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**Briefly Noted**

Reviewed and Compiled by Thomas J. Burns  
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**The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl**

By Timothy Egan  
 New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006  
 ISBN: 061834697X

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This book has the virtue of being history that reads like a compelling, page-turner novel. Egan has a gift for capturing the argot of the people who lived through the dust bowl in the American Heartland. In a number of ways reminiscent of Steinbeck's timeless novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, this book gives voice to the people who stayed. Egan considers macro-level social and political events such as ill-conceived tariffs, the over-plowing of grasslands, and, more generally, the social and economic incentives to misuse the land. The story is, in many ways, an old one. The people on the ground, such as the abjectly poor hard-scrabble farmers, were the most profoundly affected. There are many lessons in this book for the current century as well. This would be a strong addition to the reading list in a 20th century environmental history course.

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**The Weathermakers: How Man is Changing the Climate and What it Means for Life on Earth**

By Tim Flannery  
 Melbourne, Text Publishing, 2005  
 ISBN: 0871139359

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This is an informative, well-written book. Flannery pulls together a coherent text from a number of sources, and the result is a work that would be readily accessible to undergraduates without being dumbed down. Although there is nothing particularly new covered, it does fill a niche for a short, accessible text that gets students up to speed on the topic and provides plenty of food for thought and discussion. It also bears noting that Flannery is a zoologist who brings his training to bear; although it is not the central aspect of the text, he does a nice job of discussing the particular perils to animal species posed by various types of climate change.

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**Blessed Unrest: How the Greatest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw It Coming**

By Paul Hawken  
 New York, Viking Press, 2007  
 ISBN: 0670038520

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Paul Hawken makes a compelling case that social movements are interconnected, and have a common ancestry. What is a bit more controversial perhaps, albeit no less intriguing, lies in what he sees as constituting that lineage. Hawken makes a case that American Transcendentalism was a prime moving force, particularly the thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson, and his works on Nature, which directly inspired Henry David Thoreau. Emerson and Thoreau's works on nature and civil disobedience in turn encouraged and motivated not only John Muir and Rachel Carson, but also Mahatma Gandhi who in turn inspired Martin Luther King, Jr. Emerson's ideas about the oversoul dovetail quite nicely with ideas about the interconnectedness of all as seen in, for example, the Gaia hypothesis. One may not agree with all of his arguments, but Hawken has done a splendid job of thinking big in this book. Hawken concludes that living in harmony with the planet is intimately interconnected with the dignity of life on the planet.

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**When the Rivers Run Dry: Water — The Defining Crisis of the Twenty-first Century**

By Fred Pearce  
 Boston, Beacon Press, 2007  
 ISBN: 978-0807085738

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While so much time and attention is given to oil shortages, there is something even more pressing. That, of course, is water. Already, there are over a billion people in the world without access to even minimally clean drinking water, and that number is rising rapidly. As Pearce intimates in the title, he does indeed make a compelling case that water shortages will be the defining crisis in the current century — and it is likely to get worse (for sure) before it gets better (maybe). This book is chock full of facts and figures (some of which could be a bit better documented). It takes, for example, about 130 gallons of water to grow a pound of wheat, and between 250 and 650 gallons of water to grow a pound of rice. To raise livestock, the numbers go up exponentially. The overall effect is one of being bowled over by the starkness of the situation. The harshest effects are, of course, encountered

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by the poorest people in marginal ecological places. Not unlike energy resources, water is consumed in much higher proportions in developed countries than in less developed ones. This book is a good one to catalyze discussions about water in particular, and about environmental ethics more generally.

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***The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth***

**By E.O. Wilson**  
New York, W.W. Norton, 2007  
ISBN: 0393330486

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Wilson, a noted entomologist and erstwhile ecological theorist, pens this book as an epistle to the religious (particularly Christian) right. His point is that there has been all too

much bickering between science and religion over the years. Issues of creation or evolution aside, given that the planet and its life forms are here in the present, what is to be done now? There is no time like the present to have a détente and come together over issues of mutual interest — most notably those having to do with survival of life on the planet. He lays out a compelling case for sustainability through complexity and, *a fortiori*, for the catastrophic potential of ecological degradation in its many forms, most notably the loss of biodiversity. He challenges the religious right to take their own ideas seriously, particularly those of stewardship. He asks why environmental issues have, for so much of the religious right, been either treated with scorn or neglected. Wilson's challenge is given in the spirit of coming to some common ground before it is too late.