

COURAGE, COWARDICE AND COMPROMISE

**The abolition of slavery in the 19th century
Its relevance to environmental issues today**



Profits-without-conscience as a world tyrant

**The anti-slavery movement and its relationship
to today's environmental movement**

Distinctions between compromise and sellout

The consequences of inaction on innocent victims

The need for a moral awakening to protect future generations

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“Let us put heart into those rebels who fight for a finer art, a purer life, a cleaner race, unmasking imposture, overthrowing inequalities; replacing the false with the true. All religions proclaim with one voice, though in many languages, that we are summoned, not to a light-hearted saunter or even a journey where we can always walk with clasped hands of understanding and friendship, but to a battle where we have to fight the forces of stupidity and selfishness.”

S. Radhakrishnan, 1933

Preface and Acknowledgements

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of books about the slavery of black people, the anti-slavery movements and the US Civil War. But it is not often, indeed it is rare, that authors directly link the past to the present so that one can see the same problems continuing under the disguise of different circumstances. This writing endeavors to do that.

I am not a historian. The reader will find no original, primary historical research on slavery by me in this writing. All the historical facts presented here on that subject came from the work of numerous authoritative, published authors listed in the notes at the back. There were several or, in many cases, numerous sources for all the major and most of the minor information in this writing.

However, I have been an environmental activist in British Columbia for 24 years. This writing greatly condenses 24 years worth of experience that could be called recent history; and it states things that have been rarely if ever said in public for wide distribution. I am currently the Chairperson of the Valhalla Wilderness Society and a director of a similar organization, Valhalla Wilderness Watch.

As might be imagined, the subject of how history relates to the present day is immense. A writing about it that is this short could only provide an overview of the

issues. Indeed, my friend and colleague Richard Caniell has a five-volume unpublished manuscript that goes far deeper into these subjects. He declined to become a co-author of this paper, but gave me permission to quote freely from his manuscript. He also spent many hours going over this paper, providing comments which have helped it immensely.

Thanks also to my neighbor, Gary Wright, who augmented my own collection of books on these subjects by giving me access to his splendid library. He even allowed me to take home a 150-year old rare book as long as I needed it — something no library would have allowed.

Lastly, this writing is most deeply indebted to the antislavery activists. I could do no better than present their own words for consideration by activists today. So that is what I have done, but not as much as I would have liked. I hope interested readers will seek out some of the books listed in my notes. Activism against injustice is a matter of spirit; the activist within us all requires food for the spirit, and that is just what I found for my environmental work in the history of the anti-slavery movement.

Anne Sherrod

I. INTRODUCTION

When I was at work on this writing, some of my friends wondered what the slavery of black people long ago could possibly have to do with environmental problems today. It's simple. Slavery was a form of exploitation without conscience, and that's what has once again grown to huge and threatening proportions today.

"Exploitation" means "the utilization of someone or something for purely selfish ends." So all exploitation is wrong. But for centuries humans have been goaded by conscience to ameliorate and limit selfish misuse to protect the rights and life values of others. Slavery, however, was exploitation with no conscience at all.

When it comes to resource use by humans, nature is most often a slave, and humans the slaveholders, exploiting and destroying for self-gain. Those who worked for the abolishment of slavery ("abolitionists") sought to extend society's moral conscience across racial lines. Environmentalists today work for its extension to other species and to future generations. Abolitionists were goaded on by cruelty and injury to millions of human beings, sometimes to the point of murder. Environmentalists are driven by cruelty to wildlife, the annihilation of whole species, and threats to the existence of life on Earth. So it's little wonder that many environmentally concerned people count Henry David Thoreau, who had a concern for both nature and slaves, and Martin Luther King, the leader of the US civil rights movement, amongst their guiding lights.

Recently, however, there has been a new surge of interest in slavery amongst environmentally-concerned people. An example is an article in the journal *Climate Change* (27 April 2007), by Marc Davidson of the University of Amsterdam.¹ Davidson uses the US Congressional record to show that legislators are making the exact same excuses for failing to cut carbon emissions that their predecessors once made for refusing to abolish slavery. He equates slave labour to fossil fuels, which reflects why slaveholders wanted slaves: as an energy source for doing work. And he underscores the life-threatening consequences faced by people today, and particularly future generations, from global warming.

However, the people of the present and the future are not just the slaveholders of nature, nor are they threatened only with becoming collateral damage to the exploitation of fossil fuels. This paper will look at the corollaries between the slaves of the 19th century and people today. After all, we too are being directly exploited. We, too, have been bound by a system of laws that

have enthroned economic powers as tyrants. Under a cover of democratic principles we, too, have lost self-determination in most matters of environmental protection. Resources that must support the most basic survival and livelihoods of millions of people are being siphoned to concentrate huge wealth for a privileged class of people, namely the stockholders and Chief Executive Officers of corporations.

It will be argued that slavery is forced labour; that the word should be reserved for only the furthest extreme of exploitation that was endured (on this Continent) mostly by black people; that the life of even the poorest citizen today is far better than that of slaves; that we still have our voting rights and the freedom of making many choices. But if the circumstances described in this presentation can be called freedom, it is a seriously degraded freedom that has shackled the morals and ideals of whole nations of people, and now threatens the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

Is it freedom that 40% of all species are now facing their last few decades on this planet? That lands supporting millions of people are becoming deserts, even right here on the North American continent? Scientists tell us that the ocean food chain is collapsing because of acidification caused by global warming, pollution by pesticides and other causes. Extreme weather has already killed tens of thousands of people, and is becoming more extreme. And most recently, the world's top climate scientists have been telling us that if we don't stop burning coal and other fossil fuels in a short time frame, the future of all life on Earth is in doubt.² Yet, in response to the skyrocketing market value of coal, Canada (including the so-called "green" province of British Columbia) is allowing new coal mines and/or expanded coal production today.

The essence of a moral rebellion is that people come to see that the physical freedom to go where they choose and work as they choose — possibly even to enjoy an affluent lifestyle — is not enough if the cost is their health, their principles, their ideals, their ability to protect their children, and, in short, the future of life on Earth. Human society may not progress — may not even survive — unless a great many more people are able to really *feel* what it means that, in the name of generating wealth, humans today are selling their children's future.

At first this paper will sketch some vignettes of the harm that tyranny has done in the world; but then its focus will shift to consider what the good people of the world have done and are doing about it. The vast majority of people are good people, and their involvement or

lack thereof in trying to solve the problems could fill a book in itself; but this writing is concerned with a smaller group of people who have historically opposed tyranny, for instance, the founding fathers of the United States who declared independence from England, or the 19th century abolitionists, or, today, the environmentalists.

BC environmentalist Will Horter, head of the Dogwood Alliance, was perhaps the first person in BC to begin comparing the abolitionist movement with the environmental movement. His approach says: if they could bring about radical change, we can do it too:

“Our generation can learn from the Abolitionist movement. We can learn how to build a strong, diverse, politically formidable movement. We can learn how to influence money flows from bad actors towards good.”³

This is a very important message. But Horter’s analogies are more applicable to the abolitionist movement in England. They leave out critical elements of the situation in the US, which holds very different lessons for today’s environmental movement. This paper will focus upon slavery and antislavery in the US, because the situation there was much more like the deeply entrenched corporate tyranny we face today.

In the US, abolitionists were beaten, murdered, besieged by mobs, vilified and targetted by oppressive legislation. In the face of it all, they defiantly denounced the Slave Power, the Government, the Constitution, and the Union itself, as well as arguing fiercely with each other on the moral issues of their methods of activism. The relevance of this to the struggle for environmental

protection should not be overlooked. Environmental groups are critical health cells of society, functioning like white blood cells that combat disease. But are the health cells healthy today? In the opinion of many environmentalists, no. The immune system is “compromised.” Environmental groups are being co-opted by government and industry. The public needs to know this to solve some of the confusion that is being sown by a split movement, and to help turn it around.

Why is the antislavery movement so much a topic in environmentalism today? Because their’s was the spirit that can save our planet, if indeed anything can at this point. In a world that had gone much too far compromising with evil, someone had to lead the way to stand on principles, no matter what intimidation, danger, losses and beguilements of safety and comfort might assail — and to do it, not for oneself, but for others.

The details of their struggle, some of which are presented here, remind us that sometimes what we call “compromise” is really collusion in the injury of others. The union of opposing interests may lead to one consuming the other, and comfortable accords may sometimes conceal a fatal enlargement of tyranny that ends in catastrophe.

In opening the annals of history on black people in North America, we open a chronicle of courage and cowardice that is unparalleled on this Continent and unequalled in world history by anything short of World War II. It is timely to do so, because courage and cowardice will play a large role in what we do to save the future of life on Earth.

II. THE CHANGING FACE OF SLAVERY

1

The Naked Core of Tyranny

There are two tyrannies at the core of slavery: the tyranny within many individuals, in which economic interest supercedes and controls almost every other value held by the person; and the external tyranny of a few individuals, in which their material greed competes with and expands its power over others. The former makes a person a slave to his or her own misvalues; the latter is a malignant form of tyranny that seeks to control others for its profit and thus spreads throughout the world.

Obviously, cheap resources — whether unpaid labour or poorly paid labour, or cheap public forests or land or minerals — are an advantage leading to the concentration of wealth and power that can form such an external tyranny. Another advantage in cutting costs, and thus accelerating the accumulation of wealth, is a lack of conscience in how one goes about doing it.

From the villages of Africa to the cotton plantations of the first two centuries of the United States, these underlying elements operated in the same way: to take advantage of any superior strength over one's fellow human being; to turn off fundamental human emotions so that terrible things could be done for profit; and to condition the victims to consider this as their natural state in life. In the mid 1800s Dr. David Livingstone, one of the first white explorers in Africa, wrote of encountering depopulated landscapes in Africa, villages standing eerily empty or burned to the ground, human skeletons everywhere. This was the work of slave hunters. They were most often African natives paid and often armed with guns by Arab slave traders — who had been doing their dirty business longer than anyone could remember — and by Europeans who had come on the scene more recently.¹ European ships waited to carry the slaves to markets across the ocean. The United States, being a vast, undeveloped country, became the largest market.

At a time when Arabs and Europeans were only a very few vulnerable men on a continent of African natives, it was possible to shatter aboriginal cultures from within. These cultures, like so many nations that have been colonized, were infiltrated by the flow of money (or trade goods that stood for money) in return for services such as guiding and protection, and the purchase of slaves and other items. This destabilized societies by fracturing them into collaborators, victims and resisters, making them unable to defend themselves in a unified force. This is how it worked in Africa, as

observed by Livingstone:

“On the plea of witchcraft, the child [is] taken from the poorer classes of parents as a fine, or to pay a debt, and sold to a traveling native slave-trader. Then children kidnapped by a single robber, or by a gang going from their own village to neighbouring hamlets, to steal the children who are out drawing water or gathering wood. We have seen places where every house was a stockade, and yet the people were not safe. Next comes the system of retaliation of one hamlet against another to make reprisals, and the same thing on a larger scale between tribes; the portion of a tribe which flees becomes vagrant, and eventually armed with muskets, the produce of previous slaving, attacks peaceful tribes, and depopulates the country for the supply of the ocean slave-trade ... And lastly, we have still another and more ample source of supply for the ocean slave-trade, and we regret to say the means for its success are drawn directly from Europeans. Trading parties are sent out from Portuguese and Arab coast towns with large quantities of muskets, ammunition, cloth and beads. ... we know of no instance in which they have not, at one part of their journey, joined one tribe in attacking another for the sake of the captives they could take ... The bow cannot stand for a moment against the musket.”²

Groups as varied as peoples conquered by Hitler, or aboriginal North Americans, or today's labour unions or the environmental movement, have all experienced the splintering effect of this insidious, selective sharing of the rewards of preying upon some victim group. Many communities have little immunity to such influences, as when a logging company, faced with a blockade of protesters, promises to build a recreational complex for a poor rural community with the money from logging the community's domestic watershed. The community then turns against the protesters. (In the instance I observed, the logging materialized, but the recreational complex did not.)

No doubt like people today, Africans who profited from selling their neighbors laboured under the delusion that they, themselves, were free and receiving a benefit. But what difference did it make that they were paid for their human booty, if in collecting it they tore apart their own social fabric and environment — something that

profited the exploiters in huge amounts for centuries to come? When people become the robots of exploiters, doing the plundering for them for some pittance of reward, they are slaves too; they simply have a longer chain on which to do the bidding of the master. This is no different from the present-day inhabitants of developed countries being induced to earn their paychecks poisoning and wrecking their own environment and their children's future health.

In Africa, sometimes a large part of the population of a village would be murdered in the process of capturing slaves. Overall, an estimated 10 million African natives were enslaved while killing an estimated 100 million others in the process.³

Anyone who touched this sinister merchandise had their character eroded by the power they exercised. Ship owners maximized profits by chaining the slaves in the hold of ships in cramped positions in which they would be unable to move — hardly able to breathe — for weeks. Plantation owners used whips to make the slaves work from dawn until dusk, often half starved, in order to maximize profit. Holding a large population in bondage risks a violent rebellion; so terrible tortures were sometimes used deliberately as intimidation. Absolute power over human life brought out sadism wherever it lurked in the hidden caverns of human nature. Slavery produced human monsters.

Thus, the present rise of torture by the US government, as well as Canada's role in turning its own citizens over to the US in circumstances in which they were tortured, is an expectable degradation due to the re-emergence of profit-without-conscience. In the first centuries of the settlement of North America, it was the black gold of free labour that caused this degradation; in the 21st century, it is the black gold of petroleum resources and coal, the liquid gold of water, even the sales of high tech weapons in disregard of the deaths they will bring — and just about anything else on which corporations can generate fortunes for their CEOs and stockholders.

2

The Entrenchment of Slavery in Law

In his article on slavery and the environment, BC environmentalist Will Horter summarizes some of the ways that the abolitionists brought about the end of slavery:

“Their grassroots movement for change was driven by churches, intellectuals, activists and concerned citizens. They held rallies, signed petitions, boycotted products, gave sermons.

Slowly politicians followed. First with rhetoric, later with legislation targeting trade, ultimately with an outright ban.”

England did indeed have a large antislavery movement. It began formulating in the late 1700s and resulted in emancipation of slaves in all of England's colonies about 60 years later, in 1838.¹ Before we congratulate the British too much, it should be noted that the slave system in her colonies in the West Indies was among the most brutal on Earth, causing inconceivable human suffering. The very extremity of the cruelty practiced in West Indies hastened the resolve of the English to end it.

Canada, on its own, began gradual emancipation in 1793.² There had never been a large number of slaves in Canada from the beginning, but by the time of England's decree, there were very few left in Canada to liberate. Over a period of time Canada had some principled people in office who simply used the power vested in them to end what was, self-evidently, immoral and barbaric. From then on, Canada became the refuge of America's runaway slaves. Despite the existence of much prejudice against black people in Canada, for a long time there was a continual thread of principled government authorities and jurists who repulsed almost all US efforts to force the extradition of fugitive slaves — even before England freed its slaves. In summary, the abolition of slavery in Canada required no massive struggle on the part of the public. The Canadian anti-slavery societies were created by black Canadians to support US slaves.³

By far the greatest struggle to end slavery was in the United States. Ironically, after declaring its independence from England in a blaze of passion about freedom and equality, the US allowed slavery for 24 years after England's final emancipation decree. Turn the pages of US history and one sees the result of procrastination: 600,000 men lying dead on the battlefields and in the hospitals of the US Civil War.⁴ This was the first brief terminus of slavery in the US in 1865: a war in which more people were killed than in any other war in history. Only World War II comes close to it in American deaths, at 400,000.

Not until a couple of years into the war did any but a very few US politicians ever support the anti-slavery cause. This war was not started by slaves seeking independence, nor by abolitionists seeking to free them; it was started by the slaveholders themselves. And it occurred in the country that had compromised the most with slaveholders.

This may be questioned by many people who have believed the great American yarn that the war was start-

ed by extremist “hot heads” on both sides. Very few Americans will admit that the great mass of US citizens and most of their Congress, in their collusionary racism and economic concerns, consented to the growth of a psychopathic power within their borders until it opened up a blast of cannons against a federal fort, launching a war that very nearly destroyed the new nation. This is of utmost concern to people living today because we, too, have ignored the growth of a huge psychopathic power within our borders, and for the same reason: it has been profitable to do so.

Opinions on the cause of the US Civil War are many and conflicting, even amongst respected historians. Fortunately, however, there is a core of irrefutable facts that have been researched, verified and published by many of them. The facts show that an 80-year long series of compromises, made under the claim of preserving unity and peace, formed the descent to the bloody battlefields of the Civil War. Repeatedly, both sides of the compromisers bought peace with each other by selling out the slaves over and over again.

England accepted compromises too: she sought a gradual emancipation, she compensated slaveholders; but these compromises brought a sure end to slavery, whereas the ones in the US allowed it to spread over more territory, and to expand its legal rights. Underneath these factors, there were other key differences that made abolition far more difficult in the US.

There were also few slaves in England, but a large number in her colonies. One of the reasons for the decisive way in which England finally liberated them was that most of the slaveowners were in the colonies too, far away from England. So there were no slave owners in the English Parliament, thus no conflict of interest, no vote for slaveholders. And because very few households had them, there was no significant political pressure from the public. A million people in England signed petitions against slavery. Another critical factor: the courts found that slavery *had no foundation in English law*.⁵

By contrast, slavery (by means of euphemistic language) was enshrined in the US Constitution, which then paved the way for innumerable laws validating slavery. Many of the wealthy people owned slaves, thus there was great political pressure to maintain them. Conflict of interest infested every level of government and the judicial system, just as corporate conflict of interest infests our government, law-making and courts today. It infested the churches, where preachers and congregations convening for the purpose of religious instruction were inclined to protect their financial inter-

est in slaves. Predictably, they found justification for slavery in the Bible. What could possibly bring an end to such an advanced stage of takeover by the Slave Power?

In the overview provided by the passage of 150 years, it is possible to see that conflicts between the North and the South, or between the abolitionists and the slaveholders, were physical embodiments of the fact that slavery, by its very nature, was in conflict with conscience. Conscience does not go away and it cannot die. The more it is pressed down, the more it presses up. The slaveholders must not only barricade their own conscience by whatever means of self-dishonesty and mutual conspiracy they could manage, but also put up external barriers against the conscience of any and all who might intervene on behalf of the slaves. Thus it ensued that the expanding Slave Power began to tyrannize over the rights of free white people. This was accomplished by a system of state laws and political deals.

All the venom of racial hatred that was in slavery, and all the despotic control of people that slavery required, was instilled in these laws. Thus the individual slaveholder emerged sanctified and wrapped in a code of law-abiding honour, for now, *society* held the slave captive. It was widely referred to as an *institution*. The master did not need physical prowess or brutality, he could hire an overseer to take care of that. He could send his slave to the jailer to be whipped. When his slaves ran away, they could expect no help because it was against the law to help them, penalties were high, and death by mob violence was a likely result. If the slaveholder had to give chase, he could compel non-slaveholding whites to help. But some people could not live in such a society and they believed the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution had guaranteed them a moral form of government.

Over thirty years, from 1830 to 1860, 300 white people were lynched in the slave states. Some of the victims were travelers from the North who showed sympathy for slaves, but some of them were slave owners suspected of not being hard enough on their slaves.⁶ As a result of this legal and extra-legal oppression, hundreds of southern people of conscience moved to the free states, many of them to become prominent members of the abolitionist movement.

As opposition concentrated in the North, and yet the Slave Power was determined to expand there, it became more and more necessary to bind northern conscience with the chains of slave laws extending into non-slave states. The fetters on conscience began to

wound, and the wounds began to fester.

The abolitionists were not the only people with moral feelings. There were other issues of equality. White workers believed that the ideal that “all men are created equal” meant equal opportunity to improve their state in the pursuit of happiness. Many other people, white and black, believed that the United States was a moral nation that would fail unless it could assert its sovereignty and bring expanding sectional tyranny under control. But these feelings went in the direction of self-interest; they were not conscientious objection to the flagrant injustice to black people.

It was the abolitionists, black and white, who were fired to risk societal condemnation and even their lives to help others. It will never be possible to know how much their impassioned standing up for what was right influenced other groups that also had moral concerns. But by 1857, when the unionists and the workers and the abolitionists started coming together in a new political party, Walt Whitman wrote: “No man knows what will happen next, but all know that some such things are to happen as mark the greatest moral convulsions of the earth.”⁷

3

Slavery and the Exploitation of Nature

Profits-without-conscience automatically infers that it is possible to make profits within the bounds of good conscience. There are indeed many examples of that in the world. But the exploitative mind, left unfettered, makes few distinctions in what it will sell, whether animate or inanimate, human, or wildlife and plants. Thus, the exploitation of people and nature, along with the inevitable wars, have often been entwined.

In Africa, slave-trading parties slaughtered elephants for their ivory, which was used as currency for the purchase of slaves. In Canada, the currency was beaver pelts. The depletion of the fur-bearing mammals brought a devastating loss of trade currency for native people. With the slaughter of food animals, especially the buffalo and the musk oxen, as well as the depletion of many salmon runs by large canneries, those native people who survived small pox and other diseases began starving to death.¹ They could then be pushed onto reservations where they were essentially captives.

In the US, the drive to take over land led settlers to outright slaughter native people. Virgin forests and swamps made it necessary to clear that land for agricultural purposes. The use of slave labour made it economical to do this over vast areas.

After the Civil War had cut down slavery, its roots began to grow their evil consequences again; but people conspired not to call it “slavery.” This year, 2008, has brought the publication of a shocking new book documenting the continuation of slavery in the South until 1945, eighty years after the end of the Civil War. In *Slavery by Another Name* author Douglas A. Blackmon has documented the role of the Civil War in stimulating an explosion of industrial activity in the South aimed at making weapons and iron-clad ships. The South’s burgeoning coal and iron mines, its railroads, its timber industry, were all pushed to the uttermost effort to support the war. In nightmare landscapes reminiscent of JRR Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, the felling of forests, the spread of devastating industrial blight, slavery in subhuman conditions, and the making of a war that brought agonizing death to hundreds of thousands of soldiers, were all inextricably entwined.

Once the South was defeated, huge fortunes were to be made on southern resources and southern industrial capacity in the Reconstruction. Americans and US politicians found it profitable not to concern themselves too closely with how these industries produced their coal, iron, steel, cotton and lumber.

Within a few years after the Civil War, states in the Deep South were selling black people arrested on frivolous charges such as vagrancy to coal and iron mines. Within a few decades, thousands of black men were being arrested for breaking laws deliberately created to entrap them, and sold or leased to the mines where they endured a slavery even more brutal and degrading than before the war.

The mines obtained black prisoners for a pittance of the huge value of their labour. The supply was endless, so the slaves could be quickly worked to death, expended in extremely dangerous conditions, or brutally killed by sadistic guards. Thousands of these slaves never saw the light of day for long periods, as they were taken underground in ghastly mine shafts before dawn and returned to their prison houses after dark.

According to Blackmon, “In the first two years that Alabama leased its prisoners, nearly 20 percent of them died. In the following year, mortality rose to 35 percent. In the fourth, nearly 45 percent were killed.”² A number of huge coal mines and manufacturing plants had graveyards where the bodies were buried, and prisoners said that sometimes the bodies were simply thrown into the hot fires where coal and minerals were refined.

In Alabama in one year, 1925, “nearly one thousand prisoners had been sold into slave mines and forced labour camps, generating \$250,000, or about

\$2.8 million in modern currency, for local officials. The state government pocketed \$595,000 in 1925 — or \$6.6 million today....” This was also going on all across the Deep South. As part of a systematic program of brutal repression to keep blacks in this position, the old reign of terror re-established itself — 250 black people lynched in 1892 alone.³

A number of federal prosecutors gathered massive and shocking evidence and worked hard to bring the perpetrators to justice. The story of the prosecutions is a tragic one of loopholes in the laws, preposterous legal defenses of the perpetrators that received a sympathetic hearing from lenient judges and prejudiced juries, gross intimidation of witnesses, and finally the anger of southern whites causing the federal government to back off.

Blackmon’s exceptional research uncovered the shameful conclusion of post-Civil War slavery in 1945: as World War II began, President Franklin Roosevelt simply ordered an end to it so that Germany and Japan could not have the propaganda advantage of claiming that the treatment of Jews in Europe was the equivalent of the treatment of black people in the US. Federal prosecutors, using laws that were never employed during the earlier court cases, brought a swift end to post-Civil War slavery, and the laws were later tightened to forbid any re-emergence.

This shocking portrait is vastly enlarged by what black people who were not prisoners endured at that time and for decades later. There were many shades of hell along the road that led up from slavery. Poverty and white terrorism drove many hundreds of thousands of black people from the South to the industrialized cities of the North, looking for employment. There, racial hatred fermented amongst white workers who did not want to lose jobs and white people who did not want blacks settling in their neighborhoods or having access to public facilities. Racial prejudice and even segregation became greatly enlarged in the North, resulting in many horrible pogroms in which black people were killed, driven from their homes, and their houses burned down. Not until Martin Luther King’s campaign in the 1960s was there substantial improvement.

Black people still face much discrimination, but the slavery that encroaches so dangerously today threatens everyone, regardless of race. Today profits-without-conscience is cloaked in the pretense that endless economic growth is healthy for society. This cannot be so when it is considered that our present system of creating wealth is based in great part upon consuming the planet’s ability to support life. It can no longer be hidden that near fatal imbalance and disease have been the result. Yet this misbelief has shaped our laws and court deci-

sions, so that humanity is nailed to a tragic destiny unless it can bring about sweeping legislative change.

The lessons of the Civil War and the end of post-war enslavement of black people are clear: only strong government can protect people (and ecosystems) from the exploitative mind — and that only by instituting strong laws to regulate economic powers, and by strictly enforcing them. So it is no accident that the rise of corporate power into worldwide tyranny is being facilitated by government policies called “deregulation,” meaning the removal or weakening of laws that restrict corporations. The laws that are being gutted or wiped away altogether represent decades of experience of abuses and struggles for reforms in which society and government finally saw that changes had to be made.

The end result is that our environment and humanity itself are chained in servitude to the goal of the endless growth of wealth that is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few very, very wealthy people. Today’s power cartel no longer sells the mother away from the child, but it sells the forests, rivers, wildlife, air and water, away from the people whose health and welfare depend upon these resources. It no longer rips human beings out of their homes (unless they live in Iraq or Afghanistan); but it does rip whatever will make a profit — trees, minerals, wildlife — out of the earth in the cheapest possible way and in the greatest possible amount to make the most profit. It has always included terrible cruelty to animals. This is what we call “economic progress.”

As laws clamped down on physical slavery, the old model of controlling people through brutality came to be replaced by one of deception and manipulation. To operate behind a false face is the essence of the new Slave Power. In the process it has discovered that it is better to maintain a shell of democracy and allow the people to vote, while controlling politics behind the scenes. Paying people wages (however poor and uncertain), and making them feel good (however superficially), enables a far more stable and lucrative form of exploitation than abusing people with chains and whips.

Another new book for 2008, by well-known Canadian author Mel Hurtig, *The Truth About Canada*, has used statistics to create a shocking profile of the growth of corporate power at the expense of poorly paid workers.⁵ For instance, in 2005 the annual income of the 100 highest-paid CEOs “ranged from \$2.87 million to over \$74.82 million [for *one* executive.] Meanwhile, the average Canadian worker earned about \$38,000 in a year, and the average person working for minimum wage earned \$15,931 a year.”⁶

Canada has the second highest percentage of low-paid workers (earning less than \$10/hour) amongst all the developed countries.

According to a 2006 report by Stats Canada, the median net worth of the poorest 10 percent of Canadians fell by nearly \$7,500 between 1984 and 2005, while the net worth of the richest 10% increased by \$659,000.⁷ In that same year, corporate net profits reached an all-time high of \$168.1 billion. Corporate earnings of the top 1,000 firms were up 25 percent over the previous year. Yet between 1963 and 2006, the percentage of total federal tax revenue paid by corporations fell from over 20% to 14.3%. Corporate taxes compared to personal income taxes fell from approximately 63% to 29%.

Hurtig documents the devastating effect these policies are having on health, social programs and education in Canada. For instance, while having the eighth highest Gross Domestic Product in the world, Canada also has the seventh highest percentage of child poverty amongst 25 developed nations.

He points out an ongoing stream of propaganda that is constantly spewed out in our newspapers to convince the public that corporations are barely getting by, and if we don't give them more concessions, they will have to pick up and leave. This manipulation of information has the same ultimate effect as the laws that once forbade people from teaching slaves to read. Denying people access to the truth helps immeasurably to keep them enslaved.

4

Behind Closed Doors

*"In my more than three decades in government, I have never seen anything approaching the degree to which information flow from scientists to the public has been screened and controlled as it is now ... there is commonly a massaging of the text of the scientific messages that are presented. Wording is altered to make the message about climate change to appear to be less serious ... This, I believe, is a recipe for environmental disasters. I refer most specifically to evidence that relates to the desirability and feasibility of measures to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide. Evidence that this is necessary for achieving climate stability and avoiding dangerous anthropogenic interference with climate has become overwhelming, but it continues to be dismissed or downgraded via the distortions of the scientific process."*¹

Dr. James Hansen, Director
Goddard Institute for Space Studies
US National Aeronautics and Space
Administration (NASA)

The obvious purpose of laws against teaching slaves to read was to keep them ignorant of any information that could make them discontent or help them escape. But it was part of a larger context of suppressions serving a larger motive: to perpetuate a lie that slaves were subhuman. Slaves were treated like livestock, and so it was necessary to create the appearance that they were livestock. Those capacities that distinguished human beings from animals, and that were abundantly evident in slaves, were systematically and brutally repressed.

It is characteristic of slavery in any place, time or degree to suppress the exercise of the higher human capacities — the thinking capacities that make crucial distinctions, the feeling capacities that care for others and value the deeper meanings of life, the esthetic, artistic and cultural capacities, including the appreciation of beauty. Everything becomes subjugated to the expediences of profit for the slaveholders.

Slaveholders of the 21st century cannot keep people from reading, but they have other ways of keeping them ignorant. They can deny, lie, cover up evidence, and cast doubt on what information does leak out by hiring scientists to dispute the evidence. They can invade schools with their propaganda. Today's slaves are to be kept hopping on jet planes, driving SUVs, riding snowmobiles and ATVs and shopping for the latest brand names, unaware that such things as global warming, peak oil, toxic chemicals, nuclear waste and nuclear bombs are threatening the future of life on Earth. It becomes most alarming when governments collaborate in these activities and become secretive to cover up their collaboration.

For instance, in the US, the government has tried to gag one of the world's top climate scientists, Dr. James Hansen. It has also issued orders that scientists must pass any material or statements for the media or public by the political levels of government and their public relations manipulators. Early in 2008 Environment Canada issued a similar a gag order to its scientists:

"Environment Canada has 'muzzled' its scientists, ordering them to refer all media queries to Ottawa where communications officers will help them respond ... this could include 'Asking the program expert to respond with approved lines; having media relations respond; referring the call to the minister's

office; referring the call to another department.”²

In 2005 the *New York Times* revealed that a former oil industry lobbyist had been editing government scientific reports on climate.³ Here is a glimpse of the naked core of slavery: the intent to profit economically, no matter by what immoral means or the consequences on others. It is a frightening glimpse of a nightmare world that is evolving from the massive suppression of information that the public needs to defend itself.

In British Columbia, Canada’s “green province” has issued numerous promises to curb carbon emissions to help mitigate global warming. However in the spring of 2007 the government of BC, without public debate, changed the *Freedom of Information Act* to block the public and media from access to information on the activities of the top-level climate action committee that will determine how the targets will be met.⁴ As of May, 2008, reporters had been able to obtain very little information about the committee, even though meetings have been held with many industrial “stakeholders.”⁵

What are our governments trying to hide? Hansen, with a group of eight other climate scientists, has now released a report stating that the level of carbon dioxide already in the air will take the planetary temperature back to a prehistoric time before human civilization evolved. According to the scientists, world bodies currently setting limits on carbon emissions are aiming far too high:

“If humanity wishes to preserve a planet similar to that on which civilization developed, ... CO₂ will need to be reduced from its current 385 ppm to at most 350 ppm If the present overshoot of this target CO₂ is not brief, there is a possibility of seeding irreversible catastrophic effects.”⁶

These scientists point out that the current level of carbon in the atmosphere is melting the Arctic ice as well as glaciers all over the world. And they are worried that global warming itself could release massive quantities of carbon dioxide, causing the changes to accelerate beyond all control. So far this is what is happening. As it continues, rivers fed by glaciers could, after each year’s snowmelt, dry up for long periods. Such rivers in the Himalayas, Andes and Rocky Mountains alone supply water to hundreds of millions of people.

There is already enough carbon in the atmosphere to raise sea levels by metres in coming decades. The British government’s Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change (2006) has stated: “Currently, more than 200 million people live in coastal floodplains

around the world, with two million square kilometers of land and one trillion dollars worth of assets less than one metre elevation above current sea level.”⁷

Scientists now warn that the only realistic way to sharply curtail CO₂ emissions is to phase out coal use except where CO₂ is captured and sequestered. (Hansen, et al., 2008) They say that several decades of research and development may be needed before CO₂ can be economically captured and stored. And they portray a global state of emergency in which there is little time to change:

“Continued growth of greenhouse gas emissions, for just another decade, practically eliminates the possibility of near-term return of atmospheric composition beneath the tipping level for catastrophic effects.”

Recently, in testimony before the US Congress, Hansen blasted an agreement by nations at the G8 Summit in Tokyo to “consider and adopt” the goal of cutting emissions by 50% by 2050. He said it was “worse than worthless” and that it will “guarantee that we deliver to our children climate catastrophes that are out of our control.” He also stated that the CEOs of large fossil fuel companies ought to be put on trial for high crimes against humanity and nature, comparing them to tobacco companies which denied and covered up the links between smoking and cancer.⁸

Such circumstances make it clear that the major climate action committees, such as the one in BC, are making life or death decisions. Against this stand the profit margins of large corporations. One would have to be born yesterday to miss the implications of governments like BC changing the *Freedom of Information Act* so that these committees can operate in secret. It should be cause for a massive outcry.

Canada and BC have a lot to hide. Recent government figures show that Canada’s greenhouse gas emissions increased by 25 percent from 1990 to 2005, the highest amount of any G8 nation.⁹ One hundred, thirty scientists have now sent a letter to Stephen Harper stating that Canada’s energy plan is inadequate. It is amidst these circumstances that the federal government has now closed the door on the communication of its scientists with the public.

Hansen has said that coal should stay in the ground because it is a potent producer of global warming gases and the quantities available will mean world catastrophe. Yet a BC Stats fact sheet on exports (April, 2008) expresses enthusiasm about a dramatic rise in the price of coal caused by increased demand from steel-manufacturing countries such as China, South Korea, Brazil

India, and Japan. Some new coal contracts will pay triple the price of last year's coal. The government fact sheet says that "the spike in coal prices should spur not only a boost in production at current mines, but could also hasten the development of new coal mines in the province." If new mines do not show up — not to worry. In 2007 BC's existing mines produced only 69% of their capacity so "there is room for growth even without new mines."¹⁰

The *Vancouver Sun* recently printed the expectable editorial on the wonders of coal, claiming that "the industry has taken giant steps towards making the production and use of the mineral more environmentally benign."¹¹ The *Sun* editor was dazzled by what he calls an "eye-popping" \$14-billion purchase of a coal company by Teck Cominco. The only problem he acknowledged was: "environmentalists may not like it" — a matter of the likes and dislikes of a relatively small group of people who want their way — no mention of what the world's climate scientists would say. Like a bulldozer, the excitement in the corporate world over the rising market value of coal pushes before itself a huge mound of propaganda under which it buries both the facts and all evidence of the pending victims.

*

Resource-rich countries are still being colonized and made the objects of exploitation. Canada, with its great wealth of resources, has been made into an easy target for foreign takeovers. In 1986 Canada removed controls on foreign ownership of corporations. Since then, according to Mel Hurtig's book, *The Truth About Canada*, there have been 10,500 foreign takeovers of Canadian companies and none have been turned down.¹² This has led to foreign ownership of most of Canada's large petroleum companies. Out of 40 Canadian petroleum companies in the 1990's, only six remain Canadian. Most are owned by US investors.¹³

At a time when it is known that oil reserves are being depleted and that the peaking of oil production will cause massive disruption in society, Canada is allowing oil and gas companies to build pipelines that will carry massive quantities of oil to the United States. By 2004, 55.2% of all oil and gas profits from Canada were going to foreign-controlled corporations, which enjoyed ludicrous subsidies from Canadian taxpayers.¹⁴

Canada now has less than nine years of natural gas left, and less than 10 years of proven conventional oil reserves left. Yet 66% of its oil production and 60% of its natural gas are being shipped across the border to the US. Already, Canada must *import* 49% of the oil it consumes.¹⁵ Under the North American Free Trade

Agreement (NAFTA), Canada cannot reduce its exports to the US unless it also reduces its own share of the oil by an equal amount. Canada is the only country in the world that has put its oil supply at risk in this way. It has become the resource brothel of the corporate world.

It is now widely recognized that the US and Britain attacked Iraq to take over its oil fields. In the process, over one million Iraqis (a great many more if we go back to 1990) have died and there is no end in sight to the violence.¹⁶ As of 2006 the US had used at least 5 billion gallons of fuel in the Iraq war, and another 2.2 billion in Afghanistan. These wars are currently consuming 56,000 barrels of oil a day for the US alone. Obviously, Canada contributed richly to the fuel that was used.¹⁷

A new report entitled "A Climate of War" by a climate action group, Oil Change International, states that since 2003, the Iraq War has emitted at least 141 million metric tons of carbon dioxide. That is the equivalent of putting 25 million more cars on the road this year.¹⁸

At the same time, the oil shortage is causing countries to divert huge quantities of agricultural products such as corn and wheat into the production of fuels. The World Food Program says that widespread famine is occurring. A recent report by the World Bank said that the use of biofuels had driven food prices up by 75%, pushing an estimated 100 million people around the world below the poverty line. Part of the increase is being caused by investors on the stock market speculating on the soaring price of grain. Meanwhile, large multinational food corporations have been experiencing huge increases in profits ranging from 40-100%.¹⁹

Now global warming drought is threatening the water supply of many US cities. A senior health and science advisor for the US Environmental Protection Agency has warned Canada, "You will see water wars coming in every way, shape or form."²⁰ According to Maude Barlow, head of the Council of Canadians, the US Pentagon has "decided that water supplies, like energy supplies, must be secured if the US is to maintain its current economic and military power in the world. And the US is exerting pressure to access Canadian water, despite Canada's own shortages."²¹ Coming from the country that bombed Iraq to smithereens to take over its oil fields, that's more than a little disturbing

US economic interests are currently consolidating their control over Canadian markets and resources with the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) between Canada, the US and Mexico. It is being put into place by the Canadian government without the consent of the

legislature, and its full contents are so far secret. However, it is known that one agenda for the international talks included: “water consumption, water transfers, and artificial diversions of bulk water” with the aim of achieving “joint optimum utilization of the available water.” It is obvious that the very democracy under our feet is vanishing.

As government behaviour becomes more secretive and anti-democratic, it will spawn increasing injustice, injustice will inevitably spawn resistance, and resistance will lead to increasingly harsh laws, police powers and jail sentences. This is already happening. Even in North America, this new Slave Power holds its world summits behind police barricades — a glaring example of a tyrant putting up an impenetrable wall to protect itself from the people it intends to control.

Over the last twenty years, civil disobedience has become a chronic state of affairs in British Columbia. Protesters are routinely swept off of logging roads by the police and many are arrested. Many protesters have been sued by logging companies and even by the BC government. Well over one thousand citizens of British Columbia have blocked logging roads. In fact, over 1,000 have been arrested, and many have gone to jail. The government and logging companies file for a court injunction so that any disobedience of the injunction is

contempt of the court process. As a result, no defense as to the actual issues can be raised by the defendants. There is no limit to the sentences for contempt of court, and repeat offenders incur the increasing wrath of judges. Below are a few examples of sentences for environmental protesters, compared to sentences for other crimes. This contrast is only one of many signs in our society that the profits of Big Business have become more important than human life. Conscience receives a harsher sentence than brutality, theft or negligence leading to death.

5

Compromise and Contradiction

Over the last decades one of the most prominent features of the landscape of environmental affairs has been compromise. This doesn't only mean negotiated agreements between parties; it means a deeply entrenched, habitual machinery of half-way measures to protect the environment. But “half-way” is a euphemism. It is usual to give far less than half the conservation that's needed — often only a few particles of conservation — and to package it as “conservation gains.”

Compromise has always been associated with unification and fairness in the public mind. Compromise to unify diverse interests is at the core of democracy, with

Comparative Sentences

- In 1997 76-year-old Jack Ross, suffering from Parkinson's disease, refused to sign an apology for blocking a logging road and an agreement not to return to the site. He spent 76 days in jail without ever being charged with any crime.²²
- In 2006, for blocking construction of a highway bypass through a sensitive wetland in native traditional territory, 71-year old native elder, Harriet Nahanee spent 14 days in jail, even though the judge was warned that she was ill. A month after her release she died of pneumonia.²³
- In 2007, seventy-eight-year old Betty Krawczyk served seven months of a ten-month sentence for blockading the same development. (Pers. comm.)
- In 2008 in the Canadian province of Ontario, six members of the Kitchenu-hmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation, including the Chief and Deputy Chief, have been sentenced to six months in jail for blocking a mining development.
- Also in 2008, 17-year old Tuan Nguyen was convicted of an assault that left a young man a quadriplegic for the rest of his life. Nguyen's part of the attack was with fists; his friends used a bottle and an axe. He received 20 months conditional sentence to be served in the community and at home.²⁴
- In August, 2008, Graeme Bryson was convicted of defrauding the company for which he worked of \$600,000. He received only house arrest (12 months.)²⁵
- In 2008 Thomas Winkler struck a traffic controller twice with his van before leaving the scene of the accident. He received a three-month driving ban, a \$1,500 fine and a 9 month conditional sentence to be served in the community and at home.²⁶
- In 2003, two men in their twenties who killed an elderly woman while racing their cars down the street didn't go to jail at all. They also served their sentences at home (18 months).²⁷

the goal that all interests have a fair share of rights and benefits in society. It works well in some circumstances and has prevented many wars. Unfortunately, when the world's democracies were formed, the focus was solely upon people getting along with each other. There are human laws; but humanity never came to grips with the existence of nature's laws, or the fact that they demand compliance if life on Earth is to be maintained.

In many cases in our environment, negotiating parties pour in new conservation measures that are not enough to produce health, or to solve any problems. The endangered species has more protected habitat, but it will still go extinct anyway because there isn't enough. The nations put limits on their carbon emissions, but not in such an amount as to reduce global warming. Many such agreements are deferrals in which the parties designated by society to solve problems postpone doing anything real about them long enough for the responsibility to pass on to someone else. The parties to the agreements join in delusion rather than facing reality. The contradiction has to be covered up, so things are called by false names. Thus amidst growing environmental collapse, we have politicians and exploiters on every side proclaiming world class "sustainability."

The slavery of black people presented the same problems. There was then, as there is today, huge public demand for compromise. But slavery was endangering and degrading society in many ways that compromises failed to recognize or change, except to make it worse. By going back to those issues, one is brought closer to the centre of the issues before us today: whether compromises that result in injury to others, or to the life support system of all, have any legitimate claim to be considered fair, reasonable, and democratic; or whether they are in fact sellouts of public safety and principles.

During the decades preceding the Civil War, there were fatal compromises on slavery which, to far-seeing eyes, would have predicted war on the day they were made. There were compromises extorted veritably at the point of a gun. There were new compromises that were,

in reality, violations of old compromises — appeasements thrown out to an aggressively expanding slave industry that always wanted more. There were unequal compromises in which the Slave Power took the lion's share of the benefits. And there were natural laws that were ignored — the laws of human nature and of the invisible linkages that bind all human beings, so that when we hurt others, we invariably hurt ourselves.

Society at that time, like society today, suffered from chronic inability to draw a line and stand on it. The compromisers disguised their weakness as reasonability, peacefulness, brotherhood and kindness. Everyone who criticized their deals was tarred as being uncooperative, an extremist, a war monger. But the inability to draw a line and enforce it, whether to keep slavery out of certain states, or to keep economic activities out of our national and provincial parks, or to keep pollutants out of the air, allows tyrannical forces to gain enough power to take over.

Study the Civil War long enough, and it becomes possible to look at the 600,000 dead and mutilated bodies lying on the battlefields and in the hospitals, and see two or three centuries of people in comfortable circumstances who were in positions of responsibility to solve the problems, and opted instead to defer what needed to be done under the cover of "compromise." It would be possible to compare those deaths to the deaths from thirst and starvation that experts say are coming due to global warming. But in any such comparison, 600,000 would be very small in comparison to the deaths that global warming experts are warning about today. It would be possible to compare them to 1.2 million dead and 4 million displaced people from Iraq and Afghanistan, in what are very clearly wars caused by depletion of oil resources.¹ But global warming analysts predict wars for water, oil and other resources all over the world. So it is a good time for remembering how, in the past, compromises in the name of peace have inexorably drawn nations into war.

III. SLAVERY AND ANTISLAVERY IN THE UNITED STATES

“I believe the thoughtful reader of this volume can hardly fail to see that the great struggle in which we are engaged was the unavoidable result of antagonisms imbedded in the very nature of our heterogeneous institutions; — that ours was indeed ‘an irrepressible conflict,’ which might have been precipitated or postponed, but could by no means have been prevented; — that the successive ‘compromises,’ whereby it was so long put off, were—however intended—deplorable mistakes, detrimental to our National character Had the majority then stood firm, they would have precluded the waste of thousands of millions of treasure and rivers of generous blood.”

Horace Greeley
Editor & Publisher, *The New York Tribune*
The American Conflict, Vol. 1, 1865

1

Fatal Compromises

George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were amongst the leaders in the rebellion against England that created the United States. They became the first and third presidents of the US. Some Americans hold that these were “antislavery” presidents. Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence. It hurled fiery words in the face of King George, including these brazen and now famous words:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

How did slavery get past that point in the United States? The story is one of an impassioned dedication to principles that was progressively cut down by compromises. To cover up the significance of the sellouts, they began to call things by false names: slaves were not men, they were property. The Constitution did not recognize slaves, only “persons bound to service.” Once the names were falsified to blunt or cover up the true significance of the facts, there was no end to the compromises that could be made.

It started with the first draft of the Declaration of Independence, which contained a particularly powerful denunciation of King George:

“Determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legisla-

tive attempt to prohibit or restrain this execrable commerce. And that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished dye, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, by murdering the people on whom he also obtruded them: thus paying off former crimes committed against the LIBERTIES of one people with crimes which he urges them to commit against the LIVES of another.” (emphasis in original) ¹

This paragraph was removed because South Carolina and Georgia — two states where a small number of planters were reaping profits with large numbers of slaves — refused to agree to it. Nevertheless, the omission of this clause need not necessarily have led to the continuation of slavery. With this Declaration, the colonists repudiated the compromises that King George had offered them — token concessions that would have continued his tyranny over them. Many perceived that the token reliefs offered by the King were intended to keep them pacified in a condition of slavery. That’s why a party of men threw his shipment of tea into the ocean. Many said they would die before they would be slaves. When it came, the Declaration expressed a core of individual liberties and moral principles that were not negotiable. It was quite sufficient to end slavery, and some states did immediately embark upon freeing their slaves.

It was the US Constitution that made fatal bargains with the devil. It was ratified after the Revolutionary War, twelve years after the Declaration was signed. Amongst the most prominent people, both at the time of the Declaration and in the Constitutional debate, were Washington and Jefferson, as well as James Madison, who would be the fourth President; and Patrick Henry, who was a bane to tyrants and the wealthy founding

fathers alike, for his fierce defense of the rights of the common man, and the capacity of his oratory to set the public minds and hearts afire with principles.

All of these men were from Virginia, a state with a large population of slaves that was dependent upon agriculture fueled by slaves. All profited from agriculture on their large plantations. They were well aware that the untracked land around them was the basis of wealth, if land grants could be obtained and the land could be cleared of virgin forests. All had large holdings in slaves that were useful for this purpose. All bought and sold slaves, tearing them out of their families within America, even while lamenting the African slave trade that tore them from their homes in Africa.² Only Washington freed his slaves, and then only after his death. Thus a conflict of interest contaminated both the Constitution and the Presidency.

Internet research quickly brings up innumerable quotations of impassioned statements that these men made against slavery, and it is on that foundation that many Americans now glory in the antislavery presidents of the nation's early days — antislavery presidents who held slaves that numbered in the double or triple digits. On searching out more details, one quickly learns that there was no intent to put these words into action. They all said they wanted to end slavery “when the time was right,” but the time was never right during their whole lives.

Between the Declaration of Independence and the signing of the Constitution, five states adopted either immediate or gradual emancipation of slaves. Virginia was not one of them, despite the avowed antislavery leanings of its star-studded political leaders. There is evidence of considerable antislavery feeling in Virginia in those times. As a matter of fact, representatives from Virginia and several other slaveholding states were the leading proponents of the abolition of slavery at the Constitutional Congress. What might we imagine that George Washington, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison could have done if they had all really set their minds to it? But a person's actions speak louder than their words, and so do those of their states or provinces, and the facts tell us that key people were heavily conflicted on this issue.

The Constitution was written and ratified amidst huge controversy. Whether or not there would even be a federal government was a big issue. James Madison drafted the US Constitution in collaboration with Washington and other allies. They tried to push the document through quickly in the belief that a national government was needed immediately to prevent anarchy.

Patrick Henry and a number of others fought a fierce battle to defer voting on the document so that the representatives could have the time required to carefully consider the dangers contained in it. But despite some delays, it was railroaded through in the belief that any problems could be solved later.

According to Horace Greeley, who was editor of the *New York Tribune* during the Civil War, and who included considerable material from historical documents related to the formation of the Constitution in his book, *An American Conflict*:

“Could the majority have made such a Constitution as they would have preferred, Slavery would have found no lodgment in it; but already the whip of Disunion was brandished and the fatal necessity of Compromise made manifest. The Convention would have at once and forever prohibited, so far as our country and her people were concerned, the African Slave Trade; but South Carolina and Georgia were present, by their delegates, to admonish, and if admonition did not answer, to menace, that this must not be. “No Slave Trade, no Union!” Such was the short and sharp alternative presented by the delegates from those States.”³

Other sources confirm this, that there were representatives of slave and non-slave states present who argued eloquently against continuing slavery. Madison brokered quick compromises between the slavery and anti-slavery forces. The resulting Constitution did not officially permit slavery, but it did not specifically ban it either. It did not use the word “slavery” because Madison and many others did not want the Constitution to recognize property in man. But under the euphemism “persons bound to service,” it did enshrine a requirement for the return of escapees to their owners. What is that if not slavery? The new Constitution gave Congress the power to stop the slave trade, but only after 20 more years.⁴ Many accounts quote Madison's objections to that length of time, but few tell how he rallied votes by persuading delegates that it was better to eliminate the slave trade in twenty years than not at all.

The most inconceivable compromise concerned the number of representatives (or votes) that each state would have in Congress and in the elections. It would be based upon the population of each state. The southern states wanted their slaves to be counted. This was a glaring contradiction because slaves were considered property and couldn't vote, thus there could be no representation for their views. In fact, the draft Constitution

already treated slaves as property, by counting them for purposes of taxation levied upon the states.

This issue was a profound crossroads for the new nation. Whether slaves were property to be taxed, or human beings with representatives and votes in Congress had powerful implications to whether there ought to be slavery in the US at all. One of the delegates, Gouverneur Morris, captured the crux of this question and the contradiction that threatened the nation:

“Upon what principle is it that the slaves shall be computed in the representation? Are they men? Then make them citizens, and let them vote. Are they property? Why, then, is no other property included? The houses in this city are worth more than all the wretched slaves that cover the rice-swamps of South Carolina. The admission of slaves into the representation, when fairly explained, comes to this: that the inhabitant of Georgia or South Carolina, who goes to the coast of Africa, and, in defiance of the most sacred laws of humanity, tears away his fellow creatures from their dearest connections, and dooms them to the most cruel bondage, shall have more votes in a government instituted for the protection of the rights of mankind than the citizen of Pennsylvania or New Jersey, who views with a laudable horror so nefarious a practice.” (Greeley, p. 43)

But arguments from Madison’s camp sinuously wiped away the uncomfortable contradiction. Slaves were *both* property and human beings, therefore, it would hardly be fair to them count them as property for taxation and not as human beings for representation.⁵ Madison proposed, as a compromise, that three-fifths of each state’s slaves be counted for representation. One cringes to read the written arguments associated with this man who is revered as the “Father of the Constitution” and an “antislavery president.”

The future implications of this fatal compromise were put before everyone. Someone writing under the pen name “Brutus,” believed to be a New York judge, Robert Yates, wrote:

“By this mode of apportionment, the representatives of the different parts of the union, will be extremely unequal: in some of the southern states, the slaves are nearly equal in number to the free men; and for all these slaves, they will be entitled to a proportionate share in the legislature — this will give them an unreasonable weight in the government.”⁶

Sadly the antislavery contingent lost the vote by a very narrow margin. Black people in the US remained in slavery another three-quarters of a century. The tortures of the whip and many other fiendish practices went on daily. On the large plantations in the deep South, many of them were treated so badly that they died within a few years, or slashed their achilles tendons to escape being worked to death, or committed suicide.

Goaded by Thomas Jefferson, Congress did promptly shut down the international slave trade at the end of 20 years, but by then the number of slaves in the US had doubled. During the last four years of the slave trade, South Carolina alone imported 40,000 slaves from Africa.⁷ That would have meant about 400,000 killed, just in those four years for South Carolina.

By the start of the Civil War, 73 years after the Constitution was signed, the US had four million slaves. One in every seven people in the US was a slave. In the years just before the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln pointed out that one voter in the slave state of Georgia had the voting power of three people in the non-slave states.

The three-fifths clause was instrumental in Congress passing a number of pro-slavery bills, especially the *Kansas-Nebraska Act*, that played a powerful role in provoking the Civil War. According to historian William Freehling: “The three-fifths clause had only occasionally been such a crucial factor in national decisions. But on some occasions, like this one, it had a devastating effect.” (p. 559)

But those were long-term effects. Some effects began immediately, as people began making accommodations with glaring contradictions. Well over a hundred years later, British author George Orwell would capture the process in his book, *1984*:

“Doublethink means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them ... to use conscious deception while retaining the firmness of purpose that goes with complete honesty. To tell deliberate lies while genuinely believing in them, to forget any fact that has become inconvenient, and then, when it becomes necessary again, to draw it back from oblivion for just so long as it is needed ... all this is indispensably necessary.”

This is what the three-fifths clause required: to bring forward the view that the slaves were human beings so long as that was necessary to get extra votes, and to forget it again as soon as it was no longer needed. To hold slaves and yet believe that “all men are created equal” — that was the essence of doublethink.

During the first session of the newly created US Congress, one of the people who had signed both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, Benjamin Franklin, submitted a petition on behalf of a group of Quakers for an end to the slave trade and for various steps towards the abolition of slavery.³ Perhaps Mr. Franklin had signed the Constitution believing that the people could use its principles and democratic processes to bring an end to slavery. The petition, along with several others, opened fierce debate in which powerful antislavery forces within Congress denounced slavery and insisted that Congress could take numerous steps towards its end. Representatives of the slave states attacked the Quakers, attacked Franklin, and threatened to go to war if anything was done to interfere with slavery. Flooded with petitions of a similar nature, Congress passed them on to committees where representatives from the slave states buried them. These representatives soon began calling for the abolishment of the right to petition Congress for the abolition of slavery. Eventually, they achieved just that.

2

The Declaration Reconsidered

When the delegates to the Constitutional Congress went home, the slaveholders had obtained clear and substantial legal rights, whereas those who held to the idea that black people were included in the equality of mankind had nothing substantive in federal law whatsoever. That being said, the force of the Declaration was so substantial that by the time of the Civil War approximately half of the United States and its territories were free. The contradiction between the Declaration and the Constitution was constantly pointed out by abolitionists.

Seventy years after the Constitution was signed, in 1857 (a few years before the Civil War started), the US Supreme Court, in its *Dred Scott* decision, tore down any refuge that antislavery forces might find in the Declaration of Independence. This disastrous decision struck down all the Congressional laws and compromises that had kept slavery out of territories and new states. In addition, it paved the way for striking down all the northern state laws against slavery. Illinois lawyer Abraham Lincoln said that it would take just one more court case to spread slavery across the whole nation.

Opinions by two dissenting Supreme Court judges cited numerous historical facts and legal context showing that the ruling was erroneous, as it has ever since been seen to be. But what is of interest here is how the Court exploited the fact that certain founding fathers

who had written the Declaration of Independence had also owned slaves and had authored slave clauses in the Constitution; and how the Court handled the compromises that had been made in adopting the Constitution. These issues had always been a time bomb waiting only for sufficient time to pass that the actual details of the debate and compromises had been forgotten; for a document such as that makes its own testimony long after the people who signed it have passed away and can no longer tell us their rationales. What did it matter if black people were called “slaves” or a “persons bound to service” if, in the contract forming the United States, they had no escape even if they sought refuge in the free states? Very clearly, the Constitution counted each of them as only three-fifths of a human being. The majority of each person was someone else’s property. In fact, if they escaped, they were seen as 100% someone else’s property. Therefore the Supreme Court ruled:

“[Negroes] had, for more than a century before, been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to Slavery for his benefit. He was bought and sold, and treated as an ordinary article of merchandize and traffic, whenever a profit could be made by it.”

After quoting the key clause of the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal, the Court wrote:

“The general words above quoted would seem to embrace the whole human family, and if they were used in a similar instrument at this day would be so understood. But it is too clear for dispute that the enslaved African race were not intended to be included, and formed no part of the people who framed and adopted this declaration, for if the language, as understood in that day, would embrace them, the conduct of the distinguished men who framed the Declaration of Independence would have been utterly and flagrantly inconsistent with the principles they asserted, and instead of the sympathy of mankind to which they so confidently appealed, they would have deserved and received universal rebuke and reprobation.

“Yet the men who framed this declaration were great men -- high in literary acquire-

ments, high in their sense of honor, and incapable of asserting principles inconsistent with those on which they were acting ... The unhappy black race were separated from the white by indelible marks, and laws long before established, and were never thought of or spoken of except as property, and when the claims of the owner or the profit of the trader were supposed to need protection.”¹

In many ways the court decision nailed on the head the exact appearance to which the compromises of the founding fathers had lent themselves. However, the Court’s decision deceitfully omitted the fact that the Constitutional provisions affecting slaves had been the subject of extensive debate and compromises between slave interests and those people and states that adamantly held that black people were entitled to freedom under the Declaration. Not all founding fathers had held slaves. Not all of them had supported the clauses in the Constitution. The Court’s opinion in this was utterly refuted by the standing fact that five states were already free when the Constitution was written and others had become free by gradual emancipation.

The High Court’s ruling raised issues and questions that vex many societies in almost any age. What are ideals? Where do they come from? What is our relationship to them, as individuals? As a society? How do they square with a severely contradictory reality?

In *Dred Scott* the Court failed to take account of a level of inspiration that had been born of the collective experience of humanity over centuries of suffering from the tyranny of kings; an utterance that transcended the daily lives and character of those who wrote it down, and that challenged them to live up to it as much as it challenged King George; a principle that would continue to speak for itself in spite of their failures and for centuries after their deaths. My friend and colleague, Richard Caniell, has written that the Declaration of Independence represented “one dazzling hour of sanity” in the life of the US:

“The pen that the founding fathers of the United States used when they wrote ‘all men are created equal’ was dipped in the blood of countless thousands who suffered and died over centuries of oppression by monarchs whose ‘divine rights’ could never be questioned. The hands, the minds, the hearts, of those who founded America — based upon the belief that all men ‘are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness’ — spoke

for, wrote for, a million inarticulate souls who gave up their lives to protest the injustices imposed by power and royalty. These numberless persons were the invisible formulators and signators on that historic document, which was to be a legacy to millions yet unborn.

“It was only in the peril of those days, in the light yielded by a thousand fires of resistance, that human beings came, as a nation, to ask great questions, to state humanity’s highest beliefs, and to answer with their actions in such a way as to form the noblest expression of government ever attempted. But it was, as in all great endeavors, a step into the dark, an experiment fraught with error and peril, especially since people can envision ideals that their practices thereafter darken with expediencies and corruption...

“None of us can be secure in the triumphs and moral stature of a country that hides from or ignores its national dichotomies and disgraces. Nor is there any platform of neutrality available to us when it comes to the violation of principles and the mockery of all we cherish. Such a claim of impartiality makes one partners with the violation, for what we do not resist, we encourage and support with our inaction.

“Are we never to learn from the Civil War, or from World War II, that we allowed the forces that would ultimately menace us to grow in strength when we ignored the fact that they menaced others?...”²

Decades later, many would also believe that America could watch passively Hitler’s takeover of Europe from the safety of another continent, but they found out differently. Caniell points out key similarities between slavery and Nazism:

“Of course the movement of Nazism, embodying German’s majority, had economic and political premises, but its real significance was more than economic domination. It was connected with the expansion of a system of racial superiority that was the same over-riding premise which distinguished the slave owners from the slaves in the southern US — Aryanhood — which required economic, political and territorial expansion for its brutal and ego-enthraling privileges.

“Some historians ignore ... the astonishingly corruptive effect that wrongly gained luxury and absolute power have on an unprepared people. It swelled the southern slave interest into an arrogant, belligerent, unreasonable, demanding power that perpetually claimed victimization by the non-slave states for “agitating” against their “sacred institution,” while ignoring 65 years of pro-slavery agitation these states had mounted.

“The entire history of the death grip that the southern powers had on slavery, which represented the means to the whole aristocratic, opulent, life of ease and their political power as well as their assumed racial superiority, is overlooked by many historians, as it was also denied in the South.

“The tyrannizers threatened secession to get their way and so concessions were thought necessary to ‘save the Union.’ The union of what? For what? The Union only had significance insofar as it embodied the principles of the Declaration of Independence. What good a Union of despots, a Union of tyrannizing people, what good a Union that embraced oppression, torture, slavery, murder and institutionalized it? What is this reverence for union without regard for its content and meaning? What good is this Union if it is achieved by flogging and robbing innocent men, women and children in order to steal their labor and to grow fat and affluent on such theft? What good is a Union where the self-respect that comes from association with principle is dashed by a rapacious lust for illegal profits for which the government itself lends its seal and offices to support? What, in the name of any meaning, could this precious Union represent, that had bartered away conscience, equal justice, and made a bitter, mocking parody of the word liberty?

“Yet in the name of the Union, concessions made by Congress gathered to them more power, more law-making capacities, until the intent of the Declaration of Independence was refuted, trashed, reversed, and behind the thin husk of principled language injustice, tyranny, race-hatred and profiteering with human lives flourished. Will we ever learn this lesson? Not to compromise when it comes to essential principles? Not to let injustice and enslavement establish itself through concessions as a

tradition so ingrained that it becomes, to those who benefit from it, a right?”

Soon after the Civil War was over, once again in the name of peace and accord between North and South, an avalanche of new concessions and compromises brought down all the legal reforms that had been achieved at the expense of so much bloodshed. The supremacy of Aryanhood had re-established itself, with the Ku Klux Klan not only ruling the South, but spreading north to big cities such as Detroit, inciting vicious white race riots that killed hundreds of black people and drove many more hundreds out of their homes.³ The Constitutional amendments protecting black people were not revoked, they were simply not enforced.

One hundred years after the *Dred Scott* ruling, it was necessary for thousands of black people and no small number of whites to march on Washington and peacefully and lawfully demand enforcement of their Constitutional rights. Martin Luther King led them there, steeped in belief in the principles of the United States government, in spite of centuries of laws flouted by white hypocrisy, in spite of the fangs and snarls of police dogs, the violence of the fire hoses and billy clubs, and the jailings. He could not have moved those thousands who were present, nor millions around the world then and since, if he were not able to appeal so earnestly and with such confidence and faith in the principles, the government and the people of the nation. In his famous speech “I have a dream” he said:

“In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

“It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked “insufficient funds.” But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to cash this check — a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom

and the security of justice.”

Slowly a huge moral force gathered behind King’s words, composed of hundreds of thousands of black and no small number of white people. They peacefully overturned a stone wall of corrupt state laws that had long stood in violation of the amended Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. It had been 187 years since that Declaration was written.

*

All this has urgent relevance to Canadians and Americans today. The most fundamental principles of democratic government are not only threatened, but have already been substantially overrun by a barbarian horde of politicians who serve the wealth of private interests. What is at issue today is not how the government will treat the blacks or the whites or the native people, but how it will treat any of us. The very principle of government serving the commonwealth is being lost.

Today politicians at the highest levels of our governments have substituted government by appointed committee for government under the accountability of law and elected representatives. They have assumed the powers of decision-making behind closed doors. They have flouted fundamental principles of democracy that were never written, but which were, for several centuries, jointly recognized as necessary for democratic government. For instance, with an insidious model of privatization, they have given us partnerships and monetary flow between government and businesses that represent institutionalized conflict of interest. They are turning over every commonwealth function of government, as well as our commonwealth assets such as our natural resources and our public infrastructure, to be administered according to the profits of managing corporations. The fundamental principle that is being violated was pointed out by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt:

“The liberty of a democracy is not safe if the people tolerate growth of private power to a point where it becomes stronger than their democratic state itself. That, in its essence, is fascism — ownership of government by an individual, by a group or by any controlling private power.”

Like the founding fathers of the US, the people of North America wanted a government that embraced the equality and freedom of democracy side-by-side with “free enterprise” — which is roughly taken to mean the right to make money any way you want. Now the grow-

ing gap between rich and poor in our North American countries represents anything but equal opportunity. Profits First is consuming democracy. Can there be any question of this when we see that, under NAFTA, business interests in the US can sue our Canadian government for any laws or policies that interfere with their profits? Or that under various agreements between our provinces, any business in one province can sue any level of government in another for laws that limit their profits? Communities, provinces and countries are losing the right to make laws to defend themselves from commercial and industrial exploitation.

Unable to arouse much concern when “free enterprise” bulldozed the aboriginal people onto reservations, white Canadians today plead in vain for better controls on toxic chemicals, for protection of their domestic watersheds, their wildlife, their scenery, and are either ignored or carted off to jail. Willing to turn a blind eye to the genocide of innumerable species due to habitat destruction, the majority now hears from scientists that humanity is the latest endangered species. Our planetary habitat may soon no longer accommodate life as we know it, because of global warming and other serious environmental imbalances. Yet the overriding concern about solutions remains, “Will it cost me anything?” While gas-guzzling SUV vehicles, snowmobiles and ATVs are bought by the hundreds of thousands, the majority of Canadians are unwilling to pay a carbon tax. They repeatedly vote to protect their affluence, for all the world as if affluence will just keep rolling along while oceans flood port cities, sea life dies, massive areas of land dry up and fuel runs short. And so we have built and fed the tyrant that now threatens us.

Changes of law and a massive propaganda campaign are wiping away the memory of government for the public interest. Whatever is preserved of our original democracies will depend upon Canadian and American citizens to make critical distinctions between the real principles of government and the deceiving realities of laws that flout and trash everything that was ever meant by democratic government. This is what Martin Luther King did, becoming what many people today consider to be the greatest leader the United States ever produced, and one of the greatest in the world during the twentieth century.

The recognition of the necessity of making such distinctions has roots all the way back to the founding of the United States. Between the Revolution that created the Declaration of Independence, and the Civil Rights movement that gave it life, the necessary link to the future was the antislavery movement, which met this challenge in its own unique way.

The US Anti-Slavery Movement

The material presented here has been chosen for its special relevance to today's environmental issues. This necessarily tends to focus on people who were running public campaigns. However, it should be recognized in passing that other people — and in some cases the same people — were involved on the ground in the very dangerous and illegal activity of aiding the escape of fugitive slaves. This was mostly unorganized and spontaneous, but in the last couple of decades there were enclaves of activity called the Underground Railroad, which cooperated to assist slaves in reaching Canada.

The participants were partly white people, but most were black. Some people feel that white participants were more likely to write and publish their experiences, leading to a mistaken notion that the Underground Railroad was mostly an endeavor of white people. In recent years a special effort is being made to recognize the massive contribution of black people in the Underground Railroad. It is important to know that black people fought back, and that they incurred by far the most danger as well as terrible retribution. This effort at restoring history has included the re-publication of stories about fugitive slaves that had gone out of print and were forgotten.

In addition, there have been many new books. The release in 2008 of the award-winning book, *I've Got a Home in Glory Land*, by Canadian author Kathryn Frost, is an example of recent efforts to bring forward the history of the black Underground Railroad. It also presents astonishingly detailed research into fugitive slaves in Canada. Most fugitive slaves made the journey on their own, following the North Star, however that star was but a guide and an emblem to the real beacon of light, which was freedom in Canada.

This effort to rebalance history has sometimes brought with it scoffing at the "myth" of white involvement (and especially, for some reason, Quaker involvement) in the Underground Railroad. But historians who do this are leaving readers with a substantial problem. Some of the very black heroes and heroines whose accounts have been brought forward over the last 20 years alluded to white allies, and Quakers figured prominently though certainly not exclusively.

Black Underground Railroad heroine Harriet Tubman had links with white, Quaker abolitionist Thomas Garrett. She credited him with having helped a couple of thousand fugitive slaves to reach Canada. Once Tubman had fled to freedom herself, she made

connections with the American Antislavery Society. She visited some of the most famous white abolitionist leaders — Wendell Phillips, William Garrison, Samuel May, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Lucretia Mott, Lydia Child and many others. They provided her with funding and other kinds of support as she made repeated trips back to the slave states to rescue 50 other slaves.¹

We also have the accounts of John P. Parker, who was a fugitive slave. Once he reached freedom, he lived in constant danger on the Ohio River that separated the slave from free states. He went back and forth across the river repeatedly to help fugitives or even to prowl onto farms at night and "run off" the slaves. Parker said he worked with two groups of white people, one a group of Scotch Presbyterians in Ripley, Ohio, that included the Reverend John Rankin; the other around the Quaker Levi Coffin in Cincinnati. These people's homes were places where he could find emergency shelter and transportation further north for the fugitives under his care. He also states that in Philadelphia "Quakers were the real abolitionists striving for the freedom of the slaves."² These white people often faced much danger, as when mobs besieged Rankin's house.

Fugitive slave William Wells Brown says he was saved from freezing and starving to death by a Quaker couple who harboured him for weeks.³ Regardless of the racial make-up of the Underground Railroad, history contains written records of innumerable white anti-slavery activists who risked their lives in public speaking, preaching or publishing articles against slavery. The best compendium of these people that I've encountered is in Dwight Dumond's book, *Antislavery* (1964).

A recent, meticulously-researched account of a group of radical biracial activists is *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race*, by Harvard Associate Professor John Stauffer (2002). It highlights the collaboration of white abolitionists Gerritt Smith and John Brown with black abolitionists Frederick Douglass and Dr. James McCune Smith.

Conceded, the whole story of slavery, antislavery and the Civil War is that help from white people was too little, too late. But there is more. The whole solution that was needed — and the solution we look for in the future — was and is that opposition will rise up from *within* the ranks of the powerful, in people who will fight for morality and justice towards other races, other religions, political persuasions and nationalities. We look for the realization of the oneness of humanity to cross colour lines and overcome prejudice of every kind. That duty rests primarily, not upon the oppressed, but upon the

oppressors who create those barriers.

Throughout world history, no small number of people have thrown off their comfortable anonymity and safety within the privileged class, and fought for the oppressed. That is what happened in England. As Ralph Waldo Emerson described it: “Other revolutions have been the insurrection of the oppressed; this was the repentance of the tyrant. It was the masters revolting from their mastery.”⁴ He was referring to the fact that the abolitionist movement in England was started by a group of wealthy Quakers who owned plantations in the colonies that were worked by slave labour.

It is also a crucial part of the human legacy that some Aryan people harboured Jews in their homes during the reign of the Nazis; that many whites risked, and a few lost, their lives working for the US civil rights movement; and that there are actually some corporate executives and high-level financial experts who have gone public against destructive corporate behaviour. Though these remain a small minority, they must be our North Stars to Freedom.

History should put these examples in perspective, not cynically diminish or deny them. This portrait is of crucial importance to the world at this time, when there is urgent need to extend moral awareness to the realization of the oneness of all *life*. This would awaken compassion for other species, and for future generations that people living today will never see. Humans have an innate and profound caring for future generations and even animals and plants; but when under the influence of profit dementia, they are obviously unable to care about the world their own children will inherit. Even less can they feel for generations beyond that. The feeling is rampant today, to take the money and run, and let future generations invent the technology to save themselves.

By 1830 the world was similarly bleak for slaves. The Underground Railroad hardly existed. Decades of antislavery activism by scattered individuals and groups had largely failed. Their proposals to government had been aimed at confining slavery to the original slave states; or else gradual emancipation that would have liberated only the children of slaves born after a certain date, and then only after they had served 20-25 years as indentured servants. Gradual emancipation would have left millions of black people in torment for the rest of their lives. But against such overwhelming opposition, what was the use of asking for more when they couldn't even get that? Several authors say that by 1830 opposition to slavery had all but disappeared.

But in 1830 that was about to change. The next

three decades brought forward a long honour roll of heroes and heroines. A small group of them, white and black, were the closest thing to angels disguised in human form that this Earth will likely ever see.

4

Garrison: An End to Apathy

William Lloyd Garrison came from a very poor family. He was drawn into the antislavery movement at age 22, on the side of gradual emancipation. As a novice editor, his pen very quickly landed him in jail on a charge of libelling the owner of a ship used in the interstate slave trade. But by now, Garrison had a remarkably clear vision of what he intended to do with his life, and jail was not an obstacle. While there he met fugitive slaves who had been recaptured and heard the stories of their lives. He also wrote letters which friends carried away and distributed. After he had spent 49 days in jail a philanthropist, Arthur Tappan, saw the letters, bailed him out by paying his fine and costs, and bought him his own printing press.

In the first issue of his weekly newspaper, *The Liberator*, Garrison renounced gradual emancipation. Nothing but immediate, complete abolishment of slavery was acceptable. He wrote these words, which are the most widely quoted words that one will find in stories about abolitionists today:

“I am aware that many object to the severity of my language; but is there not cause for severity? I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject I do not wish to think or speak, or write, with moderation. No! No! Tell a man whose house is on fire to give a moderate alarm ... but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present ... I am in earnest — I will not equivocate — will not excuse — I will not retreat a single inch — AND I WILL BE HEARD. The apathy of the people is enough to make every statue leap from its pedestal, and to hasten the resurrection of the dead.”¹

Garrison lived up to every word of that promise over the next thirty years of *Liberators*. He worked with the local black church, which was already actively engaged in antislavery work. At first the *Liberator* could only be distributed in black barber shops. But eventually circulation went across the US and abroad as well. And many people *did* hear Garrison. Thousands became “abolitionists” instead of merely “antislavery.”

Over the next year, Garrison organized the New England Anti-slavery Society. There had been burning

coals of resistance to slavery all over the North, and now they began to burst into flame everywhere as a couple of hundred thousand people formed antislavery societies over the next decade. They did outstanding organizing that seems to have suffered little from not having access to telephones, e-mail or fax machines. They hired speakers and sent them travelling around the country. Many lawyers donated their services to argue in court on behalf of fugitive slaves.

Then as now, the work of activism was hoisted on the shoulders of thousands of men and women who made small donations, made or bought items for sale at faires, wrote letters and signed petitions. In addition, there were large donations by a relatively few wealthy donors, as there are today. Philanthropist Gerritt Smith moved his family out of their mansion and into a modest house, and over the course of his life gave between \$600 million and \$1.1 billion in 1990s currency to the fight against slavery, much of it going directly to black people.²

Garrison's work was lambasted and lampooned by major newspapers. He received volumes of hate mail, had threats made on his life, was hung in effigy, and faced a number of mobs. At one point, he had had most of his clothing torn off by one of them and was being dragged down the street on a rope when a rescue took place that was as daring and hair-raising as any that one will see in today's thriller films. Eventually, the legislature of the slave state of Georgia put up a \$5,000 reward for anyone who would bring him and/or his assistant to that state and secure his conviction according to the Georgia state laws. An attempt to do this very narrowly failed, as friends hastily put Garrison on a ship to England.

One day, as a storm of denunciations rained down on him, a friend advised that he moderate his tone and position. When Garrison became indignant, the companion observed, "My friend ... you are all on fire." Garrison calmly put his hand on the man's shoulder and said:

"I have need to be all on fire, for I have mountains of ice about me to melt."³

The nature of this man was to point relentlessly towards true North, no matter how deceiving the compass of current societal morals might be, nor how ridiculous and unreasonable he might appear in view of the presiding reality, nor how discouraging it might be to his followers to see how far short of the goal they were and how massive the blockages were to progress. It was that and only that, in Garrison and a number of other anti-slavery leaders, which tapped the melting force of the ideals at the core of human nature.

5

A Cyclone of Violence

According to Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*, when the antislavery societies began to organize in the northern states:

"The Southern journals and other oracles imperiously, wrathfully, demanded the instant suppression and extinction of the 'incendiaries' and 'fanatics,' under the usual penalty of a dissolution of the Union; to which was now added the annihilation of Northern prosperity and consequence through a retributive withdrawal of Southern trade."¹

Garrison on the Constitution

"Washington, Jefferson, Adams, all who framed that Constitution ... have committed no blunder; they have not erred through stupidity; they have not been misled by any legal sophistry. They are verily guilty of the most atrocious crimes ... We charge upon the present national compact, that it was formed at the expense of human liberty, by a profligate surrender of principle, and to this hour is cemented with human blood ...

"It assumes that ... there can be freedom with slavery, union with injustice, and safety with bloodguiltiness ... A partnership between right and wrong is wholly wrong. A compromise of the principles of justice is deification of crime ... The fact is, the compromises alluded to, instead of effecting a union, rendered it impracticable; unless by the term union we are to understand the absolute reign of the slave-holding power over the whole country, or the prostration of Northern rights."

Selections from the Writings and Speeches of William Lloyd Garrison, p. 302

Over the next decade the North was swept by a cyclone of mob violence against abolitionists. Often the mobs turned with a terrible vengeance upon whatever black people happened to cross their paths. Antislavery meetings were typically preceded by a meeting of the most respectable people in a city — the business people, the wealthy people, the Congressmen, mayor, lawyers, judges and city councillors — who denounced antislavery people as extremists and persons unfit for community or for democratic rights. These abolitionists disturbed peaceful relations with the South, thus threatening the economy of the city and the whole nation. Newspaper editors chimed in with their own incitements, and all of this fell upon the table-level of racial prejudice that was prevalent in the North.

The decade brought hundreds of mobs to antislavery meetings. Police and fire departments looked the other way while dedicated men like Theodore Weld spoke to audiences amidst a hail of rocks and rotten eggs. If this seems incredible, it is no different except in degree in British Columbia, when police refuse to attend reports of violence by loggers against people standing on public property blocking logging roads. But the wave of violence was huge in the days of slavery.

In some cases the mobs fanned out over cities for days, burning the houses of antislavery people, especially black people, burning churches, especially black churches. In Philadelphia one riot alone burned 45 houses. People were killed, including a great many black people.

In St. Louis, Missouri, publisher Elijah Lovejoy occasionally carried antislavery pieces in his newspaper, though that was not the major content. Mobs destroyed his original printing press plus three replacements. When they came after the fourth one, Lovejoy and supporters locked themselves in a warehouse, prepared to defend the press; but the mob set fire to the building and when Lovejoy emerged, he was shot to death.

In those days, abolitionists could never count on finding a meeting hall, or being able to hold it if they did find one. Through private philanthropy, they were finally able to build a majestic new hall dedicated to the freedom of speech for all causes, including those of slavery, women's rights and the outrages committed against the native people. Three days after it was dedicated, it was burned down.²

In the South, people were publicly whipped or jailed for having copies of antislavery material on them. Mobs broke into post offices in the South and searched mail pouches for antislavery materials, which they burned. The slaveholding President of the United States,

Andrew Jackson, vilified abolitionists and advocated that the federal government should legislate against the distribution of their material in the South.

Antislavery people continued sending petitions signed by tens of thousands of people to government. Slaveholders renewed their effort to shut down the right of petition, and gained a resolution in the House of Representatives to ban any discussion of petitions requesting the abolition of slavery. This "Gag Rule" was in force for nearly ten years.

None of this silenced the abolitionists. It wasn't long before Garrison's newspaper proclaimed "No union with slaveholders!" Garrison grasped that union with slaveholders had made every American part of slavery. He was the first white person to break free of the extortion of the slaveholders, by being as willing to break up the union as they were. He saw with clear eyes that the US had become a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde nation, claiming to be the land of freedom while slaves were paraded in chains within sight of the White House — some with the marks of hot branding irons on their faces, missing ears, knots of scars on their backs. The whole District of Columbia, the nation's Capital, was a nest of slave traders where any free black people were in peril of their lives. Many were kidnapped off the streets and sold into slavery.

People who were intimidated by the South's threat that it would "withdraw from the Union" believed that antislavery activism was inflaming the situation, risking the dreaded withdrawal of the South, which might bring a confrontation of arms between the southern states and the federal government. When that confrontation did come, many newspaper editors in the North initially blamed the abolitionists.

One of the ugliest aspects of the mob violence was the way that newspapers, communities, the police, and virtually all government authorities joined in blaming the victims. After the riot that burned down the warehouse where Elijah Lovejoy and his friends were trying to protect their printing press, and murdered Lovejoy, an investigation indicted the owner of the warehouse and Lovejoy's companions. They were not convicted, but everywhere the abolitionists were blamed for causing the violence against themselves because they dared to speak out against slavery.

Activists will always have to deal with this issue. It is in the nature of societal malefactors to maintain their power through a standing threat of violence if they don't get their way; if possible, they arouse community violence. The majority of people in society wish to avoid such conflict. They tell themselves that if only the

activists would do their work in a less inflammatory way, there would be no trouble. But the level at which tyranny will abide resistance without getting inflamed is the level that does not effectively interfere with its activities.

It was no different in the Civil Rights era. For a few blacks to sit down in a cafe in the South and order a cup of coffee, or to sit in the front of a bus rather than the back, was not deemed a normal, natural act in a democratic country, but an act of war. Not only southern whites, but society at large (including some black people) saw it that way. These scurrilous victims disturbed the peace. They went against established norms. They had the audacity to ask for more; to claim rights they should not have had. The very existence of their race, their colour, their religion, their views, their nerve to speak out, anything they did to defend themselves, was a flagrant incitement for which they deserved what they got.

And yet, when we look back over the centuries, these victims were the incredibly courageous people who dared to stand up and claim the rights that the Constitution gave them. Today, a great many people cherish the stories of Garrison and Martin Luther King. They are thrilled to learn that these people woke up society, stirred people out of their complacency, exposed the tyrant by calling out its venom and brutality upon themselves; that they rallied the nation to break up a huge crime ring of bigotry and injustice.

But in order to do that, those we now call heroes had to pass through a fire of hatred. They risked their lives because they had been pushed to the point of seeing that any peace that required them to be silent and do nothing was a lie. That peace could be had only if tyrants could chain and torture their victims in safety and accordance with the law. Those who stepped forward to protest had come to prefer the danger and stress of all that they had to go through, rather than continuing to live a lie.

Slavery Encroaches Upon Northern Whites

Professor of American History, William Freehling, states in his book, *Road to Disunion*:

“Abolitionists became scapegoats for every southern trouble. Southern apologists moved against slavery too slowly? That was Yankee fanatics’ fault. Domestic patriarchs whipped

too often? Outside meddlers were responsible ... To the old notion that a sin could be morally abolished only tomorrow, was added the new notion that outside meddlers only further delayed insiders’ actions. A less convoluted defensive postulate would have declared the institution holy and forever to be perpetuated. South Carolinians proclaimed for holy perpetuation in the 1830s and before. That was not the customary southern proclamation elsewhere until the 1850s.”

The years of slavery exhausted huge public energies debating whirlwinds of subject switches and charades meant to defend the one thing at centre of this maelstrom that stayed untouched by it all:

Profits from Southern Cotton Plantations¹

1800	\$5 million
1810	\$15 million
1840	\$63 million
1860	\$191 million

The northern clothing manufacturers bought this cotton, so the economic benefits of slavery were spread both North and South. With so many northern people willing to mob abolitionists to protect their profits, how did the North and the South get to fighting a war? Today some people believe that the abolitionist cause just spread until it dominated the North and antagonized the South. Freehling says that in the 1930s this question led a group of scholars called Revisionists to “revise away slavery as a cause of the Civil War.” They held that “irresponsible agitators must have used delusive propaganda to whip up a needless combat.”² But Freehling points out that this ignores a better explanation:

“While most Yankees were not fanatical about liberty for blacks, they demanded egalitarian republicanism for whites ... Few Yankees thought blacks’ right to liberty so sacred as to chase a holy war with righteous Southerners. Whites’ democratic rights, on the other hand, were as precious as the sacrament.”

Indeed, the embers of conflict were fanned into huge flames when northern whites other than abolitionists began to perceive a threat to their own rights and livelihoods. They began to see that the territories and new states of the US must remain free to provide opportunities for their own economic advancement. Thus began the “Free Soil” movement.

To the South, old cotton fields were exhausted and yields were growing poor, while the price of cotton promised fortunes wherever good, new soil could be found. In their arrogance, slaveholders were calling white labourers “white slaves” and claiming that their black slaves were better off. Over time this evolved into a call for all labour, white and black, North and South, to become slave labour. Such calls were carried in newspapers both South and North,³ which increased the concern of northern workers.

Voting on slavery-related issues in Congress was sometimes very close. The nonslave states controlled the House of Representatives. The slave states controlled the Senate, the Presidency and almost all the bureaucracies, and had stacked the courts as well. The designation of every territory or new state as free or slave had the potential to deliver to one or the other solid control of the country. This created huge controversy everytime laws governing territories and new states were contemplated.

A temporary truce was obtained in 1820 through the Missouri Compromise. This allowed Missouri to be admitted as a slave state, in return for an agreement that slavery would henceforth not be allowed in new states that far north. A line was drawn across the territories at 36°30' latitude. North of the line was for free states and territories, south of the line for slaves. While this compromise is credited with bringing stability to the US for a while, the failure to firmly shut the door to the expansion of slavery at that time was disastrous.

At first there were other ways that slavery could gain additional territory and power. In 1845 the US annexed a large chunk of Mexico, the territory of Texas. To make good its new acquisition, it invaded Mexico all the way to Mexico City and conquered it at the cost of much bloodshed. Ulysses S. Grant, who commanded all US troops during the Civil War and later became President of the US, was a soldier in that war. He stated that it was “one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation ... The occupation, separation and annexation were, from the inception of the movement to its final consummation, a conspiracy to acquire territory out of which slave states might be formed for the American Union.”⁴

But that was not enough. Inevitably the Slave Power sought to further expand both its territory and its legal rights. Soon it was plotting to take over Cuba and even areas in South America. Meanwhile the pending settlement and statehood of every US territory amplified the conflict and pushed Congress into a fever of compromise.

THE COMPROMISE OF 1850

This Act of Congress admitted California to the Union as a free state, ended the slave trade in the District of Columbia and freed a small piece of Texas. In return the old *Fugitive Slave Act* was replaced by a far more oppressive one. Now people in non-slave states would be subject to six months in jail and a \$1,000 fine if they aided a fugitive slave. There was to be no trial by jury for the black people, nor could they testify in their own behalf. They could be claimed by any slaveholder and taken before a Commissioner, who had the power to sentence that person and all of his or her progeny into slavery on the spot. What happened in Africa could now happen in Massachusetts — and did: black people, whether they were fugitive slaves or not, were kidnapped off the streets. The new law sent thousands of terrified free blacks fleeing across the border into Canada.

Ironically, this is when the Underground Railroad really began to flourish. And citizens who had never before come out against slavery now did so. Thousands packed the meeting halls. Many heard the world-famous philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson speak on the existence of Higher Law:

“An immoral law makes it a man’s duty to break it, at every hazard. For virtue is the very self of every man. It is therefore a principle of law that an immoral contract is void, and that an immoral statute is void. For, as laws do not make right, and are simply declaratory of a right which already existed, it is not to be presumed that they can so stultify themselves as to command injustice

“You know that the Act of Congress of September 18, 1850, is a law which every one of you will break on the earliest occasion. There is not a manly Whig, nor a manly Democrat of whom, if a slave were hidden in one of our houses from the hounds, we should not ask with confidence to lend his wagon in aid of his escape, and he would lend it.”⁵

There had been a shocking betrayal within government. The famous statesman Daniel Webster, who had gained office by campaigning as an opponent of slavery and was viewed as a champion by the antislavery movement, had sold out. He cast the deciding vote in favour of the compromise. Emerson denounced Webster at length in his public speeches:

“The fairest American fame ends in this filthy law. Mr. Webster cannot choose but regret his

law. He must learn that those who make fame accuse him with one voice ... that the obscure and private who have no voice and care for none, so long as things go well, but who feel the disgrace of the new legislation creeping like miasma into their homes and blotting the daylight — those to whom his name was once dear and honored, as the manly statesman to whom the choicest gifts of Nature had been accorded, disown him: that who was their pride in the woods and mountains of New England is now their mortification — they have torn down his picture from the wall, they have thrust his speeches into the chimney.”⁶

At that time the claim of “Higher Law” that would require people to disobey the immoral laws of governments seemed radical. But Richard Caniell points out that governments and people of the world have now affirmed the existence of Higher Law at the Nuremberg Trials that hung Nazi war criminals:

“There is no doubt that law and its enforcement can serve high human ideals or despotism and injustice ... Hitler’s use of law, like the southern slave owners, was based on force. All rationale and legislation came after that, served that, with laws that institutionalized the force under governmental edict; authority and aims ...

“True law is the codified form, the organization of what is called justice, and justice always means that which embodies the ideals of human progress and the equal application of its statutes ... Well below our societal, constructed sense of right and wrong there is a deep conscience in humanity, to which we all have access, which it is our human responsibility to obey. Out of this innermost moral vision comes our highest laws.

“The central enlightenment of humanity in those days illuminated the principles around which the US was convened: ‘We declare that all men are created equal and are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.’ What statutes, codifications and laws flow from this must be obeyed, as they establish the foundation of human relationship and a free society; what derogates, dismembers or mis-serves this central holding must be disobeyed. No law can command you to be unjust, to deprive or injure the innocent, to establish a fancied superiority by derogating others, to make special privileges for oneself and one’s faction at the expense of other persons,

depriving them of what basics you demand for yourself.

“The answer is that we represent, as persons, and combined as a nation, those principles that serve truth, that revere all humanity with an equal justice, that bestow liberty with personal responsibility to all, that the human race and not just our special interests be advanced. Only a country that struggles to manifest, to live, after such aims, is worthy of our love. There can be no call to patriotism that dishonours our higher nature. Nor a love that engenders disrespect of ourselves or others, nor a law that commands our obedience that does injustice to others or that asks us to ignore its lack of moral foundation.

“This thrusts upon all people an obligation or responsibility which is enormously frightening to our need for security and comfort, because it requires that we not only be alive to distinctions and significances, but that we be open enough to feel these differences and act on them.

“Nevertheless, we believe so strongly in this distinction that we hung Nazi criminals at Nuremberg for not disobeying their laws and resisting what was their national policy and their own specific military orders. We said, in effect, it is no excuse that what you did to torture and murder millions was codified in the law, nor does it relieve you of personal responsibility in commanding the means for this horrible genocide, that you had written orders from your superior so to do. We say that there is a higher law of conscience, which is the soul of humanity, that forbids you to purposely torture and destroy innocent men, women and children.”⁷

In those days, from 1850 onward, there were many who felt that. The *Fugitive Slave Act* spawned numerous instances when crowds of northern free black people and white people snatched slaves from the hands of slave catchers and even spirited them out of court rooms and jails. Unfortunately, 90% of slaves caught or kidnapped were sent South without fanfare.⁸

THE KANSAS-NEBRASKA ACT

Northern Senator Stephen A. Douglas was frustrated. Every time he tried to get a bill through Congress establishing a new state north of the line of the Missouri Compromise, it was blocked by southern senators. Finally, the troublesome southern legislators helped him figure out what to do about it. Together they cooperated on an agreement to strike down the Missouri

Compromise. Instead, the citizens of prospective new states would get to vote on whether they wanted slavery. Coming from a northern senator with all the power and prestige of Douglas, the *Kansas-Nebraska Act* passed. Today history records it as a national catastrophe and a straight chute to the Civil War.

For starters, the new law unleashed a vicious war in Kansas, as the slave states sent hordes of settlers there to stuff the ballot boxes and crush antislavery sentiment with intimidation and violence. Many Free Soil people and even a few abolitionists, including one now-famous person named John Brown, loaded their guns and headed for Kansas.

Garrison was a pacifist to the core. He and the New England Antislavery Society did not support violence for any reason; in addition, they repudiated this focus on the spread of slavery to new territories. In 1856 they passed a unanimous resolution: "We deplore the moral blindness and inconsistency of those who are seeking to transform the anti-slavery cause into a mere territorial struggle ... making it no longer a question as to the liberation four millions of imbruted slaves at the South, but only one of latitude and longitude." However, another formidable antislavery leader saw it differently.

7

Charles Sumner: A Hero

Charles Sumner was a lawyer, but one who disliked the practice of law. He preferred to dwell as much as possible in the ideals of law. In his youth he travelled to Europe to study the legal systems of England, France and Italy, learning the languages as he went along. Innately studential and service-oriented, he spent much of his time in Europe tending to research requests by jurists in the States. Sumner would distinguish himself as a man who knew when to compromise and when not to do so.¹

In his youth Sumner rejected the idea of going into politics. But his connections to the law community inevitably drew him out as a speaker at various social events. His speeches about the immorality of slavery persuaded a new political party to oppose the territorial expansion of slavery. These people wanted Sumner to speak at their meetings to attract crowds, and Sumner couldn't turn them down.

He believed that the focus of the new party should be on preventing any more expansion of slavery. He urged audiences that they were going to have to find candidates who wouldn't compromise on that. His recommendation of the necessary qualities: "Backbone,

backbone and backbone." Audiences looked Sumner over and decided he would provide that very well. He refused. No matter, he was nominated anyway.

It wasn't just that Sumner disliked politics. He had a deep conviction that forbade him from seeking position and power. Such things should come to a person unbidden, as the result of his or her character and actions. Leaders should never proclaim themselves, they should be selected by followers without interference from candidates. He would not lift a finger to campaign for himself, but he did consent to serve if elected. The vote was very close and had to be referred to the legislature, where southern states were in a paroxysm of resistance. So his supporters came to his office, hat in hand: Would Mr. Sumner write just a few sentences retracting certain things he had said in his speeches about slavery? No.

Nevertheless, by a very narrow vote, Fate drafted Sumner as a US Senator. He would be embattled for the rest of his life. Even before the Civil War he was working to get a law to desegregate Massachusetts schools, and after the War he dedicated much of his time in Congress to working for the civil rights of black people.

In 1856 he gave a speech in the Senate entitled "The Crime Against Kansas" to a packed house. Sumner always had to make his speeches to the faces of powerful slaveholder Senators who did not hesitate to taunt, bully, and bluster. Sumner was sick of this vile behaviour while people in Kansas were being murdered on account of the machinations of these Congressional tyrants. When the predictable attacks came, he furiously matched them insult for insult. Friends wanted to escort him home, but he shunned all protection.

A few days later, while sitting alone at his desk on the floor of the Senate, Sumner was savagely attacked by Congressman Preston Brooks of South Carolina. Unable to get out from under his desk quickly enough, Sumner was beaten on the head with a cane until he lost consciousness. While an accomplice blocked men who rushed to Sumner's aid, Brooks continued beating him on the head while he was passed out. Sumner nearly died when the wounds became infected, and he sustained neurological damage that left him unable to work for several years.

Brooks openly gloated about how good a job he did on Sumner. People all over the South were jubilant. Before a hearing in the House of Representatives, Brooks savoured the story of how he had planned the assault for days. Both the House of Representatives and the Senate refused to censure him. A District Court only fined him \$300. He resigned from the House of Representatives, but was hailed as a hero in the South

and promptly re-elected.

In their jubilation, the slaveholders took little account of the ominous thunder of northern anger. In the ensuing storm, Brooks's Whig Party — the party that had collaborated in the *Kansas-Nebraska Act* — toppled, as many people defected. The various experimental antislavery political efforts coalesced into the new Republican Party. While it didn't win the Presidential election, the new party made an impressive showing.

Around the time of the attack on Sumner, a slave who made a similar attack on his master, in which the master died, was roasted over a slow fire before an audience of several thousand slaves. Frederick Law Olmsted, travelling the South to write a report for the *New York Times* (then called the *New York Daily Times*), wrote that something of that magnitude happened every year. Olmsted's book, *The Cotton Kingdom*, quotes sickening language from the southern newspapers justifying a similar burning near Knoxville, Tennessee. Olmsted shuddered at the implications:

"They make it manifest that it was not accidental in its character, but a phenomenon of general and fundamental significance. They explain the paralytic effect upon the popular conscience of the great calamity of the South. They indicate a necessary tendency of people living under such circumstances to return in their habits of thought to the dark ages of mankind."²

In 1857, the Supreme Court handed down the *Dred Scott* decision. It ruled that Congress had never had any authority to exclude slavery from the territories. There was no need to mourn the loss of the Missouri Compromise — it had been unconstitutional anyway, and black people had no constitutional rights of citizenship. This ruling left the nation no alternative but change of government and amendment of the Constitution to maintain freedom on US soil.

Slaveholders were determined not to be deprived of this victory by Constitutional amendments. But against this determination rose another great power: the combination of the Free Soil and Antislavery movements. Their new Republican Party now had a platform declaring that Congress had authority over the territories and that they were assumed to be free unless otherwise decided.³

Both the Party and Abraham Lincoln bent over backwards to make clear that they did not intend to interfere with slavery where it already existed. Nevertheless, such a Party and such a candidate represented a threat to the slaveholders that the *Dred Scott*

decision might be taken away from them by new legislation to reaffirm the right of Congress to control slavery in the territories.

In the critical year of 1860, after four years of convalescence, Senator Sumner returned to the Senate and stood before it for four hours delivering a speech entitled "The Barbarism of Slavery." Sumner's address was as thorough and scholarly as it was scathing. It included a section called "The Barbarism of Slaveholders," of which there were many seated before him, choking back their rage. This Congressional show-and-tell methodically exposed the dirtiest underside of the slave system. Among many other things, Sumner documented incidents over several decades in which Senators and Representatives had been intimidated in the legislature from even raising questions about slavery. The list included several incidents in which slaveholding members had drawn pistols on their colleagues. It was with bullies such as these that most representatives of the free states continued frantically working on compromises to avoid the war.

8

The Tipping Point of Tyranny

Three months later, in the Presidential election, the proslavery vote was split between three candidates. Lincoln, representing the non-slave state of Illinois, won with 40% of the vote. This was all it took to trigger an armed uprising against the election. The following chronology, documenting Congressional and Presidential efforts to compromise, was gathered from Horace Greeley's *An American Conflict* and from Lincoln's Inauguration Speech:¹

- Nov. 6, 1860 - Lincoln elected as President. During the four months before he could assume office, the following occurred:
- Dec. 12 - South Carolina and Georgia first decide to withdraw from the US. Throughout Dec. and Jan., other slave states follow.
- January 14, 1861 - both the Senate and House pass a resolution "whereby any future amendment giving Congress power over Slavery in the States is forbidden."² This resolution sought to make slavery permanent in the existing slaveholding states, in order to bring the South back to the Union.
- Furthermore the House of Representatives (by now composed mostly of non-slave states) passed, by a wide majority, a resolution for Constitutional amendments that would:

- recognize the existence of slavery in 15 states;
- recognize state slave law as sovereign in states where slavery existed;
- request non-slave states to repeal state laws that had been designed to override the *Fugitive Slave Act*;
- request each state to pass laws to punish anyone who interfered the recovery of fugitive slaves.

(Recall that even James Madison refrained from using the word slavery in the Constitution, and that while slavery had not been banned, neither had it been made into law.)

- Greeley states that the Senate would have passed these too, but by then, the South didn't need compromises anymore. It was busy seizing federal arsenals, forts, mints and sub-treasuries at points throughout the South. \$30 million in federal property was seized before Lincoln assumed office.
- As the Congressmen were busy working out more conciliatory concessions to offer the South, the US Secretary of War, being from a slave state, availed himself of the opportunity to transfer regiments, massive shipments of weapons and military equipment to the South.³ A large part of the North's troops and over a million dollars worth of military supplies were soon turned over to the rebel state of Texas.
- Also during this period the US was suffering a hemorrhage of military officers it had trained, the most famous of whom was Robert E. Lee. A similar rash of resignations from the judiciary helped to create chaos.
- March 12: Lincoln assumes office. His Inauguration Speech stated:

"I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so..."

"I understand a proposed amendment to the Constitution—which amendment, however, I have not seen—has passed Congress, to the effect that the Federal Government shall never interfere with the domestic institutions of the States, including that of persons held to service...*I have no objection to its being made express and irrevocable...*

"there will be no invasion, no using of force

against or among the people anywhere. Where hostility to the United States in any interior locality shall be so great and universal as to prevent competent resident citizens from holding the Federal offices, there will be no attempt to force obnoxious strangers among the people for that object. While the strict legal right may exist in the Government to enforce the exercise of these offices, the attempt to do so would be so irritating and so nearly impracticable withal that I deem it better to forego for the time the uses of such offices."⁴

- One month later, April 12 - South Carolina opened fire on federal Fort Sumter and forced its surrender and evacuation.
- April 15 - Lincoln's call to arms.
- Rebels in Baltimore cut telegraph wires and sabotage rail service to the north, cutting off contact of the Capital with northern states. Rebel forces gather on the border of the free states near the Capital. Federal troops rushing to defend the Capital are attacked by proslavery mobs in Baltimore. Washington spends a week without contact with the states.
- May, 1861: South seizes Norfolk Naval Yard, with federal war ships, munitions and 2,000 cannons.
- July 21, 1861 - First battle, South trounces North at Bull Run.

*

Tyranny has a tipping point just like global warming — a threshold at which things that have been going out of balance finally “flip.” When tyranny reaches this point, a lot of things that had been leaning are suddenly turned completely upside down. George Orwell illuminated this in his novel, *1984*, where the Ministry of Love was the department that tortured people. This inversion happened in Nazi Germany, and it happened in the US Confederate States.

The southern Confederacy arrived wearing all the garments of the early American's rebellion against the despotic king of England, claiming the highest principle for its actions. It is interesting that in his bone-chilling Inaugural Speech, Vice-President of the Confederacy Alexander Stephens contradicted the *Dred Scott* decision when he explained that the founding principles of the US:

“... were fundamentally wrong. They rested upon the assumption of the equality of races.

This was an error. It was a sandy foundation; and the idea of a Government built upon it — when the storm came and the wind blew, it fell.

“Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite ideas; its foundations are laid, its corner-stone rests upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that Slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and normal condition. This, our new Government, is the first in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical and moral truth ... Many who hear me, perhaps, can recollect well that this truth was not generally admitted, even within their day. ... Those at the North who still cling to these errors with a zeal above knowledge we justly denominate fanatics. All fanaticism springs from an aberration of the mind; from a defect in reasoning. It is a species of insanity...

“May we not, therefore, look with confidence to the ultimate universal acknowledgement of the truths upon which our system rests? It is the first government ever instituted upon principles in strict conformity with nature, and the ordination of Providence, in furnishing the materials of human society.”⁵

Greeley states that, from the day that South Carolina voted to withdraw from the Union, “clubs” similar in nature to the Ku Klux Klan were organized, spreading a reign of terror across the South. Many whites deemed to be “Lincolnites” were lynched, and others saved their lives by joining these parties. (p. 350)

The Confederate government and newspapers told southerners — many of whom were horrified at the thought of secession and war — that Lincoln was an abolitionist who had declared war on the South to free the slaves. More subtle was the claim that the Confederate states meant only to withdraw from the Union, but then had to defend themselves from a federal government bent upon enforcing its sovereignty. This is soundly refuted by the attack on Fort Sumter. Few Americans seem to grasp that a victorious South, ruled by the dark spirit revealed in Alexander Stephens’ words, would have taken over their whole government and that would have been the end of the Declaration of Independence. According to General Ulysses S. Grant, for the first three years of the 4-year war the opposing armies were equally matched. He said:

“It is true the Confederates had, so far, held their capital, and they claimed this to be their sole object. But previously they had boldly

proclaimed their intention to capture Philadelphia, New York and the National Capital, and had made several attempts to do so, and once or twice had come fearfully near making their boast good — too near for complacent contemplation by the loyal North.”⁶

Had this happened, a South that had lynched so many white people over the years would certainly have clamped the iron hand of oppression over the whole country and things would have gone very badly for the “aberrant” abolitionists.

9

How the Slaves Were Freed (But into a new form of slavery)

Despite having a Congress that was almost totally from free northern states, and in spite of heavy pressure from Congress and some of his own military officers to free the slaves, Lincoln delayed for two years in an attempt to use the slaves as barter to entice the southern states back to the Union and end the war. But tens of thousands of slaves were running away and seeking shelter behind Union lines. Congress began to liberate the slaves piecemeal through legislation governing the policies of the federal troops.

Finally Horace Greeley, published his “Prayer of 20 Millions,” a letter to President Lincoln dated August 19, 1862, which he printed in the New York Tribune. The following is an excerpt:

“We ask you to consider that Slavery is everywhere the inciting cause and sustaining base of treason ... For our Government even to seek, after war has been made on it, to dispel the affected apprehensions of armed traitors that their cherished privileges may be assailed by it, is to invite insult and encourage hopes of its own downfall ...

“And finally, we complain that you, Mr. President, elected as a Republican, knowing well what an abomination Slavery is, and how emphatically it is the core and essence of this atrocious Rebellion, seem never to interfere with these atrocities, and never give a direction to your Military subordinates, which does not appear to have been conceived in the interest of Slavery rather than of Freedom...”

Lincoln’s reply included the now-famous statement:

“If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could

save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that.”¹

However, approximately one month after the publication of the “Prayer of 20 Millions,” Lincoln issued his *Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation*. It announced the intention to enact a final Proclamation in 100 days. The Proclamation would free *only the slaves of rebellious states*. During the intervening 100 days, Lincoln offered rebel states a break for coming back into the Union and drawing up their own plans for gradual emancipation: they could have federal compensation for the cost of the slaves as well as a *37-year period for gradual emancipation*.² This would have meant that many slaves living at that time would have never been free for the duration of their lives. Slaves born around that time would have had to spend the first 37 years of their lives in slavery.

Fortunately, no states took Lincoln up on the offer, so the Final Emancipation Proclamation (exempting the neutral states) was announced in January 1, 1863. According to historian Barbara J. Fields, this final Emancipation Proclamation did not free a single slave that had not already been freed by an act of Congress. One million slaves held in the neutral Border South states were, in fact, not freed until Congress passed the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in 1865 *eight months after the war ended*.³

Richard Caniell believes that, after he was elected, Lincoln became very conflicted by trying to appease both sides of the irreconcilable contradiction between freedom and tyranny::

“Lincoln’s failures to act had horrifyingly painful real-life consequences on thousands; perhaps millions of persons. Political compromises that derogate truth or democratic principles were not some abstract assault on the ideals of our nation, on the Declaration of Independence and the spirit of the Constitution and the highest yearnings of the American people. They permitted the daily injustices slaves in the exempted states had to undergo every day and night at the hands of their masters. We can only imagine what oppressions, beatings, burnings, tortures, forced labor, forced intercourse, were visited on these thousands and thousands of people for years, when Lincoln could have freed them and didn’t.

“Lincoln was commander-in-chief, and with war powers, the most powerful President in our history up to that time. He suspended court process, *habeas corpus*, for years; he

emancipated the slaves of rebel states by Proclamation, not by an act of Congress. But he refused to exercise his powers to free the slaves within the Union.”⁴

There were several statements from Lincoln to the effect that the slaves were freed because the North was losing the war and needed more soldiers.⁵ Historian William Freehling points out that the war was not only the fastest route to the termination of slavery, but it also may also have been the *only* route until well into the twentieth century.⁶

It would appear that no person or group of people played a greater role in freeing the slaves than the slaveholders. They freed the slaves by grossly overestimating their power, starting the war, and refusing all compromises. Their troops fought so hard as to produce the degree of desperation that would cause Lincoln to issue his Emancipation Proclamation.

Today the Rebel soldiers of the South still represent an icon to many people of making up for what one lacks in material advantages with a fighting spirit. They also became symbols of rebellion against authority, which can stir feelings of admiration. Perhaps this provides people with a “safe” way to indulge their own suppressed yearnings to rebel against authority — a way which does not exact from them any costs. It needs to be noted that these soldiers had never rebelled against the slave holders who had deprived them of jobs and adequate wages, had called them “poor white trash” and then had conscripted them to fight a war of aggression on false premises. Needless to say, it is tragic that their blood was poured out to defend a tyrannical, brutal system because they had been falsely led to believe that they were fighting a defensive war to protect their homes and families. The true Rebel for which so many of us yearn is the inner Rebel who will overturn the power of familial or societal conditioning within themselves, and break free of those external controlling forces represented by the lies and general state of slavery described in this paper.

10

Garrison: Highest Honours

The more powerful determining elements in human events are not necessarily the largest. William Lloyd Garrison showed that a person who is considered a radical hothead when society is divorced from its moral nature, may be embraced and recognized as a hero when society has found its conscience. He is also one of many representatives of how much difference a single person

can make. In 1839 the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society stated:

“Ten years ago a single individual (Garrison) stood up as the advocate of immediate and unconditional emancipation. Now, that individual sees about him hundreds of thousands of persons, of both sexes, members of every sect and party, from the most elevated to the humblest rank of life. In 1829 not an Anti-Slavery Society of a genuine stamp was in existence. In 1839 there are nearly two thousand such societies swarming and multiplying in all parts of the free States.”¹

By 1862, in the middle of the war, correspondents from 15 major newspapers covered a meeting of the Massachusetts Antislavery Society. The *New York Times* reporter stated that Garrison’s thirty years of work had brought him “at least the respect of all, while it has gained him the absolute love of thousands throughout the world.”²

His friend and colleague Wendell Phillips said at Garrison’s funeral:

“All through the preceding century, there had been among us scattered and single Abolitionists, earnest and able men ... but Garrison was the first man to begin a movement designed to annihilate slavery. He announced the principle, arranged the method, gathered the forces, enkindled the zeal, started the argument, and finally marshaled the nation

for and against the system in a conflict that came near rending the Union ... It is true ... that if you seek through the hidden causes and unheeded events for the hand that wrote ‘emancipation’ on the statute-book, and on the flag, it lies still there today.”³

When he visited the Senate near the end of the war, he was treated like a visiting dignitary, with many senators rushing to shake his hand, and he was welcomed by Abraham Lincoln. He was one of three antislavery activists who helped Major General Robert Anderson, who had commanded Fort Sumter when it was defeated by the rebels, once again hoist the flag over its battered remains.⁴ But most likely the supreme moment of his career occurred at the newly liberated city of Charleston, South Carolina where he was greeted by a rally of thousands of black people. Unable to reach the speakers’ stand, he was lifted and carried bodily through the crowd on the shoulders of the men until he reached the stage amidst thunderous cheers. Mayer says that almost every town of freed slaves had a Garrison Street, and his name was on schools for black people in the South.

There are many claims and counterclaims as to who, amongst the abolitionists, was the greatest. But many abolitionists knew that they were only cogs in the wheel of justice, the turning of which they could not control or foretell. This fits very well into our modern beliefs and ideals if it is recalled that Tolkien’s *Fellowship of the Ring* has thrilled millions of people

Bitter enemies and lukewarm friends represent the *Liberator* as an incendiary publication. I am willing to admit the propriety of the designation. It is, unquestionably, kindling a great fire; but it is the fire of sympathy and holy indignation against the most oppressive system on earth, and will burn up nothing but the chaff. That fire is spreading from house to house, from village to village, from city to city, from State to State. The East is glowing, as if a new sun had risen in splendid radiance; and the West has caught its beams, and is kindling with new intensity. Even the dark Atlantic, as far as the shores of old England, shows a luminous path of light, and the philanthropists of that country are rejoicing as they gaze upon it. Like a vestal fire, may this never ease to burn. Let those throw water upon it, who will — love to God and man shall feed it, and prevent its extinguishment. But the *Liberator* is said to be destructive in its character and tendency. That charge, also, I admit is true. It is putting whole magazines of truth under the slave system, and I trust in God will blow it into countless fragments, so that not the remnant of a whip or chain can be found in all the South, — so that upon its ruins may be erected the beautiful temple of freedom.”

William Lloyd Garrison
Selections from the Writings and Speeches, p. 178

living today. Victory was the result of many interacting forces. Those opposing a vast evil power did not concern themselves with whether their efforts would be successful. For their own self-respect, they had no choice but to oppose it. Recognizing the high likelihood of defeat, they resolved to go down fighting with everything they had to give. Yet in the end it was not necessary for everyone to complete their tasks or win their

battles, for the great power of the totality was at work. If they carried the weight of the Cause far enough towards its destination, in the end, unexpected help might arrive. And sometimes that help was provided by the enemy who, by going too far in his frenzied greed for power, thrust himself over the edge. That is what happened in Tolkien's *Ring*; it is what happened to Hitler, and it is also what happened to the Slave Power.

IV. COMPROMISING THE ENVIRONMENT

1

Peace at Any Price

There are enormous lessons to be taken from this Civil War history. Any lasting benefits that occur from catastrophes occur only when people come to recognize essential lessons applicable in any time under the disguise of circumstances. One enormously important factor then and now is the requirement to awaken the public from its comforts amidst the cushions of pleasure, security and nominal profits.

In order to live without being continuously assaulted by the violence, depravity, fraud and other threats in daily life, most of us have developed a kind of opacity, which is a protective shell under which we can go about the daily aspects of our lives. Confrontation ruptures this protection, so compromise, even when it sells out the principles of the issues, is most often preferred.

Seventy-five years or so after the end of the Civil War, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill learned that it is not the small minority of malevolent people who are most responsible for so much that is terrible in the world. Rather, it is the good people, the great majority, who play by far the largest role, by exerting little force of opposition to wrongdoing. Perhaps the most damaging blow against democracy, or any positive social change, is the cumulative effect of the millions of good people who do nothing, say nothing, and want nothing done when principles are violated.

Sometimes these people are actually “leaders” responsible for protecting the public interest. Churchill and a handful of colleagues had warned the British government for years about the danger of Hitler. Churchill made speeches to the legislature pleading with the Government to enforce the treaty obligations upon Hitler’s Germany. At that time, Germany had no means of making war. But Churchill says that he and others like him were seen as “warmongers and scaremongers” by politicians bent towards:

“Delight in smooth-sounding platitudes, refusal to face unpleasant facts, desire for popularity and electoral success irrespective of the vital interests of the State, genuine love of peace and pathetic belief that love can be its sole foundation, and obvious lack of intellectual vigour.”¹

British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain remains notorious to this day for signing an agreement with Hitler that guaranteed peace for England in return

for Britain conceding the Sudetenland to Hitler. (This was the frontier portion of Czechoslovakia which was a buffer critical to the defense of that country.) Chamberlain returned to England to proclaim “peace with honour,” to the cheers of a jubilant public. But his peace quickly became known contemptuously as “peace at any price” when Hitler crushed Czechoslovakia and went on to invade Poland, drawing England into war within a year of the compromise agreement.²

Chamberlain was publicly denounced, but the Chamberlains of the world experience huge pressures from a public that prefers whatever will allow for continued convenience, business as usual, and “peace in our time,” to dealing with harsh realities. In the preface to his chronicle on World War II, Churchill outlined the causes of the war and summarized:

“It is my purpose to show how easily the tragedy of the Second World War could have been prevented; how the malice of the wicked was reinforced by the weakness of the virtuous ... We shall see how the counsels of prudence and restraint may become the prime agents of mortal danger; how the middle course adopted from desires for safety and a quiet life may be found to lead direct to the bull’s-eye of disaster.”³

The “virtuous” in Churchill’s story were people who had gained positions of working for law and the principles of government; people who were as different from Hitler as night from day. Yet Churchill wrote of the years leading up to World War II: “In this dark time the basest sentiments received acceptance or passed unchallenged by the responsible leaders of the political parties.”

Environmentalists are part of the “virtuous” people today. They are in the vanguard of human sensitivities to the natural world. On average, they are people who are innately sensitive to the interconnections between things, and the sacredness of life. They do not have the kind of power that could make a compromise with a Hitler or condemn a race to slavery. But they have more power than one might imagine.

For instance, in 1990 in British Columbia, the environmental movement played a large role in defeating the Socred government and bringing in an environmental reformist party, the New Democrats. However the new government, and every administration since then, has taken great pains to co-opt environmental groups. If they can, by hook or crook, convince environmental

groups to sign on to their immorally insufficient conservation programs, that is the switch that will turn off the concerns of the broader public.

So environmental groups actually do hold a large amount of power: they can turn on or effectively block the power of the public and of their colleague organizations. So they obviously bear large responsibility in what they do with their endorsements, and this is the crux of a moral crisis within the movement. This crisis appears to be widespread all over the North America. The following tells how this has emerged in British Columbia.

2

The Weakness of the Virtuous

A movement in which well over a thousand people have been arrested or sued for blocking environmental destruction is obviously not totally morally deficient. But today, while many activists and organizations may be doing very good work, the movement as a whole is fragmented and often unable to unify itself around positions of strength. Going back to the peak of unity, it can be seen that, after helping to overthrow the Sacred Party in 1990, environmentalists achieved what most of them wanted: open, transparent, public planning processes to reform forestry and double the area of parks. Eighteen years later, it is clear that the result was a disaster.

Environmentalists, almost *en masse*, began to accept elaborate technical exercises, negotiations, panels and processes instead of demanding firm, definitive laws to regulate corporations. Government and industry have since whipped up whirlwinds of studies, reports, committees, hearings and processes — paper storms that give the deceiving appearance of vigorous action on the environment. But on the ground, aside from isolated improvements, the world has degenerated into the serious state previously described.

In the BC public planning processes, propaganda campaigns by industry and government led the public to expect “shared decision-making,” and “peace in the woods” through negotiations where everyone would win what they wanted. The buzz words “win-win agreement” began to be used. Everyone was going to come away happy. They were going to protect the environment, and it wasn’t going to cost anyone anything.

Subsequently, planning tables pumped out lists of feel-good “goals” and “strategies” that were contradictory, self-defeating and carefully left the economic priorities of industry and government more or less undisturbed. Many of them also had no validity whatsoever in

law. At every planning table the same contradictions abounded: the environment would have “sustainability” and maintenance of biodiversity, while the logging companies would have no significant reductions to their timber supply, and the mining companies would have no interference with their sweeping legal rights at all.

These negotiations were “talk and log” processes: while environmentalists were being pacified with planning exercises, the forest was being logged. Environmentalists were informed that negotiating parties do not carry on campaigns against each other outside the negotiating table. So they dropped their public campaigns.

The processes were regional, and that instantly divided the environmental movement into regional compartments. The actual intent was to have planning geared to regional ecosystems, but the result was “divide and conquer.”

Negotiations locked environmental protection to the ball and chain of what industrial interests would agree to accept. These processes put the power to block environmental reforms in the hands of the very corporations that gained their wealth from logging and mining the planning areas. This was institutionalized conflict of interest, which resulted in much stalling while the logging continued. By participating in these processes, environmentalists gave their sanction to conflict of interest as an acceptable state of affairs in environmental policy.

Government simply withdrew from any environmental protection that did not have the agreement of industry. The days of government recognizing a responsibility to protect the public interest were gone. Since then, over and over at these negotiations, environmental groups no longer even notice the conflict of interest in stacked seats at the negotiating table. Their defeat and subjugation to what the majority interests want is inevitable.

Of course, corporations want something in return for their agreement. For instance, in forestry in BC, they wanted deals that would relinquish environmental protection claims on vast tracts of land. And they got them. As a colleague recently observed, what the environmental groups consented to lose was the most important part of the outcome.

Over a period of 15 years some environmental participants eventually discovered it was more convenient to assess what government and industry were willing to give them before formulating their demands. That way they were assured a “victory” to show their funders.

Within the first year of the planning processes, government and industry began to lure pliable environmental representatives into backroom deals. That so many of us had fought hard to achieve open, transparent public process was of no import to the backroom deal-makers; they weren't the ones who had fought for it. No small number of planning table participants was susceptible to the sense of privilege and power of "working on the inside" with government and industry. Of course, insiders don't remain inside unless they keep inside information secret from the public.

As the degradation of public process continued, certain individuals moved from planning table to planning table to negotiate other environmental groups' campaigns for them, against the will of these groups and sometimes without their knowledge. Understandably, a sense of betrayal and anger began to divide the movement. But the majority in the movement refused to censure these practices, and refused to talk openly about the problems, even within the privacy of environmental forums.

With this acceptance within the movement, it was only a matter of time before the emergence of a few very well-funded organizations whose whole purpose was to negotiate environmental deals. A few of these organizations now working in British Columbia are based in the United States. Now, major issues regarding public resources in BC are negotiated secretly between government, First Nations, logging companies and one or two representatives of a few organizations whose main goal is to make agreements with industry.

These groups have had considerable success coalescing other BC environmental groups to back them in the negotiations. They go into negotiations loaded with cannon — millions of dollars of funding, abundant scientific expertise, and even a market campaign — only to emerge with results that a pop gun could have gained. This has soaked up huge resources from environmental foundations, drawing much funding from smaller grassroots environmental groups which can't approach funders with a list of dazzling "victories," but whose participation was critical to the earlier, hard-fought victories based upon massive public support.

Recently, a case was exposed in which such a coalition of groups signed confidentiality agreements to join backroom negotiations between government and industry. By the time the public found out about the secret negotiations, the results were *fait accompli*. During the resulting furor, several activists from other areas came forward and acknowledged that they, too, over a period of 18 years, had been presented with con-

fidentiality agreements and signed them. By getting part of the movement to keep public affairs secret from their colleagues, these confidentiality agreements had a devastating effect on the unity of the movement, while public response sagged for lack of being aroused.

Government secrecy is one of the biggest threats to democracy today. Virtually all environmental groups deplore the secrecy of the talks on the Security and Prosperity Agreement, and the shrouds of secrecy that allowed Canada and the US to cooperate in the torture of people who have not been charged with any crime. But the ability of many of them to oppose that secrecy is completely undermined by the fact that they sanction government secrecy as long as they can be on the inside. Truth be told, if offered an opportunity to sign such a confidentiality agreement and join the talks on the Security and Prosperity Agreement, some environmentalists would do so and the public could be damned.

BC's elaborate and extravagantly expensive negotiations never result in a provincewide raising of forestry standards or laws that would be a stable benefit — an infrastructure or legacy for protection of the environment — to society in the future. To the contrary, the actual environmental protection laws in BC have been drained of their power under "deregulation."

Two experiments emerged from these processes: Forest Stewardship Certification (FSC) and Ecosystem-based Management (EBM). These experiments required lengthy, costly and ongoing negotiations, as well as scientific panels. Recently the BC government's own Forest Practices Board issued a report showing that selection logging in EBM areas on the mid coast were actually high-grading the best old-growth cedar trees.¹ Logging in Clayoquot Sound under FSC and EBM has been shipping out huge loads of old-growth cedar and is now preparing to log the few remaining intact valleys that feed into Clayoquot Sound. Some BC environmentalists are now threatening to blockade logging that other BC environmentalists negotiated.²

The negotiations have promoted a culture of seeing one's corporate opponent as a colleague or a friend. From this has come "partnerships" between some of our biggest resource exploiters and environmental groups. Most recently, a backroom deal reached by a coalition of BC environmental groups, government and logging companies was hailed as a "love-in" in the press. What the corporation is doing elsewhere in the world, what the government is doing with its other hand, doesn't matter. These groups have sold out both in fact and in principle, settling for the appearance of protection which actually undermines or sabotages the crucially

important grounds of the real protection.

The condition of partnership makes people very susceptible to imbibing the language, tone and attitudes of their partners. As a result, many environmental activists and organizations have begun to exhibit corporate culture. Much rhetoric from corporate circles extols the virtues of “flexibility”. Our plans, our laws, our policies for managing parks or recovering endangered species, are all good if they incorporate “flexibility.” Environmentalists used to call this “flexibility” weasel holes; now many are skilled in language that offers their partners a way out. For a movement whose representatives require backbone, and whose chief lack is firm laws for the protection of their interests, such conditioning is deadly.

Misinformation on global warming put out by industry has been distressing to all in the environmental movement. Yet few are willing to recognize what damage is done in the public mind by the feel-good rhetoric of win-win deals, peace in the woods, friendly relations with opponents, and a sympathy for corporate culprits that ignores the fate of their victims — all of this at a time when the hazard indicator is in the red all over the planet.

Back in the period leading to the US Civil War, every Sunday churches in the South used to whitewash the blood on the hands of slaveholders who whipped their slaves. Today, some environmental organizations function as churches, greenwashing the public image of governments and corporations. Emerson said of the role of the churches in supporting slavery:

“If any mention was made of homicide, madness, adultery and intolerable tortures, we would let the church-bells ring louder, the church-organ swell its peal and drown the hideous sound.”³

In just such a way, government and industry have learned to use negotiations so that there is always the music of peace and hope in the air to cover up the sound of protesters being dragged away by the police and chainsaws being started up in the last remaining habitat for some endangered species. There is always a choir of environmental groups singing hallelujas to that music. Many stronger environmental activists are held hostage to this spectacle because of the superior funding of the compromising groups.

The summary is that, in BC today, the most anti-environment, pro-business government that BC has ever had, the Liberals, enjoys occasions in the media lime-light with some of the province’s largest and wealthiest

environmental organizations. This same government has axed or weakened most of BC’s environmental protection infrastructure: its regulatory agencies, expert staff, its laws and policies. Every vestige of government that used to represent environmentally concerned people, and protect the forests and animals we’ve sought to defend — has been relentlessly reduced and reduced again. Meanwhile people like Harriet Nahanee, Betty Krawczyk and Jack Ross are spending weeks or months in prison while many others watch on helplessly as their watersheds and viewscapes are logged in spite of community protest.

When one considers how the strong men who fought in the American Revolution sold out the slaves at the writing of the Constitution, and how the English Prime Minister sold out virtually the whole world to Hitler, it is apparent that there are weaknesses in human nature that are widespread, even amongst well-intentioned people. But at the same time, one must not shirk from seeing that the sellouts that preceded these wars caused tragedy beyond the human imagination to conceive, whatever the good intentions and character of those involved. Surely the human race is capable of learning from that, but so far there are few signs of it.

3

Considerations for a Moral Revolution

Environmentalists have always been working for the health and survival of all life on the planet. There isn’t any nobler cause, any cause more full of principles. Not long ago the movement was agitated by a claim that “environmentalism is dead.” But environmentalism cannot die any more than conscience can die. If some environmentalists betray the cause, conscience will produce new environmentalists who will be stronger as they see the damage growing around them.

Not surprisingly, one of the first things environmentalists seem to notice when they read about the anti-slavery movement is its moral nature. For instance, the following remarks were taken from discussions of the efforts to end slavery in various publicly available materials and websites

Marc Davidson, University of Amsterdam:

“In the case of fossil fuel use the issue is more complex but hardly less of a moral issue than was slavery two centuries ago ... What makes climate change pre-eminently a moral issue is that due to the inertia of the climatic system the bulk of impacts of climate change will clearly not be felt for another 50 years or

more, when *future* generations will occupy this planet rather than present generations.”¹

Charles Justice, *Peace, Earth & Justice News*, April 2008:

“Abolitionism was entirely based on the moral inhumanity of slavery ... The twenty-first century movement to stop runaway global warming is based more on science than on morals ... based on science, it has a much better potential for gaining widespread agreement among the world's nations.”²

A post on the *American Prospect* blog:

“The issue is, is it right or is it wrong? You make that decision first and then you decide how to do it. Global warming is reaching that moment ... The left needs to get over its fear of advocating moral causes. The right surely isn't afraid of using the language of morality to beat their voters on the head.”³

BC environmentalist Will Horter, head of Dogwood Initiative:

“Our generation can learn from the Abolitionist movement ... We can learn how to better engage churches and tap into peoples' desire to be moral. We can learn to persevere against seeming long odds.”⁴

Yes, churches should be involved in environmental issues. They have been very helpful in the past and can continue to be. But we cannot put it off on churches to provide the moral content that is now lacking in communications with government, media and the public. Morality is not religion. When it is found, it will be understood by moral people of all nationalities, religions and eras.

An individual's morality can be a private thing, but for a society to experience a moral awakening, people must talk and write about morality as much as possible. Yet I agree with the blogger on the *American Prospect* website who said that there is a fear of using the language of morality amongst many liberal-minded people, and this is certainly true of environmentalists. Firstly, morality is connected to emotions, and environmentalists have been stereotyped by their opposition as having emotional reactions that are irrational. The trend since then has been for activists and organizations to routinely scan their work to remove all traces of emotionality. But this leaves out conscience, because the conscience works through both mind *and* emotions, and must speak the language of both.

Slavery of any kind, in any age, has always aimed

to suppress emotions, precisely because they are so connected to conscience and moral force. Ancient civilizations that castrated slaves weren't just trying to limit the slave population. They were trying to disconnect the circuitry that charges people with moral outrage. Environmentalists need to struggle free of these castrating influences. The following considers what some of these influences might be.

Fear and avoidance of being called extremist is pandemic in the environmental movement. Activists and groups have been herded towards the middleground by the electric cattle prods of media, industry and government that label anyone with a strong message who won't back down as an “extremist.” A collaborating influence is that, to some funders, the best way to protect their investments in environmental activism is to put the money into middle-of-the-road activism.

There truly are extremists and we must not be swayed by them into violence or sabotage. But “extremist” is also a handy label with which to isolate and discredit anyone who deviates too far from societal norms. But suppose society is deranged? Then a middle-of-the-road person must not stray too far from derangement, or else the deranged will consider him/her to be an “extremist.” That means blocking out the truth. Someone can be isolated as an extremist for merely telling the truth, as William Lloyd Garrison was. To a creed based upon lies the truth, itself, is subversive, incendiary.

Yet a world that already has too much carbon in the air has no room for programs of “moderate” change that will allow increasing carbon levels. An endangered species like the mountain caribou, whose old-growth forest habitat has been logged for forty years, has no more habitat to compromise or it will disappear forever. What to do if middle-of-the-roadism has turned the human race into a herd of lemmings on a suicide course?

For a long time, approximately one-half of the environmental movement has been transisting from a culture of objecting to wrongdoing to a culture of making agreements with the perpetrators. Many in the movement have lost track of the first principle of moral activism, which is to object to wrongdoing. This may seem pedestrian, but a number of prominent environmental representatives have told me that they no longer take positions on issues, except in carefully chosen cases. That, in my view, is so morally-neutered that it is virtually immoral. Such statements would leave even the weakest abolitionist from the 19th century aghast.

Some people, including myself, believe there is a

lot of industry infiltration in our movement. But it is hardly worth discussing, because every movement from time immemorial has had these infiltrations. Their influence need not be disastrous, but that depends upon what the majority, who are not infiltrators but sincere activists, do with it. Do they learn to recognize its influence and reject it? Or do they readily imbibe it? Do they repudiate those views, or let them get by? It's a matter of developing moral discrimination and immunity to the many forms of bribes that come our way in disguise.

The culture of agreement counsels that environmentalism must be "upbeat" and "positive." Certainly encouragement and hope are critical to maintaining energetic opposition; but a cheery, upbeat expression cannot effectively object to wrongdoing if it is falsified by refusing to feel the seriousness of problems and the consequences upon the victims. Whatever is the role that corporate culture plays in this, it collaborates with the early childhood conditioning of almost everyone. This conditioning is a gut-level feeling that it is "bad" to say negative things, or to cause trouble for authority figures, or to "rock the boat."

Childhood conditioning is aimed at creating a robot-like respect for and submission to authority. Because of this conditioning, some people find it unbearable, if not impossible, to believe that governments or large newspapers will lie to them, or that industry representatives would deliberately string them along for years with false promises. Hitler's "Big Lie" theory — the theory that people will believe a big lie before they believe a small one — was based upon this mechanism.

It is common to assume that activists don't have this problem, but that isn't true at all. Many of the best activists have had to struggle to overcome their inhibitions, and many who do excellent work never overcome them fully. But unfortunately, we have people in positions of representing hundreds or thousands of people who want environmental damage to be confronted, but who cannot confront authority and have made it a *philosophy* that doing so is wrong.

The true activist has an innate understanding that objecting to wrongdoing in strong terms is *positive*. Ralph Waldo Emerson was at first a proponent of soft-spoken antislavery activism who criticized Garrison as an extremist because of the tongue-lashings that Garrison heaped upon slavery. But when the *Fugitive Slave Act* took away Emerson's rights to help runaway slaves, that mild-mannered philosopher came out with a force of denunciation that Garrison rarely had in any sustained way. Soon enough, Emerson was praising, not

only Garrison, but also John Brown, whom Garrison saw as an extremist. Emerson defended abolitionists from accusations that their language was inflammatory, saying:

"If you starve or beat the orphan, in my presence, and I accuse your cruelty, can I help it? ... will you blame the air for rushing in where a vacuum is made or the boiler for exploding under pressure of steam? These facts are after laws of the world, and so is it law, that when justice is violated, anger begins. The very defence which the God of Nature has provided for the innocent against cruelty is the sentiment of indignation and pity in the bosom of the beholder ..." ⁵

"Language must be naked, the secrets of slaughterhouses and infamous holes that cannot front the day must be ransacked to tell what negro slavery has been." ⁶

Just as he denounced Daniel Webster at length in public, Emerson noted astutely that much that the Slave Power achieved in Congress was with the collaboration of the representatives of the non-slave states, whose people largely did not want slavery within their borders or in the new territories:

"Gentlemen, I am loath to say harsh things ... but I am at a loss how to characterize the tameness and silence of the two senators and the ten representatives of the State [Massachusetts] at Washington. To what purpose have we clothed each of those representatives with the power of seventy thousand persons, and each senator with nearly half a million, if they are to sit dumb at their desks and see their constituents captured and sold — perhaps to gentlemen sitting by them in the hall?" ⁷

To Emerson, it was mandatory upon him that he should exercise the responsibility of a citizen by holding his representatives accountable. Studying the abolitionists, one comes to feel how their public actions upwelled from the individuals' daily, personal relationship to conscience. They felt an *obligation* to represent *in public* the morals they felt in their private lives, so that there was *no split, no double-face, no contradiction, no cowardice in believing one thing in private, but failing to stand up and say it in public*. Their reward was in their developing character.

Emerson expressed this in his deep, mystical way when he stated in a lecture on the *Fugitive Slave Act* in New York City in 1854:

“You relied on the Constitution. It has not the word *slave* in it ... You relied on the Supreme Court. The law was right, excellent law for the lambs. But what if, unhappily, the judges were chosen from the wolves, and give to all the law a wolfish interpretation? ...

“I fear there is no reliance to be put on any kind or form of covenant, no, not on sacred forms, none on churches, none on bibles. For one would have said that a Christian would not keep slaves; — but the Christians keep slaves ...

“To make good the cause of Freedom, you must draw off from all foolish trust in others. You must be citadels and warriors yourselves, declarations of independence, the charter, the battle and the victory ...

“He only who is able to stand alone is qualified for society. And that I understand to be the end for which a soul exists in this world — to be himself the counterbalance of all falsehood and all wrong ... Why have the minority no influence? Because they have not a real minority of one ...

“Whenever a man has come to this mind, that there is no Church for him but his believing prayer; no Constitution but his dealing well and justly with his neighbor; no liberty but his invincible will to do right — then certain aids and allies will promptly appear: for the constitution of the Universe is on his side.”⁸

Thus it is that questions such as “Why should I object, there isn’t anything that can be done about the problem?” or, “What will it cost me?”, or “What will I get out of it?” never occur to those individuals who feel a moral obligation — not to anyone else, but to their own conscience — to take action. Though they may be repudiated by others, they gain the freedom to openly live the principles they feel inside. This is the heart of all activism.

This paper highlights William Lloyd Garrison and Charles Sumner, not only because they represented the “minority of one” that Emerson was talking about, but also because they undertook what I believe is the most fundamental and important act of rebellion against any immoral, castrating, spirit-imprisoning force: to tell the truth for all to hear. And not just any truth, but one that is frank about the moral significance of the facts.

While others referred to slavery as if it were an economic or social problem, Garrison said it was “gangrene to the principles of the nation.” He called the

Constitution a “covenant with death and an agreement with hell” and burned it before an audience of 3,000 people; he said that black people were equal in every respect to white people; give them freedom and education, and they would ascend to every rank of white citizens. These were shocking words, even to many anti-slavery people, but hurl them, he did and he was called a hot-headed extremist for it. But few people understood, as Garrison did, that the truth, told plainly enough, flies to the conscience of the hearers, where it has its own power and sets up its own processes in the minds of people.

The whole subject of morality thrusts one into a dimension where there is right and wrong, good and bad, courage and cowardice. The language and perception of morality has been misused in many ways and can become, themselves, tyrannical. As a result, many people today reject those concepts. A standard modern defense to any criticism is “You’re being judgemental.” This reflects a very deep-seated change in societal values which stands as a powerful blockage to any moral revolution in our thinking that might occur today. Essentially, a large number of people from all walks of life expect to be exempted from any pressures based on right and wrong, and are willing to make moral judgments of any kind unacceptable in order to gain that. For insight into this, I’ve borrowed from Richard Caniell’s unpublished manuscript:

“Obviously, people today are not prepared to obey laws that establish human beings as private property. We repudiate the claim of a Master Race in Germany, as we thought we repudiated it in the slave states, though it continued for another century. But the actual issue is far more complicated. We resist injustice in other nations while we embrace its corollary within our own. We resist it in whatever group we identify as ‘them,’ while ignoring it amongst whatever group we identify as ‘us.’ We resist it in others, but are blind to it in ourselves.

“Such double standards are gilded with circumstantial morals which change as we change, always supporting what we do. Many people object to ‘moral judgments’ because they don’t believe in any truth that can reveal right or wrong. Intellect, neutered of its higher emotions by an ever-pervasive egoism abroad in our world, asks condescendingly, ‘What is truth? What is right? Who can judge?’ ... This is not a new development. One and a half centuries ago Emerson predicted:

‘Men will learn to put the emphasis pre-emptorily on pure morals, always the same, not subject to doubtful interpretation, with no sale of indulgences, no massacre of heretics, no female slaves, no disenfranchisement of women, no stigma on race...’

“But today the claim of situational ethics masquerades as high philosophy. No matter — you shall not escape this question because you, like me, like many, know injustice, fraud and human profiteering whether or not we can frame its motives and action into language or act to repel its advances. It is a smug, corpulent, satiated society that increasingly divests itself of moral responsibility, of human capacity not only to distinguish wrong and injustice but to *feel* it.

“We are accustomed to leaders who lie, whose promises and pledges are utterly unreliable, as these deceptions are included as an expectable cosmetic in the machinery of winning. This robs us of our capacity and inclination to trust, and substitutes cynicism in its stead. Thus, the less we expect, the less we demand, and the lesser men keep being elevated, since we no longer have any standards by which to demand anything better or anyone to demand it from. Our capacity to respond to moral issues is slowly being eroded by diminishing standards, at the same time that our capacity to care about it is being glazed over by the aggregate effect of our technological toys and an era of self-indulgent consumerism.

“Self indulgence often equates morality with self-righteousness, with the puritanical mind, or with a loss of freedom to the superficial edicts of formulized religions. No — morals are immortal principles around which religions have formed, and which they have most often deformed to fit their prejudices.

“Even to the most avowed atheists, murder and injury to others is wrong; the oppression, the economic enslavement of others, is wrong; the use of universal terms to achieve particular, personal and selfish aims is wrong. It is moral to have a true reverence for every soul, and for the animals and the ecology of Earth, no less. It is moral to resist success that requires wrong means; it is moral to share rather than hoard, moral to not endeavor to reshape facts, or the truth behind them, to comport with concern for what power, status, security or pleasure gives or takes away.

“In the slow evolution of the human mind and spirit, we will discover that behind the confusion in values, wherein every indulgence is trumpeted as the best and most right, we have moral instincts. They may only settle on us as vague feelings of disquiet or disbelief, dim impulses toward a higher, purer rightness, and these may be quickly suppressed or lost in the course of events; but they are intuitional flashes that may someday illuminate latitudes of truth wherein our spirit may dwell serene. This is ‘the heaven of the heart’ of which Jesus spoke, and the ascent to it climbs the stair of the very issues that society today is trying to avoid.

“We are as enwebbed in the lives of humanity as in earthly nature; we gain our qualified freedoms in obedience to underlying laws. We see this is true in the physical world: we overcome the gravities of earth by virtue of the laws of physics; we sail the trackless seas in service to its essential laws, gaining greater freedom by obedience to the laws of flotation. We have obligations to each other that constitute the laws governing the moral boundaries of our personal and collective freedom; each to the other, our nation to humanity and the world.

4

Final Thoughts

As I was putting the final touches on this final chapter, I received news that the United States had elected its first black president. To black people, this was something like the summit of the Himalayas of their struggle. TV cameras showed that hundreds of thousands of Americans, probably more than half of them white, had poured into the streets of Chicago, New York and other cities. As the TV cameras scanned the crowd, many of the people were near tears or had tears streaming down their cheeks. Certainly a very large part of this was about political change for the US. But the subject on many people’s lips was that they now had a black president; and a vast number of them, black and white, were delirious with joy. Apparently it was this, more than anything else, that made them feel that the ideals of the nation had been renewed. That they had personally made it happen by working for the campaign or casting their ballots had infused them with hope. One would have thought it was the first democratic election the US ever had, as so many who had been down-trodden most of their lives experienced a new sense of empowerment through the democratic process. Even some Canadian news casters were at

times forcing back tears.

Everyone knew that Obama's acceptance speech will stand alongside Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and Martin Luther King's speech at the Lincoln Memorial, to be perpetuated in history forever. The speech was everything for which one could hope. This was all real, all an unexpectedly full-blown ideal hour in the nation's history. But how much longer will forever last in human history? Obama's speech included a sober recognition that there are very grave problems ahead. Indeed there are, but there remains a question whether Obama recognizes the largest one with a sufficient sense of urgency.

The question before all our nations' people and leaders is whether they are capable of grasping, let alone responding to, a layer of threat that is more foundational to life and happiness, more menacing with misery and death, than the problems of war, racial hatred, economy and many others; for the whole panolpy of human ideals and triumph, and the human descent into evil, derives its existence from the life-giving processes of Planet Earth. The planet now holds within itself many secrets of how radically it is changing and at what point its changes will turn catastrophic.

Scientists such as James Hansen, pore over the data and shake their heads in worry. Global warming has handed humanity a dictum: there must be truly radical action, and the cost will be large; but if it is not paid, the Earth as a place where the spirit may come to live out these epic moral conflicts and find a larger, wider, purer unity with others and the world, may come to an end — and sooner rather than later than we thought.

The next day the *New York Times* headlines declared "Obama Elected as Racial Barriers Fall." It is crucial that humanity take courage from this event. But it is also crucial that we recognize that the whole human race is bound in another kind of slavery, slavery to an idea that is deranged and delusional: the belief that we must earn our living by polluting and tearing apart the life support system of the planet.

Today, the part of the population that advocates freedom from this tyrannical slaveholder experiences everywhere the closed doors that represent prejudice. It is in the media, in government, in the legal system, and in a large part of the public. For decades, many environmentalists (who usually received no remuneration for their efforts) sacrificed whatever extra time or funds they had to ring alarms on issues such as pesticides, species loss and global warming. They were constantly ridiculed as "doomsayers" — castigated as religious extremists standing on the street corner crying "The end

is near!" Now scientists tell us the end really is near if our governments don't get moving. Yet the ability of the deniers and scoffers to dismiss the whole scientific community goes on, exposing a tragic human pathology that is incapable of admitting its dependence upon its life support system.

It is now true of the environmental movement what Emerson said of the abolitionist movement during the dark days of the 1850 *Fugitive Slave Act*:

"I respect the Anti-Slavery Society. It is the Cassandra that has foretold all that has befallen, fact for fact, years ago; foretold all, and no man laid it to heart."

Yet even as predictions they made or passed on to the public from scientists come true, robot-like politicians, newspapers and a significant part of the public continue to view environmentalists as kooks and doom-sayers. The environmentally-concerned public must stop running and hiding from these sadly ignorant opinions. Our activists must emerge from their own robotic glaze of conditioning, in which they believe that they can change corporations by turning down the temperature of resistance to appeal to their self-interest. As Martin Luther King said in his speech before the Lincoln Memorial in Washington:

"This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism... It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment."

If the nations of the world cannot recognize this with regard to the environment, it is extremely critical that every environmentally concerned person does recognize it. For centuries humanity, fleeing from the divisiveness caused by religious and moral charlatans, and reeling from wars, has fallen into the arms of leaders who are all resilience and flexibility; people who make no unpopular decisions and are quick to compromise. It is not difficult to see that a long and brutal Revolutionary War had put a premium on peace and compromise that made the new United States of America very vulnerable to threats of war if the new government interfered with slavery. It is not difficult to see that a world that had lived through World War I would be ready to make a hero of the leader who compromised with Hitler (thereby reigniting a still worse war.) Indeed, modern slaveholders are at pains to condition society to associate compromise with peace, and strong resistance with war. But the history provided here shows that these associations are not always true.

Environmentally-concerned people, who are espe-

cially attuned to the value of life, are predominantly anti-war. Thus it was easy for pro-industry propaganda to drive BC environmentalists to the negotiating tables with blaring headlines about the “War in the Woods” and the promise that there would be heroes and heroines who would achieve “Peace in the Woods.”

Many in the 19th century anti-slavery movement were also anti-war people. But their role in the great change that happened well deserves a description that is growing popular today: “the moral equivalent of war.”¹ This does not mean war as usual, decorated with claims of moral purpose; rather it means the same all-out commitment that is usually aimed at destroying life, now focused upon saving it, using at all times moral means that respect persons, life and property. It means the mobilization of thousands of people and resources in a unified resistance to tyrannical forces.

Due to the co-opting of many groups by government and industry, the environmental movement at this moment is not the same movement it was in past decades. But, make no mistake, the wellsprings of the environmental movement are in the human moral nature, and they are intricately connected to deep-seated survival and spiritual needs. Sooner or later, through want and disaster, people will find the moral outrage that is inherent in human conscience for all the destruction that human selfishness and greed have wrought.

I believe that if people who debate in the meeting rooms and sit at the negotiating tables could wield their language, and the power of their objections, endorsements, and votes with anything like the courage of the abolitionists, many wars could be avoided. There would be fewer wars in which an older generation that has

been too self-serving to give up anything, too apathetic towards injustice, and too cowardly to look beneath the surface of events, thrusts a gun into the hands of its youths and expects to be defended.

When people of the future look back on my generation, what will they say of those who complacently allowed so much damage to be done, with the information fully in front of them as to the serious implications for future generations? They will see a generation that, being mostly born after World War II, never had to pay big prices for what they lived — not the prices that really hurt, anyway. It is because of this that there is now an urgent need — and, in some circles, a compelling interest — to learn more about the costs that past generations paid.

Here, on this planet darkened by the gloom of cynicism, enclaves of concerned people need to plant the standard of a distinctively moral concern for others — for other races, other nations, other species, other generations — and strengthfully call out for support. If less support comes than what we thought we needed, we should remember the words of William Lloyd Garrison, who said that “The success of any moral endeavor does not depend upon numbers.”

I have found no personal belief system that would enable me to think that humans can keep destroying the planet, and some higher power will save us from the inevitable ecological collapse. But history offers many reasons to believe that people do not know what they can achieve until they unify themselves sufficiently around principles and battle wholeheartedly in a spirited resistance against wrongdoing; and only then will they discover whatever will come along to help them.

“History is a warning from the past. It becomes enormously significant that we perceive that the rationales and defensive logic which commanded the credulity of millions in the days of slavery were the same claims that mislead us now. The chronicles of history should be treated like dispatches smuggled out by agents of Intelligence from an oppressed land to a people not yet conquered by the same deceptions. They tell us how easily they were imprisoned by the false claims of government that held high principle as the pivot of their action while enslaving the governed people in deceit, misreport, and misdirection. They say: ‘We fought, we suffered, we died, but not for what it was we were led to believe was at stake. We never saw our own part in what it was we warred against, nor what the true context was, because we were too lost in the events. We envy you who can see more clearly what it is we lived and why. These histories of our pain, error, triumph and failure are our legacy to you.’”

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