

[A Civil Action](#), by Jonathan Harr

In America, when somebody does you wrong, you take 'em to court. W. R. Grace and Beatrice Foods had been dumping a cancer-causing industrial solvent into the water table of Woburn, Massachusetts, for years; in 1981, the families of eight leukemia victims sued. However, *A Civil Action* demonstrates powerfully that--even with the families' hotshot lawyers and the evidence on their side--justice is elusive, particularly when it involves malfeasance by megacorporations. Much of the legal infighting can cause the eyes to glaze. But the story is saved by great characters: the flawed, flamboyant Jan Schlichtmann and his group of bulldogs for the prosecution; Jerome Facher, the enigmatic lawyer for Beatrice, who proves to be more than a match; John J. Riley, the duplicitous, porcine tannery owner; and a host of others. It's impossible not to feel the drama of this methodical book, impossible not to grieve for the parents who lost children, and impossible not to share Schlichtmann's desperation as he runs out of money. **A Civil Action reads like one long advertisement for a few well-placed Molotov cocktails.** (But that wouldn't make for a very long book, now would it?)

[Crimes Against Nature](#), by Robert F. Kennedy

Now here, I thought, is a topic on which the Kennedys can certainly write with authority, but the whole title is: Crimes Against Nature: How George W. Bush and His Corporate Pals Are Plundering the Country and Hijacking Our Democracy

Amazon Review:

"Of all the debates in the scientific arena... there is none in which the White House has cooked the books more than that of global warming," argues Kennedy in this harsh indictment of what he sees as the Bush administration's assault on the environment and democracy in general. Kennedy's investigation focuses on the undue influence of industry lobbyists (read Halliburton) on environmental standards and the government's alleged suppression of nearly a dozen scientific reports on global warming. He maligns Bush appointees like Interior Secretary Gale Norton ("a champion of corporate welfare for three decades") and offers a cogent analysis of Christine Todd Whitman's departure from the EPA in 2002. Although Kennedy accuses the Bush administration of using a campaign strategy that revolves around "fear-mongering," he uses fear to drive home his own points, noting things like the lethal mercury levels in tuna, pork industry pollution and insufficiently guarded chemical plants. Nevertheless, he competently ties the survival of democracy to sound environmental policy, contending that corporate power—particularly the power wielded by the oil, beef and lumber industries—must never supersede democratic institutions. Kennedy's argument is strongest when he sticks to the facts and avoids making the kind of angry, sweeping statements that fill the concluding chapter ("Instead of can-do American ingenuity, this is the administration of "can't do." It has constructed a philosophy of government based on self-interest run riot: It has borrowed \$9 trillion from our children and looted our Treasury..."). Whether or not one agrees with these accusations, Kennedy makes a passionate case for more effective environmental controls and wraps it up with a practical vision of a free-market future "in which businesses pay all the costs of bringing their products to market," including the costs of environmental safeguards.

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From the Inside Flap

Crimes Against Nature is a book for both Democrats and Republicans, people like the traditionally conservative farmers and fishermen whom Kennedy represents in lawsuits against polluters. Without exception, he writes, these people see the current administration as the greatest threat not just to their livelihoods but to their values, their sense of community, and their idea of what it means to be American.

[Death in the Marsh](#), by Tom Harris

In 1984, Harris, an investigative reporter for the Sacramento Bee, began following up reports that selenium-tainted runoff, piped in from farms by a federal water project, was causing a startling number of malformations and deaths among the waterfowl of the Kesterton National Wildlife Refuge in California's San Joaquin Valley. Although toxic levels of this mineral occur worldwide, with damaging consequences, in the western United States use of selenium-rich fertilizers, animal feeds and industrial materials has exacerbated the problem. Harris recounts his eight-year odyssey through the West, collecting soil, water and vegetation samples and interviewing human victims of selenium poisoning. He chronicles the work of biologists and chemists on the sources and effects of the element and the persistent clash between farming and conservation interests. While he outlines possible solutions, Harris pessimistically notes the daunting effort required for implementation. This detailed, persuasive narrative further clarifies the need to discover and remedy environmental perils while we still have the power to do so.

[Earth in the Balance](#), by Al Gore

This hardly needs discussion, but ...

'The frankest and most important publication by a current politician I have read in a long time' William Rees-Mogg in The Independent 'The whole darn' thing... even more daring than Star Wars' The Independent on Sunday 'By far the best book of its kind by a serving politician that I have read' Jonathon Porritt in the Times Literary Supplement 'Dazzlingly meticulous... a model for the politically relevant, comprehensive discussion of environmental policy' New Scientist 'He argues forcefully, unanswerably, with intense humanity' The Observer 'An honest and thoughtful explanation of why preservation of the environment is central to the future of humanity' The Independent 'Close to the action, readable, passionate' Financial Times 'Well-argued ideas for saving the world' The Mail on Sunday 'The book is an indication that Mr Gore is a thinker as well as a doer' The Times 'An intelligent, articulate and highly readable study of the parlous state of mother earth' The Scotsman 'A work of intelligence and passionate authenticity' Time 'An astonishing book' The Irish Times 'a solid intellectual achievement, a work many scholars and environmental specialists might be proud to write.' New Scientist 'A passionate, intelligent and articulate discussion of the environmental crisis we face. First published in 1992 ... [it] resonates even more strongly today.' New Scientist 'This book is a brilliant analysis of the larger context of our situation, and is as relevant now as when it was first published.' Network Review, The Scientific and Medical Network

[Eco-Warriors: Understanding the Radical Environmental Movement](#)

Eco-Warriors was the first in-depth look at the people, actions, history and philosophies behind the "radical" environmental movement. Focusing on the work of Earth First!, the Sea

Shepherds, Greenpeace, and the Animal Liberation Front, among others, Rik Scarce told exciting and sometimes frightening tales of front-line warriors defending an Earth they see as being in environmental peril. While continuing to study these movements as a Ph.D. student, Scarce was jailed for contempt of court for refusing to divulge his sources to prosecutors eager to thwart these groups' activities. In this updated edition, Scarce brings the trajectory of this movement up to date—including material on the Earth Liberation Front—and provides current resources for all who wish to learn more about one of the most dynamic and confrontational political movements of our time. Literate, captivating, and informative, this is also an ideal volume for classes on environmentalism, social movements, or contemporary politics.

[Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect](#), by David Orr

In *Earth in Mind*, Orr focuses not on problems in education, but on the problem of education. Much of what has gone wrong with the world, he argues, is the result of inadequate and misdirected education that alienates us from life in the name of human domination; causes students to worry about how to make a living before they know who they are; overemphasizes success and careers; separates feeling from intellect and the practical from the theoretical and deadens the sense of wonder for the created world. The crisis we face, Orr explains, is one of mind, perception, and values. It is, first and foremost, an educational challenge.

[Our Stolen Future: Are We Threatening Our Fertility, Intelligence, and Survival?](#) by Theo Colborn and Dianne Dumanoski

"A critically important book that forces us to ask new questions about the synthetic chemicals that we have spread across this earth."—former vice president **Al Gore**, author of *An Inconvenient Truth*

[Slow Death by Rubber Duck: The Secret Danger of Everyday Things](#), by Rick Smith and Bruce Lourie

This is one scary book. Using a variety of test methods, the authors determined individual "body burdens," or the toxic chemical load we carry. The innocuous rubber duck, for example, offers a poison soup of phthalates that "permeate the environment and humans." From other products and food, we also have a collection of chemicals shorthanded as PFCs, PFOAs, PSOSs, and PCBs. None of them are good, and they are everywhere, thanks to Teflon (which drew the largest administrative penalty against a company ever obtained by the EPA), Stainmaster, nonflammable pajamas, tuna (hello, mercury), and, would you believe, antibacterial products. The legacy of our chemically addicted society is not just all around us but also inside us, and it is killing us, as the Teflon case proved. (Workers in West Virginia believed that "having a high-paying job often meant getting sick," and many were reluctant to sue and possibly scare DuPont away.) Poised between chirpy green-living manuals and dense academic papers, Smith and Bruce Lourie have crafted a true guide for the thinking consumer. If readers don't change their ways after reading this one, then they never will. --Colleen Mondor

[Plan B 2.0: Rescuing a Planet Under Stress and a Civilization in Trouble](#), by Lester Brown

Tension between alarmism and optimism fuels this stimulating treatise on green development, an update of the 2003 edition. Earth Policy Institute president Brown (*Who Will Feed China?*) surveys the worldwide environmental devastation wrought by breakneck industrialization and the heedless, auto-centric, "throwaway economy": oil and water shortages, pollution, deforestation, soil erosion, desertification, collapsing fisheries, mass extinctions, looming famine and pestilence-and he hasn't even gotten to global warming yet. Fortunately, Brown says, "all the problems we face can be dealt with using existing technologies," at a manageable cost. He spends most of the book touting advances in sustainable agriculture, wildlife and resource conservation, renewable energy, hyper-efficient cars, mass transit and appliances, and recycling (a waterless, composting toilet that produces "essentially odorless" humus, for instance). He totals it all up in a \$161 billion yearly budget and adds a prescription for environmental taxes-on everything from gasoline to garbage-to steer the economy toward eco-friendliness. Brown wants to reform and humanize, not abolish, industrial modernity, and keeps the focus on practical, tested measures. He sprinkles many intriguing facts and figures, but they are presented selectively and unsystematically (price data on renewable energy sources, in particular, is inadequate and misleading); his somewhat boosterish approach lacks the meticulous cost-benefit analyses the subject cries out for. But while the book doesn't offer the last word on sustainable economic development, its can-do spirit and lucid exposition of promising proposals make it a good starting point for discussion of this all-important issue.

The world faces numerous environmental trends of disruption and decline such as rising temperatures, falling water tables, shrinking forests, melting glaciers, collapsing fisheries, and rising sea levels. In *Plan B*, Lester R. Brown notes that in ignoring nature's deadlines for dealing with these environmental issues we risk the disruption of economic progress.

In addition to these environmental trends, the world faces the peaking of oil, the addition of 70 million people per year, a widening global economic divide, and the spread of international terrorism. The global scale and growing complexity of issues facing our fast-forward world have no precedent.