

# Green Mission News

November 2012 Green Mission News

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"Journalism is printing what someone else does not want printed.  
Everything else is public relations."  
- George Orwell

## External Article Links:

- What is Agnotology ?

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agnotology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agnotology)

The study of culturally induced ignorance or doubt, particularly the publication of inaccurate or misleading scientific data.

- My Take on the Organic Spies Video About Whole Foods

Written by Max Goldberg on October 5, 2012

[livingmaxwell.com/organic-spies-video-whole-foods](http://livingmaxwell.com/organic-spies-video-whole-foods)

- "Nourishing the World: Scaling up Agroecology"

<http://tinyurl.com/EAAagroecology2012>

- Skills for sustainable living, farming and community...

[milkwoodpermaculture.com.au/](http://milkwoodpermaculture.com.au/)

- The Natural Step for Communities free ebook download

[open.salon.com/blog/pubroucado1979/2012/10/05/the\\_natural\\_step\\_for\\_communities\\_free\\_ebook\\_download](http://open.salon.com/blog/pubroucado1979/2012/10/05/the_natural_step_for_communities_free_ebook_download)

- GMO Foods: Science, PR, and Public Backlash (*video 14 1/2 mins*)

[tv.globalresearch.ca/2012/10/gmo-foods-science-pr-and-public-backlash](http://tv.globalresearch.ca/2012/10/gmo-foods-science-pr-and-public-backlash)

- Seed Freedom: a report

[www.navdanya.org/attachments/Seed%20Freedom\\_29-9-2012.pdf](http://www.navdanya.org/attachments/Seed%20Freedom_29-9-2012.pdf)

- Guest Editorial in Support of California Proposition 37: Required Full-Label Disclosure of Genetically Modified Organisms

By Tom Newmark, Drake Sadler, and Michael Besancon

[cms.herbalgram.org/heg/volume9/10October/Prop37GMOeditorial.html?t=1349287977](http://cms.herbalgram.org/heg/volume9/10October/Prop37GMOeditorial.html?t=1349287977)

- Power to the Plant Eaters

[www.chronogram.com/issue/2012/11/Whole+Living/Power-to-the-Plant-Eaters](http://www.chronogram.com/issue/2012/11/Whole+Living/Power-to-the-Plant-Eaters)

- Experts warn of superstorm era to come

[www.cnn.com/2012/10/31/us/sandy-climate-change/index.html?hpt=hp\\_t1](http://www.cnn.com/2012/10/31/us/sandy-climate-change/index.html?hpt=hp_t1)

- UN Report: Fisheries and the right to food: Implementing the right to food in national fisheries legislation

[www.fao.org/righttofood/publi09/Fisheries\\_en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/righttofood/publi09/Fisheries_en.pdf)

- Finding Zen in a Patch of Nature

[www.nytimes.com/2012/10/23/science/david-haskell-finds-biology-zen-in-a-patch-of-nature.html?pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/23/science/david-haskell-finds-biology-zen-in-a-patch-of-nature.html?pagewanted=all)

- Ultra-Compact Chainless Bicycle, Simplified: The Bicymple

[http://dsc.discovery.com/adventure/ultra-compact-chainless-bicycle-simplified-the-bicymple.html#mkcpgn=tbla1?utm\\_source=taboola](http://dsc.discovery.com/adventure/ultra-compact-chainless-bicycle-simplified-the-bicymple.html#mkcpgn=tbla1?utm_source=taboola)

- Pesticide Threat Looms Large Over Farmworker Families

[www.inthesetimes.com/working/entry/14055/pesticide\\_threats\\_loom\\_large\\_over\\_farmworker\\_families](http://www.inthesetimes.com/working/entry/14055/pesticide_threats_loom_large_over_farmworker_families)

- Gas Patch Roulette: Summary Report

[www.earthworksaction.org/library/detail/gas\\_patch\\_roulette\\_summary\\_report](http://www.earthworksaction.org/library/detail/gas_patch_roulette_summary_report)

- How Shale Gas Development Risks Public Health in Pennsylvania

[www.earthworksaction.org/library/detail/gas\\_patch\\_roulette\\_full\\_report](http://www.earthworksaction.org/library/detail/gas_patch_roulette_full_report)

- Primates in peril – conservationists reveal the world's 25 most endangered primates

[www.iucn.org/?11259/Primates-in-peril--conservationists-reveal-the-worlds-25-most-endangered-primates](http://www.iucn.org/?11259/Primates-in-peril--conservationists-reveal-the-worlds-25-most-endangered-primates)

- David Milarch: Ancient Trees For The Future

(and read what he has to say about Redwoods) [blog.ancienttreearchive.org/?tag=david-milarch](http://blog.ancienttreearchive.org/?tag=david-milarch)  
and

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=y069UFbk11s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y069UFbk11s) (15 minute video)

- A Generation in Jeopardy: How pesticides are undermining our children's health & intelligence

[www.panna.org/sites/default/files/KidsHealthReportOct2012.pdf](http://www.panna.org/sites/default/files/KidsHealthReportOct2012.pdf)

- Can we become a Zero Waste planet? (3 mins)

[www.cawrecycles.org/recycling\\_videos](http://www.cawrecycles.org/recycling_videos)

- David Suzuki: How environmental destruction causes illnesses and diseases

[www.straight.com/article-755311/vancouver/david-suzuki-how-environmental-destruction-causes-illnesses-and-diseases](http://www.straight.com/article-755311/vancouver/david-suzuki-how-environmental-destruction-causes-illnesses-and-diseases)

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## Full Length Articles Below:

- Barry Commoner: The Greatest Environmentalist of the 20th Century
- Prop 37: California Soil Scientist Says Label Up!
- The Privilege of Being Human: Ecological Crisis and the Need to Challenge the Twenty Percent
- Yes, Global Warming Systemically Caused Hurricane Sandy
- Candidates Flee East Coast as Frankenstorm Takes Revenge for their Ignoring Climate Change
- Walmart Sets 2017 Target for Supply Chain Improvement, Takes Sustainability Consortium to China

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Published on Tuesday, October 2, 2012 by [Greenpeace Blog](#)

### Barry Commoner: The Greatest Environmentalist of the 20th Century

by Charlie Cray

Barry Commoner (1917-2012) had a deep influence on Greenpeace back in the 1980s and 1990s, and was often way ahead of us on particular fronts. Back then, his books were on shelves all over the office, especially *Making Peace With the Planet*, a powerful, integrated analysis of the environmental crisis. Barry was an adviser to Greenpeace's Toxics Campaign who spoke at Greenpeace-sponsored conferences, authored at least one GP report ("Breaking Down the Degradable Plastics Scam" made a point so simple that I still remember it — which is that if a polymer doesn't break down



to smaller monomers that are less than 50 microns in size, they won't get assimilated into the food web and therefore cannot be called "biodegradable" — the report itself was a very useful challenge to a specific example of what we commonly refer to now as "greenwashing").

Barry Commoner, a pioneer scientist in the environmental movement and Greenpeace campaigns adviser, died Sunday. Barry spoke at a few GP conferences. Greenpeace's legislative director Rick Hind probably still has a cassette somewhere of one

such speech, “Breaking the Chlorine Trap,” which Dr. Commoner delivered at the Greenpeace Chlorine-free Great Lakes Conference, held in Michigan in 1992. To get a sense of how great a communicator of scientific principles he was, it’s worth watching the video that the NYT posted on their site.

Ralph Nader calls Barry Commoner “the greatest environmentalist of the 20th century.” It’s hard to argue with that: As the NY Times obituary attests, Commoner’s range of investigative prowess was impressive and groundbreaking on a variety of fronts. He not only conducted cutting-edge research on important issues, but he popularized the results — thereby changing the entire zeitgeist of scientific culture, making it “the people’s” business — not the diced up array of specialized academic enclaves that so often incentivize political cowardice and the failure of common sense. For example, when Barry was asked for his opinion of “cap and trade” approaches to solving climate change (i.e. pollution credit swaps), he “scorned” the idea for rewarding companies for “fouling the environment in the first place.”

Commoner was an organic yet systemic thinker (“the first rule of ecology is that everything is connected to everything else”). His framework for debating industrial policy was guided by practical concerns about public health and economic justice.

So much of his research not only exposed industry lies, but served to galvanize public opinion and action. For example, he mobilized mothers against atmospheric nuclear weapons testing by demonstrating how the radioactive fallout (Strontium90) ended up in children’s teeth via milk.

At a time when industry-funded climate deniers have successfully stymied public debate, and Monsanto and other [GMO companies use their monopoly patents to obstruct independent research](#) and even [attack researchers brave enough](#) to investigate regardless, we could use more scientists like Barry Commoner.

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*Charlie Cray is the director of the Center for Corporate Policy in Washington, DC. He helped establish Halliburton Watch, and is co-author of The People's Business: Controlling Corporations and Restoring Democracy (Berrett-Koehler), and is a former associate editor of Multinational Monitor magazine.*

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Posted: 10/06/2012 11:08 am

**Prop 37: California Soil Scientist Says Label Up!**

[www.huffingtonpost.com/annie-spiegelman/prop-37-california-b\\_1944155.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/annie-spiegelman/prop-37-california-b_1944155.html)



Photo Courtesy of [www.Rareseeds.com](http://www.Rareseeds.com) where you can still find non-hybrid, non-GMO, non-treated and non-patented seeds. Mother Nature approved.

This November, Californians will vote on a historic proposal that would require genetically modified foods in supermarkets to be labeled. For some reason, [Proposition 37](#), or The Right to Know Genetically Engineered Foods Act, has the food, biotech and pesticide industries shaking in their fancy, fat-cat boots. They've already spent

[\\$25 million](#) in opposition as they try to stifle the voices of a bunch of tree-hugging, kale-loving moms, farmers, nutritionists, scientists, non-profits and meddlesome eaters who want to know the ingredients in the food they eat and feed their children.

"What are these food and agriculture companies so afraid of?" asks soil scientist and professor of environmental science, Stephen Andrews. Andrews has been teaching college students to respect the soil for over two decades and follows the research on 'dirt' closely. "If GMOs are so great and wonderful for us to eat, be upfront about it and declare your GMO greatness on the label. It's label up, or go crawl back into your plasmid!"

First introduced into the U.S. food system in the late 1990s, genetically altered ingredients are now found in [70 percent](#) of processed foods. Eighty-five percent of the corn and 91 percent of the soy grown in the U.S. are also genetically altered. The U.S. Federal Drug Administration does not require labeling or health and safety studies for these foods, even though recent independent studies show links to allergies and other health risks. Some other unintended problems from growing these crops are an increase in pesticide use, weed resistance, the development of super-weeds, harm to bees and animals, and contamination of non-GMO fields.

I asked Professor Andrews if we should finish our lunch or run for the hills. How is the process of inserting a gene from a bacterium or virus into a seed in a biotech lab different from traditional breeding of plants?

Selective breeding of plants and animals has been occurring for centuries. You may recall the name of Gregor Mendel, and his experiments on plant hybridization using peas, from your high school biology days. Like Mendel, many plant breeders create new hybrid varieties of vegetables and flowers from established lines via cross-pollination. Cross-pollination also occurs naturally among plants.

What separates hybridization and cross-pollination from genetically engineered varieties is the introduction of a gene or set of genes unrelated to the genetic material of the parent organism (species). Simplified, hybrid zucchini are produced by crossing the pollen of different zucchini plants possessing the characteristics desired (crossed within the same species). Genetically engineered zucchini on the other hand have incorporated into their genetic code DNA snippets from other species. For example, genes from a strawberry or a bacterium. Plants bearing the genetic material of a different species within its DNA are called transgenic. Genetically engineering or genetically modified organisms (GMOs) do not occur "naturally." Creation of these organisms requires the use of genetic engineering techniques like recombinant DNA technologies.

We have centuries of knowledge based on plant hybridization, much less on genetically modified organisms or transgenic plants. Cutting-edge or creepy?

The GloFish was one of the first genetically modified animals to be sold as a pet. GloFish is a patented and trademarked "brand" of genetically modified fluorescent fish.

Similarly, seed produced from transgenic plants is patented and trademarked. Now common in agriculture are two general categories of transgenic seed engineered to influence crop input and output. Input traits refer to engineered plant performance characteristics that influence yield. This includes herbicide (Ht) resistance and insect (Bt) resistance. Transgenic corn, soybean and cottonseed are ubiquitous within U.S. agribusiness. Output traits are engineered to affect the value of the crop, for example high oleic soybeans.

Within "traditional" plant breeding we can statistically predict the outcomes of each pollen cross. When it comes to genetically modified organisms, predicted outcomes may be less certain. Do we know enough about genetically modified organisms to make them the rule rather than the exception? Fifty years ago Rachel Carson warned us about the dangers of better living through chemistry in *Silent Spring*. Might we not be on the verge of another *Silent Spring* via better living through GMOs? Could we be opening an evolutionary Pandora's box?



Photo Credit: [www.lifeinmotionphotography.com](http://www.lifeinmotionphotography.com)

Fifty countries including Japan, Australia, Russia, China and the EU have either banned or labeled GMOs. Why didn't those countries drink the Kool-Aid?

From my viewpoint, I see labeling and banning of GMOs

as the prudent application of the precautionary principle to both assess and manage risks. In spite of industry claims that GMO products are no different in terms of nutrition, quality, safety and healthfulness -- do we really know? We don't have the long-term studies that are really necessary to assess and manage the risks associated with GMOs. Our bodies are already hosts to chemical cocktails that we are only just beginning to investigate in depth. Is it not wiser to engage in long-term studies of GMOs and their potential interactions before we unleash them all over the planet?

Why have companies such as Monsanto, Bayer, Dow, DuPont, Coca-Cola and Nestle poured \$25 million into opposing food labeling? Seems like they want Californians to just shut up and eat.

You'd have to ask the industry folks why they're so hell-bent on spending millions to defeat a straightforward labeling initiative. From where I stand, the only "real" explanation is corporate greed and control. Quite simply, the agri-corps want to monopolize food production, your diet, your health and your well-being to get what's in your wallet. In the eyes of agri-business a person is no different than a hog or a steer. If I were entrusted with the management of one of these agri-giants, I would be welcoming a ballot measure to include GMO labeling on products. Heck, I'd be jumping up and down at the opportunity to toot my horn about the accomplishments of my company's GMO research. Better yet, I'd open the petri dishes to transparent review and analysis. I'd seek opportunities to have my company's GMO products subjected to cumulative-impact testing, and long-term studies to demonstrate that we did the right things, and things right.



Courtesy of ***Dirt! The Movie.***

Physicist Vandana Shiva says "Native seed is going through a holocaust as corporations are controlling seed supply. The future of our world depends on how we steward our land, soil, water, and seeds, and pass them on to future generations."

We keep being told that we need GMOs to "feed the world," but Doug Gurian-Sherman, senior scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists, writes, "GMOs may pose serious health and environmental risks and their benefits may be overstated." Your thoughts? The GMO debate is complex, nuanced and universal. To reasonably make decisions about GMO products, use and regulation requires that we each become engaged in the debate. We must collectively educate each other, and mandate that the GMO industry be transparent via labeling and product licensing.

I think that all of your readers should listen to the PandoHouse Rock -- The GMO Song: "OMG GMOs!" Find it at [pandodaily.com](http://pandodaily.com)

Here's a tease from it:

"It's a challenge to feed 7 billion and counting  
Droughts and food prices are causing world hunger  
So what's the big deal if we make the crops stronger?  
But with GMOs you can patent the breeds  
And sue the farmers if they replant the seeds  
The idea is to help developing nations  
But who benefits: communities or corporations?  
There are also ecological risks involved  
You can make a new problem like the one you've just solved  
Like corn that's bred with a built-in pesticide  
The pests evolved and now superbugs thrive"

*For more information on Prop. 37, the campaign to label GM foods, visit [www.carighttoknow.org](http://www.carighttoknow.org)*

*For more about GM health risks, visit Jeffrey's Smith's informative Institute for Responsible Technology at [www.responsibletechnology.org](http://www.responsibletechnology.org) and [www.geneticroulletmovie.org](http://www.geneticroulletmovie.org)*

*Visit Annie at:*

- Giant Walmart vs the small farmer

[www.asianage.com/columnists/giant-walmart-vs-small-farmer-401](http://www.asianage.com/columnists/giant-walmart-vs-small-farmer-401)

India is a land of small farmers. According to the United Nations, the smaller the farm, the higher the productivity.

Small farms grow biodiversity. They are falsely described as unproductive because productivity in agriculture has been manipulated to exclude diversity and exclude costs of high chemical and capital inputs in chemical industrial agriculture. When biodiversity is taken into account, small farms produce more food and higher incomes.

In the heated debate on FDI in retail, those promoting it repeatedly claim that the entry of corporations like Walmart will benefit the Indian farmer. Reference is made to getting rid of the middleman.

Any trader who mediates in the distribution of goods between producers and consumers is a middleman. Walmart is neither a producer nor a consumer. Therefore, it is also a middleman; it is a giant middleman with global muscle. That is how it has become the world's biggest retailer, carrying out business of nearly \$480 billion. So the issue is not getting rid of the middleman but replacing the small arthi with a giant one. The Walton Family is the global arthi located in the US, not in the local community. And this new kind of arthi combines the functions of all small traders everywhere from wholesale to retail. Instead of millions of small traders taking a two per cent commission at different levels, Walmart gets all profits. If three small traders mediate at two per cent between the producer and consumer, the difference between the farm price and consumer price is just six per cent. When Walmart enters the picture, the difference jumps with the farmer getting only two per cent of the consumer price and Walmart and its supply chain harvesting the 98 per cent. So the issue is not the number of middlemen but their size and their share of profits. It was to avoid this concentration of power over the agricultural produce market that India created the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) Act. Our mandis are governed by cooperatives, which include farmers. No trader can buy more than a certain amount. This prevents monopolies. It creates a decentralised, democratic distribution system from wholesale to retail.

The government, especially the Planning Commission, has been trying very hard to dismantle the APMCs and mandis to facilitate the entry of big business in agriculture. The announcement of FDI in retail will radically change Indian agriculture. It threatens the survival of the small Indian farmer and the diversity of our farming systems.

Given the size of Walmart, it creates a monopsony through its buying power. It does not go to each small farmer and buys the five sacks of extra produce. It works through giant supply chains and giant suppliers which have no place for the small. Walmart and the small, independent farmer cannot coexist. When Walmart dominates, agribusiness dominates. Industry and corporations start to control agriculture.

We can already see early attempts at the industry takeover of agriculture to match centralised and giant production systems with centralised and giant retail. On March 5 this year, the government announced a new policy for the corporate control of agriculture called Public-Private Partnership for Integrated Agricultural Development (PPP-IAD) — a scheme for facilitating large-scale integrated projects, led by private-sector players in the agriculture and allied sectors, with a view to aggregating farmers, creating critical rural infrastructure, introducing new technologies, adding value and integrating the agricultural supply chain.

The department of agriculture and cooperation has launched the PPP-IAD, which is proposed to cover 10 lakh farmers across India during the period 2012-17. Each of the integrated agricultural projects would involve engaging a minimum of 10,000 farmers. The scheme would accept proposals from private corporate entities on integrated agricultural development projects with the proviso that intervention must cover all aspects from production to marketing.

Subsidies will now go to corporations, not the farmers. In effect, 10,000 farmers will no longer be independent producers, but bonded to the corporation. These corporations will be Walmart's partners, not the small farmer.

This scheme, and the policy framework of which it is a part, is in effect a subversion of both land reforms and our food security. Land reforms in India got rid of zamindari and put land in the hands of the tiller. Land ceiling was introduced to ensure there would be no concentration of ownership over land. What the government is calling "reforms" are, in effect, anti-reform reforms, aimed at undoing every policy and law that we have put in place in independent and democratic India to ensure the rozi roti of the last person. Walmart will harm and wipe out small farmers and businesses in India the way it has harmed farmers and retailers in the US. And because the density of small farmers and small retailers is higher in India than anywhere else in the world, the destructive impact will be magnified manifold.

The argument that we need FDI in retail was made when the government allowed Walmart to enter wholesale business in 2007. No infrastructure has been built, even though five years have passed. In any case, the government has given away crores in subsidies for warehouses and cold storages since it introduced "reforms". We need a black paper to assess all the public money that has already been spent on what the government says only Walmart can do.

And the more the government pushes policies towards monopolies and monocultures, the more committed I become to defend our economic democracy and diversity as a saner, more sustainable, more just alternative to the disease of gigantism. The writer is the executive director of the Navdanya Trust

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*Published on Monday, October 15, 2012*

## **The Privilege of Being Human: Ecological Crisis and the Need to Challenge the Twenty Percent**

by [Joseph Nevins](#)



Climate justice campaigners marched under the banner 'System Change, Not Climate Change' in Copenhagen in 2009. (Photo by Neil White/ U.K. Guardian.)

Although you would not know it from what passes for debate during the ongoing presidential campaign here in the United States, the biosphere is under siege. A historically high rate of ice melt in the Arctic, devastating floods from the Philippines to Nigeria, a record-setting [decline](#) in Australia's Great Barrier Reef, and extreme levels of drought in much of the United States are just some of the recent manifestations. These worrisome signs highlight, among other things, the tragic failure of the international community to slash consumption of the Earth's resources via binding international mechanisms. While the reasons for this are numerous, a key one is the obstruction by some of the world's wealthiest and most powerful countries, and their refusal to renounce the gospel of endless economic growth. But also central is a combination of refusal by and seeming inability of members of the planet's ecologically privileged class—let's call them the twenty percent—to see their very ways of life, and their associated gargantuan levels of consumption as problems in need of radical redress.

To appreciate this one need look no further than at a much-talked-about [article](#), one with foreboding news for those interested in sustaining human life on the planet as we know it. It appeared in the journal *Nature* shortly before the ballyhooed, but ultimately fruitless U.N. Earth Summit opened in June in Rio de Janeiro. Due to human-induced changes to the biosphere, the article asserts, the world is quite possibly approaching a "critical transition." It is one "with the potential to transform Earth rapidly and irreversibly into a state unknown in human experience."

A significant decline in biodiversity, a fossil-fuel-use-induced growth in atmospheric greenhouse gases, deforestation, the melting of glaciers, and large "dead zones" in coastal marine areas are just some of the myriad indicators of the extent to which human have altered the biosphere and the "drivers" of the planetary-scale critical transition, say the authors.

As a review of already published material, the article's findings are, in some ways, old news. Its significance lies in the endorsement by the team of authors of previous findings and the synthesis it offers. Yet the paper's importance also lies in the myopia exhibited by the 22 scientists from Canada, Chile, Finland, Spain, and the United States who authored the paper in trying to explain what has produced dangerous levels of ecological degradation.

Instead of highlighting the ravenous consumption of a global minority in bringing about the crisis they decry, the authors—no doubt members of the twenty percent—assert that "population growth and per-capita consumption rate underlie all of the other present drivers of global change." In other words, by raising consumption in a manner that doesn't distinguish between differential levels of resource use (and putting population growth aside for a moment), they suggest that all of the Earth's denizens are equally at fault.

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The ludicrous nature of this position immediately struck me as I read it given that I had just come across a [report](#) revealing that New York City's billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg had recently bought a 33-acre estate, for \$4.55 million. This is his third home in Westchester County, just north of New York City. He also has three in Manhattan, one in nearby Long Island, one in Colorado, one in Florida, one in London, and one in Bermuda to where he [regularly flies](#) in his private jet.

I had also just received an email from Barack Obama (at least it purported to be). In it he promised, if I made a financial contribution to his re-election campaign, to automatically enter me into a drawing. The handful of winners, he wrote, would be flown from their home areas to have dinner with him.

To own 12 homes or to be able to fly supporters across long distances to join you for dinner are obscene displays of wealth and power given the environmental degradation resulting from the resource consumption they embody. They are obscenities that an emphasis on average rates in the form of “per-capita consumption” only serves to obscure. Yet, while highly extreme, such levels of consumption are the pinnacle of grossly unequal levels of resource use, ones that largely correspond to divisions related to the overlapping categories of race, class, and nation.

As international development scholar David Satterthwaite has [pointed out](#) in relation to climate change, about 20 percent of the world’s wealthiest individuals and households—given their consumption and lifestyles, along with the production processes, infrastructure, and institutions that make them possible—are likely responsible for more than 80 percent of all contemporary greenhouse gas emissions, and an even greater percentage of historical emissions. In other words, the problem is not primarily one of population growth, but of increasing consumption, consumption by the global twenty percent.

Members of this elite group—people like me—tend to have cell phones, personal computers, and housing with central heating and air conditioning. We typically use electric or gas-driven clothing dryers. More often than not, we own cars, and we travel occasionally, sometimes frequently, by flying—the single most ecologically [destructive](#) individual act of consumption one can undertake. (A single roundtrip flight between New York and London produces, in terms of its impact on the climate system, the equivalent of two metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions per economy class passenger—more than the emissions produced by an average resident of Brazil for an entire year.)

We also throw away a lot and consume huge amounts of plastic (more than [300 pounds](#) per person annually in the United States). And most of us eat a great deal of meat, the production of which constitutes one of the largest sources of greenhouse gasses. In other words, we consume way beyond what is globally sustainable by any reasonable measure—and increasingly so.

Invocations of population growth divert one’s attention from such levels of consumption and the massive inequities underlying them. They lead to a focus on peoples and places with the highest rates of fertility, ones which are typically largely non-white and among the world’s poorest—those who consume least, in other words. Effectively erased from view are the socio-economic classes and places with which the likes of Michael Bloomberg and Barack Obama are associated as they tend to have very low, sometimes even negative, rates of demographic increase.

This is not to say that population expansion does not matter at all. High rates of demographic growth among the global poor and related increases in consumption can and do have significant impacts on local resource bases. But to state what should be painfully obvious, these populations have a negligible impact on the global environment given how little they consume.

According to Satterthwaite, for example, 18.5 percent of the world's population growth during the 35-year period of 1980-2005 took place in sub-Saharan African, but its share of the growth in global carbon emissions was only 2.5 percent. During that same period, Canada and the United States had 4 percent of population growth, but were responsible for 13.9 percent of the increase in CO2 emissions.

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Similar to responsibility for carbon emissions, resource consumption broadly is highly unequal. The United States, home to less than 5 percent of the world's population, for instance, is [responsible](#) for almost a quarter of the world's fossil fuel use. If everyone in the world were to consume environmental resources at the present U.S. level, or that of Denmark or the United Arab Emirates, between four and five planet Earths would be required to sustain them—[according to](#) the Global Footprint Network. (In comparison, if everyone consumed at the level of India, half the planet Earth, given today's global population, would be sufficient.)

Admittedly, invocation of the global twenty percent rather than, say, the one percent no doubt obscures, just as it illuminates. Few have the power to consume and destroy like Michael Bloomberg or Barack Obama, for example. Clearly, as within any grouping, there are significant differences within. But this should not hide the fact that it is not only the super-rich who consume in a manner way out of proportion to what would be their fair share of the world's resources were they to be allocated equitably with an eye toward ensuring the wellbeing of posterity.

Moreover, it is true that an increasing share of the twenty percent is from relatively prosperous countries of the Global South—largely urban elites from the likes of China, Brazil, India, and South Africa. Yet, most of the world's top consumers, as they long have, come from those countries that are in the top tier of per capita incomes, countries such as Australia, those of the European Union, Japan, and the United States. The socio-geographic concentration of the twenty percent helps illustrate why critical scrutiny of individual consumption need not and should not lead to an ignoring of the systemic components of our ecological plight—perhaps the most notable of which is how industrial-consumer capitalism, which dominates the planet, fuels and necessitates voracious consumption for its very survival, and significantly shapes and limits our options. It is a system that mines the planet's environmental resources, damages the biosphere, and exacerbates socio-economic inequities and vulnerabilities in the process.

This system draws upon and helps reproduce multiple axes of difference—race, class, gender, and nation among them. They are differences with profound implications for how people live and die across the planet. (A recent [report](#) by the humanitarian aid and

research organization DARA, for instance, found that 400,000 deaths each year today are attributable to climate change, with air pollution causing another 1.4 million fatalities annually.) As such, these differences are inextricably tied to unjust structures that embody privilege and wellbeing for some, and disadvantage and harm for others. The focus on individual consumption also should not obviate critical attention on large institutional actors—say, the U.S. military, the world’s [single largest](#) institutional producer of greenhouse gas emissions. Nor should it obfuscate how the very organization of the places we live and work, and the larger social networks in which we are implicated, shape what we do and pressure us to engage in behavior we wouldn’t pursue were other choices available. (Think about how unsafe streets and inadequate public transport compels many to drive.)

Yet, despite the importance of such factors, we should not make the mistake of pretending that we have no options, and that our individual choices don’t have implications for the viability of the systems in which we are implicated, and the many institutions with which we interact—willingly or not. As such, the call to challenge the twenty percent’s rapacious resource use is not an effort to reduce individuals to consumers. It is necessarily tied to our responsibilities as citizens, as members of political-economic communities given that any project of social transformation requires engaging both the individual and the collective. Just as it would be intellectually, ethically and politically illogical to contend that individual racist behavior is inconsequential and that its scrutiny is a diversion from the struggle against structural racism, it is unacceptable to suggest that individual consumption—especially that of a grossly unsustainable sort—is meaningless and unrelated to systemic injustice and its reproduction.

For this reason and more, dangerous levels of [soil depletion](#), diminishing supplies of [potable water](#) across the planet, the rapidly decreasing viability of the world’s [fisheries](#), high [extinction](#) rates of plant and animal species, and rising global temperatures (among other signs) are not simply environmental matters. They are urgent issues of human rights and social justice.

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For those moved to resist the status quo, and champion radical change in response, many posing as sympathetic allies advise them to take a careful, gradual approach. These purveyors of caution are among those who today place their hopes in technological salvation, some sort of breakthrough discovery or invention that will somehow eliminate or at least greatly reduce the ecological damage associated with a particular practice or specific form of consumption, and thus allow us to continue largely our ways.

Fearful of what they and those with whom they most identify might lose, what these highly ambivalent allies actually seek to facilitate is a reworked status quo. It is a new version of the old, one which maintains established privileges and hierarchy, with simply a prettier veneer, its most brutal expressions muted.

This championing of restraint in a context demanding fundamental change is a longstanding problem, one the great writer James Baldwin, among many others, have encountered at different times and places. In an essay in *Partisan Review* (Fall, 1956), Baldwin forcefully addressed such “advice” when he criticized fellow writer William Faulkner’s call to “go slow” in the effort to overthrow the institutionalized system of racial segregation known as Jim Crow in the U.S. South. (“They don’t mean go slow, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall reportedly said in response. “They mean, don’t go.”)

“Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it,” Baldwin countered, “the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety. And at such a moment, unable to see and not daring to imagine what the future will now bring, one clings to what knew, or thought one knew; to what one possessed or dreamed that one possessed. Yet, it is when a man is able, without bitterness or self-pity, to surrender a dream he has long cherished or a privilege he had long possessed that he is set free—he has set himself free—for higher dreams, for greater privileges.”

Transforming any social system—given its very nature—is necessarily a highly disruptive process in that, for better or for worse depending on where one is situated on the spectrum of privilege and disadvantage, it is part of the very fabric of life. As such, fundamental change requires a willingness on the part of those of the privileged classes who profess to support a different world, one that is just and truly sustainable, to move to a position of discomfort, to challenge the very sources of their ecological privilege, nor merely the symptoms. Only in this way can a system that is unjust—and thus limited in terms of the distribution of its benefits—be eradicated so as to bring about Baldwin’s “higher dreams” of privileges enjoyed by all.

For those of us who gain from—and help reproduce—the institutionalized injustice, it is incumbent upon us to figure out how our comfort and prosperity are tied to the socio-economic and ecological insecurity experienced by so many. This means that we, the twenty percent, have to give up things—our ability to have lots of “stuff”; to consume the planet’s resources without thought and to dump the detriments on socially distant, unseen peoples and communities; to travel wherever and whenever we’d like in manners that exact high social and ecological costs; to have our wants satisfied before the needs of others are met.

It also requires that we abandon the illusion that a world order that facilitates our unjust privileges can and should be preserved, and that our rapacious levels of consumption are maintainable, that, somehow, contrary to everything the natural sciences tell us, we will not have to reap what we sow. For privileged people of good will, this necessitates accepting the responsibility to be human in all that it entails. We thus must struggle not only on myriad fronts ranging from Wall Street writ-large to the Pentagon, but also with ourselves and those closest to us.

The ecological challenges we face as a planet are enormous, and ominous in terms of what they suggest for the well-being of peoples and places across the planet and the

biosphere as a whole. In this regard, the ending of Baldwin's retort to Faulkner could not be timelier: "There is never time in the future in which we will work out our salvation. The challenge is in the moment, the time is always now."

*Joseph Nevins is an associate professor of geography at Vassar College. His latest book is Dying to Live: A Story of U.S. Immigration in an Age of Global Apartheid (City Lights Books).*

# # #

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## **Yes, Global Warming Systemically Caused Hurricane Sandy**

*by George Lakoff*

Yes, global warming systemically caused Hurricane Sandy — and the Midwest droughts and the fires in Colorado and Texas, as well as other extreme weather disasters around the world. Let's say it out loud, it was causation, systemic causation.

Systemic causation is familiar. Smoking is a systemic cause of lung cancer. HIV is a systemic cause of AIDS. Working in coal mines is a systemic cause of black lung disease. Driving while drunk is a systemic cause of auto accidents. Sex without contraception is a systemic cause of unwanted pregnancies.

There is a difference between systemic and direct causation. Punching someone in the nose is direct causation. Throwing a rock through a window is direct causation. Picking up a glass of water and taking a drink is direct causation. Slicing bread is direct causation. Stealing your wallet is direct causation. Any application of force to something or someone that always produces an immediate change to that thing or person is direct causation. When causation is direct, the word cause is unproblematic.

Systemic causation, because it is less obvious, is more important to understand. A systemic cause may be one of a number of multiple causes. It may require some special conditions. It may be indirect, working through a network of more direct causes. It may be probabilistic, occurring with a significantly high probability. It may require a feedback mechanism. In general, causation in ecosystems, biological systems, economic systems, and social systems tends not to be direct, but is no less causal. And because it is not direct causation, it requires all the greater attention if it is to be understood and its negative effects controlled.

Above all, it requires a name: systemic causation.

Global warming systemically caused the huge and ferocious Hurricane Sandy. And consequently, it systemically caused all the loss of life, material damage, and economic

loss of Hurricane Sandy. Global warming heated the water of the Gulf and Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean, resulting in greatly increased energy and water vapor in the air above the water. When that happens, extremely energetic and wet storms occur more frequently and ferociously. These systemic effects of global warming came together to produce the ferocity and magnitude of Hurricane Sandy.

The precise details of Hurricane Sandy cannot be predicted in advance, any more than when, or whether, a smoker develops lung cancer, or sex without contraception yields an unwanted pregnancy, or a drunk driver has an accident. But systemic causation is nonetheless causal.

Semantics matters. Because the word cause is commonly taken to mean direct cause, climate scientists, trying to be precise, have too often shied away from attributing causation of a particular hurricane, drought, or fire to global warming. Lacking a concept and language for systemic causation, climate scientists have made the dreadful communicative mistake of retreating to weasel words. Consider this quote from "Perception of climate change," by James Hansen, Makiko Sato, and Reto Ruedy, Published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences:

...we can state, with a high degree of confidence, that extreme anomalies such as those in Texas and Oklahoma in 2011 and Moscow in 2010 were a consequence of global warming because their likelihood in the absence of global warming was exceedingly small.

The crucial words here are high degree of confidence, anomalies, consequence, likelihood, absence, and exceedingly small. Scientific weasel words! The power of the bald truth, namely causation, is lost.

This no small matter because the fate of the earth is at stake. The science is excellent. The scientists' ability to communicate is lacking. Without the words, the idea cannot even be expressed. And without an understanding of systemic causation, we cannot understand what is hitting us.

Global warming is real, and it is here. It is causing - yes, causing - death, destruction, and vast economic loss. And the causal effects are getting greater with time. We cannot merely adapt to it. The costs are incalculable. What we are facing is huge. Each day, the amount of extra energy accumulating via the heating of the earth is the equivalent of 400,000 Hiroshima atomic bombs. Each day!

Because the earth itself is so huge, this energy is distributed over the earth in a way that is not immediately perceptible by our bodies — only a fraction of a degree each day. But the accumulation of total heat energy over the earth is increasing at an astronomical rate, even though the temperature numbers look small locally — 0.8 degrees Celsius so far. If we hit 2.0 degrees Celsius, as we may before long, the earth — and the living things on it — will not recover. Because of ice melt, the level of the oceans will rise 45 feet, while huge storms, fires, and droughts get worse each year. The international consensus is that by 2.0 degrees Celsius, all civilization would be threatened if not

destroyed.

What would it take to reach a 2.0 degrees Celsius increase over the whole earth? Much less than you might think. Consider the amount of oil already drilled and stored by Exxon Mobil alone. If that oil were burned, the temperature of the earth would pass 2.0 degree Celsius, and those horrific disasters would come to pass.

The value of Exxon Mobil — its stock price — resides in its major asset, its stored oil. Because the weather disasters arising from burning that oil would be so great that we would have to stop burning. That's just Exxon Mobil's oil. The oil stored by all the oil companies everywhere would, if burned, destroy civilization many times over.

Another way to comprehend this, as [Bill McKibben](#) has observed, is that most of the oil stored all over the earth is worthless. The value of oil company stock, if Wall St. were rational, would drop precipitously. Moreover, there is no point in drilling for more oil. Most of what we have already stored cannot be burned. More drilling is pointless. Are Bill McKibben's and James Hansen's [numbers right](#)? We had better have the science community double-check the numbers, and fast.

Where do we start? With language. Add systemic causation to your vocabulary. Communicate the concept. Explain to others why global warming systemically caused the enormous energy and size of Hurricane Sandy, as well as the major droughts and fires. Email your media whenever you see reporting on extreme weather that doesn't ask scientists if it was systemically caused by global warming.

Next, enact fee and dividend, originally proposed by Peter Barnes as [Sky Trust](#) and introduced as Senate legislation as the CLEAR Act by Maria Cantwell and Susan Collins. More recently, legislation called fee and dividend has been proposed by James Hansen and introduced in the House by representatives John B, Larson and Bob Inglis. Next. Do all we can to move to alternative energy worldwide as soon as possible.

# # #

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## **Candidates Flee East Coast as Frankenstorm Takes Revenge for their Ignoring Climate Change**

<http://www.juancole.com/2012/10/candidates-flee-east-coast-as-frankenstorm-takes-revenge-for-their-ignoring-climate-change-in-debates.html>[www.juancole.com/2012/10/candidates-flee-east-coast-as-frankenstorm-takes-revenge-for-their-ignoring-climate-change-in-debates.html](http://www.juancole.com/2012/10/candidates-flee-east-coast-as-frankenstorm-takes-revenge-for-their-ignoring-climate-change-in-debates.html)

by [Juan Cole](#)

Mitt Romney and Joe Biden have canceled campaign events planned for this weekend at Virginia Beach as a massive storm bears down on the east coast of the US. The candidates are fleeing from the East Coast, even though they won't talk about the key

environmental issue of our time.

The candidates in this year's presidential election completely ignored climate change in their debates and their campaigning, even though it is the most deadly issue facing this country and all humankind. Human beings are dumping massive amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere by burning coal, natural gas and petroleum at feverish rates. They have already increased temperatures significantly since 1750, and are on track to put up the average surface temperature of the earth by 5 degrees C. or 9 degrees Fahrenheit over the next century, enough to turn everyplace on earth over time into a sweating tropics, melt all surface ice, and, over the long term, submerge a third of the current land mass. A global state of emergency would be necessary to keep the temperature increase to 2 degrees C. or less, but the window is rapidly closing for this curbing of disaster.

Big oil is pouring money into the Romney campaign or superpacs supporting him, so as to make sure they keep their tax breaks but those for wind power are abolished. The power of big Carbon money is preventing climate change from being discussed in the campaign, even though it affects every American voter. Romney's energy policies will cause global disaster, but even Obama doesn't seem to realize the severity and urgency of the problem (or else he does and feels his hands are tied).

A new study appearing in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences that uses accurate tide measurements since 1923 removes any doubt that hurricanes are more frequent and stronger in warm years (the number of warm years has steadily increased over the past century and especially in the past decade).

For every increase of 1 degree Fahrenheit, US hurricanes will likely get 2% stronger (i.e. they are already 5% stronger than 2 centuries ago). In hurricanes, a 5% increase in ferocity matters quite a lot.

One mechanism for the increased severity is that higher temperatures produce more high-altitude clouds, called "deep convective clouds," associated increased rainfall. One recent study found that torrential downpours in the United States are occurring a third more often than in 1948. New England has been the worst hit, with torrential downpours 85% more common now than in 1948. Note that these findings are based on actual historical records, and are not a matter of projection.

Across the board, storms are 10% more intense now than when Truman was president. Hurricanes are a more contentious issue than storms but models show that the speed of hurricane winds could increase by as much as 13 percent over the next century as a result of our production of carbon dioxide, and rainfall rates will increase 10-31 percent in hurricanes. Because of the rising level of the seas, hurricanes will cause larger storm surges.

A Tel Aviv researcher has shown that every one degree increase Celsius produces a 10% increase in lightning, with the attendant dangers of increased forest and other fires.

Those who talk about solar energy being “more expensive” than coal or natural gas are not figuring in the expensiveness of climate change. In many markets, wind and solar are already competitive, and if the damage hydrocarbons are doing to our economy were taken into account, they’d be the only game in town.

One of the many indexes of the failure of American democracy is that our candidates can’t even publicly say the name of our worst nemesis.

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*Juan Cole teaches Middle Eastern and South Asian history at the University of Michigan. His latest book, [Engaging the Muslim World](#), is just out in a revised paperback edition from Palgrave Macmillan. He is also the author of [Napoleon's Egypt: Invading the Middle East](#) (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). He has appeared widely on television, radio and on op-ed pages as a commentator on Middle East affairs, and has a regular column at [Salon.com](#). He has written, edited, or translated 14 books and has authored 60 journal articles. His weblog on the contemporary Middle East is [Informed Comment](#).*

October 26, 2012

## **Walmart Sets 2017 Target for Supply Chain Improvement, Takes Sustainability Consortium to China**

*by Bart King*

[www.sustainablebrands.com/news\\_and\\_views/articles/walmart-sets-2017-target-supply-chain-improvement-takes-sustainability](http://www.sustainablebrands.com/news_and_views/articles/walmart-sets-2017-target-supply-chain-improvement-takes-sustainability)

Walmart this week announced a series of steps and commitments intended to increase the sustainability of its supply chain in the U.S. and China.

By the end of 2017, Walmart said it will buy 70 percent of the goods it sells in U.S. stores only from suppliers that use the Sustainability Index — a rating system under development by Walmart and [The Sustainability Consortium](#) (TSC) to evaluate and share the sustainability of products.

The target will involve suppliers who produce goods in categories where the Index is available. Walmart is [currently implementing the Index](#) for roughly 100 product categories, and by the end of 2017, hundreds of additional categories are expected to be added.

Walmart also is assisting the launch of TSC in China, via a \$2 million grant from the Walmart Foundation. Using the grant, TSC China will mirror the work of the U.S.-based TSC, bringing together industries, universities and other experts to form a network focused on improving sustainability in consumer goods. Walmart said it will use the results of TSC's work to refine its Sustainability Index for use in China.

Walmart also intends to change the way its global sourcing merchants are evaluated so that sustainability becomes an even more important part of buyers' day-to-day jobs.

Beginning in 2013, they will join key buyers in Walmart U.S. and Sam's Club, who already have specific sustainability objectives on their annual evaluations. Lastly, Walmart said, beginning in 2013, it will use the Sustainability Index to influence the design of its U.S. private brand products.

At the 2008 Sustainability Summit in China, Walmart announced goals to improve sustainability practices in the country. The retailer says nearly 95 percent of direct-import factories have received one of the two highest audit ratings for environmental and sourcing practices, and that 195 factories have improved their energy efficiency by 20 percent as of July 2012.

*@ Bart King is a freelance writer and communications consultant.*