

# Section 11 – Turning the Tide

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## The Return of the Earth Mother

The new progressive movements that were born in the 1960s were about social divides like race, gender and sexuality. They were about individuals and how they could protect their personal freedoms and their identities. They were founded by individuals and were about individuality. They depended upon individual ideas, individual leadership and most importantly, individual participation.<sup>1</sup> In the same cauldron of ideas that gave birth to the race and gender equality movements, others appeared.

The Earth movement had its roots in earlier times. Romanticism, the great artistic flowering of the 19th century, took various inspirations, but one of the most powerful was from nature. William Wordsworth, John Constable, Walt Whitman, Henry Thoreau and Ansel Adams amongst many other artists had blazed this trail. They were joined by scientists and philosophers like Charles Darwin, John Muir and Albert Einstein.

The veneration of the Earth that is implicit in their ideas, however, was not a focussed movement. The element that changed this and forged a popular movement out of these ideas was not artistic or philosophical but political. Alongside the developing feminist and black consciousnesses that were coalescing in the 1960s, was the anti-war movement. While one thrust of this protest was against the ongoing war in Vietnam, a clear and present danger, there was another target: the Cold War and the nuclear arms race.

Popular fear and hatred of nuclear weaponry consolidated into the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which was formed in the United Kingdom in 1957. It became a focus for the nascent Peace Movement and rapidly spread across the West. While the United States initially lagged behind, after the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 and during the ongoing war in Vietnam American radicals and protesters eagerly joined this campaign too.

At the heart of this new form of the Peace Movement was the understanding that through nuclear weapons, people had the power to destroy the world. This implied that humans could damage the world in other ways too. This notion was reinforced in the minds of many by the inspirational pictures of Earth, the Blue Planet, taken by the pioneer astronauts who first landed on the Moon in 1969. Suddenly, in a very graphical sense, the Earth was no longer vast,

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<sup>1</sup> The rise of the individualistic movements founded in the 1960s is the point that marked the beginning of the slow decline of conventional socialist class politics.

unlimited, so huge as to be impervious to anything we could do to it. Now it was a tiny, beautiful, precious space capsule, alone in the darkness of infinite space, incredibly vulnerable and, above all else, to be protected.

Because the other movements of the era proposed that individuals could change society through direct protest, the new Earth Movement held the same tenet – that protecting the planet was not the job of governments but of everyone. Once again, the political establishment was seen as having failed, and it was up to ordinary people to do something about it.

Ecology – hitherto a minor field – burst onto the popular stage and very quickly began to draw media attention and numerous followers. Greenpeace, perhaps the most famous campaigning ecological movement, was founded in 1971, and this led to the appearance of many other campaigning groups. Although these mostly adopted the principles of non-violent protest enshrined in the popular movements of the 1960s, they also, like the others, promoted and practised direct action by individuals in support of their causes.