



American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau (Library of America)

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As America and the world grapple with the consequences of global environmental change, writer and activist Bill McKibben offers this unprecedented, provocative, and timely anthology, gathering the best and most significant American environmental writing from the last two centuries.

Classics of the environmental imagination—the essays of Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and John Burroughs; Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac*; Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*—are set against the inspiring story of an emerging activist movement, as revealed by newly uncovered reports of pioneering campaigns for conservation, passages from landmark legal opinions and legislation, and searing protest speeches. Here are some of America’s greatest and most impassioned writers, taking a turn toward nature and recognizing the fragility of our situation on earth and the urgency of the search for a sustainable way of life. Thought-provoking essays on overpopulation, consumerism, energy policy, and the nature of “nature” join ecologists’ memoirs and intimate sketches of the habitats of endangered species. The anthology includes a detailed chronology of the environmental movement and American environmental history, as well as an 80-page color portfolio of illustrations.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. In his introduction to this superb anthology, McKibben (*The End of Nature*) proposes that "environmental writing is America's most distinctive contribution to the world's literature." The collected pieces amply prove the point. Arranged chronologically, McKibben's selection of more than 100 writers includes some of the great early conservationists, such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir and John Burroughs, and many other eloquent nature writers, including Donald Culross Peattie, Edwin Way Teale and Henry Beston. The early exponents of national parks and wilderness areas have their say, as do writers who have borne witness to environmental degradation—John Steinbeck and Caroline Henderson on the dust bowl, for example, and Berton Roueché and others who have reported on the effects of toxic pollution. Visionaries like Buckminster Fuller and Amory Lovins are represented, as are a wealth of contemporary activist/writers, among them Barry Lopez, Terry Tempest Williams, Barbara Kingsolver, Michael Pollan, Paul Hawken, and Calvin deWitt, cofounder of the Evangelical Environmental Network. McKibben's trenchant introductions to the pieces sum up each writer's thoughts and form a running commentary on the progress of the conservation movement. The book, being published on Earth Day, can be read as a survey of the literature of American environmentalism, but above all, it should be enjoyed for the sheer beauty of the writing. 80-page color illus., not seen by PW. (Apr. 22 [*Earth Day*])

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—There have been some excellent collections of nature writing published in recent years (*The Norton Anthology of Nature Writing* is one fine example), but not until now has there been a definitive anthology of American environmental writing. In this superbly edited volume, McKibben draws a clear distinction between the two. The best of the latter often celebrates nature, but also asks searching questions about the impact of human life on the planet. After a poignant foreword by Al Gore, as well as his own illuminating introduction, McKibben begins with the work of a writer, thinker, and activist ahead of his time, Henry David Thoreau, and ends the volume with Rebecca Solnit's essay, "The Thoreau Problem." She notes that many people think of Thoreau only as a man alone observing nature, but the author of "Civil Disobedience," before enjoying his day of huckleberry picking, spent a night in jail rather than pay taxes to a government guilty of ignoring the higher laws of nature. This vast and varied collection, arranged chronologically, includes many seminal names, such as John Muir, Rachel Carson, and Wendell Berry, and some that are less well known or unexpected, like Benton MacKaye, Caroline Henderson, P. T. Barnum, and Philip K. Dick. Most of the selections derive from longer prose works, but there is also a smattering of poems, song lyrics, and cartoons. Although the heft of the volume might scare away some teens, others may realize that they could easily read bits and pieces, and that they would benefit greatly by any amount of time spent in these pages. Numerous photographs, many in full color, are included.—*Robert Saunderson, Berkeley Public Library, CA*

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Environmental writing, McKibben explains in his introduction to this unique, much needed anthology, "subsumes and goes beyond" nature writing and takes as its subject "the collision between people and the rest of the world." An important environmental writer himself, McKibben has selected works by expected seminal figures, beginning with Thoreau, always startling in his prescience and sure-footed clarity, and moving on to Muir, Leopold, and Carson. But he also includes George Perkins Marsh, whose

Man and Nature (1864) was the “first major work of scientific environmentalism”; landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead; and song lyrics by Joni Mitchell. McKibben devotes most of the volume to writers of the last quarter-century, such as Wendell Berry, Barbara Kingsolver, and Michael Pollan, who have focused on increasingly urgent environmental dilemmas that affect every aspect of our daily lives. In his foreword, Nobel laureate Al Gore (his 1997 speech at the Kyoto Climate Change Conference is included) observes, “a truth eloquently expressed has an influence greater than any elected official,” while McKibben hopes that the eloquence of these 100 pioneering environmentalists “will spur not only reflection but action as well.” If you had to choose but one environmental book this season, make it American Earth. --Donna Seaman

Users Review

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Jarred Chisolm:

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