

21st century American environmental ideologies: a re-evaluation

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ABSTRACT

Around the turn of the century, myriad books and articles – from academics, journalists, organizational leaders and grassroots activists – explored the state of American environmentalism, outlining ideological antagonisms and tracing the contours of possible twenty-first century trajectories. In recent years, however, there have been few such analyses, and those that do exist continue to rely on the ideal types of the past. This article explores the shifting ideological contours of American environmentalism by (1) detailing how extant works categorize American environmental ideologies, and (2) employing discourse and content analysis of sixteen American environmental organizations to consider whether existing ideal-types capture the ideological variability driving contemporary environmental practice. It concludes by outlining six twenty-first century American environmental ideal-types: wilderness preservationism; liberal environmentalism; traditional environmental justice; techno-ecological optimism; socio-ecological progressivism; and socio-ecological radicalism. The article argues that the latter three ideological variants signal an ontological shift that cuts to the core of environmental practice.

Introduction

Since the inception of organized environmental movements in the latter half of the nineteenth century, analysts have worked to understand the ideological variability within environmental thought and practice, categorizing greens as preservationist or conservationist; radical or reformist; grassroots or beltway; deep ecological or social ecological.¹ Over time, these ideal-types have grown increasingly complex and have been subject to numerous re-evaluations alongside a changing political landscape. These periodic re-evaluations provide insight into fractures within the environmental movement, the varied tactics and strategies adopted by different environmental groups, and the ideological underpinnings of environmental practice. In the years surrounding the turn of the century, myriad books and articles – from academics, journalists, organizational leaders and grassroots activists – explored the state of American environmentalism, outlining ideological antagonisms and

tracing the contours of possible twenty-first century trajectories.² In recent years, however, there have been few such analyses, and those that do exist continue to rely on the ideal-types of the past.

The goal of this article is to explore how contemporary American greens have responded to the realities of a changing world, and to consider whether or not existing ideological ideal-types truly capture the variability that lies in contemporary environmental practice. In what areas do contemporary American environmental imaginaries converge and diverge? What new environmental ideological variants have emerged? And what political impacts do they have? I examine these questions in two parts. First, I provide an intellectual history of American environmental ideologies, outlining how various scholars and activists have broken the broad ideological family that is environmentalism into different ideological subtypes. In discussing the potential for ideological change in recent years, I pay particular attention to early twenty-first century debates over the supposed 'death of environmentalism.'³ I focus on these debates not because I necessarily agree with Shellenberger and Nordhaus (henceforth referred to as S & N) but because, in a period where there exist few systematic analyses of American environmentalism, their polemic provoked responses from a broad spectrum of environmental scholars and activists – from journalists, to mainstream leaders, to environmental justice activists, to scholars of environmental politics. These debates are thus instructive in revealing the sites of ideological struggle that have emerged among environmentalists in recent years; sites that necessitate further scrutiny.

Second, I employ discourse and content analysis of sixteen prominent national-level environmental organizations, and I identify six contemporary environmental ideological variants. I find that while there exists some continuity between the dominant ideal-types that characterized twentieth century American environmental practice, there are three new ideological variants – techno-ecological optimism, progressive socio-ecology and radical socio-ecology – that differ significantly from those outlined in extant frameworks, signalling an ontological shift that cuts to the core of environmental practice. The nature/society dualism that many academic analysts have argued so vehemently against is, in fact, being deconstructed and reconfigured in environmental practice in ways that observers of environmental ideologies have yet to grasp fully. The end of the twentieth century gave rise to an enormously productive dialogue over the state of American environmentalism. Perhaps, with the benefit of fifteen years' hindsight, it is time for an update.

Varieties of American environmentalism in the late twentieth century

The term 'environmentalism' did not become widespread until the 1960s, but scholars of American environmentalism have since recognized that the movement's roots are deep, and its origins are typically traced back to groups like the Boone and Crockett Club, Sierra Club and Audubon Society in the late 19th century.⁴ Scholars have also recognized that although environmentalism can be considered an ideology of its own, united around a shared attention to reconfiguring nature/society relations, there are myriad ideological variants (or 'subsets') within this broad grouping.⁵ Over the past several decades, there have been many attempts to understand and categorize the broad ideological spectrum driving environmental thought and practice throughout the world;⁶ however, for the purposes of this article, I confine my analysis to the ideological variants that have characterized American environmental practice.⁷

Early American environmental imaginaries divided greens into preservationists and conservationists: the former, led by Sierra Club founder John Muir, internalized romantic ideals of wilderness as sublime and wholeheartedly embraced ecocentrism, while the latter, led by former Forest Service Chief Gifford Pinchot, emphasized scientific expertise, efficient allocation of resources and maximum sustainable yield.⁸ Retrospective depictions of American environmentalism have since inserted a third variant that, until recently, was not recognized as ‘environmentalism’ – the early twentieth century movements for public health and workplace protections in working class, urban areas, influenced by the burgeoning labour movement and often led by women like Alice Hamilton and Jane Addams.⁹ These three broad environmental variants would intersect with emergent political conjunctures and ideologies in ways that continued to define American environmentalism throughout the twentieth century.

From the movement’s origins to its current iterations, major ideological shifts have emerged (e.g. ‘new social movements,’ the fall of communism and the rise of new fundamentalisms, the growing popularity of globalism/cosmopolitanism, etc.) in response to a rapidly changing reality, and new environmental problems (e.g. population, suburban sprawl, climate change) have entered onto (and sometimes fallen off of) the national agenda. The resulting environmental ideological terrain is complex; a reality reflected in the widely divergent ways that scholars categorized late twentieth century environmentalism. Former Sierra Club chairman Michael McCloskey divided greens into mainstream, radical and conservative.¹⁰ Author Mark Dowie noted distinctions between the mainstream movement, the ‘people-of-color network for environmental justice’ and the ‘new conservationists.’¹¹ Environmental activist Adam Werbach’s creative categorizations included ‘druids’ (who have a deep spiritual connection to wild places), ‘polar-fleecers’ (who wish to save nature so that they can ski and climb and hike in it), and ‘eco-entrepreneurs’ (who seek to save nature through innovation).¹² Environmental sociologists Jason Carmichael, Robert Brulle and Craig Jenkins broke the movement into four overarching groupings – conservation and wildlife management; preservation; reform environmentalism and environmental health; and alternative discourses (deep ecology, environmental justice, etc.).¹³

Interestingly, while these contemporary scholars used different names and varied categories, their examinations nonetheless reveal certain commonalities and a general trajectory linking the three aforementioned early environmental projects – preservationism, conservationism and urban public health – to three (broadly construed) late twentieth century environmental ideological variants. Other environmental strands periodically punctured late twentieth century environmental activism (e.g. eco-feminism, social ecology, indigenous ecologies, eco-Marxism), but these three were the dominant ones around which American environmental organizations oriented their practice.

The first ideology was that of *wilderness preservation*. With roots in preservationism, wilderness advocates emphasized untouched, edenic locales as sacred. Wilderness preservation gave way to a wide variety of environmental organizations, both reformist and radical. In terms of the former, groups like the Wilderness Society and National Wildlife Federation transformed grassroots desires for preservation into policy prescriptions, eventually helping to pass laws like the Wilderness Act, Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and Endangered Species Act (among others). Over the years, they gained large professional staffs and were thoroughly incorporated into the politics of the ‘beltway.’ In terms of the latter, a more recent iteration of wilderness preservation, deep ecology, attempted to save wild places through shifts in

individual-level consciousness as well as direct action working outside the existing institutional spheres. Deep Ecology was characterized as eco-centric, radical and grassroots, and was adopted by groups like Earth First!, the Earth Liberation Front and the Sea Shepherds.

A second ideology was that of *liberal environmentalism*, where attempts to protect nature were embedded in the machinations of the market. Rooted in a conservationist ethic, liberal environmentalists sought 'to enlist the powerful machinery of the market in the service of economic transformation – to create capitalism with a green face.'¹⁴ While there were, in fact, varieties of liberal environmentalism, this ideology generally emphasized entrepreneurship and green consumptive choices. It gave rise to strategies like buying land from developers in order to protect (or create) wilderness; devising flexible, market-based regulations; and partnering with businesses to promote greener production. Liberal environmentalism was anthropocentric and reformist and was adopted by 'beltway environmentalists' and organizations like the Environmental Defense Fund and the Nature Conservancy.

The final ideology – one that was underscored by late twentieth century analysts as emergent – was that of *environmental justice*. With roots in the community-based environmentalism of early twentieth century urban reformers, as well as civil rights struggles intensifying in the 1960s,¹⁵ environmental justice activists were fighting against the asymmetric exposure to environmental hazards and access to environmental services that plagued poor and racial minority populations. With its conception of nature as the place in which people 'live, work and play,' this ideological variant emphasized human health and well-being as important environmental concerns. Focusing on both legal strategies as well as grassroots activism, it strategically engaged in actions that were reformist and radical. It was adopted predominantly by local and regional level groups like the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, The Indigenous Environmental Network and the Environmental Health Coalition.

This was the ideological field around which American environmentalism revolved at the turn of the century. Where, then, did major American environmental organizations – like the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) – fit within this framework? Some analysts placed these organizations into a separate discourse of 'reform environmentalism,'¹⁶ whereas others noted widespread variability within this grouping. The commonality marking the literature, though, was a sense that mainstream environmental organizations existed at the nexus of the three dominant discourses, variably prioritizing one or the other in relation to a shifting political terrain, tactical and strategic decisions and distinct organizational cultures. For example, heated debates over immigration reveal a Sierra Club struggling between commitments to wilderness preservation and environmental justice. Debates over the North American Free Trade Agreement similarly suggest that the hegemony of neoliberalism was already forcing calculated engagements with market-based mechanisms, with some 'mainstream' organizations (like the NRDC, Environmental Defense and National Wildlife Federation) supporting so-called Free Trade, and others (like the Sierra Club and Friends of the Earth) in opposition.¹⁷

This contestation is where turn-of-the-century analyses concluded. Dowie, for instance, foresaw a 'fourth wave' of American environmentalism that combined the ideologies present in previous manifestations. 'At present,' he wrote, 'the fourth wave has no single defining quality beyond its enormous diversity of organizations, ideologies, and issues. It is in part wilderness preservation, part toxic abatement, part ecological economics, part civil rights, part human rights, part secular, part religious and parts of many ecologies.'¹⁸ Environmental

writer Jenny Price echoed this claim: ‘environmentalism has acquired no real redefinition, and no articulate philosophy, but currently remains a grab bag of available causes and rhetorics, old and new: some apocalypse, a bit of earth is our mother, some justice and power here, some indigenous people there, a lot of sustainability, some earth happening, and a lot of we are all in this together.’¹⁹ Has this ‘new wave’ of American environmentalism emerged? If so, what ideological variants characterize it?

Twenty-first century shifts? Debating American environmentalism’s ‘death’s

Extant reflections on early twenty-first century American environmental ideologies have largely revolved around Shellenberger and Nordhaus’ ‘Death of Environmentalism,’²⁰ a thirty-page communiqué that took American environmentalists to task for their wonky language, excessive moralism and overall inability to connect to a twenty-first century American public. The polemic created enormous controversy, but also provoked a dialogue that has served to highlight the sites of ideological antagonism around which early twenty-first century environmental debates have hinged. Specifically, a review of the literature surrounding the ‘death of environmentalism’ (DOE) debates reveals four phenomena that have begun to redefine American environmental ideologies: the hegemony of neoliberalism; the question of nature; the growing salience of environmental justice; and a renewed emphasis on alliance-building with non-environmental actors.

The hegemony of neoliberalism

First, the DOE was inspired in large part by the success of American conservatism, and its ideological vision of free-markets, privatization and deregulation. In short, it was a response to the hegemony of neoliberalism. As S & N observed, ‘America is a vastly more rightwing country than it was three decades ago.’²¹ Neoliberals were winning. Wise use – once a fringe commitment of ranchers and a few scattered legal scholars – had become conservative dogma; the strong state regulations on which environmentalists had hitched their wagon had morphed into the menacing ‘command and control’; and in issue-areas ranging from water conservation to grazing to resource extraction, property rights were trumping environmental regulations. The wrinkle here is that, contra the dominant environmentalist response, S & N were looking inward at green missteps rather than laying the blame solely at the feet of corporate power. ‘While liberals were defining themselves in opposition to the problems that were besetting a modernizing America,’ former Sierra Club President Adam Werbach noted, ‘conservatives began to construct a movement that envisioned an optimistic America that would appear better and stronger than ever.’²²

This was one area of virtual consensus that emerged from the debates: greens were losing and conservatives, driven by a neoliberal political economic ideology, were succeeding in blocking or weakening environmental laws and regulations.²³ There was certainly debate over the extent to which greens were losing – with mainstream environmental leaders citing examples of incremental progress²⁴ – but there was little satisfaction with the state of (in)action on climate change, in particular. The dialogues make clear that one of the central strategic questions driving early twenty-first century environmentalism has been: how should American environmentalists respond to a political environment dominated by neoliberalism?

The question of nature

The hegemony of neoliberalism relates directly to the second phenomenon that the dialogues underscored – the relationship between politics, ‘narrative’ (or ‘discourse’) and nature. The neoliberals, the argument goes, had skilfully crafted a forward-looking narrative of American prosperity – one that resonated with the general public – while environmentalists had appealed to narrow issues (e.g. wilderness) and technocratic policy fixes. ‘Environmentalists,’ wrote Werbach, ‘promoted a regulatory paradigm, not a narrative for the country’s success.’²⁵ Similarly, environmental justice scholar Robert Gottlieb asserted that a fundamental challenge faced by environmentalists was ‘to not only define what’s possible by way of environmental and social change, but to change the political discourse as well.’²⁶

Changing the political discourse, according to many analysts, necessitated changing the dominant green conception of nature itself:

[A]s a community, environmentalists suffer from a bad case of group think, starting with shared assumptions about what we mean by ‘the environment’ – a category that reinforces the notions that a) the environment is a separate ‘thing’ and b) human beings are separate from and superior to the ‘natural world.’²⁷

The argument here – one echoed by many environmental scholars and activists – was that greens had dedicated so much time and effort to saving nature ‘out there,’ that they had neglected to consider the nature that we encounter in our day-to-day lives (in our homes, neighbourhoods, workplaces and communities). By contrast, ‘this 21st-century environmentalism,’ according to Price, ‘emphasizes as its absolute fundamental principle not that we save or destroy nature but that we inhabit nature for better and worse.’²⁸ Changing the way that we think and talk about nature/society relations, the argument goes, can fundamentally alter environmental practice; ontological shifts have broad political impacts.

While this claim provoked a heated debate over the relationship between narratives, political institutions and economic structures, the necessity of rethinking nature was generally accepted by the scholars and activists entering into this dialogue. But this emphasis on rethinking nature/society relations also revealed a gap in S & N’s missive. There was, of course, a form of environmental politics that had long been echoing this more quotidian, interconnected environmental perspective: the environmental justice (EJ) movement.

The integration of environmental justice

The third phenomenon that emerged from debates over the death of environmentalism was the growing salience of the environmental justice movement. That S & N had failed to adequately engage with environmental justice was a virtual consensus among respondents to their missive. Some framed this omission in sympathetic terms. In their essay, ‘The Soul of Environmentalism,’ Michel Gelobter and his colleagues wrote: ‘Leaders of the environmental justice movement welcome the essay because it echoes concerns they’ve been working on for well over two decades.’²⁹ Others, however, were more pointed in their criticism. Environmental justice activist Ludovic Blain bemoaned the absence of environmental justice from the Death of Environmentalism:

For too long the concerns and solutions proposed by both U.S.-based EJ leaders and environmentalists beyond our shores – especially from indigenous communities around the world – about the shortcomings of elite, American environmentalism have been ignored, scoffed at and actively campaigned against.³⁰

Judging by the responses the essay engendered, the notion that environmentalism sorely needed to explore antagonisms of race, class and gender was becoming increasingly popular (if only partially realized). Most notably, Gelobter et al. forcefully argued that both the dominant environmental narrative and the twenty-first century vision articulated by S & N emerged from a white, middle-class perspective that had forgotten about environmentalism's soul – its rootedness in the struggles of historically marginalized populations. In discussing the 'soul of environmentalism,' the authors fleshed out an alternative to the dominant American environmental history; turning to the writings and activism of African-Americans, women, indigenous peoples and immigrants.³¹

Criticisms for S & N's blind spot, as well as impassioned pleas for the integration of environmental justice, arose not only from EJ activists but from mainstream greens³² and environmental scholars.³³ The question remains: to what extent has EJ reconfigured the ideologies driving environmental organizations?

A shift in environmental movement-building

In spite of their differences, Gelobter et al. concluded their essay in a manner similar to S & N by echoing the call for new progressive alliances that could work to bridge gaps between environmentalism and other social movements. This was another commonality marking debates over the death of environmentalism: the widespread sense that in order to confront the institutional and ideological dominance of neoliberalism, the environmental movement needed to build transformative alliances. Although greens had long engaged in coalition-building, the frequency and intensity of these efforts were increasing.

Making this coalition-building strategy all the more pressing was the crisis of climate change and the relative lack of resources that greens possessed vis-à-vis their anti-environmental counterparts. For example, Schlosberg and Bomberg argued that the anti-environmental forces 'can be attacked and surmounted, but only through new conceptualisations and framings, new alliances and arenas and new forms of movement agency.'³⁴ Such a project entailed a rejection of the narrow politics in which 'birds were an environmental issue, clean air was an environmental issue, but economic policy was not.'³⁵ A shift, then, from a purely 'environmental' activism to one grounded in 'socio-ecological' activism was emerging.³⁶ As environmental political theorist John Meyer pointed out, 'Properly understood, [the] goal is not merely the remaking of environmentalism, but the remaking of the social formation in which a new "environmentalism" (or whatever it may be called) could participate.'³⁷

But who would be included in this transformative social formation? On this question, the consensus began to shatter. For S & N, the emergent coalition clearly included not only greens, labour unions and civil rights organizations, but also business leaders and entrepreneurs.³⁸ For others commentators, the goal was not simply to include every agent in a new progressive alliance but to reconfigure social antagonisms against the forces of environmental destruction (variably defined as 'capitalism,' 'neoliberalism,' 'the oil and gas lobby,' etc.).³⁹ This divergence is reflective of the wide variety of environmental ideologies participating in this dialogue. As Brulle and Jenkins argue, uniting around a vision of nature and shared political commitments is a large task – particularly when one considers the

‘plurality of values that support contemporary environmentalism.’⁴⁰ The call for transformational alliances had been loudly put out, but would (or could) environmentalists respond? It is here where my analysis begins.

Methodology

I have thus far argued that turn-of-the-(twenty-first)-century American environmentalism was defined by three broad ideological variants: wilderness preservationism, liberal environmentalism and environmental justice. I have also made the case that early twenty-first century environmental dialogues revealed four phenomena that had the potential to transform twenty-first century environmental ideologies: (1) the hegemony of neoliberalism; (2) the question of nature; (3) the growing salience of environmental justice; and (4) the emergence of new forms of alliance-building. How are these shifts reflected in the ideologies of today’s environmental organizations? Do the ideological variants recognized by turn-of-the-century observers still characterize environmental practice? Or are they in need of revision?

In the remainder of this article, I answer those questions by analysing sixteen American environmental organizations in an attempt to understand the ideologies that guide their practice (see Figure 1). Rather than orienting my analysis around certain ideological elements that an organization must employ to be considered ‘Green,’ I focus on organizations that self-identify as environmentalists, and examine the constituent parts of their respective ideologies. This list is by no means comprehensive, but it provides a representative sample that reveals the breadth of contemporary American environmentalism. I have chosen several new organizations that were not included in late twentieth century analyses (like 350.org and Rising Tide), as well as organizations, like the Indigenous Environmental Network, that move beyond the ‘group of ten’ that frequently characterized past analyses.

In undertaking this examination, I employ two methods: discourse analysis and content analysis. First, discourse analysis focuses on studying the language that political actors employ, in order to reveal the systems of meaning that undergird political action.⁴¹ In

Environmental Org.	Established	Primary Scale(s) of Focus
Breakthrough Institute	2003	National
Center for Biological Diversity (CBD)	1989	National, Global
Center for Health, Environment and Justice (CHEJ)	1981	Local, National
Center on Race, Poverty and Environment (CRPE)	1989	Local, National
EarthFirst!	1979	Local, National
Environmental Defense Fund	1967	National
Friends of the Earth (FOE)	1969	National, Global
Greenpeace USA	1971	National, Global
Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN)	1990	Native Nations, Global
National Wildlife Federation (NWF)	1936	National
Nature Conservancy	1951	National, Global
Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)	1970	National
Rising Tide North America	2006	Local, National, Global
Sierra Club	1892	National
Wilderness Society	1935	National
350.org	2008	National, Global

Figure 1. American environmental organizations.

analysing core ‘texts,’ discourse analysis seeks to understand how language – far from being a neutral descriptor of a pre-existing reality – is a political tool deployed to advance certain claims to truth, social norms and narratives in order to reconfigure reality toward a particular normative end. Between February and September of 2015, I performed a discourse analysis of the aforementioned sixteen environmental organization’s websites. The websites varied greatly in their format, but, for each organization, I analysed the content linked to on its home page, and in all of the major tabs found on its website.

In keeping with the four changing dimensions of environmentalism that I have underscored, my discourse analysis focuses on: how nature is conceptualized by the group in question (e.g. Is nature comprised of lives with intrinsic value or of resources to meet human needs? Is nature separate from society or intertwined with it?); how the group’s political economic ideology is articulated (e.g. Is economic growth good or bad? Do markets help or hinder environmental protection); how environmental justice does (or does not) factor into the group’s sense of social purpose (e.g. What is justice for the organization? Do racial, gendered, or class-based inequalities enter into the equation?); and how alliances with other social actors are discussed (e.g. Which actors and organizations are considered vital to advancing environmental protection? How central is alliance-building to the organization’s perceived mission?). Throughout the analysis that follows, I provide select quotations that illustrate the relevant organization’s discourse with regard to nature, political economy, environmental justice and alliance building.

Second, content analysis of these same websites enables me to gauge the centrality of specific issues and commitments to each organization by counting the number of times that particular words and phrases appear on its website. My content analysis also pays attention to the aforementioned variables. I counted how many times various environmental issues (e.g. public health, climate change, forests and public lands) were emphasized (Table 1); how many times terms related to the political economy (e.g. markets, capitalism, divestment) were employed (Table 2); and how many times terms related to environmental justice (e.g. racism, inequality, injustice) were factored into the groups’ discourse (Table 3).⁴² To provide an idea of the organization’s general focus, I also noted how many terms were coded overall in each category, relative to the other categories (for instance, out of all the terms I coded, 70% of Friends of the Earth’s focus relates to environmental issues, 14% to political economy and 17% to environmental justice). Figure 2 explains my coding scheme in more detail.

These two methods complement each other. Content analysis can be undertaken in a systematic and objective fashion, but it lacks an attention to context (e.g. counting the number of times ‘the free market’ is invoked does not provide insight into whether or not a group considers this normatively beneficial or problematic). Conversely, discourse analysis provides that much needed context, but is often criticized for its lack of methodological rigour. Content analysis ensures that the quotations that I underscore in my discourse analysis are reflective of general patterns characterizing the organization in question. Taken as a whole, these two methods provide insight into how the organization’s environmental ideology is constructed.

Table A Environment/Nature

Category	Terms Coded in Category
Wilderness, Plants and Animals	species, habitat, wild, pristine, biocentric, deep ecology, plants, biodiversity, mother earth, sacred land
Forests and Public Lands	logging, forests, public lands, trees, timber, (over)grazing
Non-Renew. Energy and Resource Extraction	fracking, oil and gas, pipeline, natural gas, nuclear, coal, mining, tar sands
Food and Agriculture	GMO, genetically engineered, food system, organics, farming, agriculture, pesticides
Community and Public Health	community, local, grassroots, health, carcinogen, hazardous waste, toxic waste, pollution, clean air/water
Climate Change	climate change, global warming, greenhouse gases, carbon emissions, COP21, Kyoto
Renewable Energy	renewables, solar, wind, windmills, clean energy

Table B Political Economics

Category	Terms Coded in Category
Markets	market-based, green markets, carbon markets, REDD, free market, cap and trade, private sector
Growth	green growth, economic growth, growth rates, prosperity
Investments	investments, investment, invest, finance
Innovation	innovation, ingenuity, entrepreneurship, entrepreneur
Divestment	divest, divestment
Equality	equality, equity, inequality, economic justice, poverty, poor, low-income, just transition
Labor	labor, unions, workers, blue collar, working class
Capitalism	capitalism, dominant economic system, industrial civilization, neoliberalism, corporate power

Table C Environmental Justice

Category	Terms Coded in Category
Justice	(in)justice, environmental justice, climate justice, social justice, oppression
Solidarity	ally, solidarity, alliance, coalition
Race	racism, race, environmental racism, discrimination, minorities, people/communities of color, racial (in)equality
Class	poverty, poor, working-class, workers, blue-collar, economic (in)equality, equity
Gender	women, gender, patriarchy, androcentrism, feminism, gender (in)equality
Indigeneity	Indigenous, Indigeneity, Native Peoples, Inuit, Native American, First Nations
Colonialism	colonialism, settler colonialism, decolonize, decoloniality
Human Rights	human rights, civil rights, civil liberties, inalienable rights
Diversity	diversity, multiculturalism

Figure 2. Content analysis coding scheme.

Table 1. Nature/environment.

	Wilderness, plants and animals	Non-renew. energy and resource extraction	Food and Ag.	Community and public health	Forests and public lands	Climate change	Renewable energy	Total	% Focus on nature
Environmental Org.									
Breakthrough Institute	116 (36%)	31 (10%)	65 (20%)	6 (2%)	43 (13%)	28 (9%)	32 (10%)	321	77%
Center for Biological Diversity	113 (52%)	28 (13%)	8 (4%)	40 (18%)	5 (2%)	24 (11%)	1 (<1%)	217	94%
Center for Health, Environment and Justice	0 (0%)	10 (14%)	0 (0%)	62 (85%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	73	79%
Center on Race, Poverty and Environment	0 (0%)	17 (17%)	8 (8%)	61 (61%)	0 (0%)	10 (10%)	3 (3%)	99	52%
EarthFirst!	63 (40%)	50 (32%)	2 (1%)	15 (10%)	25 (16%)	1 (<1%)	0 (0%)	156	66%
Environmental Defense	7 (8%)	6 (6%)	7 (8%)	26 (28%)	12 (13%)	29 (31%)	6 (6%)	91	68%
Friends of the Earth	31 (17%)	38 (21%)	31 (17%)	40 (22%)	26 (14%)	14 (8%)	5 (3%)	185	70%
Greenpeace USA	17 (13%)	33 (26%)	11 (9%)	19 (15%)	9 (7%)	17 (13%)	22 (17%)	128	73%
Indigenous Environ- mental Network	57 (30%)	19 (10%)	21 (11%)	34 (18%)	20 (11%)	31 (17%)	5 (3%)	187	55%
National Wildlife Federation	138 (53%)	16 (6%)	0 (0%)	40 (15%)	10 (4%)	51 (20%)	6 (2%)	261	97%
Nature Conservancy	50 (34%)	2 (1%)	6 (4%)	37 (25%)	29 (19%)	22 (15%)	3 (2%)	149	70%
NRDC	38 (16%)	19 (8%)	55 (23%)	60 (25%)	8 (3%)	48 (20%)	15 (6%)	243	89%
Rising Tide North America	6 (7%)	41 (48%)	0 (0%)	17 (20%)	0 (0%)	17 (20%)	4 (5%)	85	54%
Sierra Club	58 (13%)	145 (33%)	0 (0%)	157 (35%)	25 (6%)	30 (7%)	30 (7%)	445	82%
Wilderness Society	85 (46%)	13 (7%)	0 (0%)	9 (5%)	52 (28%)	8 (4%)	17 (9%)	184	97%
350.org	0 (0%)	47 (46%)	0 (0%)	7 (7%)	5 (5%)	39 (38%)	5 (5%)	103	56%

Table 3. Integration of justice.

	Environmental/ climate justice	Solidarity	Race	Class	Gender	Indigeneity	Colonialism	Human Rights	Diversity	Total	% Focus on justice
Breakthrough Institute	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (67%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (17%)	1 (17%)	0 (0%)	6	1%
Center for Biological Diversity	0 (0%)	4 (40%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (30%)	2 (20%)	10	4%
Center for Health, Environment and Justice	10 (77%)	2 (15%)	0 (0%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	13	14%
Center on Race, Poverty and Environment	11 (15%)	4 (6%)	21 (30%)	12 (17%)	0 (0%)	5 (7%)	0 (0%)	18 (25%)	0 (0%)	71	37%
EarthFirst!	15 (25%)	12 (20%)	12 (20%)	3 (5%)	4 (7%)	9 (15%)	5 (8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	60	26%
Environmental Defense	0 (0%)	3 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6	4%
Friends of the Earth	17 (38%)	10 (22%)	2 (4%)	3 (7%)	1 (2%)	9 (20%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)	45	17%
Greenpeace USA	4 (13%)	3 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	24 (77%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	31	18%
Indigenous Environ- mental Network	35 (29%)	7 (6%)	1 (1%)	4 (3%)	2 (2%)	61 (51%)	5 (4%)	4 (3%)	1 (1%)	120	36%
National Wildlife Federation	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	2	<1%
Nature Conservancy	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	26 (72%)	0 (0%)	7 (19%)	2 (6%)	36	17%
NRDC	5 (42%)	2 (17%)	2 (17%)	2 (17%)	0 (0%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	12	4%
Rising Tide North America	36 (67%)	2 (4%)	4 (7%)	3 (6%)	4 (7%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	54	34%
Sierra Club	9 (17%)	12 (23%)	3 (6%)	24 (46%)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	52	10%
Wilderness Society	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1	<1%
350.org	9 (35%)	3 (12%)	0 (0%)	3 (12%)	0 (0%)	9 (35%)	2 (8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	26	14%

Findings: the ideological contours of twenty-first century American environmentalism

Through this analysis, I outline six ideological variants of contemporary American environmentalism (see Figure 3). Three of these – wilderness preservation, liberal environmentalism and environmental justice – are holdovers from the late twentieth century, while three – techno-ecological optimism, progressive socio-ecology and radical socio-ecology – have only recently emerged, but highlight the novel ways in which environmental ideologies are shifting in relation to our current political conjuncture.

Wilderness preservation

A commitment to wilderness, species and eco-systems defines the politics of three environmental groups – the National Wildlife Federation, Wilderness Society and Center for Biological Diversity – all of which are reformist in their aims. Unlike the deep ecological iterations of preservationism, this ideological variant is grounded in an attempt to reconfigure American environmental policy through policy changes and individual level shifts – e.g. the protection of ANWR (Arctic National Wildlife Refuge), the integration of preservationism into public lands policies and the cultivation of citizens who view it as their duty to recreate in and defend wild places.⁴³ As the National Wildlife Federation puts it, ‘America’s experience with cherished landscapes and wildlife has helped define and shape our national character and identity for generations.’⁴⁴ Protecting wilderness and its non-human inhabitants thus remains the major focus of wilderness preservationists, accounting for between 46% and 53% of their discussion of environmental issues (Table 1).

Beyond this commitment to the non-human, the political leanings of wilderness preservationists are subdued. Political economics are mentioned only in passing (Table 2); no systematic commitment for or against markets is taken, although prescriptive environmental regulations (e.g. support for President Obama’s Clean Power Plan) are openly embraced. Further, while commitments to diversity and the sacredness of wilderness to indigenous peoples are periodically discussed, these actors have not significantly incorporated environmental justice into their ideology. Terms related to environmental justice comprised 4% of the focus for the Center on Biological Diversity, and less than 1% for both the Wilderness Society and National Wildlife Federation (Table 3). Instead, for wilderness preservationists, the threat to wilderness comes from society writ large. As the Wilderness Society puts it, ‘as we become a more urbanized society with growing needs for space and energy, we often turn to wilderness as a resource.’⁴⁵ The communal referent, in this ideology, is the national ‘we’ and differences within that ‘we’ or historical exclusions from it, are not areas of emphasis. Accompanying this ostensibly non-partisan, consensus-driven approach, typical alliances pursued by wilderness preservation groups are with ‘hunters, anglers, hikers, birders, wildlife watchers, boaters, campers, climbers, cyclists, gardeners, farmers, forest stewards, and outdoor enthusiasts.’⁴⁶

Liberal environmentalism

In contrast to the eco-centrism of wilderness preservationists, liberal environmentalists – like the Environmental Defense Fund and Nature Conservancy – turn to a human-made

Ideological Variant	Ontological Foundation	Major Environmental Issues	Incorporation of EJ?	Environmental Justice Terms	Political Economic Ideology	Political Economic Terms	Radical or Reformist?	Organizations
Wilderness Preservation	Eco-centric	Wilderness, Plants and Animals	No	n/a	n/a	n/a	Reformist	NWF, CBD, Wilderness Society
Liberal Environmentalism	Anthropo-centric	Wilderness, Plants and Animals; Climate Change; Community and Public Health	Partial	diversity, human rights	Market-based mechanisms, limited state intervention	markets, private sector, ingenuity, innovation	Reformist	EDF, Nature Conservancy
Traditional Environmental Justice	Anthropo-centric	Community and Public Health; Non-renewable Energy and Resource Extraction	Yes	environmental justice, racism, poverty	Strong state regulations, limitations on corporate power	inequality, workers, blue-collar, workplace, community-owned	Hybrid	CHEI, CRPE
Techno-Ecological Optimism	Socio-Ecological	Wilderness, Plants and Animals; Food and Agriculture; Energy	No	n/a	State support for green entrepreneurship, infrastructure	entrepreneurship, innovation, growth, decoupling	Reformist	Breakthrough Institute
Socio-Ecological Progressivism	Socio-Ecological	Community and Public Health; Non-renewable Energy and Resource Extraction; Wilderness, Plants and Animals	Yes	environmental justice, climate justice, inequality	Strong state regulations, limitations on corporate power, status quo unsustainable	inequality, workers, corporations, divestment, just transition	Hybrid	Greenpeace, FOE, NRDC, Sierra Club, 350.org
Socio-Ecological Radicalism	Socio-Ecological	Wilderness, Plants and Animals; Non-renewable Energy and Resource Extraction	Yes	climate justice, colonialism, racism, indigeneity, patriarchy	State and capitalism inherently destructive; private property illegitimate	capitalism, inequality, neoliberalism, just transition	Radical	EarthFirst!, IEN, Rising Tide

Figure 3. Twenty-first century environmental ideologies.

edifice, ‘the market,’ in attempting to underscore the mutually beneficial relationships between environmental protection and economic growth. Like many national-level environmental groups, liberal environmental organizations embrace a range of environmental issues: The Nature Conservancy’s main focus is on wilderness, plants and animals (34%), while the EDF emphasizes climate change (31%) and community and public health (28%) (Table 1).

Undergirding these environmental commitments is a strong faith that markets, and the technological shifts that they incentivize, will provide the information that consumers need to lead green lifestyles. Market-based mechanisms – notably, carbon markets and the UN Program on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (UN-REDD) – provide the solutions to global environmental crises insofar as they stimulate ‘important economic incentives for forest conservation.’⁴⁷ Both aforementioned groups tout their market-friendly ethos, insisting that ‘the private sector has an important role to play in advancing our conservation mission’⁴⁸ and that it is possible to ‘create and shape markets to reward cleaning up instead of polluting.’⁴⁹ Phrases like ‘market-based solutions,’ ‘business partnerships,’ ‘innovation’ and ‘entrepreneurship’ appear frequently on the websites of liberal environmentalists. For both organizations, discussion of political economics is dominated by references to ‘the market’ and ‘investment’ (Table 2).

This liberal political economic ideology emphasizes policy prescriptions that differ from those of other mainstream greens. For instance, rather than opposing fracking, the Environmental Defense Fund touts new technological innovations that will help to slow or stop methane leaks.⁵⁰ For its part, the Nature Conservancy has expressed support for the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the controversial free trade agreement advanced by the Obama administration that has faced major opposition among greens.⁵¹ It is important to note, however, that these liberal environmental groups are not market fundamentalists; the EDF urges states to pass fracking regulations,⁵² while the Nature Conservancy has supported President Obama’s Clean Power Plan.⁵³

Liberal environmental organizations emphasize that they are ‘non-partisan,’ ‘consensus-based’ and ‘pragmatic,’ and highlight alliances with ‘landowners, investors, [and] businesses large and small’ from ‘across the political spectrum.’⁵⁴ The Nature Conservancy also underscores its coalitions with indigenous populations, and incorporates a language of ‘diversity’ and ‘human rights’ into its 17% environmental justice focus.⁵⁵ The EDF, however, has not significantly incorporated EJ concerns (4%). Moreover, the main alliances that both organizations continually emphasize are those with transnational corporations, like Dow Chemical, Coca-Cola, Newmont Mining, Cargill, Dupont, Walmart and McDonalds.⁵⁶

Traditional environmental justice

Whereas liberal environmentalists turn to the market to provide environmental guidance, traditional environmental justice organizations turn to the places where we ‘live, work, play and pray.’⁵⁷ The main environmental issues advanced by EJ organizations – like the Center for Health, Environment & Justice and Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment – are exposure to toxic waste, public health problems stemming from pollution, and fracking (Table 1). Unlike the socio-ecological groupings that I outline later, however, no attention (0%) is paid to the protection of wilderness, species and ecosystems. The core ideological commitment of traditional environmental justice groups is to highlight and resist the

asymmetric ways in which populations are exposed to environmental hazards – across lines of race and class (and, to a lesser extent, gender and age). For instance, the CRPE observes that toxic waste, air pollution and climate change all have disproportionate impacts on ‘low-income communities and communities of color.’⁵⁸ Environmental justice terms commonly used by the CRPE include ‘environmental racism,’ ‘poverty’ and ‘low-income’ while the CHEJ focuses more broadly on environmental ‘justice’ and ‘injustice,’ particularly in relation to the health of children (Table 3).

Not surprisingly, the political economic focus for both groups is ‘inequality’ (Table 2). In combatting inequality, traditional EJ organizations are opposed to liberal environmental solutions (like cap-and-trade), noting that they ‘have a disproportionate negative impact on communities of color because those communities do not receive the benefits of on-site reductions when major polluters buy pollution reductions from somewhere else.’⁵⁹ They are supportive of strong state intervention to ameliorate historical injustices and to provide a check on corporate power. For instance, the CHEJ emerged out of struggles over Superfund, and continues to fight for the regulation of toxic wastes and fracking.⁶⁰ To resist the aforementioned inequities, EJ groups employ a variety of alliance-building strategies. The CHEJ (representing a more mainstream form of EJ) highlights partnerships with ‘parents, teachers, doctors, nurses, students, blue-collar workers and faith-based leaders,’⁶¹ while the CRPE takes a more progressive approach in emphasizing its work with immigrant farmworkers, Alaskan Native populations, and civil rights and climate justice activists.⁶² Both groups structure their efforts around local, bottom-up, grassroots organizing.

Techno-ecological optimism

Moving into the emergent environmental ideologies, techno-ecological optimists forcefully reject the binary between ‘nature’ and ‘society,’ asserting that the two ontological zones are mutually constitutive. Articulated most forcefully by the Breakthrough Institute (but increasingly embraced by influential public policy institutes, think tanks and liberal politicians),⁶³ techno-ecological optimists are confident that the adoption of a ‘post-natural’ ontology will lead greens towards a more politically astute and environmentally effective politics. Writing in the Breakthrough Institute Journal, for instance, Bruno Latour urges greens to ‘love [their] monsters,’ critiquing romantic dismissals of technology and asserting that ‘only “out of Nature” may ecological politics start again anew.’⁶⁴ As I detail later, this ontological move increasingly characterizes American environmental ideologies. However, techno-ecological optimists embed this effort to break down the nature/society dualism in a very different social register than that of their environmental counterparts – one that is optimistic with regard to technological change, regards humanity as a potential ‘force for good,’⁶⁵ and is largely silent on questions of environmental justice.

In terms of its political economic bearings, techno-ecological optimism differs from liberal environmentalism in its embrace of strong state investment in infrastructure and its emphasis on dialogue within a public sphere.⁶⁶ The Breakthrough Institute’s ‘Mission Statement’ captures this attitude succinctly: ‘We believe the market is a potent force of change, but that long-term government investment is required to accelerate technological progress, economic growth and environmental quality.’⁶⁷ Breakthrough reports, for instance, routinely underscore the role that government has historically played in the development of ‘infrastructure, education and innovation,’ such as the ‘shale gas revolution,’⁶⁸ and they

urge further public investment in green entrepreneurship. The main environmental foci of these reports include wilderness, plants and animals (36%), food and agriculture (20%) and energy politics (10% non-renewable, 10% renewable).

Alongside its mixed-economic programme, the novelty of techno-ecological optimism lies in its optimistic (some might say cornucopian) attitude towards technological advances, and its concomitant embrace of nuclear power, fracking, GMOs, and industrial farming. In a recent article on the food system, for instance, Ted Nordhaus argues that industrial agriculture is mistakenly dismissed by environmentalists because it is seen as less ‘natural’ than small-scale, ‘artisan’ farming.⁶⁹ He contends that ‘attempting to feed a world of seven-going-on-nine billion people with a preindustrial food system would almost certainly result in a massive expansion of human impacts.’⁷⁰ The overarching argument is that technology – and its deployment in pursuit of industrial aims, like farming, fishing and forestry – has the potential to ‘liberate the environment.’⁷¹ Indeed, technological innovation comprises 28% of the Breakthrough Institute’s political economic focus, and economic growth 40% (Table 2).

Two interrelated concepts are central to this optimistic approach. The first is ‘decoupling,’ in which advanced economies continue to grow without giving rise to greater environmental degradation.⁷² The second is the ‘Environmental Kuznets’ Curve,’ which asserts that as levels of development increase, societies reach a point at which citizens demand environmental laws and regulations and begin to place greater emphasis on environmental norms and ‘post-material values’ (e.g. eating less meat, demanding cleaner air and water).⁷³ The idea, here, is that through appropriate technologies and continued development, societies modernize, producing more ecologically-minded institutions and citizens.

Insofar as these concepts and policy prescriptions differ dramatically from the vast majority of American environmentalists, it is perhaps appropriate that the main social antagonism continually cited by eco-modernists is not between ‘greens and industry’ or ‘the people and corporate power,’ but between environmentalists and self-described ‘eco-modernists.’ Indeed, the Breakthrough Institute is littered with references to environmentalism as ‘apocalyptic,’ ‘outdated’ and lacking in humility.⁷⁴ Given this self-described ‘forward looking’ focus, it is surprising that environmental justice (one of the rising trends in environmentalism) receives virtually no attention (1%) from techno-ecological optimists, although adherents do tout partnerships with business, unions, entrepreneurs and students.

Socio-ecological progressivism

Socio-Ecological Progressives – including the Sierra Club, NRDC, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and 350.org – also increasingly draw on a politics that recognizes the intense interconnections between the natural and social realms. Unlike techno-ecological optimists, however, this attempt to break down the nature/society divide is not hedged within a desire to ‘love your monsters,’ but in a desire to grapple with the ways in which environmental destruction and social inequality are driven by similar structures, logics and policies. Like many American environmental organizations of the past, socio-ecological progressives analyse a wide variety of environmental issues, including: wilderness and species protections, public health, toxics and climate change (see Table 1). What has changed, however, is how these environmental crises are linked to issues of democracy, economic inequality and racial injustice. Additionally, increased attention is focused on grassroots organizing,

gesturing toward a shift away from what environmental political theorist John Meyer has termed ‘paternalism’ and towards ‘populism’.⁷⁵

This grassroots turn is reflective of a changing political economic vision that seeks to combat neoliberalism by reinvigorating democracy. Socio-ecological progressives emphasize the importance of a strong public sphere – one that creates the opportunity for free, fair and inclusive deliberation by getting money out of politics, increasing voter participation (particularly among marginalized populations) and strengthening the power of workers.⁷⁶ 350.org continually refers to ‘people power’ versus corporate power,⁷⁷ while Greenpeace has a project on ‘Defending Democracy’ that assails the insidious rise of ‘corporate influence in American politics’⁷⁸ (Table 2).

In contrast to past iterations of ‘public environmentalism’ (in which the national public was a mostly white, largely middle and upper-class public), environmental justice is also integrated into the ideological underpinnings of progressive socio-ecology, though there remains significant variability in the extent to which it factors into each organization’s discourse (Table 3).⁷⁹ This conception of EJ is markedly different from that expressed by liberal environmentalists in that it is hedged within a critique of the neoliberal economic structure, and emphasizes solidarity in the face of racial inequality and economic injustice. For example, Greenpeace discusses the importance of ‘standing together with allies across the spectrum to rebuild our democracy,’⁸⁰ and Friends of the Earth has a ‘Statement of Commitment to Anti-Oppression.’⁸¹ Signalling an increasingly cosmopolitan ethos, in 2013, the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, and 350.org all came out in favour of comprehensive immigration reform that offered a path to citizenship.

In attempting to achieve this vision of socio-ecological justice, these organizations pursue alliances with a variety of progressive social actors, including labour unions, immigrants’ rights organizations and indigenous rights organizations. The Sierra Club, for instance, is part of the Blue-Green Alliance, fights against the militarization of the US-Mexico border, and has a working relationship with the Latino/a group, Presente.org.⁸² 350.org has been active in the climate justice movement and helped to support the ‘Cowboy-Indian Alliance’ protesting Keystone-XL.⁸³ The NRDC is also a member of the Blue-Green Alliance, and touts partnerships with local level environmental justice groups across the country.⁸⁴ Echoing this approach to alliance-building, Greenpeace recently released a video entitled, ‘We Are All Connected,’ with statements from civil rights, LGBTQ, labour and environmental activists.⁸⁵

Socio-ecological radicalism

Socio-ecological radicals – like Earth First!, Rising Tide and the Indigenous Environmental Network – share the ontology and the social justice emphasis of their progressive counterparts. What differentiates this ideological grouping is their anti-systemic and anti-reformist ethos; one encapsulated in the traditional Earth First saying, ‘no compromise in defense of Mother Earth.’⁸⁶ And yet, despite the fact that this phrase is still in use by Earth First!, a more accurate statement capturing the contemporary politics of socio-ecological radicals would be ‘no compromise in defense of Mother Earth or Social Justice.’ Like the deep ecologists of the past, this grouping continues to emphasize wilderness, species and ecosystems, and to oppose resource extraction and non-renewable energies (Table 1); however, these ecological commitments are embedded not in the misanthropism or xenophobia of Ed Abbey and Dave Foreman, but in a philosophy of ‘total liberation’ for all oppressed human and

non-human lives.⁸⁷ A recent EF article states the formula as follows: 'biocentrism + deep ecology + anti-oppression + solidarity = eco-liberation.'⁸⁸ Similarly, Rising Tide describe themselves as a movement 'taking a bottom-up approach to connecting the dots between colonialism, corporate power, climate disruption, social justice and biocentrism.'⁸⁹ Socio-ecological radicals level a political economic critique against capitalism and industrial civilization, forcefully articulate a commitment to social justice, and increasingly pursue relationships with other radical, anti-systemic groups.

More than any other grouping, socio-ecological radicalism emphasizes the incommensurability between capitalism and sustainability. For these organizations, the political economic terms that received the most attention were 'capitalism' (always deemed normatively problematic) and 'inequality' (Table 2). Whereas progressives frame their struggle in opposition to the 'oil and gas lobby' or 'the forces of environmental degradation,' socio-ecological radicals explicitly reject the state (particularly the police, military and prison-industrial complex) and capitalism as inherently destructive and oppressive institutions. The Indigenous Environmental Network, for example, spends significant time critiquing UN REDD and carbon markets not only as flawed market-based approaches, but as forms of 'bio-colonialism.'⁹⁰ As an alternative, Rising Tide and the Indigenous Environmental Network employ the concept of the 'just transition,' calling for an immediate, 'large-scale transition away from a fossil fuel-based economy.'⁹¹ Solutions, for these organizations, must be decentralized and bottom-up; they must respect non-human lives, while also breaking down human-made borders and institutionalized exclusions.⁹²

From this perspective, it is clear that environmental justice is integral to the politics of the radicals, with a language of solidarity, intersectionality and decoloniality foregrounding all practice.⁹³ Terms related to environmental justice comprise 26% of Earth First!'s focus, 36% of the Indigenous Environmental Network's, and 34% of Rising Tide's (Table 3). Although socio-ecological progressives also highlight environmental inequalities (across lines of race, class and gender), this ideological grouping moves a step further in extending its conception of oppression to colonialism, the prison-industrial complex and (for Earth First!) discrimination based on sexuality. Resistance involves civil disobedience and direct action, while alliances are transnational and increasingly cut across the boundaries of radical social movements. The IEN explains its coalition-building philosophy as one of 'building alliances among indigenous communities, tribes, inter-tribal and Indigenous organizations, people-of-color/ethnic organizations, faith-based and women groups, youth, labor, environmental organizations and others.'⁹⁴ The IEN is also a strong participant in the climate justice movement, while Rising Tide North America itself emerged out of a concerted attempt (by members of Earth First! and other radical socio-ecological organizations) to fuse radical environmental and social justice concerns around climate change.

Conclusions

Over fifteen years into the twenty-first century, it is clear that there have emerged environmental ideologies that do not mesh with those developed to understand twentieth century environmental practice. American greens are adapting to a changing political environment in a variety of novel ways that extant reviews of American environmental ideologies have not adequately explored. My analysis has focused particular attention on how environmental ideologies are shifting in response to four phenomena: the hegemony of neoliberalism;

the question of nature; the increased salience of environmental justice; and the need for alliance-building with non-environmental actors. My findings indicate that three emergent ideological variants – techno-ecological optimism, socio-ecological progressivism, and socio-ecological radicalism – are increasingly coming to drive American environmental practice. In each variant, the nature/society dualism has been broken down and varied social commitments – to environmental justice, political economics, and causes like labour and immigrants’ rights – are being explicitly and intentionally articulated to ecological causes, albeit in ways that differ dramatically.

This deconstruction of the nature/society dualism is reflective of a systematic blurring of the boundaries between environmental and social organizations, and the resulting ontological fluidity that has come to characterize both types of activism. It is no doubt true that the borders between groups ostensibly dedicated to ‘the environment’ and those dedicated to ‘social’ issues have always been somewhat porous; for instance, there have been well-known dialogues between the environmental movement and peace movement, and between greens and labour unions. But, as evidenced by the discourses deployed by socio-ecological progressives and socio-ecological radicals, many national-level environmental organizations in the United States are devoting greater attention to issues (e.g. racial inequality, the role of money in politics) that have historically been the purview of social organizations (or, in some cases, traditional environmental justice groups). In such a conjuncture, the type of environmentalism typified by wilderness preservationists – where virtually no attention is given to environmental justice or political economy – appears to be going by the wayside. Further, the refusal of techno-ecological optimists to engage with environmental justice could render organizations like the Breakthrough Institute incapable of appealing to a progressive base driven by socio-ecological concerns. The shifts by groups like Sierra Club and Earth First! away from narrowly defined ecological sensibilities and toward ideologies founded upon socio-ecological interconnection are telling in this regard.

The ideological variability within American environmental organizations is both a blessing and a curse: on one hand, it presents opportunities for forging alliances with a variety of ideologically diverse social actors (including those who have historically been underrepresented in the environmental movement); on the other hand, it poses a potential barrier to the deep cooperation that is needed in order to respond politically to pressing environmental challenges (e.g. free trade agreements, fracking, climate legislation). In this vein, further research at a range of scales is needed; particularly into the varieties of eco-localism and eco-regionalism found in the food sovereignty, ‘transition town’ and environmental justice movements, and into the types of eco-cosmopolitanism that are emerging in the global justice and climate justice movements. The environmental ideological variants emphasized at those scales articulate with the national-level variants outlined in this article in interesting ways that are crucial to understand in the pursuit of the transformational alliances needed to fight for global socio-ecological sustainability.

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 3. Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, 'The death of environmentalism: global warming politics in a post-environmental world', Breakthrough Institute 2004 [online], available at http://thebreakthrough.org/PDF/Death_of_Environmentalism.pdf (accessed 19 September 2015).
 4. Hays, *A History of Environmental Politics*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 2; Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 2.
 5. Young, *op. cit.*, Ref. 1; Vincent, *op. cit.*, Ref. 1.
 6. See Ref. 1.
 7. Perhaps the most influential of these efforts is John Dryzek's *Politics of the Earth* (*op. cit.*, Ref. 1), which outlines nine discourses that characterize environmental political struggles: Survivalism; Prometheanism; Administrative Rationalism; Democratic Pragmatism; Economic Rationalism; Sustainable Development; Ecological Modernization; Green Consciousness; and Green Politics. Dryzek's focus differs from mine in two respects. First, his corpus of study is broader, extending beyond the US to environmental movements in the European Union, Japan and Australia. Second, his environmental discourses are narrower than my environmental ideological variants (which are constellations of multiple discourses). For example, the ideological variant of 'techno-ecological optimism' that I outline deploys Dryzek's discourses of administrative rationalism, prometheanism and ecological modernization.
 8. Dowie, *op. cit.*, Ref. 2, pp. 15–18; Shabecoff, *Earth Rising*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 2, pp. 1–3.
 9. Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 2, pp. 82–88; Brulle, *op. cit.*, Ref. 2, pp. 225–6; Dorceta Taylor, *Race, Class, Gender and American Environmentalism* (US Department of Agriculture: Forest Service, 2002), pp. 14–17.
 10. Shabecoff, *Earth Rising*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 2, p. 32.
 11. Dowie, *op. cit.*, Ref. 2, p. 208.
 12. Adam Werbach, *Act Now, Apologize Later* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), pp. 68–69; as cited by Shabecoff, *Earth Rising*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 2.
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 15. Laura Pulido, *Environmentalism and Economic Justice: Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1996); Dorceta Taylor, *op. cit.*, Ref. 9; Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 2.
 16. See Brulle, *op. cit.*, Ref. 2, pp. 189–193.
 17. Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 2, pp. 20–21.

18. Dowie, *op. cit.*, Ref. 2, p. 207.
19. Jennifer Price, 'Remaking American environmentalism on the banks of the LA River', *Environmental History* 13(3) (2008), pp. 536–555.
20. Shellenberger and Nordhaus, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
22. Adam Werbach, 'Is environmentalism dead?', Speech to the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco, 8 December 2004.
23. See also Bill McKibben, 'Bill McKibben sends dispatches from a conference on winning the climate-change fight', Grist.org, 26 January 2005 [online], available at <http://grist.org/article/mckibben3/> (accessed 19 September 2015); William Chaloupka, 'The environmentalist: "what is to be done?"', *Environmental Politics* 17(2) (2008), pp. 237–253.
24. Amanda Little, 'Green leaders say rumors of environmentalism's death are greatly exaggerated', Grist.org, 14 January 2005. Available at <http://grist.org/article/little-responses/#clapp> (accessed 17 July 2016).
25. Werbach, *op. cit.*, Ref. 22.
26. Gottlieb, *op. cit.*, Ref. 2, p. 28; see also P. Brick and R. McGregor Cawley, 'Producing political climate change: the hidden life of US environmentalism', *Environmental Politics* 17(2) (2008), pp. 200–218.
27. Shellenberger and Nordhaus, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 12.
28. Price, *op. cit.*, Ref. 19, p. 552.
29. Michel Gelobter, Michael Dorsey, Leslie Fields, Tom Goldtooth, Anuja Mendiratta, Richard Moore, Rachel Morello-Frosch, Peggy Shepard, and Gerald Torres, 'The soul of environmentalism: rediscovering transformational politics in the 21st century', 2005 [online], available at https://www.energyactioncoalition.org/sites/wearepowershift.org/files/Soul_of_Environmentalism.pdf (accessed 19 September 2015).
30. Ludovic Blain, 'Ain't I an environmentalist?', *Social Policy* 35 (3) (2005), pp. 31–34.
31. Gelobter et al., *op. cit.*, Ref. 29.
32. Carl Pope, 'An in-depth response to the death of environmentalism', December 2004 [online], available at <http://grist.org/article/pope-reprint/> (accessed 17 July 2016).
33. These criticisms intensified after Shellenberger and Nordhaus' book length argument, which moved from largely ignoring EJ, to criticizing it as a form of 'sectarianism'. See Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, *Break Through: From the Death of Environmentalism to the Politics of Possibility* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), p. 145. For critiques, see: John Meyer, 'Does environmentalism have a future?', *Dissent* 52(2) (2005), pp. 69–75; Robert Brulle and J. Craig Jenkins, 'Spinning our way to sustainability', *Organization & Environment* 19(1) (2006), pp. 82–87; David Schlosberg and Elizabeth Bomberg, 'Perspectives on American environmentalism', *Environmental Politics* 17(2) (2008), pp. 187–199.
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