

The Empty Celebration of Earth Day

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Theme: [Environment](#)

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Fifty years ago I and other conservationists and public health advocates were thrilled with the idea of an annual Earth Day celebration to honor our planet. At that time, I had more requests from television and radio to speak about health, nutrition and the early natural food movement. I had never received before any requests to speak about the environment, although I was an organic farmer and taught organic and sustainable agricultural methods at my Fertile Earth Farm outside of New Paltz in the Hudson Valley.

Despite the success of the early Earth Day events, there seemed to be very little national interest in deeper environmental issues. Even in those days, I largely spoke to deaf ears. Unlike the worldwide consciousness growing around civil and women's rights, activism advocating for stewardship of the Earth, its resources and wildlife was still in its infancy. I was hoping these various efforts might join together. That included going vegetarian, live through the principle of being in harmony with the natural world and conscientiously simplifying our lives. Rather than focus on a future to purchase and hoard more stuff, explore what other cultures do to connect with our human faculties that foster compassion, kindness, and a shared commons. I believed we should be oracles of peace rather than ambassadors of political hegemony, oppression and power.

Yet how foolish, naive and delusional I was! Now jumping forward fifty years, where does humanity linger today? Last year was the year of Greta Thunberg, a teenager who raised hell, got into the faces of the world's leaders and demanded environmental priority over profits. Despite her sincerity, it turned out to be a rather futile gesture. Her activism is admirable for mobilizing the global youth. But it also served her backers. Pull back the curtain and we discover laissez faire opportunists behind Green capitalism exemplified by the elite such as Al Gore. With very few exceptions, I no longer believe the world governments, and certainly not private industry or the mainstream media, will effectively cause anything to change to the degree necessary to reach a realistic level of ecological sustainability.

Do we ever ask a basic question? What are we trying to save the planet from? The answer is simple: massive over-consumption of unessential stuff that requires endless exploitation of natural resources and the media's manufacturing of consent. Aside from a bubble economy of debt, we have a bubble educational system. Bubble military and pharmaceutical complexes. A bubble agriculture. A bubble body politic. And bubble comfort where we do nothing that advances the causes for empathy by engaging in authentic change and care for others rather than solely for ourselves and our tribe. All of our grasping for luxuries while doing less feeds the predatory capitalist system.

Robinson Jeffers, an icon of America's early 20th century environmental movement, anti-war activist and epic poet warned of the same social hubris that we witness today and is now leading us to an environmental precipice. He believed humanity was too self-centered and

indifferent to the “astonishing beauty of things.” He called on his readers to “uncenter” themselves. The only thing that materialism accomplishes, according to Jeffers, is to teach us how to suffer. His contemporary John Muir would castigate the utter failure of the faith based religions to protect the Earth and pen, “No wonder the hills and groves were God’s first temples, and the more they are cut down and hewn into cathedrals, temples and churches, the farther off and dimmer seems the Lord.”

Sadly, our lying mainstream media rarely portrays the ugliness of our culture and our destruction of the planet. It only focuses on the consequences of climate change disasters, not why these crises are happening and who is ultimately responsible. These are treated as one time events. There is no complex and truthful analysis. For example, last year, there were record breaking weather events. Alaska witnessed for the first time a complete loss of sea ice. Wildfires occurred in Greenland and above the Arctic Circle. There was epic flooding in the American heartland, forest fires devastated large tracts of northern California, and the Bahamas were hit with the first recognized Category 6 hurricane. But these events were only in the news cycle for a day or two before disappearing. Have major media outlets ever gone back to look at the long term consequences?

Our media reality is hyper-kinetic. Short and spastic, it changes with each 24-hour news cycle. Information is rapidly lost from our cultural consciousness and other political news stories replace it before another climate catastrophe appears on the horizon. Consequently there is no time for self reflection or meditation about what each of us as individuals should be doing.

I knew something was terribly wrong during a later Earth Day celebration in Dallas where I was a speaker. After my lecture, I wandered around the fairgrounds observing people eating hamburgers and junk food. Coke cans were scattered about. I realized most came for the country music. They did not attend in order to learn how to better change their lives.

Today there is nothing to stop global warming’s dangerous feedback loops. Repeatedly we learn that the experts were wrong in their predictions by a substantial measure. The Antarctic ice sheets are melting far more rapidly than expected, by a ten-fold magnitude. Sea level rise is happening faster than forecasted. [In 2019](#), the International Arctic Research Center reported that the region has entered an “unprecedented state” that threatens the planet’s climate stability.

The Trump White House does absolutely nothing and instead [has been making efforts](#) to censor press statements related to climate change. Wall Street and the private corporate industrial complex are equally complicit in keeping the public stupefied. In the meantime, there is a new Earth Day for us to stand up and be proud of. And this meaningless ritual we will continue to frivolously revere in the future as matters worsen. There is nothing to be learned from celebrity environmentalists, many who will fly to events in private jets, eat meat and then pontificate about environmental consciousness raising.

This does not mean that I am surrendering my commitment to the Earth nor should you. However, I will no longer waste my time with large environmental organizations and Earth Days. Instead, every day I support local activities such as farmer markets and efforts to strengthen local community resilience. I balance my lifestyle in order to minimize my carbon footprint, support truly sustainable movements, and intentional communities where people choose to live in harmony with nature and focus on the emotional and intellectual quality of

their lives. I will continue to host daily radio broadcasts and direct documentaries on the environment and health. However, what we do as individuals in our homes, with our neighbors and communities also make a difference.

When Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson founded the first Earth Day in 1970, it was because he observed that the health of the planet was being completely ignored in politics and the media. The nationwide event would have been irrelevant except for it having set important milestones. It led to public support behind the eventual passage of Ralph Nader's Clean Air and Clean Water acts and the founding of the Environmental Protection Agency. Nader is undoubtedly our most important and uncompromised environmentalist. It was his commitment to the Earth and our humanity's relationship to the environment that resulted in passing many laws to protect us.

Therefore, instead of another Earth Day pageant on April 22nd, let us reconnect with the beauty of what remains of nature and our neighbors with earnest. And let's remember the words of Chief Seattle from the Suquamish nation that "humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves."

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