

# Divided Planet: The Ecology of Rich and Poor

by Tom Athanasiou  
307 pp., notes, index  
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Reviewed by Edward B. Liebow  
Battelle Seattle Research Center  
Seattle, Washington 98105 USA

*Divided Planet* is a rich primary text in contemporary environmental politics, and Athanasiou is a clever, if melodramatic wordsmith. In the final analysis, however, its polemics overwhelm its potential value, and careful readers of science and policy studies will be disappointed.

As *Divided Planet* tells us, the world is going to hell. This is a matter of fact, not opinion, certainly not a socially constructed viewpoint. Anyone who says otherwise is blinded by either their indulgent political orientation or cynical, manipulative corporate greenwashing. The impending social and ecological tragedy demands pragmatism, but no practical suggestions can be offered, because what is politically feasible will not make a difference, while changes significant enough to be worthwhile are politically unthinkable. Feel-good environmentalism, illusory practices in industrialized economies, only fuel the crisis. This crisis can, however, provide the motivation and focus for an enlightened new world order, with new political institutions made equal to the challenges of the emerging world. This new world order will consist of an economic regime of "upward harmonization" in which minimal environmental and labor rights standards apply to all, or at least to all that seek access to global markets. With a globalized economy, "upward harmonization" implies creating and enforcing environmental standards within trade agreements as a way of controlling transnational corporate behavior. The greening of international trade is critical. To accomplish this, greens, workers movements, and human rights activists must go global, just as the corporations have done.

Athanasiou, a self-described political activist and journalist, has written for *The Nation*, *Technology Review*, *World Watch* magazine, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He also holds a "day job" on the staff of Sun Microsystems.

As many others have suggested before him (see Greenberg and Park, 1993 for a helpful review; as well as the more recent Rocheleau et al., 1996), Athanasiou points to the political processes of economic globalization, commodification of natural resources, and territorialization of resource bases and regulatory jurisdictions as having potentially calamitous ecological consequences. He further argues that in addition to a planetary "North" / "South" division of wealth and power, a marked disparity has emerged in the way environmental issues are constructed. The "South"—"the poor, indebted, population-booming regions of the world" (p. 15)—sees environmental protection as inextricably linked to survival and justice.

The "Northern" construction of "nature protection" is rejected as incomplete, naive, or perhaps intentionally oppressive.

Evidence from a number of sources concerning trends in energy consumption and environmental quality supports Athanasiou's argument. A carefully crafted, empirically based model of decision-making regimes is echoed in his call for a new path to resource allocation decisions. A repertory of useful tools for redistributing wealth and protecting resources is certainly to be found among an array of technological, market, and policy alternatives. So why is this book's treatment of these important issues of such limited value? Perhaps because it drips with venomous contempt for the same institutions of power it regards as necessary to enlist in democratizing and greening the global economy. When industrial representatives offer a point of view, they are "PR flacks." A press release from the "scientifically scrupulous" Greenpeace, however, is presented as evidence that the Clinton Administration's "Climate Action Plan" "is widely seen as just a lot of hot air." "Movement-based" analysts are given precedence over World Bank "stonewalling" and "monumentally confusionist" pundits.

*Divided Planet* is also filled with internal contradictions. We hear on the first page that "the alarm has been rung," that the currents of history have "swept us quickly into deep, turbulent waters." Slogans, not remedies, are proposed throughout the book's course, however, and by the end we are assured that "time and resources remain" (p. 303). We hear "North" and "South" as a gloss for the key social and ecological planetary divisions until we get roughly two-thirds of the way through the argument, when it is then revealed that:

a new internationalism is needed, and it will not likely be grown within the sterile frames of 'North' and 'South.' . . . It is time to stop talking about the 'North and the South,' the 'South and the North,' and the 'North within the South' and the 'South within the North' and start talking about (in rough translation) 'the fuckers and the fuckees.' (p. 218)

If this "North/South" division indeed is not helpful in advancing a new sort of internationalism, it is unfortunate that Athanasiou did not try to reframe the global ecology in more productive terms from the very first page.

While *Divided Planet* correctly illuminates a key juncture in the history of ideas and social movements, it has a highly selective regard for intellectual history: An entire philosophy

of science literature about the construction of uncertainty is vaguely debunked with a reference to Thomas Kuhn and then summarily dismissed in a footnote as a matter of opinion (p. 256, see note 111). Anthropologist Gregory Bateson, whose prolific career spanned six decades, is described as a "1970s systems theorist and eco-philosopher" (p. 297).

From a more encompassing vantage point, the book's textual features—its invective, its internal inconsistencies, its selective historical consciousness—are also its most instructive elements. *Divided Planet's* intended audience is the environmentally aware, and the book is written in a style and tone that many in this audience will find familiar and inspirational. The subtext of the book is fundamentally one of burdens of proof and rules of evidence. Here is a resounding rake of a drinking cup across the cell bars to awaken the dozing guardians of the environment, interrupting their dreams of business as usual. Lose your "debilitating population fetish!" goes the plea for radical change—it only hides class distinctions and difficult political truths behind "biologic pseudo-explanations" (p. 82). Technological "fixes" have not and will not work. Energy efficiency is increasing, but not nearly as fast as overall energy consumption. Demographic transitions (to lower fertility) cannot be engineered through technology-driven economic development. The Green Revolution, a "technological fix" in its own right has "violence and ecological scarcity" as its legacy (p. 88). How do we know this? We read Greenpeace's press releases, *Rachel's*, the World Watch Institute's annual *State of the World* report, and anything the *New York Times* covers as "hard news," and we need not consult the National Academy of Sciences for its discourses on human dimensions of global climate change or on environmental risk, only yielding in a moment of weakness to that seductive population fetish (pp. 71-72).

New institutional paths must be taken, coupling a redistribution of wealth and power with self-restraint. However, if we thought that deliverance from ecological calamity would accompany the end of the Cold War, the resulting new world order, and a redirection of military spending, we have another think coming. While communism has had a poisonous environmental legacy, the world's industrial democracies have everything to gain from the continuing destruction of the central European states. We learn that in these states the West sees export markets for nuclear power, toxic wastes and automobiles, while the West appropriates oil and gas, timber, and fish at bargain basement prices in exchange for hard currency. What's more, Western observers are said to be "quick to seek out local causes" (p. 141), rather than properly attribute the environmental consequences to Western sources.

The new world order is imperfectly realized in international trade agreements as well. Globalization of industry is leading to local ecological destabilization, and "the Free Trade movement" (Global Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, or GATT; the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA; the European Community; and the Asian Pacific Economic Community, or APEC) is implicated in economic globaliza-

tion, commodification of local natural resource stores, and production that reflects world prices, not local conditions of supply and demand.

National sovereignty is at stake, especially the ability of nations to maintain environmental standards. More fundamentally at stake is the need for a global set of "process standards," which refer to the processes by which products are brought to the international market. Rich nations seeking to uphold high environmental standards by proscribing the exports of the poor threaten the integrated global trading system. "Technology transfer" becomes an important issue if poor nations lack the means to enforce environmental protection standards in their export industries (p. 179).

More than lax environmental laws, cheap labor is what drives "Northern" industry "South"-ward, but ecological destabilization is the result. Northern environmentalists, who have kept themselves aloof from the worker's world, must eventually acknowledge the importance of the cost of labor (p. 184). Contrary to the traditional development view, economic growth in the North, coupled with free trade, is NOT the solution to Southern poverty. And while the U.S. environmental mainstream—"the Shameful Seven"—embraced NAFTA as the greenest trade treaty ever, Athanasiou finds little cause for optimism in the byzantine procedural substitute for environmental protection guarantees (p. 191).

Ecological crisis can provide the motivation and focus for an enlightened new world order, with new political institutions made equal to the challenges of the emerging world. In Athanasiou's view, the transnational corporation is the dominant institution of the age, and needs to be considered as a key player in any realistic vision of the new world order. Corporations possess the organizations, tools, and methods that far surpass the power of either community resistance or governmental regulation.

I agree wholeheartedly with this last contention, but what is needed (and sorely lacking from *Divided Planet*) is a concrete suggestion for constructive engagement by mature environmentalists with the world's corporate citizens. It is not too much to expect Athanasiou to tell us how he expects the keepers of the planetary treasures to loosen their grip on accumulated wealth and power. In engaging the powerful "other," it is reasonable to expect him to acknowledge observations and models of global-local articulations from sources "they" find credible, and to acknowledge that in a participatory decision-making process, corporate citizens have a legitimate stake in the outcome.

## References

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# Resolving Environmental Conflict: Towards Sustainable Community Development

by Christopher Maser  
200 pp., notes, index  
Delray Beach, FL: St. Lucie's Press, 1996  
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Reviewed by Carl Moore  
Western Network  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87505

*Resolving Environmental Conflict: Towards Sustainable Community Development*, according to its author Chris Maser, has been written "to give people the necessary philosophical underpinnings for practicing transformative facilitation." The first part of the book explicates what the author believes about facilitation and the second part "examine[s] notions of development, sustainability, and community."

If I were asked to edit this book as printed, I would make the following suggestions for how to improve it.

1. Explain "transformative facilitation." After all, that is the reason you wrote the book. You say what it can do, what are its potential effects, but not what it is. Be clear about how transformative differs from other types of facilitation. The reason for reading your book, rather than Bush and Folger (1994), would be if it provides new insight into the use of transformative facilitation. Your description in chapter one cries out for actual examples and for you being clear about how your approach is transformative.

2. Be clear about how "facilitation" differs from other processes. "Facilitation" and "mediation" are not synonymous as you imply. Is it facilitation when you put on slide shows or make presentations? I cannot imagine any circumstance when a facilitator would need to begin a process with, according to your report, "a several-hour monologue."

3. Either drop the first person approach or get help tempering the imposition of Chris Maser into the ideas of the book. It is tricky to write in the first person without appearing self-promotional. It does not work even when self-deprecating. Part II has a much improved tone because it does not use so many first person pronouns.

4. Decide whether you want to present your views about the environment or you want to write a book about facilitation. You cannot do both. You reveal your ideological viewpoint throughout the book and your views get in the way of your perceived neutrality as a facilitator. In your discussion of personality traits, for example, it is apparent that a "systems" thinker is more desirable than a "piece" thinker.

A piece thinker is likely to be a rural resident who is very much concerned with land ownership and property rights and wants as much free rein as possible to do as he or she pleases on his or her property, at times without regard for the consequences for future generations. A systems thinker, on the other hand, is most often an urban dweller who is likely to be con-

cerned about the welfare of others, including those of the future and their nonhuman counterparts. Such a simplistic rural/urban dichotomy is indefensible.

5. Use illustrative material (examples, illustrations) that fit the topic of the book. Why illustrate the use of "questions" with "Do you know what the moon is?" when you can easily select an example from your work on environmental disputes. Use actual examples from your own work in the chapter on "Conflict" rather than garbage collectors and doctors. Use environmental facilitation situations to illustrate how the concept of boundaries apply to people wishing to facilitate them. Why not use examples from your work when discussing anger and aggression?

6. Improve the style. Take out the repetition. You make the reader work too hard by having to read the same ideas and the same phrases over and over again. Don't be so extreme. One example is your claim that "anything short of [listening as you describe it] is an act of passive violence." Reduce the frequent use of allness terms such as "only" and "all." Be sensitive to the use of words or phrases that will act as a red flag for some readers (e.g., "out of the closet")

7. Reconcile what is now a mixed message. On the one hand you indicate that the facilitator should not influence the content, but you give an example where you do influence the content. When discussing the use of silence, you give an example where the breakthrough was your suggestion to "call it lifestyle," but you go on to say "had I in any way helped them with the answer..., it would have been my answer—not theirs—and it would have been useless to them."

A few additional concerns:

Your understanding of "communication" does not match your description. You seem to believe that communication is what is received, yet you say that "communication occurs when one person transmits ideas or feelings to another." You recognize that communication is a two-way process yet do not include "feedback" as an essential element.

You say "I intentionally go into each facilitation with very little specific knowledge of the conflict or the participants." One of the most powerful tools a facilitator has is to interview people individually before they come together. It introduces her to the participants and it encourages people to be more candid than they would be in the meeting and thereby enables the facilitator to be the messenger of ideas that might not otherwise

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surface in the meeting. It is one way a facilitator can achieve your goal of making “the process safe enough that all hidden agendas are placed on the table.” The facilitator need not be an expert on the topic, but the more a facilitator knows about the content, the more helpful s/he can be. The key, of course, is to proceed in such a way that the work is the work of the participants, not the facilitator.

Two of my least favorite statements in your book are:

“I must never crack a joke.” and “My data are my truth and I will not allow it to be compared to other data.”

## Reference

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# Green Backlash: The History and Politics of the Environmental Opposition in the U.S.

by Jacqueline V. Switzer

Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997

Reviewed by Antony S. Cheng and Steven E. Daniels  
Oregon State University  
Corvallis, OR. 97331

The "wise use" movement in the United States has attracted attention in the past two years, fueled in part by the actions of the 104th Congress. Environmental organizations frequently cite the Timber Salvage Rider, Clean Water Act limitations, and the endangered species listing moratorium as examples of a "frontal attack" launched by wise use advocates—Republicans and powerful industry lobbyists—on the nation's environmental laws. Grassroots wise use groups advocating private property rights, less government regulation, and increased access to federal land and natural resources are directly associated with broader corporate forces working to weaken environmental statutes and regulations. Political commentators note that the types and sheer number of wise use groups are compelling because they encapsulate an interesting, if disturbing, sentiment that seems have overtaken the United States—a deep distrust of the federal government.

Despite interest in and concern over environmental opposition politics and the wise use movement, there remains a dearth of academic research perspectives on the subject. David Helvarg's *The War on the Greens* (1994) and John Echeverria and Raymond Eby's edited volume, *Let the People Judge: Wise Use and the Private Property Rights Movement* (1995) are two prominent titles, but offer perspectives of wise use groups and organizers that are purposively slanted towards an environmentalist bias. With *Green Backlash: The History and Politics of the Environmental Opposition in the U.S.*, Jacqueline Switzer takes a first step towards filling the void in academic research on the wise use movement and current environmental politics in the United States. The overall objective of the book is to locate environmental opposition politics in broader historical and political contexts with the intent of making the reader realize that there is more to current environmental opposition than characterized in previous accounts.

*Green Backlash* contains three general premises: 1) breaking down stereotypes invoked by environmental organizations that the wise use movement is a monolithic political force united by the purposes of dismantling U.S. environmental laws and policies; 2) demonstrating that grassroots wise use groups and activists are not pawns of industry or well-funded fronts for corporate interests, but are gatherings of average citizens venting personal grievances against government; and 3) linking the objectives and activities of environmental opposition groups to a "traceable ancestry to federal policies dating to the beginning of the republic." These three premises are fleshed out in eleven chapters organized into four general sections.

The first section (Chapters 1-3) establishes environmental opposition politics not as corporate responses to the recent 25 years of environmental legislation, but as an integral part of how business and industry have historically approached political matters. Since the earliest days of the United States, the federal government's role in disposing, managing, and protecting public lands and natural resources has reflected what Switzer calls competing "visions" for how land and natural resources should be used. Throughout the 1800's, westward expansion and economic industrialization fueled industry efforts to define their visions of using and extracting what was perceived to be an endless supply of raw materials. The strategies and tactics of timber, utilities, water, mining, petroleum, ranching, and farming industries are each examined by Switzer, particularly their influence in Congress and the organization of coalitions to dominate policy-making arenas. While the emergence of the Progressive movement and the preservation ethic challenged industry visions in the late 1800's and required industry to expand efforts to protect their visions, the fundamental character of the debate has remained constant into the twentieth century: environmental opposition politics are, in essence, *interest group politics* and are fundamental features of American democracy. The rise of urban recreation and off-road vehicle groups in response to endangered species restrictions are cited by Switzer as further evidence that recent industry efforts to restrict environmental laws and policies are but one episode in a long history of opposition to preservationist visions.

The second section (Chapters 4-6) moves beyond analyzing specific industries and land management issues to explore tactics and strategies employed by businesses and corporations in general, such as public relations campaigns and lobbying. While corporate public relations campaigns to portray corporate responsibility to the environment are derided by environmental commentators as "greenwashing," Switzer is more matter-of-fact in suggesting that such campaigns, whether they represent true changes or are merely cosmetic, are enduring features of how business and industry interests have always protected themselves in political arenas and in the court of public opinion. In short, "greenwashing" and lobbying are transitory strategies playing out in the broader arena of interest group politics. Of equal importance for Switzer is the fact that large industries such as chemical manufacturers and automakers have become more politically astute in forming coalitions to campaign and lobby policy makers to counter lobbying efforts of environmental organizations. Indeed, the most notable industry successes generally take place outside the

public view, within the obscure and complex agency rule-making process. The three-pronged strategy of direct industry lobbying of legislators, public relations campaigns, and coalition-building to influence bureaucratic decision making have become more public due to the Republican transformation of the 104th Congress, but have been underlying currents in environmental politics for a long time.

The third section of *Green Backlash* (Chapters 7-10) switches the focus from business and industry towards grassroots groups, leaders, and organizational structure that are broadly labeled as the “wise use” movement. Rather than portraying “homegrown” environmental opposition as part of a unified, monolithic corporate movement to systematically disassemble U.S. environmental laws and policies, Switzer maintains that grassroots wise use organizations defy simple categorizations. Moreover, Switzer demonstrates that each group is a product of unique origins or catalytic events, entrepreneurial efforts of key individuals, and political opportunities or “policy windows.” A vast majority of the groups appear to be gatherings of “average” citizens or landowners who share similar experiences and perceptions of an oppressive federal government that no longer represents their best interest. While political entrepreneurs form umbrella organizations and disseminate propaganda in tremendous volumes and enthusiasm, most grassroots groups tend to operate in isolation, working on issues and concerns specific to them, rather than operating under a unified front.

The section is divided into examinations of the “Sagebrush Rebellion” of the 1970’s, the origins and organizational structure of the wise use, the “county supremacy” movement, and the property rights movement. By separating these submovements into distinct components of the grassroots environmental opposition, Switzer bucks the conventional wisdom that they are all somehow related and draw funding and political power from the same place.

*Green Backlash* closes with a number of conclusions (Chapter 11). The first is that the success of environmental opposition forces is proportionate to their ability to engage in interest group politics at the highest levels of government. While grassroots groups mobilize symbolic opposition to government policies and are indicators of broader political sentiments, their effectiveness in the policy arena tends to be marginal. Business, industry, and corporate interests continuously maintain access to key players in congress and bureaucratic decision processes, and forge enduring coalitions to fight environmental initiatives to post the real successes of environmental opposition. In addition, the life-span of grassroots wise use groups is questionable as they are generally associated with policy windows and the efforts of key entrepreneurs.

Second, using measurements of success invoked by other political scientists, Switzer challenges the conventional wisdom that environmental opposition forces have made irreversible gains in the 104th Congress to roll back 25 years of environmental laws. While the perception of legislative overhaul is daunting, Switzer takes the view that if any gains were

made by the environmental opposition, they are marginal. For Switzer, the reasons for the small environmental opposition gains are due in large part to the overwhelming public support for environmental protection among the general U.S. population. Unfortunately for national environmental organizations, they too have failed in posting significant policy gains despite the large public support for environmental protection. Once again, the reasons Switzer provides for the environmentalists’ incapacity lie in simple interest group politics—namely, the ability of environmental groups to mobilize sufficient resources to lobby, campaign, and form enduring coalitions to turn environmental initiatives into law, and to prevent current laws from constant attack from environmental opposition forces.

As a final conclusion, Switzer maintains that environmental politics is an enduring feature on the political landscape due to the very nature of interest group politics. Both environmental advocates and industry interests have sufficient resources and capacity to raise environmental issues in the policy arena, but neither side has enough capacity to push through a dominant vision that can remain unchallenged. What remains clear is that the environmental opposition will remain as a vital component in environmental politics. For Switzer and other commentators cited in the concluding chapter of *Green Backlash*, the strategies and efforts to reform environmental laws and policies always gravitate towards a proverbial “mainstream,” where the majority of the U.S. population resides ideologically. In this regard, Switzer predicts a rise in the number of negotiated, “partnership” collaborations to resolve tensions in land and natural resource management. Grassroots groups and individuals will eventually fade from the political scene, leaving business and industry to continue to defend their interests through the channels provided by interest group politics in America.

The layout and organization of the book are straightforward and easy to follow. Switzer’s well-documented anecdotal narratives of specific events and individuals provide a historical sense of the political environment which existed at the time of key land and natural resource policy debates, although several narratives border on being tangentially relevant. Much of the writing style is reminiscent of journalistic accounts of people and events. In some narratives, figures and tables organizing funding sources, organizational structure, and coalitions would have been useful. Switzer generally cites original sources, although much of the information on grassroots environmental opposition groups lurks in “gray matter” literature such as newspapers and popular journals.

*Green Backlash* seems to add a layer to Charles Wilkinson’s *Crossing the Next Meridian* (1992) by exploring the strategies of key interest groups and policy makers in establishing and maintaining land and natural resource policies favoring utilization and extraction. It moves beyond *Crossing the Next Meridian* by providing some key differences among the political strategies taken by various business and industry groups, and by supplying a greater degree of depth in examin-

ing the relative effectiveness of specific lobbying, public relations campaigns, and coalition-building activities over time. The extensive chronicling of grassroots wise use, property rights, and county supremacy groups is unprecedented and tremendously informative. In general, the content of *Green Backlash* successfully expands on the first two premises that Switzer lays out at the beginning of the book: to break the stereotype of a monolithic environmental opposition, and to cast a more objective light on the purpose and organization of grassroots environmental opposition groups.

The third premise of *Green Backlash* faces a more difficult research challenge. Developing linkages between current environmental opposition politics to the roots of U.S. land and natural resource policy is indeed a task requiring a strong set of unifying themes and features. In this regard, *Green Backlash* falls somewhat short. In many ways, the underlying themes in *Green Backlash* reflect Jeffrey Berry's classic, *Interest Group Society* (1997) and *The Organization of Interests* (1988) by Terry Moe. However, the way in which Switzer presents the emergence and development of environmental opposition interest group politics never quite sets out unifying themes or features to which the reader can consistently refer. Instead, each narrative example brings up features of interest group politics in an ad hoc fashion, such as coalition building, social movements, and policy subgovernments (or, "Iron Triangles"). It is difficult to uncover the "traceable ancestry" to which Switzer refers at the book's beginnings because the features of that ancestry are never fully explicit. *Backlash* would have benefitted by anchoring upon the themes outlined in Berry and Moe.

The subject matter and information in *Green Backlash* are presented in a manner suitable for upper-division undergraduate natural resource policy classes or political science courses dealing with interest group politics, and would be a valuable counterpart to Wilkinson's *Crossing the Next Meridian* as a basic text. It may also be appropriate to cater *Green Backlash* to an audience in rural sociology to examine the phenomena of grassroots wise use, property rights, and county supremacy groups. Needless to say, *Green Backlash* is a necessary addition to any bibliography on wise use groups or current environmental politics.

## References

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