



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on January 20, 2020

Published in the January 20, 2020 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 36, No. 02

Why the Greentopians Would Destroy the Earth

If you'd wanted some really cheap shorefront property, Lake Karachay circa 1990 was the place and time to buy. Nestled in the beautiful southern Ural Mountains, there was no better locale for peace, quiet, and solitude. There was a catch, however: Linger around the shore a few hours put you at risk of acute radiation poisoning. But, hey, if you're a Child of Atom (from video game *Fallout 4*) or a moss piglet (a small, radiation-resistant aquatic creature) and have a hankering for deathly silence, the small USSR lake could have been your Shangri-La.



Welcome to environmental stewardship, socialism style.

As with Indonesia's Citarum River — one of the world's most polluted and a dumping ground for human and industrial waste — Lake Karachay is an extreme example of an old phenomenon: Contrary to greentopian myth, poorer, more undeveloped, less-free lands have the worst environments. In contrast, the freest, richest nations enjoy by far the cleanest environments and have flourishing, well-preserved wilderness. This truth has never been more relevant, too. For our time's socialist doomsayer demagogues claim that if we just give them enough power, they'll serve up a sustainable, verdant tomorrow. But history shows that they'll deliver a toxic wasteland with pollution distributed to, and more equally affecting, everyone — except themselves.

Environmental destruction is an old story. It happens naturally on various scales. In fact, the most devastating environmental "catastrophes" — if we're to thus label what atheists would brand purposeless natural occurrences and theists may call God's will — have been authored by forces more powerful than man. Scientists tell us that there have been five mass extinctions during the Earth's history, with causes ranging from ice ages to volcanic activity to a possible asteroid strike to the emergence of competitor species to the unknown (alas, the Green New Deal wasn't around to save the day). All told, 99.9 percent of the species that have ever existed have gone extinct — virtually all without man's help.

Of course, while many biologists claim we're experiencing a sixth mass extinction (with the competitor species being us), any of the other aforementioned disasters could occur again. Additionally and according to Science™, we have to worry (well, we don't really have to, but it is a hobby with some people) about a nearby supernova, a hotter burning sun, the death of our sun, colliding galaxies, a roving black hole, CO2 levels dropping too low to allow for plant photosynthesis, and, on the nearer term, out-of-control artificial intelligence (*The Terminator*) and aggressive, technologically superior extraterrestrials (*Independence Day*).

Returning to the more mundane, man's environmental despoilment is not, as many assume, a modern Western phenomenon. Arid North Africa was once a Roman province and the empire's breadbasket, but



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on January 20, 2020

Published in the January 20, 2020 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 36, No. 02

later Arab invasions led to the region's medieval deforestation. The world's largest desert, the Sahara, "was once green and alive, pocked with lakes, rivers, grasslands and even forests," wrote the Smithsonian in 2017. But non-Western humans and their goats might have "tipped the balance" and kick-started a "dramatic ecological transformation," suggests archaeologist David Wright. Across the pond, medieval American Indians via their agricultural practices "increased soil erosion and sediment yields to the Delaware River basin" and "decreased forest cover to reorient their settlements and intensify corn production," a 2011 Baylor University study found. Moreover, "From New England to the Southwest, wherever Indian populations were dense and farming was intense, deforestation was common," wrote the Property and Environment Research Center in 1996. "Indeed, the mysterious departure of the Anasazi from the canyons of southeastern Utah in the thirteenth century may have been due to depletion of wood supplies used for fuel." There goes the "noble savage" living "in harmony with nature" bit.

That said, our time's far-denser populations and greater technology — modern weapons, drift-net fishing, industry that can disgorge chemicals and toxic waste, nuclear contamination, etc. — create the potential for environmental destruction on a grander scale. There are serious problems, too, ranging from deforestation to water supply pollution to species' extinction to oceanic debris, with plastics of particular concern. Furthermore, we're told the issue is our modern, "unsustainable" lifestyles and that if the Third World becomes like us, perish the thought, doomed we will be; in fact, implied is that we need to become more like the Third World.

Intuitively, this can seem to make sense. I mean, we do produce a lot, and consume a lot, and use massive amounts of energy. We're downright profligate. Yet is the above green assumption really true?

On the Environment, the West Is Best

In reality, Western Civilization is doing remarkably well environmentally. Consider the United States. We not only currently have our planet's fourth-largest collection of forests, "comprising eight percent of the world's forests, or about 300 million hectares," wrote Wide Open Spaces in 2015, but also more trees now than we had 100 years ago. In fact, the Earth in general has more trees than it did 35 years ago, largely due to gains in Europe and North America.

Providing specifics about changes from 1982 to 2016, the World Economic Forum (WEF) reported in 2018 that the United States gained 378,000 square kilometers of tree canopy cover, while Europe added 741,000 square kilometers. Russia, part of which lies in Asia, "added 790,000 square kilometers," writes the WEF. (Even China is doing better in this regard: After initiating a major tree-planting program, it has gained 324,000 square kilometers of trees.)

In contrast, the WEF tells us that South America lost 431,000 square kilometers from 1982 to 2016. As for Africa, policy institute Chatham House claimed in 2018 that up "to 58,000 square miles of forests are being lost to deforestation every year." Do note, shrinking tropical jungle means lost biodiversity.

And what of air and water? "Since the late 1970s, pollutants in the air have plunged" in the United States, wrote the Heritage Foundation in 2015. And 100 years ago, "about one in four deaths in America was due to contaminants in drinking water. But from 1971-2002, fewer than three people per year in the United States were documented to have died from water contamination." Moreover, Europe



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on January 20, 2020

Published in the January 20, 2020 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 36, No. 02

also enjoys cleaner air and water than it did decades ago.

Yet in the developing world, air pollution “is getting worse,” reported *The Guardian* in 2018, with India having the title of “the most polluted country on earth,” according to the *Financial Times*. And as The Water Project tells us, “In developing countries, about 80% of illnesses are linked to poor water and sanitation conditions. [One] out of every 5 deaths under the age of 5 worldwide is due to a water-related disease.”

Then there are the oceans. Plastic micro-particles are now ubiquitous in them, and larger plastic items can kill marine creatures. As to the problem’s magnitude, “Every year, 8 million metric tons of plastics enter our ocean on top of the estimated 150 million metric tons that currently circulate [in] our marine environments,” according to the Ocean Conservancy. (Note: Some scientists believe these numbers are exaggerated, as naturally occurring, “plastic eating” microbes may already be at work.) Yet the United States is responsible for less than one percent of it, reported the *Wall Street Journal* in 2015, despite having 4.27 percent of the world’s population and producing approximately nine percent of the world’s plastic. (By the by, now-demonized plastic straws, which demagogues aim to deep-six, account for far less than one percent of our one percent.) As for Europe, it’s also a plastics one-percenter while producing almost 18 percent of the world’s plastic. So who’s guilty?

Photo credit: AP Images

This article appears in the January 20, 2020, issue of The New American.

Up to “95 percent of the plastic waste transported by rivers into oceans comes from just ten rivers,” the *New York Post* informed in 2017. Eight of them are in Asia and a pair in Africa, with the two biggest offenders being China’s Yangtze and India’s Ganges. Moreover, most plastic waste comes from just five Asian nations. China contributes more than any other four countries combined, being responsible for 28 percent of ocean-polluting plastics despite having only 18.59 percent of the global population and producing just under 17 percent of the world’s plastic.

In fact, China has largely become synonymous with pollution, with smog dense enough to block sunlight from solar panels and a majority of its water contaminated. Then there’s Sichuan Province, where farmers must pollinate their apple orchards by hand because pesticides have killed off their entire wild bee population. Yet, interestingly, across the sea from China is an Asian exception: Japan. Despite having the world’s seventh longest coastline, relatively little of its plastic finds its way into the ocean, and it’s now quite a clean country overall (Fukushima accident notwithstanding). So what’s the difference? Well, there are two prerequisites for environmental health: freedom and prosperity.

The Path of the Good Shepherd

A forgotten episode from the 1990s concerns the plight of the Marsh Arabs. Living in Iraq’s Mesopotamian Marshes, their 5,000-year-old culture was targeted for destruction by late dictator Saddam Hussein starting in 1988. Aside from bombing their villages, the despot drained the wetlands and poisoned the water, reducing a marshland once almost as large as Wales to just 10 percent its original size by 2000; in total, more than 9,300 square miles of it became a desert of death and destruction. A similar process, albeit for different reasons, occurred with the USSR’s draining of the Aral Sea, a phenomenon called “one of the planet’s worst environmental disasters.” Once the world’s fourth-largest lake, it was reduced to 10 percent its original size and had split into four smaller lakes by 1997. (Note: The Mesopotamian Marshes have since been partially re-flooded.)



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on January 20, 2020

Published in the January 20, 2020 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 36, No. 02

Speaking of lakes brings us back to the radioactive Karachay, which got that way courtesy of the nearby Mayak nuclear facility. The Soviet “government kept Mayak entirely secret until 1990, and it spent that period of invisibility mainly having nuclear meltdowns and dumping waste into the river [that fed the lake],” wrote the environmental website Grist in 2012. “By the time Mayak’s existence was officially acknowledged, there had been a 21 percent increase in cancer incidence, a 25 percent increase in birth defects, and a 41 percent increase in leukemia in the surrounding region of Chelyabinsk. The Techa river, which provided water to nearby villages, was so contaminated that up to 65 percent of locals fell ill with radiation sickness — which the doctors termed ‘special disease,’ because as long as the facility was secret, they weren’t allowed to mention radiation in their diagnoses.” In fact, the most radioactively contaminated place on Earth, Mayak’s discharges “have polluted hundreds of lakes ... and people are still banned from living or farming in a zone 350 square kilometres around the complex,” *New Scientist* reported in 1997.

The point? Autocrats — especially given the type of (sometimes sociopathic) people rising to power in despotic regimes — generally have no compunction about destroying man or nature if it serves their ends. As for the killing of Karachay, there were no media or public-interest watchdogs to sound an alarm, no governments or private entities to sue, and no politicians to hold accountable via elections because there was no freedom. Perhaps we can say: Absolute power pollutes absolutely.

This doesn’t mean freer nations don’t have environmental woes — especially when government is wrongly involved. An example was the Love Canal contamination problem in upstate New York in the late 1970s, resulting from government projects that released previously sequestered toxic waste, according to Steve Bonta in “Environmental Stewardship” (*The New American*, September 25, 2000).

The issue is that there’s a pitfall to government involvement: “Politicians do not expend their own revenues or regulate their own properties when they enact environmental laws,” wrote Bonta. “Consequently, they need not be concerned about their environmental actions destroying their own livelihoods or placing their own lands off-limits to development.... The result is what legal activist Clint Bolick calls a ‘separation of authority from responsibility.’ Bolick notes ‘that ... government decision-makers are largely immunized from the consequences of their decisions.’”

But what of the idea that public lands belong to the people? “Surely the people would not damage the environment, thereby operating against their own self-interest!” Bonta later wrote. This fallacy’s fatal flaw “is that everybody’s responsibility is nobody’s responsibility,” he continued. What transpires when authority and responsibility are linked, however, was explained well by an excerpt Bonta presented from a Pacific Lumber Company brochure:

Because a continuous supply of trees is vital to The Pacific Lumber Company, we manage and cultivate our 194,000 acres of forestland carefully. We maintain access roads so we can protect our trees against forest fires, erosion, insects, or damage from human activity. We plant and nurture new seedlings to replace the trees we cut. We watch our lands as carefully as any good farmer would, because our lands represent our livelihood.

Now consider the devastating wildfires currently raging in California. Even Golden State officials have tacitly admitted, reported the *New York Post* November 20, that they erupted due to government forest land mismanagement.

The lesson? Conservation’s probability is maximized when those with authority over nature areas have a



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on January 20, 2020

Published in the January 20, 2020 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 36, No. 02

direct vested interest (usually economic) in their preservation. The more that government has this authority, however, the less likely this is.

To elaborate further, the liberty/healthy environment phenomenon was explained well by The Stream in its 2015 article, “Why Do the Freest Economies have [*sic*] the Cleanest Streams?” “Free economies aren’t dog-eat-dog, free-for-all economies,” the site wrote, expounding upon the matter of “ordered liberty.” “An economy where people rob, kill and pollute at will isn’t free. Most of us intuitively grasp this when we’re thinking about criminal acts of violence, but the same holds for pollution. Economists actually have a term for helping understand pollution as a violation of other people’s freedom”: negative externality.

An externality is a business action affecting individuals not associated with, or patrons of, the business. The Stream elaborates:

A cherry orchard creates a positive externality for everyone driving past it when the cherry trees are in blossom. A factory with poor pollution controls creates a negative externality.... Ideally the factory’s neighbors would be free to breathe unpolluted air in their backyard, but the factory’s sooty smoke settling onto those yards impinges on that freedom.

In societies characterized by ordered liberty — neither anarchy nor hyper-regulation — sane laws make negative externalities part of the market activity that causes the pollution so that the cost is borne by either the factory, its trading partner, or both, rather than fobbing off the cost on uninvolved land owners with the misfortune of living downwind from the factory.

At the same time, the freest societies avoid regulatory micromanaging of the business transaction, since hyper-regulation of this kind scrambles market incentives and leads to unintended bad consequences. The trick, in other words, is to work with market forces rather than against them. This is not a lesson that leaders in command-and-control societies usually take to heart.

The Beauty of Many Problems

Economic freedom ultimately breeds wealth, and wealth breeds environmental health. For when “there’s food on the table, there are many problems; when there’s no food on the table, there’s only one problem,” the Chinese proverb goes. Starving people aren’t worried about burning jungle to farm or killing an endangered animal; they’re endangering themselves. As the “environmental Kuznets Curve” informs, The Stream also wrote, “the wealthier a country is, the more its citizens can afford to pay for, and are willing to pay for, clean air and water.”

Yet wealth has other positive effects, too. Just consider how poverty “is one of the most significant indirect reasons causing deforestation across Africa,” Chatham House also told us in 2018. When Africans clear forest to farm and avoid starvation, their inefficient, low-tech methods mean they need to use a lot of land to achieve a sufficient yield, the site explained. Moreover, their lack of fertilizer causes land depletion, resulting in even more forest being cut.

In contrast, land devoted to agriculture in the United States dropped by 72 million acres between 1982 and 2012, continuing a long trend, reports the Farmland Information Center; this is despite our population and food needs growing during that period. It’s a testimonial to economic-freedom-born technology and innovation and is why our forested area is, as mentioned earlier, greater than it was 100 years ago.



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on January 20, 2020

Published in the January 20, 2020 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 36, No. 02

So the truth is precisely the opposite of the green demagogues' claims. We needn't fear the Third World "becoming like us" and using the last of the planet's resources. Saving the environment means they must become like us: freer, wealthier, and hence more advanced, so they'll be good shepherds of the Earth.

We should fear, however, environmentalist schemes that would make us more like the Third World. Sure, command-and-control proposals by green doomsayers — who peddle propaganda and parade paranoid teen Swede climate activists before the world as they promise a greentopia — can be seductive. But history's verdict is crystal clear: There is no precedent of a top-down, controlling government delivering anything, on balance, but environmental degradation.

In fact, following today's greentopians' prescriptions would yield utter disaster, asserted ecologist and former Greenpeace Canada figure Dr. Patrick Moore in a February interview with *The New American magazine*. Addressing socialist Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's (D-N.Y.) Green New Deal, he warned that if instituted globally, the scheme could "result in the death of nearly all humans on Earth." But before meeting their miserable end, he added, they'd cut down every tree for fuel and kill every animal for food.

Moore's point is that providing water, food, heat, and other essentials for billions of people sustainably — which the West currently does — requires the massive amounts of energy we derive from the fossil fuels the greentopians aim to eliminate in 12 years. And what the Earth can't sustain is 7.3 billion people living as subsistence farmers and hunters. Thus would the greentopians make Joseph Stalin look like a piker: He starved only five million to death.

Of course, none of this means the West can't and shouldn't do even better environmentally. (Start with getting the human feces, hypodermic needles, and garbage off Los Angeles streets. Then secure the border, as illegal aliens dump trash in the Arizona desert.) Remediating problems such as that of ocean-polluting plastic would also be good. Yet just as the starvation predictions of 18th-century British scholar Thomas Malthus and later doomsayers fell flat because they couldn't anticipate technological innovation, this is our only worldly hope today. This means, however, avoiding what could halt such advancement: command-and-control government that stifles private-sector creativity.

Speaking of creativity, it's only fitting to leave you with some age-old, Earth-centric wisdom. "All things are connected like the blood which unites one family," famed Indian Chief Seattle is widely quoted as having said, in books and by politicians. "Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the sons of earth." If you take those words to heart, well, you'll be as deceived as a Swedish teen climate activist. Those lines were actually written for a movie by a scriptwriter named Ted Perry, a Westerner, as a paraphrase of a speech by a professor of classics named William Arrowsmith, also a Westerner. It's a reminder that not only did the West originate most everything that's preserving the environment, but also most everything preserving the myth that the opposite is true.

It also should remind us that if we want to do right by God's creation, we should first clean up the greentopian lies polluting public discourse.

Photo credit: AP Images



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on January 20, 2020

Published in the January 20, 2020 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 36, No. 02

Subscribe to the New American

Get exclusive digital access to the most informative,
non-partisan truthful news source for patriotic Americans!

Discover a refreshing blend of time-honored values, principles and insightful perspectives within the pages of "The New American" magazine. Delve into a world where tradition is the foundation, and exploration knows no bounds.

From politics and finance to foreign affairs, environment, culture, and technology, we bring you an unparalleled array of topics that matter most.



Subscribe

What's Included?

- 24 Issues Per Year
- Optional Print Edition
- Digital Edition Access
- Exclusive Subscriber Content
- Audio provided for all articles
- Unlimited access to past issues
- Coming Soon! Ad FREE
- 60-Day money back guarantee!
- Cancel anytime.