

Cultural Movement: The Environment (1960s-70s)

- Environmentalism is more than simply protecting the environment, but it has become a policy that “intersects local, state and federal politics. It impacts business practices, art and the media, education and health”
 - “Environmentalism was based on the spread of an ecological consciousness that viewed the natural world as a biological and geological system that is an interacting whole.”
- Caused by environmental concerns of the era
 - Industrial waste of the immediate post-war period caused alarm
 - SO₂ emissions kill 20 people and injure 600 others near a steel plant in 1950, prompting the Clean Air Act
 - Smog in New York City causes and worsens asthma and other breathing conditions, killing “170-260 people” — also influences the future Clean Air Act
 - Hydrogen bombs were dropped (Bikini Atoll) and caused mutations in the surrounding wildlife
 - In 1961 there were almost two nuclear bomb detonations and a nuclear meltdown
 - There were oil spills near California
 - The increasing use of chemical pesticides and insecticides (e.g., DDT) triggered fear of harm
 - Bald eagles were negatively affected by DDT, and their population decrease was especially shocking to the Americans (the bald eagle being their mascot)
 - The Cuyahoga River branching off of Lake Erie was so polluted that the debris caught fire
 - This event was especially inspirational for the environmental movement, inspiring the song “Burn On” and getting a reference in Dr. Seuss's “The Lorax”
 - The great increase in the number of cars on the roads lead to high concentrations of CO₂ in the environment
 - This prompted the creation of the Motor Vehicle Air Pollution Control Act of 1965
 - Rachel Carson wrote the book *Silent Spring* (1962) that helped raise awareness of the harmful effects of pesticides on the environment
 - The TV show “Our Vanishing Wilderness” brought attention to the loss of biodiversity in the US with photography
- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was created in 1970 by Nixon
 - Conservation was a liberal idea, showing the overwhelming support for this movement even by the conservative president
- Most of the movement was the push for conservation of the environment to protect from human-caused natural disasters (e.g., the Lake Erie Fire, oil spills, DDT water contamination, etc.)
 - The Endangered Species Act of 1973 passed to preserve wildlife
 - The Environmental Pesticide Control Act of 1972 passed to limit the danger of pesticides on the environment
 - The National Wildlife Fund was created in 1961

- Some of the movement focused on the issue of the human damage to the environment and its effects back on humans
 - The National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 (NEPA) set many regulations to protect the environment, and the Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976 controlled toxic chemical output by humans
 - The Clean Water Act of 1972 and the Clean Air Act of 1970 controlled water and air pollution
 - The Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974 helped improve the quality of drinking water for Americans
- There was an evolution of ideas from more current to more global
 - “In the 1960s and 1970s, the environmental movement focused its attention on pollution and successfully pressured Congress to pass measures to promote cleaner air and water. In the late 1970s, the movement increasingly addressed environmental threats created by the disposal of toxic waste. Toward the end of the century, the environmental agenda also included such worldwide problems as ozone depletion and global warming.”
- The first Earth Day occurred on April 22nd, 1970 to recognize the importance of environmentalism
 - 20 million Americans celebrated the first Earth Day
- The Sierra Club, headed by environmentalist John Muir, gained many members and lobbied the government
 - For example, they blocked the construction of the Echo Park Dam successfully
 - By now they have ended 251 coal plants and established 439 national parks
 - Other groups formed included the Friends of the Earth, the National Resources Defense Council, and Greenpeace
- Even now NGOs ask for improvements of the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts and more regulation to prevent climate change and the loss of the ozone layer
- The movement slowed with Reagan’s anti-regulation movement, but was revived later with a large industrial incident in India (1984) and the Chernobyl accident (1986), slowed again with Clinton’s presidency because of the emphasis on “market-based environmentalism” and with the focus on terrorism after 9/11/01, and revived again with more scientific research on the melting ice caps and decreasing ozone layer

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