Even though decades of research proved global warming, the scientist and researchers could not push forth this idea of global warming into the public’s mind. “Carbon dioxide spewed by fossil fuel burning and other greenhouse gases were warming the world at an alarming rate, potentially threatening the health and livelihoods of millions of people. Despite the gravity and urgency of their findings, the scientists’ warnings fell mostly on deaf ears for years” (Sumner 1). Until 2006, when the film premiered. The main research shown in the film was done by glaciologist Lonnie Thompson. Shockingly, the research was done 28 years before the documentary was released (Sumner 1). In 1978, Thompson discovered that “rising temperatures were melting ancient titans of ice and snow. Mammoth glaciers were disappearing at unprecedented rates and withering to the smallest sizes in millennia. The delicate balance of Earth’s climate was upset” (1)

The movie forced climate change and global warming into mainstream America. This made it easier for climate scientists to relay their findings to the public. 10 years later, improved technology and more knowledge about the planet provide a clear picture of how the climate will change (Ken 1). Some of the predictions made in the documentary are proving to be true, while others are occurring much faster than Al Gore thought (Sumner 1). A few claims are also being revised. However, many questions are left unanswered. One thing is known for sure. Humans play an integral role in producing carbon dioxide and that’s causing the planet to warm (Ken 1). This truth is what Al Gore made the general public accept. The documentary won two Academy Awards and Gore achieved the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for his success in communicating the real reason for climate change (Sumner 1).

Even though Gore achieved much praise for his work, there were still people who disagreed with him and rebuked the new dominant ideology. The main criticism comes from the Republican party. They agree that the climate is changing, but deny the fact that humans are causing it, even though it is a fact agreed upon by the scientific community. Republicans choose to go against scientists and believe that humans have nothing to do with the changing climate. However, there is a reason behind this belief. If climate change policies were enacted, huge industries like the fossil fuel and coal industries would lose a lot of money because alternative forms of energy and resources would be sought out, causing many jobs to be lost (Sumner 1). So, the Republicans think that pursuing ways to stop climate change would put the United States in an economic crisis. Recently, the current Republican Governor of Florida, Rick Scott, went to the extent to ban the use of words like “climate change” and “global warming” (Korten 1). This shows that some Republicans are trying to get rid of the idea that Gore instilled in the public’s mind by not talking about it (Korten 1).

The “Going Green” movement had trouble becoming legitimate and needed the creation of “An Inconvenient Truth” to turn the emergent ideology into a dominant ideology. It is clear with the vast majority of the American public that the earth needs to be taken care of and global warming has to be stopped. However, the United States has yet to devote serious funding for the green movement because of political differences and inability to reach an agreement. Until these strong party gaps are closed and differences settled, the problems with global warming and the environment may never be solved and many future generations will look back and wonder why nothing was done about these crucial issues. This means that the American citizens have taken it upon themselves to continue the green movement. Every individual can participate in the green

revolution in some way, even if it is simply recycling. People can work together to solve this environmental crisis to clean up the planet and stop global warming before it's too late.

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