

Review: Environmentalism in Popular Culture: Gender, Race, Sexuality and the Politics of the Natural
By Noel Sturgeon

Reviewed by Ryder W. Miller

Sturgeon, Noel. *Environmentalism in Popular Culture: Gender, Race, Sexuality and the Politics of the Natural*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2008. 240pp. ISBN 9780816525812. US\$25.95, paper.

Environmentalism in Popular Culture by Noel Sturgeon is a brilliant and challenging text inspired by contemporary issues, but may be too critical of a discussion starter. One does not here find the voice of the ecologist or old school environmentalist. Instead one finds the icons and totems of the environmental field being challenged, and for some newer readers degraded, maybe beyond repair.

The author is making way for environmental justice and eco-feminism, but missing is the link between conservation and sustainability. There is almost no mention of preservation and endangered species or any listing of them in the index. Instead, there is a new take on environmentalism that does not understand the old battle lines.

Unfortunately, Sturgeon seems to be throwing out the baby with the bath water. The child may have grown up, but we should not discard the child left in us. Challenged here are environmental icons like the ecological Indian, space ship Earth, and nature, contrasted with technological culture, pristine nature as a possibility, and frontier mythology. These concepts may no longer be sacrosanct, but they did serve their purpose, and Sturgeon should know that the environmental movement will be lesser without them.

The book is certainly thought provoking and it does get one to question the older ideas in environmentalism, but if this is more than a discussion generator, the impact may be harmful.

The book would succeed in a high level environmental studies course if the ideas herein are contained within an academic institutional setting or at least contrasted with the ideas of people who have real world experience. The work is very critical and it does not provide substitutes for what is being lost in the argumentation. Sturgeon leaves that up to the reader. The book does challenge one to think more deeply about cultural icons, but it neglects to mention their worth. It also does not challenge what seems like an environmental backlash in the mass media. We now live in an age "green baiting," culture wars, and mass extinction.

One may find missing a more conservative or traditional approach rather than the revolutionary ideas presented. A viable alternative is not presented, but the field has opened itself to new voices who may not appreciate or be familiar with the longer environmental tradition. Sturgeon does far more than get the reader to pause and think; she seems to be asking for a fresh start. A new environmental revolution should not forget the accomplishments of their forebears, even if they have mostly been white forefathers.

Ryder W. Miller <dolphin1965@hotmail.com>, Freelance environmental and science reporter who has been published in Sierra Magazine, California Coast & Ocean, California Wild, and Hydrosphere.

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