

From Climate Justice to Green Business: A Rhode Island Case Study of Current Trends in the Environmental Movement



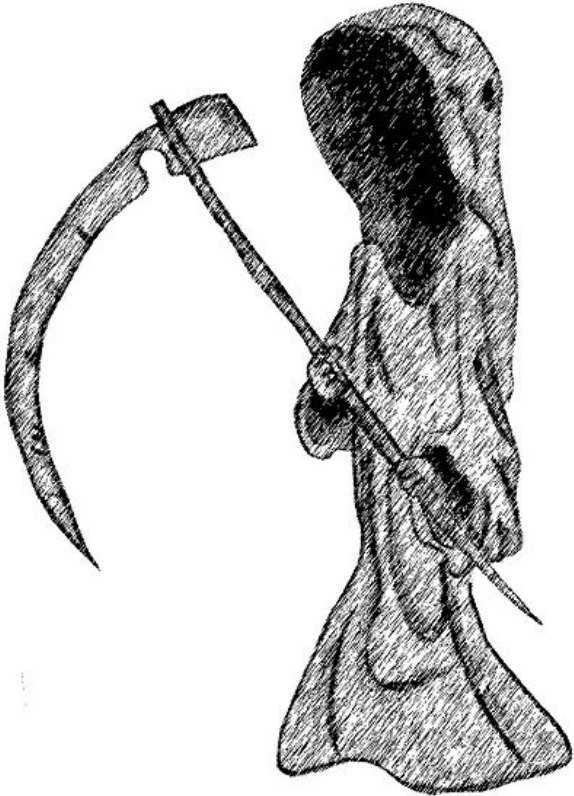
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April 30, 2009

Outline

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Introduction



- Shellenberger and Nordhaus, *The Death of Environmentalism* (2004)
 - Environmentalism is dead
 - Search for symptoms of problems rather than root causes
 - Reliance upon a legislative-focused approach seeking “technical policy fixes”
 - No articulate vision and set of values
 - Solution=coalition of env., labor, business, and community allies with a common vision and set of values

- Van Jones, Green For All
 - Third Wave of Environmentalism
 - “promises to solve old problems while creating new wealth and new jobs”
 - “social-uplift strategy” or maintenance of status-quo (consumption patterns, social relations) with shift in technologies?



Green consumerism:

“reduces people to consumers [whose] power to influence society is reduced to their purchasing power, [and] does not deal with issues such as economic growth on a finite planet, the power of transnational corporations, and the way power is structured in our society.”

-Sharon Beder, *Global Spin: the Corporate Assault on the Environment*



What was that bump?

Thesis question

To what extent does the environmental movement address material consumption and how is the movement evolving into the twenty-first century?



Background

$\text{Impact} = \text{Population} \times \text{Affluence} \times \text{Technology}$

- Mainstream environmentalism
 - Big Green/Big Ten
 - largely look at I term, also T
 - education, advocacy, legislation, litigation

Impact=Population X Affluence X Technology

- Radical environmentalism/social ecology
 - examines root causes, often focused upon *P* and some criticism of *T*, but also examination of *A*
 - direct action

Unless we realize that the present market society, structured around the brutally competitive imperative of 'grow or die,' is a thoroughly impersonal, self-operating mechanism, we will falsely tend to blame other phenomena — technology as such or population growth as such — for environmental problems. We will ignore their root causes, such as trade for profit, industrial expansion, and the identification of progress with corporate self-interest.

-Murray Bookchin, "What is social ecology?"



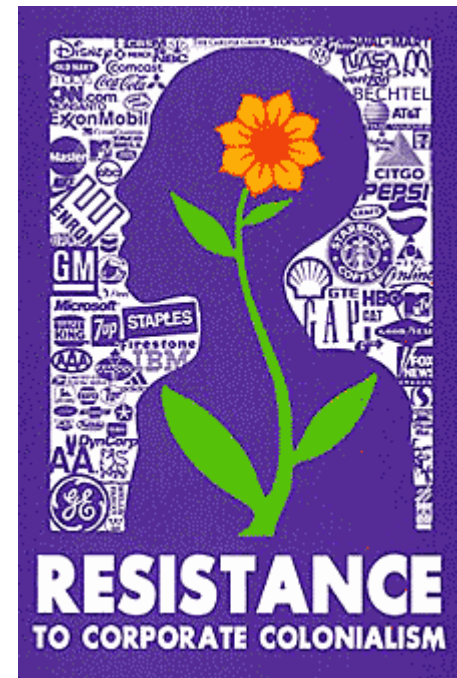


- Ecological Footprint (Rees and Wackernagel, 1996)
 - 1.39 Earths necessary for sustained consumption (Venetoulis and Talberth, 2006)
- Herman Daly (2005)
 - In consideration of the biological limitations of the planet, a sustainable economy must shift away from growth
- Cradle-to-cradle design, eco-effectiveness (Braungart, McDonough, Bollinger 2007)



- Anti-consumerism movement

- Historical: utopian experiments (Brook Farm, 1840's), Gandhi, back-to-the-land movement
- *Voluntary Simplicity*, Elgin, 1981
- *Freeganism*, resource cycling, Reverend Billy, Adbusters/Buy Nothing Day



Anti-consumerism

Voluntary simplicity

- Downshiffters: **reduce consumption** and income without deeply altering their way of living
- Strong simplifiers: significantly **restructure** their lives
- Holistic simplifiers: **rejection of consumerism** flows from a coherent philosophy

Freegans

- Alternative** strategies for living based on **limited participation in the conventional economy** and **minimal consumption of resources**
- Total boycott** of current economic system
- Avoid buying anything** to the greatest degree possible

Green Consumerism

- Balances** between the **expectations of consumer behavior and businesses' profit motives**
- Consumption** of fair trade, organic, and other **“ethical” products**
- Uses **people power** for positive change
- Helps **businesses** by **increasing competition**

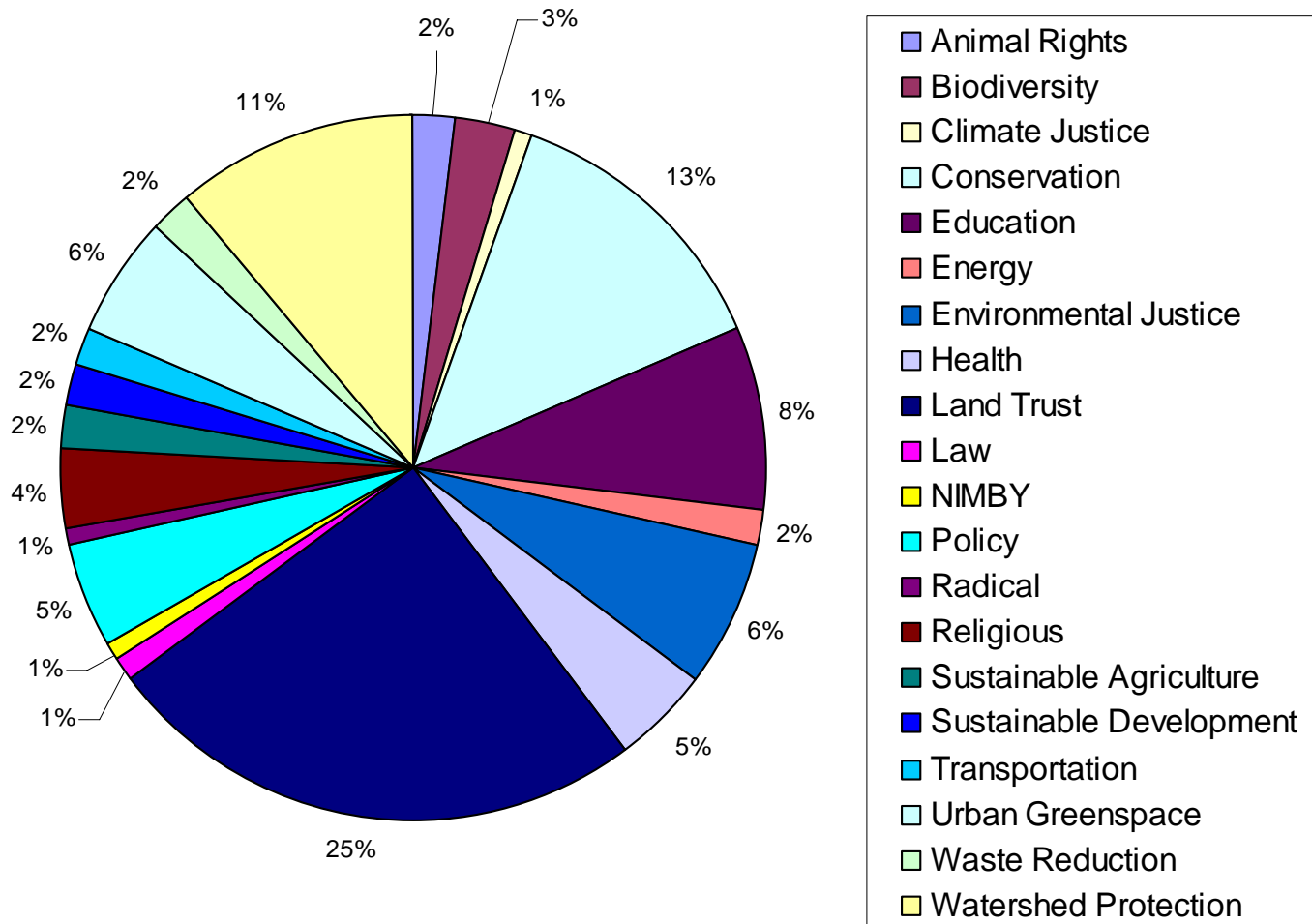
Methodology

To what extent does the environmental movement address material consumption and how is the movement evolving into the twenty-first century?

Summary of Methods	
Listing of organizations	List taken from ECRI & Apeiron Institute websites, for-profit/governmental/non-active groups removed, others added by referral
Classification of organizations	Arranged by year of establishment and coded by focus of action
Mission of reducing consumption?	Mission statements coded for : “consum-,” “waste,” “reduce-,” “simpl-,” and “energy conservation”
Interviews	G.Gerritt, representatives of Big Ten, new organizations (2004-present), those with focus on reducing consumption, information from questionnaires used for organizational profile
Media Review	Search of the Providence Journal from 12/25/83-3/23/09 to examine media coverage of selected environmental trends including anti-consumerism, green business climate justice, religious environmentalism, local food, and voluntary simplicity
Profiling of Brown organizations	List found on Brown <i>mygroups</i> website as well as through research; organizations arranged by year of establishment, coded by focus of action and reducing waste vs. energy efficiency

Results

Areas of focus for Rhode Island environmental organizations by percentage of total # of organizations



- 108 groups
- Chronological correlation with history of env. movement (conservation, policy, env. justice, etc...)
- 25% land trusts, 13% conservation, 12% urban issues, 11% watershed protection

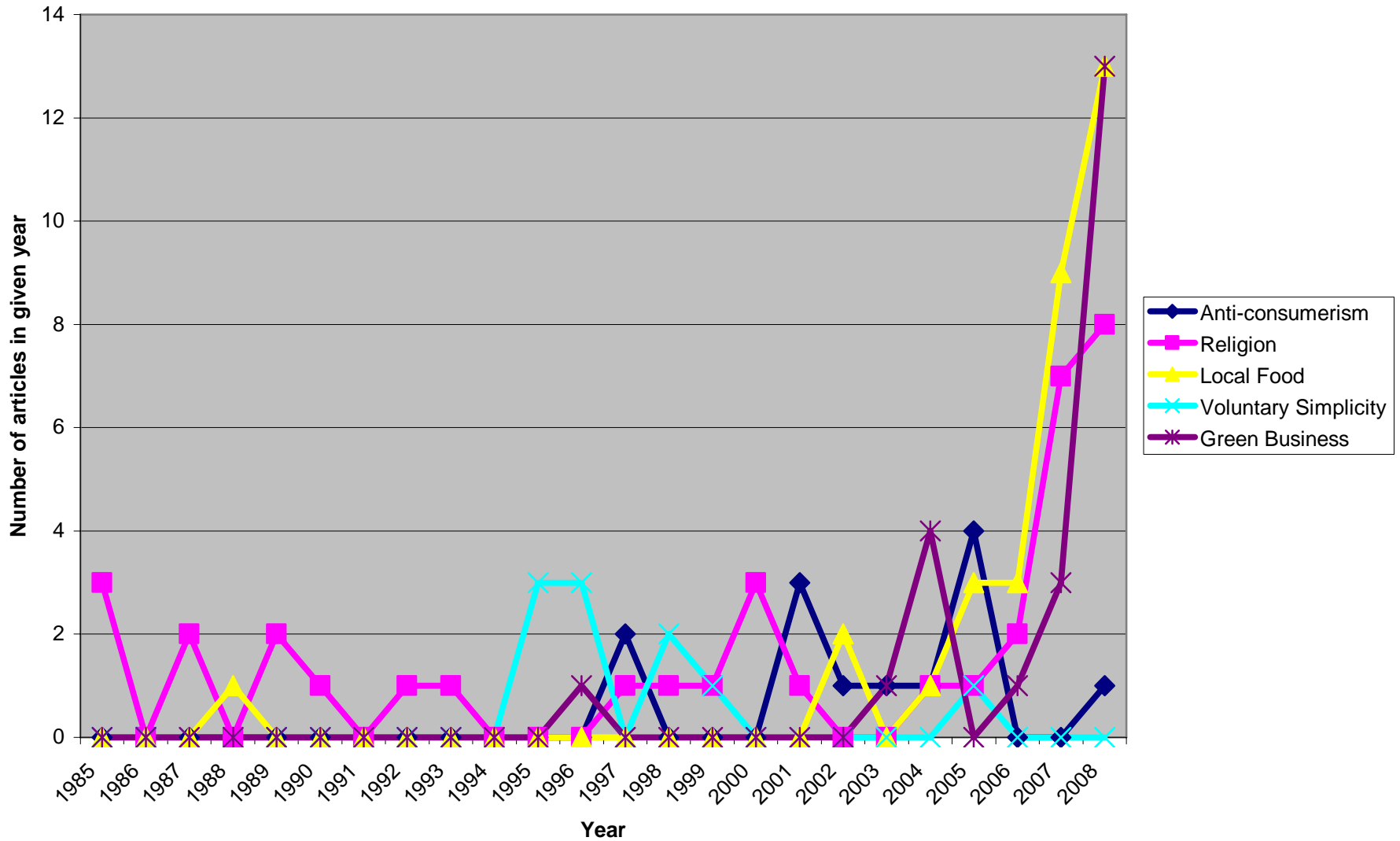
2004	Local Food	Farm Fresh RI
2004	Waste reduction	Freecycle
2004	Radical	Ocean State Earth First
2005	Watershed Protection	Blackstone River Watershed Council
2006	Religious	New Dawn Earth Center
2006	Religious	Rhode Island Jewish Environmental Alliance
2006	Watershed Protection	Rhode Island Rivers Council
2006	Climate Justice	Rising Tide North America
2007	Environmental Justice	Environmental Justice League of RI
2007	Religious	Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island Environmental Stewardship Task Force
2007	Religious/Energy	RI Interfaith Power and Light

Organizations coded as focusing on anti-consumption (N=9/108):

- Apeiron Institute
- Aquidneck Land Trust
- Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island Environmental Stewardship Task Force
- Freecycle
- New Dawn Earth Center
- People's Power and Light
- Recycling for RI Education
- Rising Tide North America
- The Dunn Foundation



Media coverage of select environmental trends in the Providence Journal, 1985-2008



Brown Profile (N= 24 active)

1970	Cooperative	Brown Association for Cooperative Housing
1983	Cooperative	Environmental House (West House)
1986	Outdoor Recreation	Outdoor Leadership Training, Brown (BOLT)
1990	Education	Brown is Green Initiative (B.I.G.)
pre-2001	Outdoor Recreation	Outing Club, Brown (BOC)
2001	Health	Breeze Against Wheeze
2004	Environmental Thought	Watershed
2004	Waste Reduction	Eco Reps
2005	Outdoor Recreation	Brown Boobies (Student Bird Club)
2005	Food	Sustainable Food Initiative
2006	Sustainable Design	Engineers Without Borders Chapter, Brown (EWB)
2006	Energy	EmPower

2006	Radical	Students for a Democratic Society
2007	Animal Rights	Animal Rights Club, Brown (BARC)
2007	Food	Real Food Challenge
2008	Sustainable Design	Emerging Green Leaders
2008	Sustainable Design	Progress Initiative, Brown (BPI)
2008	Energy	Project 2020
2009	Green Investment	Socially Responsible Investment Fund, Brown
2009	Waste Reduction	Beyond the Bottle
	Green Investment	Sustainability Consulting and Investment Partnership
	Outdoor Recreation	Wilderness Medicine
	Animal Rights	Students for the Humane Treatment of Homeless Animals, Brown

Key Findings

- Many organizations with varied foci
- Local chapters of Big Green maintain traditional issues and tactics, but are somewhat autonomous with regional focus
- New trends:
 - Social ecology of new groups
 - Religious environmentalism
 - Climate justice
 - Local food
- Lack of cohesion and communication
- Lack of diversity!!!
- Neither anti-consumerism or green business is dominating (Brown is exception)
- Organizations promoting green consumerism are not themselves receiving a profit; instead they are providing sustainable options for supplying basic needs

Recommendations

- Diversify!
 - seek out young people and other underrepresented faces of environmentalism
 - act in **solidarity** with non-traditional environmental interests (ex. Climate justice)
 - address environmental classism
 - criticism of green capitalism/green-washing should persist
 - environmental movement to serve as a means for empowerment of how to procure basic needs in a sustainable and self-sufficient manner
- Create stronger connections between secular and religious environmentalism
- Local and direct action in creating alternative systems (modeling tactics)

Conclusion



Acknowledgements

Caroline Karp
Thesis Advisor and Reader
Center for Environmental Studies

Frank Kellerman
Research Consultation
Brown University Library

Greg Gerritt
Environmental Council of Rhode Island

All the organizations participating in my study

Friends and Family!