

PERCEPTIONS OF MORALITY, CRIMINALITY, AND SOLIDARITY
IN THE RADICAL ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNITY

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This study explores perceptions of morality, criminality, and solidarity within the radical environmentalist community in order to determine and define its relationships with other criminalized or marginalized communities such as people of color, indigenous peoples, immigrants, and, most specifically, incarcerated people. Through an analysis of the *Earth First! Journal* from 1981 to 2011, as well as interviews with radical environmentalists, the study will draw upon the concepts of “political race” and “oppositional consciousness” in order to understand the changing conception of who is, or is not, a worthy ally in environmentalist struggle. Finally, the study examines the place of radical environmentalists within the criminal justice system, perceptions of the criminal justice system, and how environmentalists establish relationships of solidarity with other criminalized communities in order to challenge the existence of the criminal justice system.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introduction.....	1
II.	Background.....	5
III.	Establishing a Moral Base for Direct Action.....	11
IV.	Charges of Criminality.....	23
V.	Perceptions of Marginalized Communities.....	38
VI.	Conceptions of Solidarity and Shared Fate.....	49
VII.	Radical Environmentalists, Race, and Shared Space.....	78
VIII.	Conclusion.....	106

I. Introduction

In the past two decades, the radical environmental movement has experienced government retaliation and repression for their activism. This repression, now known as the “Green Scare” has included governmental surveillance, harassment of activists and their families, Grand Jury indictments, and both short-term jailing and long-term incarceration.¹ Because of this new intimate experience of the criminal justice system, radical environmentalists, who come from communities that are generally distanced from this system, find themselves in a new space—somewhere between their privileges of race and class, and their new status of being criminalized. Even in this unique position of both privileged and criminalized statuses, radical environmentalists are only one of many communities, particularly communities of color, that have intimate experience with the criminal justice system.²

This thesis explores notions of solidarity in the radical environmental movement in relation to several different communities, but focuses primarily on radical environmentalists’ relationship to incarcerated people and criminalized communities. Specifically, I will use ideas derived from Guinier and Torres’ conceptions of “linked fate” and “political race” in order to show the ways in which

¹ Will Potter, *Green Is The New Red*, 2011

² Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America*, 2008; Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 2005

ideas of race and belonging in the criminal justice system have shifted the radical environmentalist community's understanding of the system.³

Specific moments throughout the history of radical environmentalism have shown that solidarity is a powerful tool for the success of the movement. The Redwood Summer of 1990, which called on activists from across the country to converge and directly confront extraction of Redwood forests, is one important example of the expansion of radical environmentalists' politics to include timber workers; a more recent example being that of radical environmentalists involvement in anti-Border struggles in solidarity with migrant communities.⁴ I explore these, amongst other inter-community relationships, in order to highlight the shifting understandings of morality, criminality, solidarity, and environmentalism in the radical environmental community. In all cases, radical environmentalists articulate a conception of solidarity that focuses on the shared experience of oppression by either their own community or the Earth, and another community that was once imagined as antagonistic or 'other.'

The thesis poses several questions: How do radical environmentalists perceive themselves in connection to other criminalized or marginalized communities? Does their activism provide a new lens to question or challenge broader trends of repression and criminalization? Conversely, does environmental activism claim a moral superiority, which excludes others—such as those who

³ Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres. *The Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy*.

⁴ See sections "Perceptions of Marginalized Communities" and "New Politics of Environmental Justice and Anti-Racism."

stand in opposition to the War on Drugs or anti-immigration policy—from challenging criminalization?

There are many distinct environmental ideologies and groups from the farthest reaches of the political spectrum. Environmentalism has often been a battle ground amongst conservatives, progressives, and indigenous groups— each utilizing the power of the environmental movement towards their own ends— whether it is conservation of “wild” lands, anti-immigration policies, decolonization of a homeland, anti-war, anti-nuclear, population control, etc. It is in the spirit of recognizing the political power of the environmental movement that I direct the discussion toward another pervasive social phenomena: mass incarceration.

Organization

This thesis is largely chronological, and thus will trace the transformation of Earth First! from its birth as a conservation-oriented environmental direct action group, to Earth First! as a social change movement that incorporates many different concepts of environmentalism, social justice, and political organization. Parallel to these transformations, which are reflected through both shifting membership within Earth First! and relationships with other communities, are changes in perceptions of morality, criminality, and solidarity.

The first section, “Establishing a Moral Base for Direct Action,” outlines the early conceptions and principles of the new Earth First! movement in its use of direct action. The second section, “Charges of Criminality,” describes the ways in

which criminality is conceived, and the ways that the charge is leveled against different entities—particularly government entities, from the Forest Service to the FBI, and corporations. Third, is a short section titled, “Perceptions of Marginalized Communities,” which surveys Earth First!’s relationships with diverse communities, including indigenous peoples, immigrants, timber workers, and incarcerated people.

The last section, “Conceptions of Solidarity and Shared Fate,” analyzes how the radical environmental community’s relationship with communities have changed over time due to their changing conceptions of environmentalism, solidarity, and interwoven systems of domination like racism, colonization, environmental destruction, and incarceration. This section also highlights the educational experience of incarceration, raises questions about the place of radical environmentalists within the criminal justice system, and the meaning of whiteness in relation to acts of rebellion and incarceration. Finally, it explores the meaning of linked fate, its potential shortfalls, and the possibility of ‘linked fate’ in confronting the ‘war on terror,’ which has affected several communities within the United States, particularly Arab and Muslim communities along with radical environmentalist and animal rights activist communities.

Author Involvement

This thesis is a result of my involvement in environmental organizations, prisoner rights’ campaigns, and abolitionist politics. Between these communities, I witnessed a gap in the perceptions of the connections between communities of

incarcerated/criminalized people and the environmentalist community— more particularly, some of my friends within the environmentalist community were eager to categorize incarcerated environmentalists as “political prisoners,” and to distinguish themselves from people who were being charged under draconian laws such as Measure 11 or in relation to the ‘war on drugs’. To me, this signaled a lack of understanding of the oppression and repression that happens through the criminal justice system, and led me to question the relationships of the radical environmentalist community to other marginalized communities.

Background

Earth First! History

Earth First! is a movement with mythical origins. As Rik Scarce writes in his book, *Eco-Warriors: Understanding the Radical Environmental Movement*, the movement was started on a hike through the desert with Dave Foreman, Mike Roselle, Bart Koehler, Howie Wolke, and Ron Kezar.⁵ Or perhaps “while reveling in a whore house.”⁶ All were disenchanted mainstream environmentalists, coming from an array of environmental groups, looking to disrupt the economic and political maneuverings of the environmental movement and to put the earth first.

The movement has evolved over decades since 1980, with new people, ideas, and actions. With the strong force of Foreman as editor and publisher of the

⁵ Rik Scarce, *Eco-Warriors: Understanding the Radical Environmental Movement*.

⁶ *Ibid.* 61

Earth First! Journal (EF!J) for the first decade of existence, the journal and the movement grew under the common slogans of “No Compromise In Defense of Mother Earth,” and “Earth First!” In the words of Foreman, “The main reason for Earth First! is to create a broader spectrum within the environmental community... The people who founded Earth First! felt there was a need for a radical wing to the environmental movement. Somebody has to say what needs to be said.”⁷ Similar to other social movements, the radical arm of the environmental movement pushed the conversation further towards what was once perceived as impossible, and framed mainstream groups as moderate negotiators. As Stokely Carmichael said in 1967, “[White America’s] unwillingness to deal with someone like Doctor King just means they have to deal with this young generation,” which he characterizes as less patient, compassionate, and merciful.⁸ In a similar manner to the Black Power movement, Earth First! challenged notions of a hegemonic culture at its roots— causing great discomfort not only for those who profited from destruction of the earth, but also for those who also thought of themselves as environmentalists.⁹

It is not simply the rhetoric of Earth First! and other radical environmental groups like Sea Shepherd and, in some cases, Greenpeace, that makes them “radical;” rather, “foremost is their emphasis on confronting problems head-on through ‘direct action.’”¹⁰ This includes legal protests on one side of the spectrum,

⁷ *Ibid.*, 58

⁸ *Black Power Mixtape*, [8:30-9:00]

⁹ Donald R. Liddick, *Eco-Terrorism*. 63

¹⁰ Rik Scarce, *Eco-Warriors*, 5

to sabotage of property on the other—with tree-sits, blockades, lockdowns, and other illegal tactics existing within the spectrum. As Dave Forman writes in the *EF!J*, EF!ers should have “a willingness to let our actions set the finer points of our philosophy and a recognition that we must indeed act.”¹¹ Thus, *action*, preferably direct action, is a necessary part of a radical environmental movement. While conversation and debate are widespread within the movement, the distinguishing feature of any social group is the ability to enact their beliefs. Furthermore, Ingalsbee writes,

“‘radical’ is both an ascribed and achieved identity for EF!ers.”¹² Opponents of EF! use ‘radical’ in the “colloquial political sense” (much like terrorist has also been used); whereas EF!ers use ‘radical’ as describing their approach, which is “to the root.”

It is with this notion of ‘radical’ that Earth First! treats their environmental activism as something that does not target politicians; rather, EF! challenges and subverts dominant ideas about the environment and our relationship with it.¹³

Tim Ingalsbee elaborates upon this “paradigm shift” that Earth First! brought to the environmental movement:

“[‘Subvert the Dominant Paradigm’] has been one of the most popular bumper stickers sold by the *[EF!J]* since the early 1980s because this slogan accurately describes the EF! movement’s strategical reason-for-being and tactical modes-of-action in a multitude of socio-environmental issues and conflicts. EF!ers believe the ecological crisis is primarily rooted in the culture and consciousness of modern techno-industrial civilization... EF!ers perceive the struggle for social change in

¹¹ Dave Foreman, “Whither Earth First!?...” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VIII, No. I, November 1, 1987, 21.

¹² Tim Ingalsbee, “Earth First!: Conscious in Action in the Unfolding of a New-Social-Movement.” 142

¹³ *Ibid.*, 142-3

Industrial societies as primarily an ideological struggle— a “war” not merely of ideas but of worldviews, where consciousness is the prime terrain of conflict. As ‘Maple’ says, ‘We mess with people’s minds as much as we can, trying to encourage people to take back their own brains from the corporate entities that are trying to destroy this planet, and get back to learning about the natural world.’”¹⁴

Political Repression and Mass Incarceration

In the late 1950s the use of the term “law and order” was just beginning to spread. The success of the Civil Rights Movement, a Black-led movement that frequently used tactics of mass mobilization and civil disobedience, was obvious to both politicians and citizens. With landslide legislation passing as a result of the long, hard work of the Civil Rights Movement and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, no longer could racial segregation, and other Jim Crow practices, be upheld by the federal government. The terrorist tactics of the Ku Klux Klan, including threats, lynchings, and bombings, were on the decline as the Jim Crow Era of segregation ended. Furthermore, the explicit and uncoded language of race would no longer be acceptable in political debate.

However, the language of race could still be spoken, as long as it was never explicit. The rhetoric of “tough on crime,” “law and order,” and the “war on drugs” became this implicit, coded language— “Crime meant urban, urban meant Black, and the war on crime meant a bulwark built against the increasingly political and

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 50-1

vocal racial 'other' by the predominantly white state."¹⁵ This coded language was used to "generate and mobilize white opposition to the Civil Rights Movement."¹⁶

Even while the tactics of the Civil Rights Movement remained nonviolent in the face of extreme police and extralegal violence, these tactics were dismissed by the political right as being equivalent to any other type of crime. Nixon, vice-president at the time, argued that "the deterioration [of respect for law and order] can be traced directly to the spread of the corrosive doctrine that every citizen possesses an inherent right to decide for himself which laws to obey and when to obey them."¹⁷ The would-be President, not unlike many before him, drew a direct connection between dissent and crime, which he drew upon in the declaration of the War on Drugs in 1970.

The conflation of crime and dissent, along with the coded rhetoric of race, laid the foundation for an era of massive criminalization, defined by Angela Davis as "a race and class ideology that has been used to justify an explosion in the incarceration of poor people, people of color in particular. Black people are 7.8 times as likely to be imprisoned as whites."¹⁸ This era of massive criminalization and incarceration in the United States has hardly ceased since declaring a war on drugs; rather, its tools have grown, through the 'war on drugs' and the 'war on terror,' to encompass increasingly diverse communities. The radical

¹⁵ Parenti, *Lockdown America*, 7.

¹⁶ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 50.

¹⁷ Parenti, 7.

¹⁸ Angela Davis, "Race and Criminalization: Black Americans and the Punishment Industry," in *The House That Race Built: Black Americans, U.S. Terrain*, ed. Wahneema Lubiano (New York: Pantheon, 1997, 271

environmentalist community is one of these affected communities, clearly targeted in the rhetorical war on terror. As I argue in this thesis, the rhetoric of ‘terrorism,’ continues to draw upon racialized images of the imagined ‘other,’ and is simultaneously used as a political tool against dissidence and rebellion. Thus, repression via incarceration is both political and racialized.

“Linked Fate” and the Radical Environmental Community

In this thesis, I argue that radical environmentalist communities have built strong coalitions, and have many potential future coalitions, through an understanding of their linked fate or “shared political space” with diverse communities. This shared political space is less obvious in some points of radical environmentalist struggle—for example, the common interests of timber workers and environmentalists is not often noted or acted upon because they often see one another as adversaries. However, through the criminalization of activists within the radical environmentalist community, the shared space of incarceration becomes both *physical* and *political*.

In thinking about this shared space, I employ what Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres call “political race,” which “seeks to construct a language to discuss race, in order to rebuild a progressive democratic movement led by people of color but joined by others.”¹⁹ This means that radical environmentalists must recognize their shared fate, and also be willing to de-center themselves in order to form a multi-racial coalition that challenges mass incarceration. In many ways, the radical

¹⁹ Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres, *The Miner’s Canary*, 12.

environmentalist community has established abolitionist politics and ideals, but there remain many possibilities of enlisting their labels of ‘criminal’ and ‘terrorists,’ in coalition with others labeled as such, in order to challenge racialized systems of control, particularly incarceration. It should also be noted that relationships with criminalized communities are different from other alliances that radical environmentalists have had because the alliance is primarily about the survival of the environmentalist community in the face of criminalization, rather than creating an alliance in order to protect the Earth (although Earth First! also brings an environmentalist critique to the mass construction of prisons).

III. Establishing a Moral Base for Direct Action

In engaging in civil disobedience and direct actions, social movements have the responsibility to defend their actions as more morally righteous than the laws that they feel are necessary to break. In different social movements, this morality can come from many different sources— religion, popular support, human rights, and, in the case of Earth First!, the land. Founders of Earth First! found their moral righteousness in a connection to place and land, which was also linked to a rhetoric of patriotism and the use of the “American” identity as a catalyst for action in defense of the Earth.

This section explores the conception of Earth as a moral basis for direct action and civil disobedience, as well as the contradictory nature of using patriotic rhetoric in defense of the Earth. In outlining this moral base, I aim to distinguish the criteria by which early Earth First!ers characterize certain groups, or their

actions, as criminal, immoral, or illegal. These charges are leveled primarily towards the United States government, corporations, but also towards immigrants, working people like loggers, and incarcerated people; however, as Earth First! underwent many changes in the later 1980s and early 1990s, the conception of criminality shifts along with EF!'s understanding of their moral base and conceptions of who is an enemy or ally of the Earth. These changes are due to their own experience with criminalization, but also because of many different political shifts in the movement—especially with the growth of anarchism, feminism, environmental justice, and antiracism.

Wilderness As Moral Base for Criminality, "True Repository of Freedoms"

At its conception, Earth First! was a wilderness conservation group. This conception of the Earth, wilderness, and the need to protect these places was, and continues to be, a popular vein in the environmental movement that has a particular understanding about *what* wilderness is and *who* it belongs to.²⁰ As Ingalsbee writes, "the notion of wilderness' is a Euro-American social construction subject to numerous historical changes and cultural differences in its definition and meaning," but "to EF!ers "wilderness is the 'real world.'"²¹ Inspired by the ideas of Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Edward Abbey, early

²⁰ For an in-depth study into Earth First!'s philosophical, political, and organization of EF! From 1980 to 1995, see Tim Ingalsbee, "Earth First!: Conscious in Action in the Unfolding of a New-Social-Movement," Dissertation, 1995.

²¹ Ibid., 122-3

Earth First!ers found their sense of place, as well as their “consciousness-in-action,” through their idea of “Romantic naturalist perceptions of nature.”

Throughout the environmental movement and in Earth First!, “wilderness” is often described as “virgin,” “untouched,” and “native.”²² These descriptions romanticize wilderness and also imply the gendered sexualization of the land. These conceptions of wilderness also denote the erasure of the existence of indigenous peoples by stating that the land has never been touched, even though many indigenous people utilized complex land management practices.²³ In the earlier years of *Earth First!*, EF! and other conversation groups navigated a contradictory political ground in which they promoted an idea of “wilderness” that erases any narrative of indigenous existence or indigenous peoples’ long history of ecological management and land-use, while also being in conflict with the dominant colonial force, the United States government, which seeks to extract the “resources” of “wilderness.” It is in the context of these political forces that *Earth First!* has used appeals to patriotism and the stereotypical American identity of white male outlaws to protect their idea of “wilderness.”²⁴

²² For more the construction of “wilderness,” see page 22; for also “Alliances with Indigenous Peoples,” see page 39.

²³ See Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* for more on colonization and sexualization of land. See also Charles C. Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* on land-use practices.

²⁴ Romantic ideas of wilderness, as early EF!ers and other conservationists understood it, implied the removal of several Native American tribes from their homelands and to reservations. See Mark David Spence, “Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks.” New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, especially pages 3-7; For more on constructions of “wilderness,” see Gary Paul Nabhan, ‘*Cultural Parallax in Viewing North American Habitats*,’ in *Reinventing nature? Responses to postmodern*

Patriotism

In the *Journal*'s first year, co-founder Dave Foreman tells Earth First!ers, "Wilderness is America. What can be more patriotic than the love of the land? We will be Americans only as long as there is wilderness. Wilderness is our true Bill of Rights, the true repository of our freedoms, the true home of Liberty."²⁵ This connection of the "wild" and "America" promotes ideas of Western expansion and manifest destiny— that "wilderness" exists for "Americans," not its original inhabitants. It is this same conception of the land existing for "America" and for other colonial entities that is used to extract resources from the land Foreman hopes to defend.²⁶ However, as Foreman connects the American identity with connection to land, his definition is, in some ways, more expansive— not only in its attempt to connect "Americans" to the land, but also in its attempt to expand our notions of laws, rights, and morality.

By connecting the "American" identity to "wilderness" and to our ideas of freedom and liberty, Foreman provides grounds to expand morality beyond the Bill of Rights and Constitution, and law in general. Rather than rely on traditional notions of law and righteousness, he argues that freedom comes from the land and our connection to it, and that in destroying the land we lose not only an opportunity to realize "freedom," but also lose what it is to be "American." Even

deconstruction, ed. M. Soule and G. Lease (Washington, D.C. Island Press, 1995, 87-101); See also Marcuse, Herbert, *One Dimensional Man*, 231.

²⁵ *Earth First! Newsletter*, Vol. 1, No. 6, 1981, 6.

²⁶ See Steve Martinot, *The Rules of Racialization*, page 11 and 17, for "minority" 'nationalist' conceptions of land that challenge hegemonic notions of property, government, and "the European notion of nationalism."

while Foreman's conception of "freedom" and morality expands beyond the traditional understanding of *what* is right and *who* decides what is right, Foreman's conception of "American wilderness" continues to be one that shuts out many people, for his conception of "American" relies on particular notions of whiteness and coloniality. These notions exclude Native Americans who have inhabited and continue to inhabit the land, and also exclude immigrants who do not fit into Foreman's idea of "American."²⁷

The idea of patriotism as a lens through which to reconceive morality and righteousness recurs frequently in the early 1980s. Articles such as "Civil Disobedience is the American (Montana) Way" and the column "Dear Ned Ludd" are examples of this trend.²⁸ In "Civil Disobedience is the American (Montana) Way," Mike Bond, like Dave Foreman, again relies upon patriotism as a moral framework for breaking the law:

"What leads a normal, reasonably intelligent American to commit acts of civil disobedience?[...] It is perhaps the love of country whose laws are no longer applicable to the situation at hand, laws used not to embellish freedoms but to undercut them?[...] So what do we do? We step outside the law. We take the law back into our own hands. We remind our politicians and other fellow citizens by our civil disobedience how wrong the political system has become."²⁹

²⁷ See section on "Perceptions of Marginalized Communities," 33.

²⁸ "Dear Ned Ludd," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. IV, No. VIII, August 1st, 1984; "Dear Ned Ludd" was a regular column throughout the 1980s, which gives directions for, but does not necessarily condone or condemn, monkeywrenching as a tool for wilderness defense.

²⁹ Mike Bond, "Civil Disobedience is The American (Montana) Way," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. IV, no VIII, August 1st, 1984, 6.

Bond's appeal to the "reasonably intelligent American" calls upon the patriotic duty to challenge the law's reason. For Bond, the law has failed to provide a framework through which to realize his moral conscience—a conscience that is connected to the preservation of wilderness and to freedom. He claims that the American government is so out of line with "freedoms,"—"undercut[ing]" rather than "embellish[ing]" them—that he is willing to charge the entire political system with this wrongdoing. In this allegation of injustice against the American government, and in his articulation of a "vacuum, between the will of the American people and the acts of the U.S. government," the author once again separates his idea of justice from the institutional structures that enforce law.

At the end of his essay, Bond asks, "is it better to stay out of jail when there is no justice in freedom?" It is here that he moves a step further than Foreman's conception of morality, which is based only in wilderness. Freedom is not worth having, or perhaps is not possible, if it is a freedom based on injustice. While the "injustice" that he describes is targeted towards the destruction of wilderness and the American political system, the conception of both freedom and justice as necessary entities for life, even if it is an exclusive "American" way of life, opens the door for a morality that is not only based in "wilderness," but also based in the way society functions in regard to its people.

Although the label of "American" may shut out certain peoples that do not identify with the label (or, perhaps more importantly, people that Bond would not identify as "American"), he takes a step toward a more mutualistic morality, which links the experience of others' injustice to his own freedom. Furthermore, his

sense of freedom and justice arise through action rather than as ideals that somebody achieves. These ideas of mutuality, solidarity, and freedom as action occur in Earth First! in different ways throughout its thirty years of existence, and while these earlier conceptions of freedom and justice are ones that may be used for exclusion and demonization of other communities, those same ideas, triggered in different contexts, encourage inclusion of other diverse communities and expansion of the movement.

Mike Bond's essay is of a very frequent tradition of alleging legal institutions—such as the United States Forest Service, Federal Bureau of Information, and the United States government as a whole—as out-of-touch and immoral institutions that commit illegal or immoral acts. Conversely, the United States government and corporations that depend upon resource extraction for wealth have charged Earth First!, and often the environmental movement, with the same allegations. Thus, between the radical environmental community, other criminalized communities, and the United States government, conceptions of criminality and morality are heavily contested in the media and the courts.

Deep Ecology and Biocentrism: Industrial Society as Prison, Wilderness as Freedom and Home, Humanity as a Parasite

Conceptions of freedom coming from “wilderness” also happen elsewhere throughout the environmental movement. Dave Brower, who was an executive director of the Sierra Club, founder of Friends of the Earth and Earth Island

Institute, among others, expressed a similar conception to that of Foreman: "Wipe out the wilderness and the world's a cage."³⁰

For wilderness conservation-oriented environmentalists in *Earth First!*, the industrial society is often viewed as a cage or as a prison, whereas wilderness is, as Foreman writes, "the true repository of our freedoms."³¹ Foreman also expands upon this idea to include the wilderness as an extension of one's own self or, conversely, as one's self as an extension of wilderness. By realizing the intimate connection of self to the land, Foreman writes that "We are *of it*," and thus concludes the wilderness defense is self-defense: "We are a wilderness defending itself."³² Even while Foreman's and other patriotic messages seem to wither away in the late 1980s, and are entirely cut-off by the early 1990s, *deep ecology*, as a philosophical, ideological, and spiritual base, continued to connect the movement's moral framework as based in the land—with an acceptance of all forms of life, and even non-life such as mountains and streams, as inherently and intrinsically valuable.³³

³⁰ Bill Devall, "Dave Brower: Muir's Disciple," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol IV, no. IV, March 20, 1984, 12.

³¹ *Earth First! Newsletter*, Vol 1, No. 6, 1981.

³² Dave Foreman, "Reinhabitation, Biocentrism, and Self-Defense," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VII, No. VII, Aug 1, 1987, 22.

³³ Because my research focused on perceptions of criminality and solidarity, I often overlooked the numerous articles on "deep ecology;" however, its presence in the *Earth First! Journal* is incredibly visible throughout the 1980s, and conversations of "deep ecology" recur throughout the *Journal* to present-day. see "Deep Ecology and the New Civil Rights Movement," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VIII, No. V, May 1, 1988, 4; "Deep Ecology and Lifestyle," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. V, No. VII, August, 1985; George Sessions and Arne Naess, "The Basic Principles of Deep Ecology," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. IV, No. VI, June 20, 1984.

Edward Abbey, the author of *The Monkeywrench Gang*, articulates this particular conception of freedom and morality in his contribution to the *Earth*

First! Journal:

“What the conscience of our race—environmentalism— is trying to tell us is that we must offer to all forms of life and to the planet itself the same generosity and tolerance we require from our fellow humans. Not out of charity alone— though that is reason enough— but for the sake of our survival as free men and women.”³⁴

Again, Edward Abbey’s conception of freedom is one that depends on mutuality and solidarity; however, his solidarity is particularly one that is “biocentric” rather than anthropocentric and, as we will see, Edward Abbey and others in *Earth First!* articulate a willingness to sacrifice humans in the protection of the earth. Unfortunately, some writers that promoted the ideologies of “biocentrism” and “deep ecology” also promoted ideas that were racist, classist, and genocidal in nature, celebrating the proliferation of AIDS and malnutrition in the colonized African continent, and denying the humanity of incarcerated people. These ideas alienated (and endangered) many within and outside of the *Earth First!* movement. This includes an understanding of loggers as an expendable population in regard to tree-spiking, as well as immigrants and incarcerated people as expendable in regard to “population control.”³⁵

³⁴ *Earth First! Journal*, Vol III, No. 7, 16.; See also Ed Abbey, “Dear Ned Ludd,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. V, No. II, 26.

³⁵ See section “Perceptions of Marginalized Communities”; Angela Davis criticizes both “population control” and “crime discussions” for “employ[ing] statistics in the same fetishistic and misleading way as Malthus did more than two years ago.” “Race and Criminalization: Black American and the Punishment Industry,” *Rethinking the Colorline*, 316; Furthermore, advocates of population control employ the philosophy of “Euro-American humanism,” which “produces for itself a

Recalling Social Change Movements

In creating a movement of civil disobedience, Earth First! had the challenge of creating a cultural and moral base for breaking the law in order to promote a perceived “greater good.” This moral base was originally found in idea of “wilderness” as a place where freedom could be realized, as well as in the patriotic duty to protect that wilderness and, thus, freedom. The radical environmental movement also utilized the stories and rhetoric of previous civil disobedience and direct action social change movements in order to find inspiration and lessons through which to create a vibrant movement.

Particularly in the 1980s, the Earth First! movement alluded to the Civil Rights Movement in several ways. These allusions were made in order to highlight some connection with moral righteousness of the civil disobedience and law-breaking that was done in the Civil Rights Movement, another movement which challenged a system of domination provided and protected by the United States government for centuries. In 1986, one contributor alludes to Martin Luther King Jr.’s famous “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” with his own “Letter from Oregon Jail.”³⁶ Judi Bari also recalls the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement when she organized the “Redwood Summer,” calling for “Freedom Riders” to save the forest.³⁷ She goes on to write that “Following in the footsteps of the brave civil

standard or norm as the measure of human being.” That standard, for advocates, is of ecological destruction practiced by Euro-Americans in the colonization of North America.(Martinot, 11)

³⁶ *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. V, No. II, 7.

³⁷ Judi Bari, “Freedom Riders Needed to Save the Forest”, *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. X, No. V, May 1, 1990, 1.

rights activists of the 1960s, Earth First! is calling for a Mississippi Summer in the California Coast Redwoods.” By recalling these events that are part of America’s collective memory, Earth First! connected itself to a movement that was also moved by a “higher” law, and whose tactics are now greatly accepted as morally righteous and necessary in the struggle for racial equality. In making allusions to the Civil Rights Movement in their own struggle, Earth First! established another moral base for their illegal actions.

Earth First!ers also called upon the legacies of organizations and movements such as the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, Irish Republican Army, Prince of Plowshares, Boston Tea Party, the Underground Railroad, women’s suffrage radicals, the Sons of Liberty, and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).³⁸ As Earth First!ers took illegal action in order to protect the environment and to disrupt the profits of corporations, putting the EF! into the context of other civil disobedience was an inspiring and affirming tactic. The actions of Earth First! could then be seen as “carrying on a venerable tradition” of righteous resistance. Similar to the EF!’s treatment of the ‘Grandfathers’ of Earth First!—Thoreau, Muir, Leopold, and Abbey—these movements became “an ongoing source of inspirational slogans and symbols helping activists to mobilize collective consciousness-in-action.”³⁹

³⁸ “Radical Environmentalism: Carrying on a Venerable Tradition.” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. X, No III, February 2, 1990,31; T.O. Hellenbach, “The Future of Monkeywrenching,” Vol. VI, No. VI, June 21, 1986, 26.

³⁹ Ingalsbee,1995: 122-123

While earlier Earth First!ers simply recalled the traditions of other direct action and civil disobedience movements, later Earth First!ers would find common struggles with those groups, and work towards mutual relationships of solidarity. This would become another important tool for mobilization and action, and would also widen the movement's analysis of social and environmental issues.

Conclusion

Through ideologies of biocentrism/deep ecology and patriotism, along with the recalling of the histories of other movements of direct action and civil disobedience, the Earth First! movement established a moral and ideological basis for their illegal actions. Even as EF! situated civil disobedience as the "American way;" and despite its colonial sense of place "America's" wilderness," it also situated itself in direct conflict with the United States government and corporations that extract resources or otherwise devastate the Earth. Arising from this conflict in interest is the contestation of morality and criminality. Earth First! charges governments and corporations with terrorism, illegality, and immorality; and those entities reciprocate the same charges as the radical environmental movement. Meanwhile, on the margins of these arguments are people of color, immigrants, and indigenous peoples, whose desires and needs are often ignored, and sometimes intentionally undercut by both Earth First! and the United States government.

In the next section, I will explore these charges of criminality, first against Government entities such as the Forest Service and the Federal Bureau of

Investigation, and second, against extractive industries. Then, I will explore Earth First!ers conception of criminality amongst immigrants, incarcerated people, and loggers. Conceptions of criminality drove conceptions of who was the ‘target,’ of actions, as well as which populations were expendable in Earth First!’s goal to stop “overpopulation” and other perceived environmental challenges.

IV. Charges of Criminality

Charges of Criminality Against Government Entities

Even as early Earth First!ers celebrated the pioneer image of American expansion, patriotism, and the “American way” as part of the moral framework of their movement, Earth First! has remained in an almost constant state of opposition to the United States government and extractive corporations. While in recent decades the charges of criminality and immorality against the United States have been out of an anarchist ideology, earlier charges of criminality and immorality of the United States and its entities came out of an environmentalist and biocentric framing of morality and righteousness; these two anti-state conceptions are not exclusive, and biocentric perspectives still exist alongside anarchist ones. As mentioned earlier in Mike Bond’s essay “Civil Disobedience is the American (Montana) Way,” there exists a “vacuum between the will of the American people and the acts of the U.S. government.” The sentiment that the U.S. government is not acting to benefit the will of the people is consistent throughout Earth First!’s entire existence, although its particular articulations change

throughout the years—ranging from anarchism to patriotism, and biocentrism to anti-racism.

Throughout most of the 1980s, anti-government stances were taken only so far as to promote environmental causes, and if the governmental avenues could be used for the conservation of wild places, Earth First! would apply such tactics. In this era of clearly conservationist goals, many articles would end in a call for readers to write letters to appropriate government agencies, like the Forest Service, United States Senate, or others. Appeals to government would largely fade off in Earth First! after its first decade, thus implying that in this time period Earth First!ers either had some sense of hope in the governmental process, or that they were willing to achieve their goals by any means necessary, including appeals to the government. Later, a belief in legislative process faded, and anti-government sentiment became centered on issues of political repression, unequal protection under the law, and the state as an oppressive and violent force of destruction with which it is immoral to collude with.

In the first decade of Earth First!'s existence, EF!'s main enemies seemed to be the United States Forest Service (FS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Articles like "When Was the Last Time The Forest Service Lied to You?" and "Oregon RARE II Suit Filed" charge the Forest Service with corruption and back-door dealing.⁴⁰ One article states that "[the Utah BLM State Directors....] have

⁴⁰ "When Was the Last Time The Forest Service Lied to You?" *Earth First! Journal*, Vol VII, No. V, March 20, 1987; "Oregon RARE II Suit Filed," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. IV, No. III, Feb 2, 1986; See also Howie Wolke, "The Grizzly Den," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. IV, No. 1, November 1, 1983, 14.

put forward a masterful and until now extraordinarily successful deception,” and another describes the Forest Service as “an outlaw agency. If we don’t stop them in the Kalmiopsis, there won’t be any old-growth left on the Pacific Coast outside of currently designated wilderness and parks.”⁴¹ Thus, while environmentalists accuse government institutions and corporations of criminal acts (sometimes legally substantiated and successfully litigated, and sometimes only rhetorical charges), they also commit themselves, as in the latter example, to the responsibility of stopping the agencies’ “outlaw” ways. Echoing Mike Bond’s article, “Civil Disobedience is the American (Montana) Way,” these environmentalists feel the need to take matters into their own hands and directly intervene.

However, as patriotism, environmentalism, and slight trends of anarchism were contested within the early Earth First!, debates around government involvement in Earth First! activities became important.⁴² One example of this is Bill Haywood’s article, “To Permit or Not?,” which discusses the complexity of deciding which laws to comply with, particularly in regard to camping permits for the annual Earth First! gathering.⁴³ The author argues that Earth First! should comply with Forest Service camping regulations, also noting that, “As a philosophical anarchist, it’s ironic that I am defending government regulation

⁴¹ *Earth First!*, Vol III, No I, Nov. 1, 1982, 12.; Marcy Willow, *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. III, No. IV.

⁴² For a hilarious debate on anarchism in Earth First!, see “Schmooker on Anarchy,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol VI, No. V May 1, 1986, and responses in *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VI, No. VI, 1986.

⁴³ Bill Haywood, “To Permit or Not?,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol VI, No V, May 1, 1986.

here...” Haywood’s article represents a willingness, or at least a necessity, to negotiate with governmental institutions in order to hold other parties to similar standards of environmental stewardship, i.e., snowmobilers, logging companies, and road-builders. This negotiation falls within the trend of its time, which is the perception of the United States government and laws as corrupt and immoral, but also as tools that can be harnessed towards the realization of environmental conservation.

Activists within Earth First! also recognize that the successes of the environmental movement, like passing major environmental legislation, do not parallel a search for justice on a wider level. As one contributor wrote in 1995,

“Environmental laws have always been something of an anomaly in American culture. Remember, it was Nixon who signed the National Environmental Protection Act into existence— the same Nixon who incinerated Vietnamese villagers and poisoned our own troops with Agent Orange. While the National Forest Management Act and the Endangered Species Act were being written and authorized, the Marines were soaking Nicaraguan beaches in blood and the CIA was assassinating human rights activists in Cuba and El Salvador. While the Clean Water and Air Acts were winding their way through Congress, timber cut volumes were increasing and dams were being thrown up on the few truly wild rivers left.”⁴⁴

This recognition of these environmental successes in a larger context of oppression was meaningful for radical environmentalists, providing for them proof that compromise with and dependence on the state as the purveyor of justice would not fulfill the goals of the radical environmentalist community. Rather, these injustices inspired Earth First! toward a broader critique of both mainstream environmentalism and the United States government.

⁴⁴ *Earth First! Journal*, Vol XV, No V, May 1, 1995, 3.

Governmental Repression and Radical Environmentalist Response

While the laws of the government were not entirely dismissed by Earth First!, their stance of “No Compromise In Defense of Mother Earth” also necessitated direct confrontation with laws and law enforcement agencies. As noted above, the early years of the *Earth First! Journal* showed a trend of contempt for the USFS; however, Earth First!’s governmental nemesis started to shift as some Earth First!ers began to find themselves under more severe forms of governmental repression. Although earlier articles give voice to trends of criminalization and repression, it is not until the late 80s that Earth First! came under real fire by law enforcement agencies, thus shifting much of its focus from criticizing the USFS towards criticizing and dealing with the FBI.⁴⁵

In the March 20, 1988 issue of the *Journal*, two articles highlighted steeper shifts within the movement due to higher fines and longer sentences for environmentalists: “Roselle Gets Four Month Sentence” and “Sapphire Six Sued.”⁴⁶ Both articles are clear in politicizing the charges, claiming that “... the courts are *not* protecting the public safety by punishing committed activists,” and that “the corporate tactic of suing non-violent protesters for damages, if successful, would mean that if your political position is opposed by big business, you had better keep quiet.” Heavy charges against activists were perceived as political attacks against dissent and freedom of speech, with the government accused of doing the bidding of “big businesses.” In a 1984 article, Brian Heath wrote mockingly “The legal

⁴⁵ See *EF! Newsletter*, Vol. II, Issue II, December 21, 1981, 2; “What do you expect to accomplish anyway?” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol V. No I, November 1, 1984, 5.

⁴⁶ *Earth First! Journal*, Vol VIII, No. IV, March 29, 1988.

system—judges, jailers, and prosecutors— are professional defenders of freedom. Their reaction to my activity is to deny my freedom.”⁴⁷ Rather than safeguard freedom *for* the use of political dissidents, Heath claims that the legal system safeguards freedom *from* the use of political dissidents. In all of these cases, the charging of activists is seen as an immoral encroachment upon fundamental rights of freedom of speech by the United State government in order to ensure profits for corporations.

A year after the “Sapphire Six” were sued, repression against Earth First! heightened when the FBI arrested four Earth First!ers as the result of a three year, two-million dollar investigation, complete with an agent provocateur. The FBI coordinated a raid against several Earth First! members as they went into the desert to cut down a powerline tower that ran from a nuclear reactor, and in the aftermath began to use rhetoric of “terrorism” and “organized crime” to describe Earth First!. This incident would become known as the case of the “Arizona 4” (and later “5”).⁴⁸ In response to the head of the anti-terrorism task force’s claim that “[terrorism] includes any individual committing criminal acts under federal, state, or local laws in furtherance of political or social goals,” an editor of the *Journal* wrote “that makes blocking a bulldozer a felony offense, while the chairman of Exxon, because he supports the dominant social paradigm, walks

⁴⁷ *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. V, No. I, November 1, 1984.

⁴⁸ Dale Turner, “Arizona 4 are now 5,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 3, Brigid/Feb 2, 1990, 8.

free.”⁴⁹ Again, in the perception of Earth First!ers, the law does not reflect what is *right*; rather, it protects the status quo and the right of profit over dissent and environmental stewardship.

The FBI not only went after who would be known as the “Arizona 4,” but also Earth First!ers in Montana, Animal Liberation activists, Rod Coronado, and later Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney.⁵⁰ A deeper knowledge and consciousness of FBI tactics grew within the movement throughout these years, inspiring articles like “OUR LIFE WITH THE FBI” by Dale Turner, and “FBI Uses Familiar Tactics Against Peace Movement.”⁵¹ Later, the era known as the “Green Scare” would affect entire activist communities with Grand Jury indictments and FBI investigations.

To challenge this increasing use of repressive tactics, activists contested the rhetoric of “terrorism” and “eco-terrorism,” as well as connected the radical environmental movement to other criminalized movements.⁵² Amongst several articles criticizing and calling attention to the tactics of the FBI, one telling example is “EF! and the FBI— A Strained Relationship,” which states that “from Palmer raids after World War I down to sabotage, disinformation, intimidation, framing, jailing, and even murder in the 1960s and 1970s, the FBI has not hesitated to use any means to check the effectiveness of such movements.”⁵³ Earth First! thus

⁴⁹ “FBI ATTACKS EARTH FIRST! FOREMAN, MILLETT, 2 OTHERS ARRESTED,” *Earth First! Journal*, Special Edition, June 16, 1989.

⁵⁰ *Earth First! Journal*, Vol X, No II., December 21, 1989.

⁵¹ *Earth First! Journal*, Vol X, No. III, February 2, 1990, 12.

⁵² “Clearcutting is Eco-Terrorism,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol X, No. II, December 21, 1989, 2.

⁵³ See , “FBI ALERT: Low-down on the Low Life: FBI Harassment of Activists Continue,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol XII, No. VII, August 1, 1992,7; “Montana Earth

characterizes the Federal Bureau of Information as a rogue and lawless agency of social control. This analysis is not new, and as Earth First! begins to borrow rhetoric from recent social movements, deeper connections and recognition of shared struggle is realized.⁵⁴

Accusations of immorality and criminality against the United States government go back much further than recent movements, but also include generations of repression of indigenous resistance to colonization. Rod Coronado, an indigenous activist that was involved with Animal Liberation Front (ALF) actions, connects the repression against Earth First! with the tactics of the United States used against native resistances, stating that "... the past shows that any concession with the U.S. government will be quickly taken away when the quest for resources exploitation becomes economically desirable. Let a hundred broken treaties be the proof of that belief."⁵⁵ Coronado also later writes:

"At a time when ecological and cultural destruction is commonplace and within the perimeter of the law, it sometimes becomes necessary to adhere to the higher laws of nature and morality rather than stand mute witness to the destruction of our lands and people."⁵⁶

First!ers Get Federal Subpoenas," "Feds Harass Animal Rights Activists," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. X, No. I, November 1, 1989; "FBI Lies!!!! New Evidence in Bombing Case," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol XIII, No. VI, June 21, 1993, 15.; "FBI Targets ALF Activists," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol XII, No. VIII, September, 1992, 25.; Rod Coronado, "With The FBI On Our Backs," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XV, No. II, December 21, 1994, 18.

⁵⁴ See section "Solidarity With Other Social Movements"; see also Ward Churchill, *The War At Home*.

⁵⁵ *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XII, No. VIII, September, 1992, 75.

⁵⁶ Rod Coronado, "Spread your Love Through Action," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XV, No. IV, March 21, 1995, 8.

Thus, as the United States itself is guilty of broken promises, oppression and genocide of indigenous people, and destruction of the land, Coronado voices the need to look outside the limits of the law. In Coronado's view, any "concession" to social movements will be taken away once it becomes inconvenient for business—a clear reiteration of Earth First!'s slogan of "No Compromise In Defense of Mother Earth."

Within this era of increasing repression by the FBI, it appears that the EF! and other radical environmental organizations begin to perceive their moral righteousness to come out of their opposition to injustice, and that their struggle for justice is validated by the repression that bears down upon them. For example, after the FBI investigation of the Arizona 4, the bombing of Judi Bari, and other traumatic experiences within Earth First!, Foreman writes, "They've come down on Earth First! because we've been effective."⁵⁷ Whether his statement is true or not in regards to the success of the movement, it echoes a popular sentiment within Earth First! and highlights the relationship that radical environmentalists could expect to have with the United States government, which is one of direct conflict.

When both aboveground and underground radical environmental groups found themselves in conflict with the powers of the United States, the radical environmental movement responded to their criminalization by also accusing the government of criminal and immoral actions. The moral framework that originally

⁵⁷ Dave Foreman, "What's Happening to Our Movement?" *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XII, No. VIII, September 1992, 31.

came from a sense of place, a connection to the land, and sometimes patriotism, was expanding to include an opposition to injustice on a large scale—in solidarity with people whose dissent and actions were also targeted by repressive forces, and in opposition to the state. While Foreman and other “old guard” Earth First!ers resisted this shift in the movement, EF! was coming to understand itself as a social change movement with anarchist tendencies rather than a conservation group with direct action tendencies. In the face of criminalization in the late 1980s and early 1990s, articles discussing “Deep Ecology” and a connection to the land fall to the side, while other justifications for resistance, both legal and extra-legal come to the forefront. While these include fighting for a “sacred Earth,” justifications also include solidarity with indigenous peoples, solidarity with recent progressive social movements, and a growing recognition of people as part of the Earth. These changes are also important in Earth First!’s shift away from being an exclusively conservation-oriented environmental group, and towards a environmental *and* social justice group.

Charges of Criminality Against Business/Corporations

Because Earth First! directly disrupts extractive industries and, as EF! understands it, the government that backs them, the movement must contend with the moral authority and right to exist of both government and business. In this section, I will highlight some examples of Earth First! exposing and challenging both the illegal and the immoral elements of extractive industry. Interestingly

enough, Earth First!ers often used similar rhetoric to that which is used to justify the prison system. This includes a rhetoric of rape, theft, and murder.

An influential character within the Earth First! movement, having written the fictional novel *The Monkeywrench Gang*, Edward Abbey, as well as Dave Foreman, shaped early rhetoric around the destruction of the Earth for profit. In the “Dear Ned Ludd” column, Abbey writes “We are justified in defending our homes... not only by common law and morality, but also by common belief.” As noted earlier, this defense is rooted in a sense of place and connection to the land, and it is the businesses that are infringing upon Abbey’s “right” to live in his “home”.⁵⁸ These businesses, not the tree-spikers and blockaders, are viewed as the “real criminals”: “To the spikers, the real criminals were the logging companies and their lackeys, the Forest Service.”⁵⁹ Another contributor asks, “How are they getting away with all this? It seems to be a classic case of the monstrous government-big business-organized crime liaison.”⁶⁰ This sentiment has lasted throughout the entirety of Earth First!’s history.⁶¹

To bring the point of criminal actions home to the reader, rhetoric of crimes against humans is used. Logged land becomes “like a defiled virgin,” and the

⁵⁸ See section “Establishing Moral Base,” and “Perceptions of Marginalized Communities”

⁵⁹ “Tree Spiking and Moral Maturity,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. V, No. VII, August 1, 1985

⁶⁰ *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. IV, No. VI, June 20, 1984, 10.

⁶¹ “Compost the Corporations,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XVII, No. VI, Nov-Dec 1997; Liam Sionnach, “Earth First! Means Social War: Becoming an Anti-Capitalist Ecological Social Force,” *Earth First! Journal*, July-August, 2008, 14.

timber industry becomes “thieving vandals.”⁶² In an article titled, “The Perils of Illegality,” Foreman attempts to define moral law-breaking, writing that “many laws are necessary when millions of people live in close proximity to one another... I believe in laws against rape, assault, and invading wilderness areas with vehicles or chainsaws;” however, Foreman continues on to say that:

“I also recognize, of course, that most acts of rape, robbery, assault, and murder go unpunished because they are committed by accountants, lawyers, and managers hiding behind the legal facade of non-living corporations, which are permitted to function legally like human persons.”⁶³

There seems to be several reasons for this rhetoric: it shifts the allegation of criminality onto corporations, it heightens the level of criminality of the corporations, and it attempts to push our conception of the Earth toward a biocentric rather than anthropocentric understanding, towards respecting all living (and nonliving) entities as inherently valuable. Most importantly, it is meant to enrage and inspire people to disrupt environmentally destructive practices.

Earth First!ers respond to the destruction of Earth in many different ways, from lawsuits to blockades. (Further along the spectrum of direct action are tree-spiking and arson, but these are never done under the name of Earth First!)

Threatened environmental laws are often the rallying cry of direct action campaigns, and are often successfully used by environmental groups in order to

⁶² “Clear Cuts of Oregon,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. III, No. IV, 4

⁶³ Dave Foreman, “The Perils of Illegality,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol X, No. I, November 1, 1989, 25; Some have taken issue with EF!’s rhetoric of environmental destruction, especially in regards to using rhetoric of sexual assault.

save wild places.⁶⁴ Successful legal actions that were celebrated in the *Earth First! Journal* include corporate executives being sentenced for dumping, judges ruling against logging corporations, rulings against trophy hunting in California, and lawsuits deeming particular timber sales as illegal.⁶⁵ While Earth First! has had many legal victories, often supporting legal battles by stopping destruction in the forest until the trial is settled, there is also a recognition that the legal system will only take environmentalists so far toward their goals. For example, even as G-P committed 200 violations of the California Forest Practices Act over a three year period, the fines imposed on the company for their violations were “incapable of restraining” the company’s practices. In light of these failings of the legal system and with the understanding of the Earth, rather than the law, as EF!’s moral compass, it was Earth First! that stepped into the role of civil disobedience—as a result: “after two court orders, 22 arrests, one injury, and 20 trees down, the cutting stopped.”⁶⁶

Radical environmentalist actions that force the illegal or immoral actions of corporations into the media spotlight and public debate are many, ranging from

⁶⁴ See *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XV, No. V, May 1, 1995, 3, for environmental laws as unequivocal with goals of social justice.

⁶⁵ “Tree Huggers Save Redwoods,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. IV, No. I, November 1, 1983; “Corporate Executives Sentenced for Dumping,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VI, No. II, December 21, 1985; “Judge Blasts MAXXAM,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VIII, No. II, December 22, 1987, 24; “Court Spares California Cougars?” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VIII, No. II, December 22, 1987, 24; “California Mountain Lion Get Stay of Execution: California Fish and Game Exposed as Corrupt,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VIII, No. I, November 1, 1987; “Timber Sale Halted in the Shawnee,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. X, No. VIII, Sep. 22, 1990.

⁶⁶ “Sinkyone Struggle Continues,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VI, No. II, December 21, 1985, 9.

banner-drops to tree-sits to arsons. In the first year of the *Earth First! Journal*, Foreman writes in the article “Ancient Ecoguerilla Tactic Resurrected,” “public shaming lost currency during the previous part of the industrial era when moral absolutes were abandoned for the ‘anything goes’ amorality necessary to make industrialism click,” thus calling on Earth First! to publicly shame entities that are environmentally destructive. One example of this is when Earth First!ers “...decided to indict some of the criminals responsible for the greenhouse effect...” in a public protest.⁶⁷ Protests with the intention of publicly shaming corporations are also numerous, and it has been one of the most important *legal* tactics that Earth First! has used to rally support around environmental struggles. Radical environmentalists cannot rely on the courts to charge corporations of “crimes against nature,” because the actions perceived by Earth First!ers to be criminal are often legal; also, as mentioned above, even when action is taken by courts through environmental legislation, it is sometimes not enough.⁶⁸ For this reason, aboveground campaigns that highlight the environmental destruction and the immoral actions of corporations become necessary for Earth First!, both to rally the public and to secure a solid moral footing in their struggle against these corporations.

When the rhetoric of “eco-terrorism” jumped into the public sphere in the late 1990s, Earth First!ers responded with their own conception of the term,

⁶⁷ “Greenhouse Criminals Indicted,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. IX, No., November 1, 1984, 5.

⁶⁸ Howie Wolke, “The Grizzly Den,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. IV, no. 1, November 1, 1983.

framing corporate executives, government officials, and the enactors of their policies as the real eco-terrorists.⁶⁹ Rod Coronado writes that

“Earth First!ers unequivocally agree that the real ecoterrorists are those engaged in legally sanctioned actions that destroy and murder indigenous people, wildlife, and the homeland that all depend on for survival. The Earth First! movement, however, remains committed to waging a nonviolent campaign against ecoterrorism while the media establishment, special interest groups, and law enforcement agencies busily spin lies to hide their own violent deeds. We are left risking life and freedom in actions placing biodiversity before profit. Meanwhile, corporate forces reap the benefits of a legal system that defends their interests with ‘anti-terrorist’ legislation and federal grand juries intentionally used to harass legal activists while increasingly repressive police agencies use obsessive force against nonviolent activists.”⁷⁰

Coronado lays out the dynamics of power, portraying Earth First! as a singular force that is under attack for challenging the destructive powers of corporations and the legal system that backs their practices.

While radical environmentalists had to challenge both government and business in their right to confront environmentally destructive practices, there also remained the challenge of situating themselves not as “criminals,” but as righteous rebels with a cause. With an eye focused solely on environmental conservation, earlier Earth First!ers perceived several exploited and oppressed groups to also be their rival in the environmental realm—including undocumented immigrants, loggers, and “common criminals.” However, as the radical environmental movement came under severe repression from the state, they were

⁶⁹ “Wild Law Denounces Eco-Terrorism,” *Earth First! Journal*, February-March 2002; “Ecoterrorists Gun Down Wolves,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 2, December-January, 1999, 4.

⁷⁰ “Combatting Ecoterrorists,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 5, May-June, 1999.

forced to reconsider their relationships with not only other social change movements, but also their relationship with regularly marginalized populations. In this process of change, many Earth First!ers recognized ways in which their fates were linked to that of people the movement had previously demonized, and many also sought out relationships of understanding and solidarity with these people as the movement progressed. In the next section, I will discuss early perceptions of marginalized communities that early Earth First!ers disregarded and demonized, and later show the ways in which Earth First! tried to change or reconcile these negative relationships.

V. Perceptions of Marginalized Communities

As mentioned previously, patriotism, as a sense of place and pride in the land of “America”, was an important part of the Earth First! ideology in the early years of the movement. While this did not necessarily mean a respect for the United States government, it did correlate to a sense of place, and the right to defend it. “We are justified in defending our homes,” writes Ed Abbey.

Understanding their home to be America and its wilderness, early influential Earth First!ers such as Abbey and Foreman were staunchly anti-immigrant, perceiving immigrants as a manifestation of “overpopulation” and a threat to the American wilderness.⁷¹ This anti-immigration stance, as well as articles celebrating the spread of deadly viruses, came out of a belief of Earth’s “population bomb,” as

⁷¹ See Edward Abbey, “Immigration and Liberal Tabboos”
<http://compassrosebooks.blogspot.com/2009/10/edward-abbey-on-immigration.html>

outlined in the book “The Population Bomb” by David Brower and Paul R. Ehrlich.⁷² Tom Stoddard, another *EFJ* contributor who would later have a regular column entitled “The Human Horde,” focusing on overpopulation, echoed this idea when he wrote, “Every human birth is an ecological and environmental disaster for wildlife.”⁷³ In the same trend of “population control,” Stoddard and a contributor with the pen name of “Miss Anthropy” (read: misanthropy), wrote articles celebrating famine, criminalization of undocumented immigrants, and the proliferation of HIV/AIDS as environmental victories.⁷⁴

These views fell under the idea of “Earth First!” as it was originally intended. In the late 1980s, when the *Earth First! Journal* was filled with debate on philosophy and tactics, Foreman outlined his understanding of Earth First!, with the first idea being “a place of the Earth first in all decisions, even ahead of human welfare if necessary.” It was not until Earth First!’s criminalization and marginalization that radical environmentalists recognized the “liberation” of Earth, animal, and humans to be intimately connected, and the need for solidarity amongst different communities.

⁷² David Brower and Paul R. Ehrlich, “The Population Bomb”; See also Thomas Malthus, “An Essay on the Principle of Population,” <http://www.esp.org/books/malthus/population/malthus.pdf>

⁷³ “Wilderness and Wildlife,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. IV, No. IV, March 20, 1984; “The Human Horde,” *Earth First! Journal*, March 21, 1989, Vol., IX, No. IV

⁷⁴ “What A Wonderful Famine,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VI, No. VI, June 21, 1986; “Population and AIDS,” *Earth First! Journal*, May 1987.

Alliances with Indigenous Peoples

Meanwhile, even as some Earth First!ers celebrated the death and criminalization of “illegal aliens”, they also celebrated collaboration with indigenous peoples in order to save land. Articles such as “SOUTH MORESSY: Native Struggle to Save Land of Identity,” “The Gourd of Ashes,” “BC Government Rejects Natives’ Forest Plans,” and “Indian-Environmental Alliance Stop Exxon Mine” all highlight EF!’s valuing of shared struggle with indigenous people, even within an era of racist rhetoric.⁷⁵ Environmentalists could offer their own skill-sets and ideals in working with indigenous peoples to protect the environment, while indigenous peoples could also offer their own skills, ideals, and rights in order to protect the Earth, their homelands, and their culture. The power of this coalition has often been valued and glorified by environmentalists and has often been successful.⁷⁶

In spite of this positive coalition building, in the first decade of Earth First!, radical environmentalists’ excitement in working with Native American peoples came secondary to their desire to “conserve” the environment—that is, that the alliances would only be respected as far as the environmental cause was promoted. In Earth First! and other predominantly white environmental

⁷⁵ “SOUTH MORESSY: Native Struggle to Save Land of Identity” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VI, No. III, February 2, 1986; “The Gourd of Ashes” and “BC Government Rejects Natives’ Forest Plans,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VI, No. IV, March, 20, 1986; “Indian-Environmental Alliance Stop Exxon Mine,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VII, No. III, Feb 2, 1987.

⁷⁶ The glorification of Native American peoples (and Native-Environmental alliance) is problematic in itself, and is outlined well in *Transcending the Debate Over the Ecologically Noble Indian: Indigenous Peoples and Environmentalism*.

organization, it was important that the Euro-American conception of Earth came first. If the white conception of the environmental conservation became secondary to the rights of indigenous people, for example, influential thinkers such as Foreman and Abbey would have likely protested the rights or sovereignty of indigenous peoples.⁷⁷ Foreman outlines this view in “Whither Earth First!?...” writing that that Earth First!ers should value “an unwillingness to set any ethnic, class, or political group of humans on a pedestal and make them immune from questioning.”⁷⁸ The idea that no group of humans should have “special” rights has the potential to erase the rights and history of Native American peoples, and falls in line with the popular environmentalist conception of wilderness as “American” and “our home,” rather than the colonized land of indigenous people that have faced and survived genocide in its many forms.⁷⁹ In the glorification of Native-Environmentalism alliances, Earth First!ers at once marginalize claims to indigenous sovereignty, while also employing those claims of sovereignty in defense of the Earth. Therefore, the rights of indigenous peoples were only respected as far as they could be used towards the protection of the Earth, but not necessarily for the well being of indigenous people themselves.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Nadasdy, *Transcending the Debate Over the Ecologically Noble Indian*, 293.

⁷⁸ Dave Foreman, “Whither Earth First!?...” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VIII, No. I, November 1, 1987.

⁷⁹ For more, see Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*

⁸⁰ Nadasdy, *Transcending the Debate of the Ecologically Noble Savage*.

Immigrants

Early Earth First!ers respected the rights of indigenous people insofar as it promoted the conservation of the Earth; simultaneously, they did not respect the right of migration of some indigenous peoples, specifically those south of the border, to migrate across an artificial border. One might view this as an apparent contradiction in EF!'s values and moral framework; however, the contradiction of logic makes sense when "illegal immigrants" are viewed as catastrophic to the environmental heritage of "Americans," whereas Native Americans are perceived as more connected to the land, as well as having rights that can potentially protect the land.⁸¹ If Earth First!ers become, in the words of Foreman "the wilderness defending itself," then they erase their role as migrant and colonizer, and can thus assert their right to defend the land on equal footing with indigenous peoples and *before* the rights of indigenous people that decide to migrate across the U.S.-Mexico border.⁸² Thus, the conceptions of Earth as the first priority, and of wilderness defense is self-defense, can be framed in order to support colonial notions of colonizers' belonging, "immigrants" stealing their resources, and other indigenous peoples being valued only insofar as they can be utilized to support the environmentalist conception of "conservation." This denial of the rights of immigrants and indigenous peoples highlights a dangerous trend in Earth First!, which is that of perceiving no linked fate between these communities and environmentalist struggles, or with environmentalists themselves. By

⁸¹ Abbey, "Immigration and Liberal Tabboos"

⁸² Dave Foreman, "Reinhabitation, Biocentrism, and Self-Defense," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VII, No. VII, August 1, 1987.

criminalizing or dismissing these communities, the Earth First! community imagined itself as different from these communities; however, as experience would show, Earth First! and the radical environmentalist community would later come under attack by same forces of repression that it was validating in its dismissal of immigrant communities.

These trends were not wholly accepted within Earth First!, even though some of them carried on within the *Journal* for a considerable time. As one contributor, Ron Gould, responded:

“THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO DESERVE TO DIE OF AIDS ARE RICH
PIG SCUM LIKE YERSELVES NOT POOR THIRD WORLD PEOPLES
WHO THREATEN YOUR POMPOUS AMERIKKAN WAY OF LIFE.
ALSO YOU ARE NO ORIGINAL INHABITANT OF THIS LAND... ONLY
THE INDIANS ARE AND MEXICANS AND INDIANS. SO FUCK OFF
RAMBO ABBEY. YOU ARE IN FOR A HARD TIME NOW
EVERYWHERE!!!”⁸³

In the same issue, an article called “Alien Nation” confronted the writings of Stoddard and Abbey. It was at this time that Foreman’s views were threatened and he felt the need to outline the parameters of EF! in “Whither Earth First!?...”, as noted previously.⁸⁴ These parameters are explicit in stating the policy of EF! as one that understands overpopulation as a cause for environmental devastation, and “an unwillingness to set any ethnic, class, or political group of humans on a pedestal and make them immune from questioning.” Together, these Earth First!

⁸³ Ron Gould, “Nazi Amerika First,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VIII, No. I, November 1, 1987.

⁸⁴ Dave Foreman, “Whither Earth First!...?” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VIII, No. I, November 1, 1987.

“commitments” establish basis through which the rights of others are often diminished, and any sense of solidarity or shared fate, discarded.

Timber Workers

As mentioned earlier, another complicated relationship also existed between Earth First!ers and loggers.⁸⁵ Earth First!ers interacted with loggers on a consistent basis due to their forest defense activism, and it was easy to portray Earth First!ers and loggers as bitter enemies—with one community seeking to make a living of logging, and the other community concerned with the health of the planet, local ecosystems, and people due to deforestation. To further complicate this issue, Earth First!, though never claiming responsibility for tree-spiking, dedicated a regular column in the *Earth First! Journal* to give instruction on different methods for the act of sabotage. Although the target of tree-spiking was not to harm loggers but to keep trees standing by discouraging timber sale and harming profits, loggers remained at the highest risk of being harmed by the actions. For some, particularly Paul Watson, loggers were an expendable population when it came to defending the forest—“loggers are not the friends of trees”.⁸⁶

In spite of this seemingly incommensurable conflict amongst loggers and

⁸⁵ See Jeffrey Shantz, “The Feminization of Earth First!” (2002), and Jeffrey Shantz, ‘Beyond productivism: syndicalism and ecology’ *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* Vol. 25, 1999, pp.20-23; See also Ingalsbee, “Alliances with WoodWorkers,” in “Earth First!,” 359.

⁸⁶ Captain Paul Watson, “In Defense of Spiking,” *Earth First! Journal* Vol. XV, No. III, February 2, 1995, 10.

protesters, Judi Bari had a different conception of the situation: “The timber companies treat the loggers and millworkers the same way they treat the forests—as objects to exploit for maximum profit.”⁸⁷ With the recognition that “the interests of the timber bosses would be served if environmentalists and workers continued to view each other as the enemy,” Bari began doing labor organizing amongst loggers, whose community was being obliterated by over-logging and technological advancement in the mills, both of which cost hundreds of timber workers their jobs.⁸⁸ As an act of unity during a 1990 conference, Bari and other Earth First!ers even denounced tree-spiking, for the safety of timber workers; however, monkeywrenching (a.k.a., sabotage) was encouraged amongst timber workers in order to disrupt logging and growing unemployment. Rather than encouraging an atmosphere of conflict, Bari and ‘Redwood Summer’ organizers attempted to create a feeling of shared fate amongst the timber workers and the forests that were being logged, thus creating a common goal of sustainable harvest for both EF!ers, timber communities, and the Earth.⁸⁹

This relationship was obviously complex, and was brought deeper into question when, in 1998, David Chain was killed by a tree felled by a logger while trying to disrupt logging operations. Originally, Earth First! charged the MAXXAM CEO, Charles Hurwitz with the guilt of murder: “David Chain didn’t die, he was

⁸⁷ “Two Thousand Rally at Fort Bragg,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. X, No VIII, August 1, 1990, 7.

⁸⁸ Judi Bari, “Timber Wars,” 1994:15-7; Shantz, “The Feminization of Earth First!” 2002: 110, 111.

⁸⁹ For more, see Bari 1994: Timber Wars

killed, and the person who did it has a name and address: Charles Hurwitz.”⁹⁰

However, it later became apparent that the EF! community sought some sort of redress for the incident, and when neither the logger nor company was not charged with any crime, one contributor wrote that:

“The video and eyewitness statements prove that A.E. Ammons knew what he was doing. He threatened to drop a tree in their direction and then did so. That’s murder,” and that the decision “send[s] out the message that it’s okay to hurt, brutalize, and kill EF!ers and get away with it.”⁹¹

This conflict highlights a complex relationship between radical environmentalists, timber workers, extractive industry, and the government. Through the perspective of Earth First!, each of these groups becomes guilty at different moments— from the government’s inadequate monitoring of timber sales, to charges of guilt at the CEO, to charges of guilt against the timber worker, and back to the government again for allowing violence to occur against environmental activists.

Justifications for Criminalization of “Other” Communities

It was not only immigrants, indigenous peoples, and loggers who were viewed as expendable by the promoters of “population control,” in Earth First!, but also “criminals.” Stoddard, who celebrated the proliferation of AIDS and increased border security, also promoted the use of incarceration of “criminal, psychotic, and

⁹⁰ “Breaking the Promise of Civil Disobedience,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 1, Nov-Dec 1998, 2; see also “Nature and Politics,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 1, Nov-Dec 1998, 18.

⁹¹ “No Charges in Gypsy’s Death,” Vol. 19, No. 3, February-March, 1999, 11.

derelict individuals,” and arguing that we should “stop holding retrials and appeals *ad infinite* for criminals in our bizarre, convoluted, and wasteful legal system designed primarily for full employment of unconscionable and lecherous lawyers and judges.”⁹² Although Stoddard represented a sensational fringe, the notion that EF!ers are *not* criminals, and that they should be distinguished from criminals, has remained present within the Earth First! movement for some time.

Foreman expresses this sentiment in a much for tactful way than Stoddard, reasoning that “if our ethical disobedience becomes unfocused, untargeted, and ethically ambiguous, then we appear as hooligans and common criminals,” and in the article “Monkeywrenchers’ Guide to Lawyers and the Law,” he states that

“The following is written for *monkeywrenchers*— those who conscientiously and nonviolently engage in the destruction of property for an ecological purpose. If you’re merely a thoughtless vandal out for kicks, or if you’re just working out a grudge, this essay is not for you. You deserve your punishment.”⁹³

Foreman’s statements demonstrate the peculiar position of EF! and radical environmental communities as *legally* criminal but *morally* righteous, thus requiring the need to distinguish their criminality from that of other, “real” criminals— whether they be “executives, [politicians, and bureaucrats],” or the people who are actually criminalized and incarcerated on a large scale. Foreman claims that these criminals who are imagined as “other,” deserve what the state gives them. While the need to distinguish criminalized radical environmentalists from other criminalized people is, perhaps, a political necessity, I argue that

⁹² “Wilderness and Wildlife,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. IV, No. IV, March 20, 1984.

⁹³ Dave Foreman, “Monkeywrenchers’ Guide to Lawyers and the Law,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol., IX, No. VI, June 21, 1989.

environmentalists would have been better prepared to deal with the criminal justice system if they recognized their shared fate with these other communities.⁹⁴

Distinguishing EF! from Common Criminals

Even as EF!ers differentiate themselves from “common criminals” and “thoughtless vandals,” there is also a rhetoric about the *necessity* to break the law from the outset of the movement: “When freedom is outlawed, only outlaws will be free.”⁹⁵ This sense of necessity demonstrates recognition of criminalization and repression, and questions the moral authority of the law and state, but particularly focuses on activist communities. Even though knowledge and conversations about criminalization has hardly been lacking in Earth First!, early analysis of such trends did not give much respect or credence to other targeted communities besides activist communities.

For example, with the growing War on Drugs, EF!ers focus in on themselves as the victims of the legislation, whereas other potential victims are forgotten or denounced.⁹⁶ When increased funding from the Drug War provided the Forest Service “the authority to hire 500 special agents,” EF!ers bemoaned their fate, but did not challenge the new “drug bill” on a deeper level. They simply emphasized

⁹⁴ For more on civil disobedience and “just” laws versus “unjust” laws, see Martin Luther King, “A Letter from Birmingham Jail.” 1963.

<http://www.uscrossier.org/pullias/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/king.pdf>. See also, Henry David Thoreau, “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience,” 1849. <http://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Thoreau/Civil%20Disobedience.pdf>.

⁹⁵ *EF! Newsletter*, Vol. II, No. II, December 21, 1981

⁹⁶ “DEA and Freddies Poison Opposition,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VI, No. IV, March 20, 1986, 14.

the importance of not getting caught.⁹⁷ Even in an article titled “Of the ‘War On Drugs’ and Tree Spiking,” the author recognized that the War on Drugs has “apparently sacrificed some of our most basic civil liberties,” but fails to analyze the War on Drugs as a tool to criminalize thousands of people and which has thus enabled the criminalization of radical environmentalist struggle and other social movements, specifically through the anti-tree spiking rider, but also more generally as a tool of social control on a larger scale.⁹⁸

Rather than express solidarity with the other victims of criminalizing drug policies, or to see their fates as connected, the author, in a self-congratulatory manner, claims that “[the anti-tree spiking rider] shows we are actually having some effect on the Industrial state.” Before the days of intense repression and criminalization of the radical environmentalist movement, links between different communities failed to be made; however, this soon changed as ideals of solidarity become more important for the survival and success of the radical environmental movement.

VI. Conceptions of Solidarity and Shared Fate

Educational Experience of Arrest and Incarceration

As environmentalists struggled to distinguish themselves from “other” criminals, their experience of being viewed and treated as criminals by law

⁹⁷ “Freddie Pot Cops Danger to Monkeywrenchers,” *Earth First! Journal*, Dec. 21, 1986.

⁹⁸ Alexander Berkman, *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. IX, No. IV, March 21, 1989; See Michael Parenti, *Lockdown America*; see also Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*.

enforcement and businesses forced them into the same political and physical spaces as those “other” criminalized communities. The experience of being arrested often validates one’s commitment to the environmental movement, but it also connects people to the reality of the criminal justice system— creating the potential for a greater understanding of experiences of criminalized people. Thus, for the radical environmental movement, criminalization and incarceration become processes that build a sense of belonging and solidarity within the community, and also with other communities, both activist and non-activist.⁹⁹ One important way this happens is through the movement’s direct contact with the criminal justice system as well as direct contact with other jailed or incarcerated people. Particularly, it is the first-hand experiences of activists that create lasting impressions for the jailed activists and later, through them, their community.¹⁰⁰

In 1986, one contributor wrote of the importance of direct action as an educational tool— not only for the

“press, and the public, and courts and corrections systems; but perhaps most importantly they educate the blockader in skills s/he would not namely acquire— not just on the specific issue, but in dealing with “peace” officers, courts, and jails [...] An understanding of the ‘justice’ and ‘corrections’ systems is something few average folk have the opportunity to gain.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Jim Flynn, “Operation Backfire Backfires on FBI,” *Earth First! Journal*, May-June 2006, 9.

¹⁰⁰ For another example, see the case of Tim DeChristopher, “Released from Prison, Climate Activist on Civil Disobedience & Building Movements.” *Democracy Now!*. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Jan. 2014.

<http://www.democracynow.org/2013/5/17/released_from_prison_climate_activist_tim>

¹⁰¹ *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VI, No. III, February 2, 1986.

Similarly, another contributor writes of his disenchantment with law enforcement due to intimate experience with the police: “I’ve lost my childish idea that police are perpetrators of good.”¹⁰² This experience of unequal treatment under the law is frequent throughout the movement, and an understanding of this treatment becomes part of the culture of the movement, perhaps taking a part in shifting the movement towards a more anarchist ideology.¹⁰³ The above-noted contributors demonstrate that even early on in the radical environmental movement, civil disobedience opened doors into whole new worlds of experience that “average folk”— probably referring to people of white, middle-class status— do not have access to.¹⁰⁴

Another EF! activist, Peg Millet, who was one of the “Arizona 4” that were arrested in an FBI sting operation in the late 80s, wrote of her experience of the attempted action, her friend being exposed as *agent provocateur*, and her incarceration as

“...very important to go through. It was a major educational experience that I could not have gotten any other way! I call it the ball peen hammer method of enlightenment. It sure isn’t a very pleasant method, but it was a good educational experience for me.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² “Blockaders Roughed Up in Middle Santiam,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. IV, No. VIII, August 1st, 1984

¹⁰³ “Redwood Summer Activists Harassed by Police,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. X, No. VIII, August 1, 1990; “Adirondroack Vigilantes Assault EF!ers,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XI, No. VIII, September 22, 1990.

¹⁰⁴ See section “Radical Environmentalists, Race, and Political Space.”

¹⁰⁵ “Interview with Peg Millet,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XVI, No. VII, September 21, 1996, 15.

In the case of Peg, who was attempting sabotage and did not expect to be arrested, the transformation of her devastating experience into an educational one allows her to learn and move on from that experience, as well as to continue to inspire and teach others in the Earth First! movement. Like others viewing governmental repression as a sign of the movement's success, Millet shifts a negative experience into a positive to reinvigorate the radical environmental community.

Along with the personal education of being caught up in the criminal justice system, there is also the educational experience of interacting with other people who are caught up within the system. Brian Heath writes of his experience in prison that "the other inmates do not ask, '[what do you expect to accomplish, anyway?]' They know the system needs changing."¹⁰⁶ The author implies that his fellow inmates, already experiencing the inhumanity of the criminal justice system, do not need an explanation for why someone would want to challenge laws and morality. The contributor understands the experience of arrest and jailing as a form of political education, this time by recognizing that the people stuck within the criminal justice system are likely already knowledgeable about the lack of fulfillment of "justice" in the courts and, perhaps, in other systems of domination like environmental destruction.¹⁰⁷ This recognition of other peoples' shared

¹⁰⁶ Brian Heath, "What Do You Expect to Accomplish, Anyway?," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. V, No. I, November 1, 1984.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Hames-Garcia argues that this is not inherent; rather, "through active struggle against injustice and struggle for freedom and humanity, they are thrust into a location that afford them the opportunity to assess and evaluate the

knowledge and experience happens elsewhere within the movement, particularly in regard to FBI and Grand Jury harassment. It is through these trials and tribulations that Earth First! recognizes its shared fate with other social movements and groups, such as the Black Panther Party, the Wobblies, and the Civil Rights Movement, as well as with non-activists.¹⁰⁸

In line with the experience of this 1984 Earth First! activist, several interviewees told of developing a sense of solidarity with their jail-mates. Like Heath, one interviewee, “Claire,” had a sense that “it was like we (people in jail) were united against these evil people (jailers) who were forcing us here.” Another activist, Swift, shared a similar story of being held captive in a jail for women:

“There is something that happens on the women’s side of the jail that is actually really beautiful. I’ve been to jail since that happened and people are really receptive to noticing [when] someone is coming and [is] totally distraught. Someone will come over and talk to you, which is really nice...”

Jail becomes a place of shared space and shared fate where activists and non-activists share a common oppressor— “these evil people who were forcing us here”— thus creating a common bond through which to support one another.

Swift went on to describe that:

“Just from experiencing, talking to people who I was in jail with, *I thought that there is no way I’m never going back to jail*, because somehow I am going to get caught up again, because the system is not actually righteous. Justice is this illusion, and people get caught up. And that is a really real term to me now. It’s not fair. It’s in no way fair.” (Emphasis added)

meanings and possibilities of ethical concepts like justice and freedom.” *Fugitive Thought*, page XLIV; For more, see page 88.

See also Angela Y. Davis, *If They Come in the Morning*.

For Swift, the experience of jail was extremely different than for most North American environmental activists, who are usually arrested and released within the same day. Swift was held in jail for 23 days in the notorious Smith County, whose history of corruption is highlighted in the book Smith County Justice.¹⁰⁹ The experience left her with the sense that *she will* be going to jail again someday, regardless of whether or not it is because of her activism, but simply because the system is “not fair.” This sense of fairness is no longer just connected to her activism, but in her sense of survival as a citizen in the United States, where incarceration, she finds, does not correspond with justice. This sense of inevitability comes not just from her individual experience within jail but, more importantly, from her shared experience with other people that were also in jail. Her sense of shared fate with those she was jailed with does not end after she is released, but is carried from there on. In the experiences of her jailmates, who are jailed for non-political acts, she sees a risk of incarceration that she cannot simply separate herself from.

Jeff Luers, who was originally sentenced to 23 years for the arson of an SUV dealership in Eugene, Oregon, also developed a sense of shared fate with fellow incarcerated people. Like other interviewees shared, what connected Jeff with fellow inmates was the perception of a shared fate and oppressor. “I think the biggest (connection) is one of being a number. I guess what I mean when I say that

¹⁰⁹ David Elsworth, *Smith County Justice*, http://wikileaks.org/wiki/Smith_County_Justice

is that prison, jail, the court system, it's becoming an industry. People are no longer processed as people." He continues,

"...If the system of justice is setup so that the object is to convict people— not find the truth, not find out what actually happened, but to simply put people into a cage where other people can make money off of that industry— you have a broken system."

As Jeff describes his relationship with other inmates as "one of being a number," he does not implicate other incarcerated people in order to validate his own position within prison; rather, he charges the "broken system" as one of dehumanization.

Jeff also echoes Swift's claim that the criminal justice system is not a righteous purveyor of justice, but a dehumanizing process that one gets caught up in.

When I asked "Sam," involved with the Cascadia Forest Defenders and who has been arrested twice while engaging in environmental activism, about his knowledge of the criminal justice system before and after being arrested, he responded that,

"It was a pretty dichotomous change. I didn't think about it at all prior to being engaged in civil disobedience and environmental work and those were turning points for me to start thinking about it, because understanding how it affected me made me look a little more closely and now I try to look more consistently at how the justice system affects other people."

Even though "Sam" had prior knowledge about the criminal justice system and political tools like the War on Drugs later in the interview, it was not until he was having direct and personal experiences with the criminal justice system that he began to "look more consistently" at it, and to feel connected with other people that find themselves within the system. "Ross," a former action coordinator for Greenpeace, again shared the importance of firsthand experience: "You always

hear about it, you always hear about the stats, [...] but it is totally different to see it. It's one thing to be in there, but also to see how people are treated." After a visit with an incarcerated activist-friend, one *EF!* contributor echoed this experience of first-hand experience, admitting that they came to recognize inmates as "regular people" and that the experience "made me really think about the prison system."¹¹⁰

These intimate experiences with the criminal justice system give radical environmentalists a somewhat unique perspective on the system, considering the social class of most environmental activists. It is through these personal experiences that statistics, stories, and "cultural mores" become viscerally real.

Some of the people I interviewed had been previously educated about incarceration, partly because that had become part of the culture of the moment in the later 1990s and 2000s; however, it is through personal experience that a culture of understanding and critique of the criminal justice system within the radical environmental movement is renewed. Therefore, as individuals in the radical environmental community become personally affected by the criminal justice system and experience shared space with others inside jail/prison, their education becomes part of the cultural understanding of the entire movement, and thus a bridge for solidarity with criminalized communities as the individuals of those diverse communities find themselves occupying the same space.

¹¹⁰ "Behind the Barbed Wire with Sherman Austin," *Earth First! Journal*, May-June, 2004

Education of the Wider Movement

The “dichotomous change” that Sam experienced as a result of his civil disobedience seems to be typical of those within the radical environmental community. Certainly, there is some political education happening prior to arrest that would prepare protesters for their experience in jail, but it appears that personal experience is the most effective way to be educated about the criminal justice system. On the other hand, not every environmentalist is going out and getting arrested. These non-arrest-role individuals still gain an effective political education of the criminal justice system because of its direct effect on their community and friends. As Will Potter pointed out, consciousness about incarceration and criminalization is “not necessarily personal,” but can come through supporting others in their community. Thus, while radical environmentalists have the direct educational experience of arrest and jailing/incarceration, their community, activist and non-activist, will be present throughout the processes, both judicial and emotional, of the criminal justice system. These experiences become educational for the entire radical environmental community through the *Earth First Journal!*, as subscribers to the *Journal* are also receiving a political education through the experience of their peers, rather than an abstract “other.” This could also be extended to a third-degree of education, wherein people who can’t get arrested because of their jobs or families, stay connected to the radical environmental community and educate their peers at work about environmental destruction as well as incarceration.

Conversations about repression and criminalization happened early within Earth First!, with attention being called to repressive legislation such as Reagan's SBS 1630 as early as 1981, Earth First!'s second year of existence and prior to any protest-related arrests.¹¹¹ Writers speak of the "repressive 80s", and connections to other civil disobedience and direct action movements are frequently made.¹¹² Moral necessity and duty is extensively discussed, and most important for the growth of solidarity in the environmental movement, is the educational experiences of being jailed and/or incarcerated for their activism. As one contributor stated: "Please remember the Arizona Five and Redwood Summer. Learn from those individuals and experiences..."¹¹³

Somewhat proactively, the *Earth First! Journal* kept the radical environmentalist community educated about potentially dangerous bills and laws that would criminalize or endanger people, especially "monkeywrenchers" and tree-spikers.¹¹⁴ Even though this knowledge was provided exclusively for the use of radical environmentalists and not "thoughtless vandals", it did educate environmentalists on deeper trends of criminalization affecting other

¹¹¹ *EF! Newsletter*, Vol. II, Issue II, December 21, 1981

¹¹² "Crawdads in the Summer," *EF! Newsletter*, Vol. II, Issue II, December 21, 1981, 2; "Around the Campfire," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. IV, No. VIII, August 1st, 1984.

¹¹³ Katuah EF!, "Radical Enviro in the South Targeted by FBI," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XVI, No. VII, September 21, 1996, 5.

¹¹⁴ "Freddie Pot Cops Danger to Monkeywrenchers," *Earth First! Journal*, December 21, 1986, 30; "DEA and Freddie's Poison Opposition," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VI, No. VII, November 1, 1986, 14; "Dear Ned," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. X, No. V June 21, 1990, 32; "Anti-Spiking Legislation On The Horizon," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VIII, No. IV, March 20, 1988, 29.

communities.¹¹⁵ One article, written in 1988, described one activist's arrest as

“...[part of a] growing threat to civil liberties in this country, as the criminal justice system cracks down on non-violent protesters and uses [...various techniques] to restrict activists and to attempt to quell the protests by discouraging others.”¹¹⁶

Even in the earlier days of the movement, radical environmentalists perceived themselves to be targeted by the criminal justice system, sparking awareness and some preparation for such tactics of repression. This knowledge only grew along with the movements repression, with such articles as “The Criminalization of Ecology,” “Federal Sentencing: You May Be Headed Up Shit Creek Without a Paddle,” amongst others.¹¹⁷ Amidst this education, Foreman warned Earth First!ers to be “wary of the tarbaby of the legal system; avoid being worked into considering it your primary focus. (If your emphasis really is injustice instead of wilderness preservations that is fine. Such activists are needed.)”¹¹⁸ His warning highlights the movement's growing political education—honoring that education,

¹¹⁵ Dave Foreman, “Monkeywrenchers Guide to Lawyers and the Law,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol., IX, No. VI, June 21, 1989.

¹¹⁶ “Roselle Gets 4 Month Sentence,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VIII, No. IV, March 20, 1988.

¹¹⁷ “The Criminalization of Ecology,” *Earth First! Journal*, August-September, 2001, 6; “Federal Sentencing: You May Be Headed Up Shit Creek Without a Paddle,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 2, December-January, 1999; James A Barnes and Craig Beneville, “ECOTERRORISM on Capitol Hill,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 7, August-September, 1998, 1; “BLACK & GREEN,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XVI, No. VIII,” November 1, 1996; Warcry, “Are You a Patriot or a Terrorist? Intensifying Domestic Repression,” *Earth First! Journal*, November-December 2001, 6; “Homeland Security,” *Earth First! Journal*, November-December 2002, 9; “Patriot II: Are You a Terrorist?,” *Earth First! Journal*, May-June 2003; “The Criminalization of Ecology,” *Earth First! Journal*, August-September, 2001, 21.

¹¹⁸ Dave Foreman, “The Perils of Illegality,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. X, No. I, November 1, 1989, 25.

but also attempting to keep the movement focused on ecological goals, as well as imagining prison movements as “other.”

While the 1980s gave some sense of preparation and warning about the threat of the criminal justice system for the radical environmental movement, that threat became a reality in a much deeper way than could have been expected. In the 1990s and 2000s, the era known as the “Green Scare,” it became not only wise but also necessary for many radical environmental activists to be familiar with their rights in regards to Grand Jury indictments and the FBI, as the government sought out arsonists and monkeywrenchers by interrogating entire communities of people. While there were articles such as “EF! and the FBI—A Strained Relationship” numerous present throughout the journal in the 1990s, and environmentalists responded by contesting charges of criminality and throwing them back at the United States government, they also had to prepare for this harassment.¹¹⁹ This preparation happened in two main ways— education about rights and “security culture,” as well as community building.

Community building, and creating a sense of shared fate within the radical environmental movement was particularly important for the survival, not just of targeted individuals, but of the entire movement. One contributor wrote in 1994 that “the threat of the subpoena is everywhere. We have all either been subpoenaed or know someone who has,” giving a sense of the widespread threat of

¹¹⁹ “EF! and the FBI--A Strained Relationship,” Vol. XI, No II, December 21, 1990, 32; See also section “Charges of Criminality Against US Entities”

repression in the radical environmental community.¹²⁰ In “FBI ALERT: Low-down on the Low Life: FBI Harassment of Activists Continue,” another contributor warns that “we really need to start dealing with reality, meaning that this sort of thing is going to occur more frequently. We need to begin to make security and the FBI a part of our everyday routine so nobody is caught off-guard.”¹²¹ In the article “Grand Jury Convened in Portland,” the author writes that “solidarity is important now more than ever,” and that “we all need to think about it, and make a conscious choice and be prepared for the travesty called the U.S. judicial system.”¹²² The author challenges environmentalists to be ready to resist grand juries, and thus, to be ready and willing for incarceration. In all of the mentioned articles, the rhetoric of solidarity and shared fate amongst the environmental community is held as the most necessary ideal for the survival of the movement, not just the individual. There is a sense of truly collective endeavor as the era known as the “Green Scare” affected the entire radical environmentalist community, with a great spoken commitment to be unwavering in the face of repression.¹²³ As grand juries were convened around the country, and across several years, similar tactics and rhetoric

¹²⁰ “The Grand Jury Dilemma,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XIV, No. VII, August 1, 1994, 3.

¹²¹ Deb Stout, “FBI ALERT: Low-down on the Low Life: FBI Harassment of Activists Continue,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XII, No. VII, August 1, 1992, 7.

¹²² “Grand Jury Convened in Portland,” *Earth First! Journal* Vol. XIV, No. VI, June 21, 1994, 7.

¹²³ “Six Arrested on Eco-Terrorism Charges,” *Earth First! Journal*, January-February 2006, 23; “The Times That Try Our Souls,” January-February 2006, 2; “An Injury to One Is An Injury To All,” *Earth First! Journal*, March-April 2006.

of “Know Your Rights” and solidarity used by the radical environmentalist community.¹²⁴

Community building and solidarity remained important once activists were already incarcerated. While previous articles had been written about Leonard Peltier’s incarceration, as well as the incarceration of the MOVE family, it was not until the late 1990s that regular listings of “political prisoner” addresses appeared in the *Journal*, and have since been a consistent presence in the *Earth First! Journal*.¹²⁵ With the growing list of the movement’s own political prisoners, they also came to include prisoners from other social movements such as MOVE, AIM, BPP, BLA, Anti-Nuclear (particularly, Prince of Peace Plowshares), and Animal Liberation. This inclusion of other political prisoners was another crucial step for the education and growth of the movement towards a politic of solidarity. As Sam explained, by including different movements alongside one another, the movement recognizes “environmental[ist] prisoners as one category of political prisoner,” thus providing space to recognize their shared fate. By continuing to support incarcerated people from their own community, radical environmentalists gained more lessons and connections that would connect them to other communities.

¹²⁴ “California Activists Fight Government Harassment: Grand Jury or Grand Inquisition?” *Earth First! Journal*, September-October, 2005, 35; “The Times That Try Our Souls,” January-February, 2006, 2; “Finding Meaning In The Great Environmental Inquisition,” March-April 2006, 11.

¹²⁵ Jim Vanderall and Eric Holle, “American GULAG: Leonard Peltier,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VII, No. III, February 2, 1987; “BLACK & GREEN,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XVI, No. VIIINovember 1, 1996; “Writing Letters of Support to Prisoners,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XVIII, No. III, February-March, 1998; “Political Prisoner Listings,” and “In and Outs of Prisoner Support,” *Earth First! Journal*, December-January, 2002.

Another way that activists prepared themselves for repression, besides building solidarity and commitment with one another and other movements, was by spreading the legal knowledge and strategy necessary to deal with law enforcement and courts. In one article about 'Copwatching,' a tactic used to hold police officers accountable, the contributor writes: "Know Your Rights. Know Your Enemy."¹²⁶ These claims are outlined in greater detail over time, with calls from readers and writers to "devote a page every issue to security culture so that we can minimize the impacts of grand juries."¹²⁷ This call for more production of educational literature on the law and how to stay out of trouble is not wholeheartedly granted, but the call does reflect a growing need, as well as presence, of educational articles on knowing one's rights, FBI harassment and tactics, and dealing with grand juries.¹²⁸

The next section will focus on the radical environmental movements' broadening analysis of repression, oppression, and the criminal justice system. As previously mentioned, Earth First!ers gained some inspiration for direct action and civil disobedience from other social change movements. Lessons from these movements continued to be necessary, the radical environmentalist community would find out, especially as political repression came to be felt first-hand. Through the experience of incarceration and shared fate with other prisoners,

¹²⁶ "COPWATCH," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XVII, No. III, November-December, 1997.

¹²⁷ "The Four Laws of Revolutionary Ecology," *Earth First! Journal*, March-April 2001, Vol. 21, No. 4, 14.

¹²⁸ Ramon, "Getting Arrested: A Citizen's Guide," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 1, November-December 2000, 30; "Common Sense Security," Vol. 21, No. 4, March-April 2001, 16; "Security Culture," *Earth First! Journal*, May-June 2003, 58; "Security Resources," *Earth First! Journal*, January-February, 2009, 19.

“political” or not, radical environmentalist and animal rights prisoners began to look deeper at the experiences of different communities.

Lessons from Other Social Change Movements

As the environmental movement came under attack, it became increasingly necessary for the movement to embrace a rhetoric and strategy of survival that was based in shared fate and in solidarity. Without the relationships and lessons that come from an understanding of the necessity of solidarity within social change movements, the radical environmental movement would have likely isolated itself—becoming less effective on all fronts. Furthermore, other social movements were the first communities through which Earth First!ers could understand and survive repressive criminalization, and through which Earth First!ers would make connections to larger trends of racism, colonialism, and criminalization that affected not just activists, but many other marginalized communities. This section will examine the growth of inter-movement solidarity in the radical environmental movement, particularly in the mid 1990s and 2000s, when the radical environmental movement was facing the most repression. Later, I will argue that the rhetoric of solidarity was eventually expanded through other social change movements to include a vast array of communities and issues that were not previously considered to be “environmental” issues.

As mentioned earlier, recent movements for social justice offered inspiration and a moral base for the actions of the Earth First! movement.¹²⁹ They also provided, perhaps more importantly, lessons for the radical environmental movement to survive by. In 1992, when Dave Foreman asks, “what is happening to [the Earth First!] movement?,” he recognizes that

“What’s happening to Earth First! right now is what happened to Martin Luther King in the late sixties before he was murdered. It’s what happened to the [Black Panther Party, The American Indian Movement, The Wobblies, Sacco and Vanzetti...] What is happening to us is not unique.”¹³⁰

Similarly, earlier articles about the political prisoner Leonard Peltier of the American Indian Movement gave radical environmentalists, who were just beginning to be introduced to governmental harassment on a deeper level, a notion of what was to come: “To Native Americans, such willingness of governments and multinational corporations to play “hardball” with dissenters come as no surprise.”¹³¹ This is also echoed in various writings of the Animal Liberation Front and Earth First! activist, Rod Coronado: “This (harassment of family, subpoenas, phone tapping, break-ins, arresting employees) may all sound a little unjust but when you are an indigenous person in the context of the last 500 years, you learn to expect it.”¹³² Thus, as many radical environmentalists come into

¹²⁹ See section “Establishing Moral Base”

¹³⁰ Dave Foreman, “What’s Happening to Our Movement?” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XII, No. VIII, September 1992, 31.

¹³¹ Jim Vanderwall and Eric Holle, “American GULAG: Leonard Peltier,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. VII, No. III, February 2, 1987.

¹³² Rod Coronado, “With The FBI On Our Backs,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XV No II, December 21, 1994, 18; also, Rod Coronado “FBI Targets ALF Activists,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XVII, No. VIII, September, 1992, 25.

deeper conflict with the United States government and particularly with the criminal justice system, they are not “unique;” rather, they situate themselves as part of Native Americans’ “500 years of resistance,” and carry on part of “venerable tradition” of civil disobedience—humbled by the knowledge that their experience is not a new phenomenon.¹³³

Many of these lessons had to do with general trends of rebellion and repression in the course of social change movements. To many in Earth First!, repression was even perceived a sign of success.¹³⁴ However, beyond generalities of the struggle, Earth First! experienced the very same tactics and laws that were used against other progressive social change movements. One example of this took place as EF! protested logging exports, when the state of Washington charged them with laws that were used to “persecute” the radical union Industrial Workers of the World— the 1919 Sabotage and Anarchy Law.¹³⁵ Along similar lines, Earth First! accused the Federal Bureau of Information of using COINTELPRO tactics, which were used against the Civil Rights Movement, Anti-War Movement, Black Power Movement, and American Indian Movement, among others. For example, after being the victim of a car-bombing, Judi Bari wrote that “The events surrounding the 1990 bombing can only be explained in the context of COINTELPRO, J. Edgar Hoover’s Counterintelligence Program to ‘disrupt, misdirect,

¹³³ “Earth First! and 500 years of Resistance,” *Earth First! Journal*, , Vol. XIII, No. I, November 2, 1992; “Radical Environmentalism: Carrying on a Venerable Tradition,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol X, No III, February 2, 1990,31; See section on “Radical Environmentalists in Prison”

¹³⁴ See page 28.

¹³⁵ Connie Firr, “EF!ers Revive 1919 Wobbly Laws,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol X, No III, February 2, 1990, 1.

isolate and neutralize' radical groups in the U.S."¹³⁶ In an article titled, "Grand Jury: The Feds Best Friend," the contributor writes that "[a]s activists, history has taught us one thing: the government is less interested in prosecuting crimes than hell-bent on disrupting and destroying potent social movement of change."¹³⁷ This person, "as an activist," shows the common understanding of the activist community in regards to repression, which is one based in the lessons of previous social change movements. Through these stories and connections, the radical environmental movement was able to develop a wider political analysis, and understand itself in relation to other social change movements. Eventually, this became a more mutual relationship, with environmental communities "[stepping] up" to support recent movements' political prisoners, as well as emphasizing the importance of building coalitions and "work in solidarity with oppressed peoples."¹³⁸

Lessons also came in the form of direct advice from influential people in other movements. This included a speaking tour with both Ramona Africa of the MOVE family/movement and Judi Bari of Earth First!, as well as writings from

¹³⁶ Judi Bari, "The Bombing Story," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XIV No III, Feb 2, 1994, 14; See also, Katuah EF! "Radical Enviros in the South Targeted by FBI," *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XVI, No VII, September 21, 1996, 5; Andy Caffrey, "A Commentary about the Luna Deal: Behind the Butterfly" *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 3, Feb-March 2000, 28; "Green Scare: Agents of Repression Wage War on the Radical Environmental Movement," *Earth First! Journal*, March April, 2006.

¹³⁷ "Grand Jury: The Feds Best Friend," *Earth First! Journal*, June-July 1997, 22.

¹³⁸ "Notes on Liberation," *Earth First! Journal*, February 2011, 49; Jim Flynn, "1995 EF! Activist Confluence" *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XV, No IV., March 21, 1995.

American Indian Movement prisoner, Leonard Peltier.¹³⁹ Both of these individuals offered advice on how to relate to other movements, and highlighted the importance of shared struggle. Peltier encouraged the movement not to “separate issues of environmental degradation from the oppression of people... All these things, the degradation of Earth, the genocide of indigenous peoples, slavery and racism are intimately connected,” while Ramona also reminded the movement that “People are not being asked to abandon the particular front (animal, earth, or human) they are dealing with.”¹⁴⁰ Thus, as these inter-movement relationships deepened and became more personal, and with the recognition of many shared values and goals, Earth First! also had to struggle with the complexities of where to put its focus. People from other movements offered their advice, but Earth First!’s actions would be the realization of those lessons.

Earth First! learned many lessons of repression and survival through intimate experience as well as from learning from other social change movements. As the movement progressed, though, it was not enough to learn from other movements, but to also extend the Earth First! movement’s solidarity *to* other movements. This meant that Earth First! could not only learn about and pay lip-service to other social movements, but also had to recognize these movements’ values as important and valid. In the case of Earth First!, this becomes important as the EF! movement began to see human liberation as integral to environmental

¹³⁹ “The Revolution is Here!: Interview with Ramona Africa,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 6, June-July 1998, 4 ; “Voice from the Inside: an Interview with Leonard Peltier” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 2, Dec-Jan 2001, 3.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

protection. Thus, it seems that it was a combination of learning the values of other social change movements, as well as having intimate experiences with repression, that Earth First! began to question trends such as criminalization, incarceration, and anti-immigration on a deeper level— questioning their devastating effects on both the environment and the people.

Solidarity Beyond Activist Communities:

New Politics of Environmental Justice and Anti-Racism

“Years ago, I recognized my kinship with all living things, and I made up my mind: That I was not one better than the meanest on Earth. I said then as I say now that while there is a lower class, I am in it. While there is a criminal element, I am of it. While there is a soul in prison, I am not free.”¹⁴¹

Eventually, the Earth First! movement could not simply express solidarity with other social movements’ political prisoners, but had to deepen that sense of solidarity by recognizing the struggles and analyses of different social movements. This would come to mean a deeper recognition of racism, colonization, and other forms of oppression that groups such as the Black Panther Party of Self-Defense and the American Indian Movement struggled against, as well as making their analyses part of Earth First!’s political analyses. Finally, Earth First! had to question its own history of racism and sexism, and to strive toward creating alternative ways of resolving conflict outside of the criminal justice system.

By 2000, the Earth First! movement had undergone drastic changes since the turbulent year of 1990, when many “old-guard” Earth First!ers, including Dave

¹⁴¹ Graphic, *Earth First! Journal*, July-August, 2005, 39.

Foreman, separated from the group. As Judi Bari commented in 1990, “EF! is not just a conservation movement, it is also a social change movement,” and that “[Foreman] proudly calls himself a patriot, and glorifies the dominant culture of our corrupt society.”¹⁴² A decade later, another contributor recognized that, still, “social justice is being incorporated into our ecological passions, connections are being made, and foundations questioned.”¹⁴³ These foundations were not only those of dominant society, but also of the Earth First! community itself. As this shift towards a more “social justice” oriented movement took place, Earth First!ers challenged their movement’s foundations by re-evaluating their relationships with diverse communities, questioning their social privileges, and honoring the struggles of different social change movements. This challenging of foundations went beyond solidarity to other activists, but was realized in a spoken, and sometimes active, solidarity with activist and non-activist communities alike.

While it was necessary for Earth First! to solicit help and knowledge from different communities, Earth First!ers also recognized that it was necessary to have reciprocal relationships with these communities— support could not only be solicited, but had to be extended:

“We cannot expect to receive solidarity from oppressed communities if we don’t acknowledge and ally ourselves with their historic and ongoing struggle against faces of criminalization. Ignoring or denying privilege and racism will only isolate us further and play into the state’s caricature of radical environmental

¹⁴² *Earth First! Journal*, Vol X, No. VIII, Sep. 22, 1990, 5.

¹⁴³ “Shouldering EF!’s Baggage...” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 4, March-April 2001, 59.

movement as out of touch with the working class and communities of color.”¹⁴⁴

Other activists, including Rod Coronado, called for a similar, reciprocal relationship across diverse communities.¹⁴⁵ In a similar trend, another contributor called on the environmental movement to “move beyond single-issue environmentalism.”¹⁴⁶ In the recognition of its own self-centered perspective and political isolation, Earth First! attempted to expand its political analysis and to reach out to communities it had previously disregarded. The most obvious ways that this happened was through new analyses of Environmental Justice, Anti-Racism, and Abolitionism.

Environmental Justice

One way that these new relationships and mutual understandings were created was through the growing movement and ideas of Environmental Justice, which “affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction,” among several other principles outlined at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991.¹⁴⁷ This analysis saw humans

¹⁴⁴ Camilo Viveiros, “Ten Lessons from the Criminalization of Dissent,” *Earth First! Journal*, March-April, 2006, 11.

¹⁴⁵ “An Interview With Rod Coronado” *Earth First! Journal*, March-April, 2003, 58; “Letter from Editor,” *Earth First! Journal*, Nov 1, 1996, Vol. XVI, No. VIII, 2.

¹⁴⁶ “The NEXT Environmental Movement,” *Earth First! Journal*, January-February 2003, 28; Errol Schweizer, “13 tips for Activists,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 6, June-July 1999, 33.

¹⁴⁷ “Principles of Environmental Justice,” <http://www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html>; For more on Environmental Justice, see Robert D. Bullard “Environmental Justice

not simply as destroyers of the Earth, but inhabitants that are a part of the Earth.

By upholding the rights of people, particularly those of immigrants and indigenous peoples, the radical environmental movement could foster important connections as well as continue to strive towards their mission of protecting the Earth.

This analysis became popular in the Earth First! movement in the early 2000s, with several *EF!J* articles explaining the principles of Environmental Justice, and how they might be enacted.¹⁴⁸ Rather than separating environmental and social justice struggles, Earth First! was coming to recognize those struggles as inherently interconnected. A mid-1990s article wrote of a May 1st rally “May 1 symbolizes a growing trend within Earth First! to combine the philosophy of Deep Ecology and the practice of working-class anarchism,” and another contributor stated that “an urban movement must combine a concern for environmental justice with a call for social justice.”¹⁴⁹ Thus, EF!ers were striving, in several different ways, to create bridges between movements, with a noted emphasis on people being integral to the environment.

Despite this push towards Environmental Justice, there was also dissent to this change by some in EF!. One contributor questioned, “So why not extend ourselves into more environmental justice issues in cities to colorize our

in the 21st Century: Race Still Matters,” in *Rethinking the Color Line*, page 262-276; and Kristin Shrader-Frechette, *Environmental Justice: Creating Equality, Reclaiming Democracy*, 2002.

¹⁴⁸ Lacey Phillabaum, “Environmental Justice,” and Daniel Chodorkoff, “An Urban Ecosystem,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 5, May-June 1998; “War On the Earth: Military Seeks Exemption from Environmental Laws” *Earth First! Journal*, March-April 2003, 18; “In the Belly of the Beast,” *Earth First! Journal*, June-July 2001, 9.

¹⁴⁹ Lacey Phillabaum, “Environmental Justice,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 5, May-June 1998, 10.

movement? Because we logically can't. We can scarcely win the issues we already work on."¹⁵⁰ In this argument against expanding the EF! movement, the author sees the inclusion of people of color as separate from issues of environmental conservation or environmental justice, rather than an attempt to overcome narrow views of the environmentalist community. In spite of this, it seems that the rising trend of the movement at this time was to include different people, particularly those not traditionally included within the identity of "environmentalist." This particular point was touched upon in an interview with Ross, former Greenpeace Action Coordinator, who emphasized the importance of making the skills, knowledge, and resources required for direct action campaigns accessible to "frontline" communities:

"I feel like one of the greatest ways that you could become proactive (in challenging criminalization) is to expand the skill base and knowledge to more impacted communities to do more effective actions, or to do more consistent effective actions... I feel like through that, a lot of the injustice and oppression that we see in the justice system would come out, but then there would be people there to say that is not acceptable."

Thus, making skills and resources of the environmental movement accessible to frontline communities, the interviewee suggests, could be a positive force for the environmental movement while also exposing the injustice of criminal justice system in way that is accessible for the public.

One great example of Earth First! enacting its more recent Environmental Justice analysis is in relation to the U.S.-Mexico border. As early as 1993, Earth

¹⁵⁰ "In Defense of Misanthropy," *Earth First! Journal*, June-July 1999, Vol. 19, No. 6, 21.

First! embraced a criticism of the border that not only focused on the rights of endangered animal species to migrate, but also the devastating effect of border militarization and the economic policies of NAFTA.¹⁵¹ In 2001, one article, “Border Militarization,” highlighted the interconnected trend of militarization, environmental destruction, and human rights violations that exists on the border:

“Their corporate agenda comes full circle when they create a large population of displaced people heading north, with which they can flood prisons and fuel the growing trend of immigrant prison privatization. The vicious corporate cycle becomes complete, leaving in it’s wake a devastated environment and a broken people.”¹⁵²

Also printed with the article is a graphic reading “Todos Somos Ilegales,” incorporating again the shared, but unique, fates that undocumented immigrants and environmental activists have the potential of sharing. This was in stark contrast to the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the 1980s, which was later regarded as a failing of single-issue activism— “Sometimes single-issue activism can be very detrimental, such as how environmentalists echo fascistic anti-immigration propaganda.”¹⁵³ Again, this highlights a shift from single-issue activism to a more inclusive and interconnected understanding of social and environmental struggles.

As is vitally important for the action-oriented environmentalism of Earth First!, the Earth First! community reported on and took place in actions against the militarization of the border. One way that the Earth First! movement attempted to

¹⁵¹ John Green, “NAFTA is a Disasta,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XIII, No. VI, June 21, 1993, 13; “NAFTA on the Border,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 6, June-July 1999, 12.

¹⁵² “Border Militarization” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 4, March-April 2001, 58.

¹⁵³ Errol Schweizer “13 tips for Activists,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 6, June-July, 1999, 33.

enact this new mission of incorporating social and environmental justice, along with border issue, was to move the headquarters of the *Earth First! Journal* to Tucson, Arizona. The move was an attempt for the movement to gain a more “frontline” perspective in order to include “more indigenous, environmental justice, and working class participants.”¹⁵⁴ Earth First!ers also attended the 2008 “No Borders Camp,” and spoke out against the oppressive Arizona legislation of SB 1070.¹⁵⁵

In resisting the border, Earth First! did not ignore its own histories of collusion and support, but instead recalled the old EF! rhetoric as racist and dehumanizing, and called attention to the fact that EF! founder Dave Foreman remained active in supporting anti-immigrant legislation. EF! also spoke out against the Sierra Club’s anti-immigrant rhetoric: “Environmentalists are fond of saying that pollution knows no borders, so it is ironic that environmentalists would argue for greater control over those artificial political boundaries.”¹⁵⁶ Similarly, different groups in the radical environmental community criticized one another’s anti-immigrant perspectives, such as the England EF! criticizing the still remnant anti-immigrant and population-control sentiments within the U.S. Earth First! community. As an article in the *EF!J* noted, “ELF disavowed the reactionary,

¹⁵⁴ “The World Looks Different From Down Here” *Earth First! Journal*, Nov-Dec 2005, 16.

¹⁵⁵ “Resistance Against the Wall,” *Earth First! Journal*, Jan-Feb 2008; “Razing Arizona,” *Earth First! Journal*, Samhain/Yule 2010, 34.

¹⁵⁶ “Environmentalism or Racism,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XVIII, No. III, February-March 1998, 3; See also Hannah Creighton “Not Thinking Globally: The Sierra Club Immigration Policy Wars,” *Race, Poverty & the Environment*, Vol. 4, No. 2, Special Issue: POPULATION & IMMIGRATION (Summer 1993), pp. 24-29

apolitical rantings about population control and immigration that some EF!ers in the US were voicing. Instead, ELF looked to Europe for its history of radical change.”¹⁵⁷ Thus, accountability for political viewpoints was enacted within activist communities, and continued the questioning of foundations that was necessary for Earth First! to evolve and expand.

This acceptance of an Environmental Justice orientation, which placed people as part of the environment, opened up avenues through which to create new relationships, with people that Earth First! had previously dismissed or perceived as adverse to the environment, such as immigrant communities.

Environmental Justice principles centered people of color in environmental struggles, and similarly, politics of anti-racism within Earth First! required the radical environmentalist community to question their foundations of whiteness, and to recognize their relationship with the criminal justice system as one that is not unique to the radical environmental community.

Anti-Racism

Along with the perspective of Environmental Justice, Earth First! also took on a politic of anti-racism, which required more internal questioning than the external relationships of solidarity required by Environmental Justice. Even though this anti-racist rhetoric was largely an internal process in radical environmentalist communities, it allowed the movement to strengthen its ability to see beyond its immediate struggles of protecting the environment and staying

¹⁵⁷ Tea the Sea ELF, “The Earth Liberation Front,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XVI, No. VII, September 21, 1996, 18.

out of prison, and to see the ways that different communities were being affected by criminalization by recognizing the social privileges that come with the middle-class status and whiteness of the Earth First! communities. The EF! movement had been founded by several white men, who often embraced dehumanizing ideologies about immigrants, indigenous peoples, and other people of color; however, in the 1990s and especially around the year 2000, rhetoric of anti-racism became more common, and was combined with other analyses of oppression— in the words of one anonymous contributor: “The mindset of the individual who can destroy the forest is the same as the domestic abuser, the homophobe, the racist, and the sexist.”¹⁵⁸

As the movement came to question the criminal justice system, which was heavily affecting the radical environmentalist community, they also had to recognize that, “as white, mainly middle-class activists, we have a decidedly different experience with the justice system than indigenous people and people of color!” and another contributor quipped that “if EF! and ELF are isolated, prison support will “be dismissed as a white rights movement.”¹⁵⁹ These understandings of racism within the criminal justice system occurred within the same time frame as the recognition of race as an important factor in Environmental Justice.

This recognition of whiteness as a social privilege was much different than the attitude of Foreman, who asserted that EF!ers should have “an unwillingness to

¹⁵⁸ Beans and Rice, “Privilege is Invisible to Those Who Have It.” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 3, February-March, 2001, 1 and 26.

¹⁵⁹ “Cult of Nonviolence” *Earth First! Journal*, , Vol. XVIII, No. III, November-December, 1997; and “Earth First! Can’t Fight Alone,” *Earth First! Journal*, Sep-Oct 2002.

set any ethnic, class, or political group of humans on a pedestal and make them immune from questioning.”¹⁶⁰ Rather, the newer political trends within Earth First! recognize these social paradigms of racism and colonialism, and peoples’ experiences with them, as inherently connected to the environmental cause. As one *Earth First! Journal* contributor warned: “Ignoring or denying privilege and racism will only isolate us further and play into the state’s caricature of radical environmental movement as out of touch with the working class and communities of color.”¹⁶¹ Thus, it has been important both in terms ethical anti-racism as well as in political survival for radical environmentalist communities to recognize the connections they share with other communities. As the social justice orientation of the movement deepened and the experience of repression increased, connecting the criminalization of environmentalists to the criminalization of other communities, particularly communities of color, became especially important.

In the next section, I will demonstrate how these new understandings of race, environmentalism, and criminalization shape the radical environmentalists understanding of the criminal justice system, and their connections with other criminalized and incarcerated communities.

VII. Radical Environmentalists, Race, and Shared Space

This section will explore the shared “political space” of prison, and how political action forces radical environmentalists into the shared political space of

¹⁶⁰ Foreman, “Whither Earth First!?...” *Earth First! Journal*.

¹⁶¹ Camilo Viveiros, “Ten Lessons from the Criminalization of Dissent,” *Earth First! Journal*, March-April 2006, 11.

incarceration along with more historically marginalized communities.¹⁶² The section will demonstrate the unique position of radical environmentalists within jails and prisons, but also how they fit into the larger political project of incarceration along with communities of color affected by War on Drugs, anti-immigration, and anti-terrorism legislation. Furthermore, the section will explore ideas of “linked fate” amongst radical environmentalists and people of color, and the centering of people of color in critiques of the criminal justice system and democratic process.

The recognition of the unique experience of radical environmental activists, who are predominantly white, in the criminal justice system occurred several times in my interviews. The experiences shared represent recognition of differential treatment for activists—sometimes positive, and sometimes negative, but certainly perceived to be different than their fellow cellmates. In the *Earth First! Journal* and in interviews, activists shared different senses of ‘belonging’ in prison. On the side of symbolic actions and arrests, such as those of mainstream organizations like Greenpeace or 350.org, activists were often perceived by authorities as ‘not belonging’ in the criminal justice system. On the other hand, activists who more directly confronted extractive resources and/or hegemonic ideas of property, laws, and domination of the Earth were seen as belonging.

¹⁶² Guinier, Lani, and Gerald Torres. *The Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003.

For example, while speaking of the experience of mainstream environmentalists being arrested, Sam perceived his experience of jail as “not *doing time*. It was the easiest thing ever. It’s like ‘you don’t belong [in jail]. You have this support network. This device isn’t meant to contain you,’” and that “The justice system sometimes does not know how to handle environmental activists, because they’re often just working on little things.” Similarly, Swift thought of the arrests of mainstream environmentalists as “purely symbolic. You know, in a way they are not stopping anything[...] It’s very different than the action (against pipeline construction), where we [were] physically getting in the way and stopping this.” Ross also stated that his fellow activists have been rushed out of jail “with the implication that ‘you’re taking up the space of other people that should be in these places.’” He goes on to say that the criminal justice system, in certain cities, has learned to deal with protesters in a lenient way, so that “everyone gets what they want.” While the leniency of law enforcement is not a negative occurrence, it does signal a lack of innovation and challenge by protesters. The protesters, if they are satisfied with symbolic acts of arrest to show how serious they are, do not challenge ongoing destruction of the Earth, nor the sanctity of the law.

On the more ‘radical’ side of the environmental movement, in which people are physically stopping industry at the point of extraction, or else committing arson to directly confront practices that are destructive to the Earth or violent towards animals, activists are then more frequently seen as ‘belonging’ in jail or prison. Rod Coronado states this explicitly when he writes, “[warriors] must

accept that prison awaits those who are unwilling to compromise the earth.”¹⁶³

Sam also observed that political actions have different depending on the level of threat to the system, and that the criminal justice system will respond accordingly. For Swift, her surprisingly long jail sentence (long in relation to other activists arrested in the anti-pipeline campaign, but short compared to many of her jail mates) of twenty-three days came in response to committing the only act of civil disobedience in Smith County, Texas, a county which is notorious for its corruption on many levels. Along similar lines, Jeff Luers felt that his sentence of twenty-two years was not in response to his crime, rather, he says, “it was so clearly a disproportionate sentence trying to punish a political ideology, and not a crime.” Thus, as radical environmentalists challenge more dominant social ideas, they experience differential treatment and longer sentences.¹⁶⁴

It is not only political action in operation, though. As many have documented and argued, the criminal justice system, or prison-industrial complex as some call it, is a racialized system of control.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, people who are raced as other than white often have a very different relationship with the criminal justice system. For example, Ross, the Greenpeace Action Coordinator, explained to his African-American activist-friend that “[your experience in jail] is going to be very different for you than for me. Look at your skin tone and look at mine.” In this example, it is not only the status of *environmentalist* or *activist* that is

¹⁶³ Rod Coronado, “Spread Your Love Through Action,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XV, No. IV, March 21, 1995, 8.

¹⁶⁴ For an in-depth study of this, see Will Potter, *Green Is The New Red*.

¹⁶⁵ See Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*; Mark Mauer, *Race to Incarcerate*; Parenti, *Lockdown America*.

important to treatment, but also how one is racialized— whereas white activists are perceived as not to belong, it is implied people of color are seen as belonging in jails or prisons, whether activist or not. The Action Coordinator also stated “people of color are just inherently taking more risk just because of the social paradigms.” In Ross’s perception, the experience of people of color practicing civil disobedience takes on a different meaning and experience because of the racialized nature of the criminal justice system.

Sam echoed this point, stating that “since different groups (like environmental activist and immigration activists) engage in civil disobedience, it’ll mean different things for how those people relate to the justice system.” For example, a blockade by white environmentalists on a logging road is going to have vastly different consequences than a blockade by undocumented immigrants outside of ICE office. For these undocumented immigrants, Sam argues, “The justice system is trying to limit their actions in a much greater extent. Probably because they are trying to make institutional changes, which is what the justice system is trying to prevent.”

Sam’s statement implies that it is not only the concept of “race-as-skin-color” that is in play, but also the political constructs of racialization. Radical environmentalists’ political action and their political race together pose a threat to a “white-supremacist patriarchy,” which “has a specific goal of controlling and suppressing other populations.” With an understanding of the justice system as “a racial/class control mechanism,” Sam argues, “you can see why it functions differently for different groups.” Not only does it operate for different populations

of people (for example: communities of color, LGBTQ communities, or activists), I argue that it also operates differently within those groups as their identities and actions constitute a larger or smaller threat to hegemonic ideas like the sanctity of property and law, as well as the meaning of whiteness.

Sam frames radical environmentalists not as particularly special for being incarcerated, but that they do have a very unique relationship to the “mechanism of control,” perhaps because of their unique position as a predominantly white, middle-class movement that enjoys many social privileges, but that takes action which directly threatens profit, as well as their own social standing. If environmentalists see only themselves as experiencing injustice in the criminal justice system, Sam warns that anyone who thinks the justice system is simply “keeping the environmentalists down [...] will be more brutally and horribly surprised when [they] educate [themselves] about what prisons do.” While more mainstream activists, Sam argues, would frame the case of Tim DeChristopher as a singular injustice, radical environmentalists and abolitionists will understand his case as part of a larger system of injustices.¹⁶⁶

For Coronado, radical environmentalists “must accept that prison awaits those who are unwilling to compromise the earth.”¹⁶⁷ Coronado describes the fate of committed environmentalists to be incarceration, highlighting the necessity of Earth and Animal liberation activists to directly confront the injustices of the

¹⁶⁶ Tim DeChristopher served a 21-month sentence for bidding on BLM lands in order to protect them from extractive industry. For more information, see bidder70.org

¹⁶⁷ Rod Coronado, “Spread Your Love Through Action,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XV, No. IV, March 21, 1995, 8.

United States government and profit-driven corporations, and that the natural reaction of those institutions is to lock away the threat. In many of his writings, Coronado connects his experience of repression and incarceration to his identity of being indigenous, as well as his actions in defense of the Earth and animals. For Coronado, it is both his identity and action that are targeted, but “when you are an indigenous person in the context of the last 500 years, you learn to expect [harassment of your family, subpoenas, phone-tapping, break-ins, arresting employees, and incarceration.]”¹⁶⁸ These ideas of race and belonging within the prison system may be understood through Guinier and Torres’ conceptions of “political race” and “linked fate.” I am employing these concepts in order to explore ideas of solidarity, race, and the political nature of imprisonment.

Political Race and Linked Fate

In *The Miner’s Canary*, the authors describe political race “as a concept [that] encompasses the view that race still matters because racialized communities provide the early warning signs of poison in the social atmosphere.”¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, the concept of political race “seeks to get at the way people are placed—and place themselves—in powerful or powerless positions depending on both the historical context and their given relationships at a personal, group, and institutional level.” Guinier and Torres’s idea of political race recognizes race as not only a social and cultural category, but as a political construct and identity that

¹⁶⁸ Rod Coronado, “With The FBI On Our Backs” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XV, No. II, December 21, 1994, 18.

¹⁶⁹ Guinier and Torres, *The Miner’s Canary*, 17.

is of great importance in democratic social change. Steve Martinot shares a similar conception of race, arguing that the meanings of race are “produced politically, producing what they provide to be noticed as a social importance.”¹⁷⁰ Martinot, also adds that “racialization means that race is something people do, rather than what they are.” Thus, both Guinier and Martinot’s conceive of race as changeable and political.

This idea of political race gives us an interesting lens to view radical environmentalists within the criminal justice system, for their political actions “place” them in a space that is predominantly populated with people who are ‘raced’ as not-white. This “place” of incarceration (or jailing) is both physical and political, and in both senses the radical environmental community has often shared this place with marginalized and racialized communities. Looking again to Guinier and Torres, who further argue for understanding “race as a political place,” this invites an interesting question in regard to radical environmentalists and whiteness: does radical activism challenge notions of whiteness and racialization by “[rendering whiteness] an ‘otherness’”?¹⁷¹ By raising this question of whiteness, I do not intend to erase meanings of race; rather, the question might highlight the different experiences of whiteness, and their connection to Guinier and Torres’ idea of political race.

¹⁷⁰ Steve Martinot, *The Rule of Racialization*, 11.

¹⁷¹ Martinot, 204; I raise this question with hesitation, and I do not intend to give a full answer; however, this could be an interesting field of study as both Guinier and Torres and Martinot theorize, respectively, “political blackness” and “whiteness as otherness,” thus posing whiteness, like other racial categories, to be changeable.

One way to understand radical environmentalists' relationship to the criminal justice system is through an understanding of whiteness as non-homogenous and non-hegemonic. As McDermott argues in her book, *Working-Class White: The Making and Unmaking of Race Relations*, there are diverse meanings attached to whiteness.¹⁷² McDermott explores these differences in terms of gender, class, ethnic identity, and geographical location. While acknowledging these differences, I further propose that political activity may imply another interpretation of whiteness that is not aligned with its usual, hegemonic meanings. In the case of incarcerated radical environmental activists, hegemonic notions of whiteness are challenged and, thus, their experience of a middle-class whiteness, with all of the property entitlement and rights that it implies, is disrupted—at least temporarily.

In regard to the operation of whiteness in political incarceration, Will Potter claimed that many of the privileges that white activists have “do not apply in prison any longer.” His comment seems to contradict the recognition of whiteness a social privilege; however, this is not the case throughout the rest of our interview, nor does he claim that *all* privileges are lost.¹⁷³ Rather, his comment

¹⁷² Monica McDermott, *Working-Class White: The Making and Unmaking of Race Relations*, 2006, 2.

¹⁷³ White political prisoner Marilyn Buck does not agree with Potter, noting “Without antiracist consciousness, white [prisoners] do not acknowledge the white privilege that they still enjoy even as prisoners.” Becky Thompson, “A Promise and A Way of Life.” 2001:278); Furthermore, Martinot argues that there is no possibility of “abandoning white skin privilege,” and that the “problematic of antiracism for whites becomes how to invent a deracializing movement and a deracializing identity for themselves for which “whiteness” would in turn be rendered an otherness...” *The Rules of Racialization*, 204. On the other hand,

might highlight the reality of a shared political space with incarcerated people—a space that implies not only isolation, but also a loss of rights and citizenship (via voter disenfranchisement, isolation, loss of movement). When Potter calls attention to a loss of some of the privileges of whiteness, it implies that the whiteness of political activists takes on a new meaning within the political space of incarceration. This new meaning of this whiteness has the potential to be one that is resistant and non-hegemonic, much like Guinier’s argument of using race as a political asset; however, for this resistant whiteness to take form, it is necessary that radical environmentalists connect the political identity of their community to the fate of other criminalized communities.

Through the lens of political race, the subversive and non-hegemonic whiteness of political activists empowers political activists to perceive their incarceration *not* as an individual failing, like other whites may perceive their incarceration; rather, the radical environmental community’s understanding of anti-racism, along with the political education of experiencing incarceration, and the resulting shift in white identity creates a space to understand incarceration as a structural injustice.¹⁷⁴ As Michael Hames-Garcia and Marilyn Buck both argue, the experience of being incarcerated is not enough to provide a meaningful political education for incarcerated people, activist or not. Furthermore, the experience of incarceration alone does not drive one towards solidarity with

Guinier and Torres show an example of “prisoner” identification being understood as similar to racial identification. *Miner’s Canary*, 76.

¹⁷⁴ For more on individual failure and whiteness, see McDermott, *Working-Class Whites*, 43 and 55.

fellow incarcerated people; rather, as white political prisoner Marilyn Buck argues, “Without antiracist consciousness, white [prisoners] do not acknowledge the white privilege that they still enjoy even as prisoners.”¹⁷⁵ Thus, in order to obtain a real political consciousness of solidarity, radical environmentalists must actively confront their privileges of whiteness.¹⁷⁶

Guinier and Torres argue for an understanding of race that can be used towards political education and an understanding of shared political space, which can then be developed into an “oppositional consciousness” through which to organize. Similarly, an identity of whiteness that is not attached or entitled to the meanings of whiteness, made possible through antiracist political education, may allow radical environmentalists to develop an ‘oppositional consciousness,’ along with other incarcerated peoples, in order to mobilize against incarceration in a systematic, rather than individual, manner. Like McDermott outlines in the case of whites with particular ethnic identities in Boston, radical environmentalists with a politicized and antiracist conception of whiteness might act in a similar way to the racial identity of people of color in developing an “oppositional consciousness” that is attached to the shared experience of a community.

To complicate this notion of a politicized whiteness further, it is important to recognize that political race, in Guinier and Torres’s terms, is an “activist” term—its definition is based in doing. For white activists in many movements, not only environmental movements, whiteness is a politically safe place for retreat.

¹⁷⁵ Becky Thompson, *A Promise and A Way of Life*. 2001, 278.

¹⁷⁶ See above note 106.

Members of the Weather Underground used their whiteness as a disguise of 'passing,' and were also acquitted of their charges due to FBI illegality; meanwhile, illegal FBI tactics were also used against the Black Panther Party, and no Panthers were acquitted on those terms. In the Women's Movement, Audre Lorde addresses the white feminist in showing that their experiences are very different because of their skin color:

"Some problems we share as women, some we do not. You fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you, we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your backs upon the reasons they are dying."¹⁷⁷

Furthermore, political race is not an absolute. As Guinier and Torres argue, it is not something that is achieved, but it a continual process. Thus, the challenging of one's own whiteness and the systems of domination that uphold it must be a continual process of rebellion.

Even as radical environmentalists recognize their shared fate with people of color, that does not change the racialized nature of the criminal justice system, as has been extensively outlined in books such as *The New Jim Crow*, *Lockdown America*, and *Are Prisons Obsolete?*. Rather, the idea of political race suggests that the experiences of people of color, through processes of systematic and historical racisms, indicate failures of the United States of America's democratic project, and that white working-class and white radical environmentalists have been the next realization of that widening failure. Thus, it is necessary that the racialized

¹⁷⁷ Audre Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," in *Sister Outsider*, 1984. 33.

experiences of people of color, and not just the experiences of radical environmentalists or other “political prisoners,” be at the central to our understanding of the criminal justice system. In the words of Camilo Viveiros, “we (radical environmentalists) should use our work against repression of eco-activists to highlight these dynamics (of racism) rather than obscure them.”¹⁷⁸

Shared Fate in the “War on Terror”

One relationship that I have yet to touch on is the relationship amongst different communities affected by the “war on terror.” While there are other communities that are affected by the “war on terror,” I will focus on Arab and Muslim communities, and on radical environmentalist communities. Lately, in media, law enforcement practices, and legislation, the most demonized and targeted people have been of Arab and Muslim communities, especially immigrants.¹⁷⁹ Through media (as well as other entities’) construction of “terrorist,” the term is racialized, and allows us to see our enemies as ‘other.’¹⁸⁰ Interestingly enough, when it comes to acts deemed ‘terrorism,’ the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) and Animal Liberation Front (ALF), crowd out any other organization from 1990-2005; as Potter describes, this use of ‘terrorism’ against

¹⁷⁸ Camilo Vivieros, “Ten Lessons from the Criminalization of Dissent,” *Earth First! Journal*, March-April, 2006, 11.

¹⁷⁹ ‘Antiterrorism’ legislation is certainly not only used against Arab and Muslim communities, but others as well.

¹⁸⁰ Susan M. Akram and Kevin R. Johnson, “Race and Civil Rights, Pre-September 11, 2001” in *Rethinking the Colorline*, 2007, 186.

radical environmentalists and animal rights activists is inherently political.¹⁸¹

While the United States tightens civil rights and freedoms in search of a racialized 'other,' they claim the arrests of "eco-terrorists" as the notable outcome of their infringement upon civil rights and liberties. In this process of labeling 'terrorists' as both a *racialized* and *political* 'other,' the criminalization of Arab/Muslim communities leads to the criminalization of radical environmentalists, while the 'catching' of 'eco-terrorists' further validates the criminalization of Arab/Muslim communities and the infringement of rights "necessary" to catch them.

In my research, I found a wide gap in scholarship between treatment of Arab and Muslim communities in the 'war on terror,' and the treatment of environmental activists in the same war. Books about "terrorism," whether arguing for a restriction of civil rights or for a democratic society, focused almost exclusively on Arab and Muslim communities, with some extension into broader society. On the other hand, in books such as *Eco-Terrorism*, *Green is The New Red*, and in my research of the *Earth First! Journal*, the targeting of Arab and Muslim communities is rarely given voice. In the cases of each community, the rhetoric of terrorism goes back much earlier than September 11, 2001. This section is a small attempt to lessen this gap of scholarship.

Targeting both Arab/Muslim and environmentalist communities, political opponents used the rhetoric of terrorism years before the state adopted its use into law. In "Race and Civil Rights, Pre-September 11, 2001: The Targeting of Arabs and Muslims," Susan M. Akram and Kevin R. Johnson demonstrate that as

¹⁸¹ Potter, *Green Is The New Red*, 47.

early as the 1970s, “US laws and policies have been founded on the assumption that Arab and Muslim noncitizens are potential terrorists and have targeted this group for special treatment under the law.”¹⁸² They argue that the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has “[reinforced] the image of Arabs as terrorists and security threats, thereby creating a climate of fear, suspicion, and hostility towards Arab-Americans and others who espouse critical views of Israel...”, and that the treatment of Arabs and Muslims in film, and in speeches by public officials, has further reinvigorated negative stereotypes.(186, 189)¹⁸³ Similarly, several contributors in the *Earth First! Journal* saw their own political opponents throwing around charges of ‘terrorism’ at environmental activists (even before the days of the Earth Liberation Front).¹⁸⁴ The racialized and politicized rhetoric of political opponents was soon turned into legislation, with the passage of the Animal Enterprise Protection Act (AEPA) of 1992 (later the “Animal Enterprise Terrorism

¹⁸² Akram and Johnson, “Race and Civil Rights,” 186

¹⁸³ More recently, in response to racism towards Arabs and Muslims post-9/11, the National Director of the ADL wrote, “We are disturbed that a number of Arab Americans and Islamic institutions have been targets of anger and hatred in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. At this time of profound anger and anxiety, no group in this country should be singled out for hatred, prejudice or blame based on their ethnicity or religion.” “ADL Says Americans Must Remain United, Reject Group Hatred in Aftermath of Terrorist Attacks.” *ADL: Fighting Anti-Semitism, Bigotry, and Extremism*. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Jan. 2014.

<http://archive.adl.org/presrele/dirab_41/3919_41.html>.

¹⁸⁴ “FBI ATTACKS EARTH FIRST! FOREMAN, MILLETT, 2 OTHERS ARE ARRESTED,” *Earth First! Journal*, Special Edition, June 16, 1989; Jim Vanderwall and Eric Holle, “American GULAG: Leonard Peltier,” Vol. VII, No., III, Feb 2, 1987, 28;

James A. Barnes and Craig Beneville “ECOTERRORISM on Capitol Hill”, *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 7, August-September, 1998, 1.

Act” of 2006), and the “Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act” (AEDPA) of 1996, which paved the way for the PATRIOT Act and other post-9/11 legislation.

In *Green Is The New Red*, Potter’s depiction of ‘terrorist’ rhetoric as a political tool against activists becomes most obvious when we find out who is *not* being charged as terrorists, such as those committing murder and bombings in protest of abortion and homosexuality.¹⁸⁵ Others agree, as one article reprinted in the *Journal* points out:

“Two stories received substantial (and substantially different) media attention over the past two weeks: the murder of an abortion provider Dr. Barnett A. Slepian in Buffalo, New York, and the arson attack on a Vail, Colorado Ski Resort. While both attacks were politically motivated, there is at least one glaring difference in media coverage: the frequency of terms like “terrorism” or “terrorist.””¹⁸⁶

In regard to the arson, media sources used the term ‘terrorism’ 55 times, but only referred to the murder as ‘terrorism’ six times.¹⁸⁷ Potter asks, “How is it that destroying property is terrorism, while murdering people is not? One explanation is that this is all purely political. The government treats attacks on corporate property more seriously than violence against doctors and minorities not because of the nature of the crime but because of the politics of the crime. The government’s domestic terrorism operations are more about protecting profits than protecting people.” Within *Earth First!* the label of ‘terrorist’ is perceived to be deeply political; however, even as radical environmentalists find their labeling of terrorists to be a political tool by the state, there seems to be minimal creation

¹⁸⁵ Potter, *Green Is The New Red*, 46-47.

¹⁸⁶ “Sabotage by Any Other Name.” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Dec-Jan 1999.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

of community or constructed 'oppositional consciousness' built with Arab and Muslim communities that are also targeted by the rhetoric.¹⁸⁸

In response to allegations of terrorism, Earth First!ers most often deflected the accusations, and returned the charge at their political opponents. The 'real eco-terrorist' became those who were extracting resources from the Earth, rather than those protecting it.¹⁸⁹ Very rarely did Earth First! articulate a conception of 'linked fate' with Arab and Muslim communities, or even talk about such communities. Allegations of terrorism upon themselves and others, including Leonard Peltier, did serve as a warning. As early as 1987, Earth First!ers were reading 'terrorist' rhetoric as a threat: "The media is nowadays replete with images of "terrorism," with the rhetoric of counter-terrorism... Desperate measures are being called for, civil liberties must be infringed upon. [...] The disproportionate size of the reaction to the threat is the clue indeed to understand that "counterterrorism" is simply the Right's program for persuading Americans to acquiesce to the suspension of their civil liberties."¹⁹⁰

As was the case in terms of jailing and other forms of incarceration, it was not until activists found themselves in the very same space, both physically and politically, as other 'terrorists' that their 'linked fate' came to be recognized. In one article, Lauren Reagan responds to the placement of Daniel McGowan in a 'Communications Management Unit' (CMU). The units were previously known as

¹⁸⁸ "AETA: Animal Enterprise Terrorist Act and the Assault on Academic Freedom" *Earth First! Journal*, Samhain/Yule, 2010

¹⁸⁹ See pages 26 and 32 for more.

¹⁹⁰ Jim Vanderwall and Eric Holle, "American GULAG: Leonard Peltier," Vol. VII, No., III, Feb 2, 1987, 28.

“Central Terrorist Unit,” “but because the unit only housed brown-skin people, the feds became concerned that they would be sued. So, they changed the name and kept their eyes peeled for a couple of white guys to add to the mix.”¹⁹¹ Again, the criminalization of one community validates the criminalization of another. As Will Potter writes, “All of the defendants—Muslims, environmentalists, animal rights activists— are housed there because of their ethnicity, their religions, their ideology, or all of the above.”¹⁹²

Writing of several recent eras of government repression, including the Palmer Raids, interment of Japanese-Americans in WWII, COINTELPRO, House Un-American Activities Committee, and now the War on Terror, Cole and Dempsey argue that “in all these cases, the government reacts to real and perceived threats by sacrificing the rights and liberties of immigrants, citizens who oppose government policies, or both.”¹⁹³ Such has been the case with the ‘war on terror,’ and it has been Arab and Muslim communities, along with radical environmentalists, who have held the heaviest burden of labeling. After 9/11, the United States called upon 80,000 men in for ‘special registration,’ and subjected 5,000 ‘foreign nationals’ to ‘antiterrorism preventive detention.’ Most of them were Arab or Muslim, and “not only of of the thousands of individuals ensared in these programs stands convicted of a terrorist crime.”¹⁹⁴ Of the twenty-eight acts deemed ‘terrorism’ that occurred in the United States between September 11,

¹⁹¹ Lauren Reagan, “Silencing the Sentenced: Daniel McGowan and Little Guantanamo,” *Earth First! Journal*, May-June, 2009, 24.

¹⁹² Potter, *Green Is The New Red*, 216.

¹⁹³ Cole, *Terrorism and the Constitution*, xiii.

¹⁹⁴ David Cole and James D. Dempsey, *Terrorism and the Constitution*, 2005, 220.

2001 and 2005, all but five were attributed to the ELF or ALF.¹⁹⁵ None of these acts of ‘terrorism’ (or any committed by ELF or ALF) physically targeted or harmed a person. In the racialization and politicization of an imagined ‘other,’ the United States seems to have created two major groups through which each validates the other’s criminalization and demonization. Like many eras of repression before, race and politics are woven together. There remains plenty of space for those labeled terrorists to develop a deeper sense of ‘linked fate’ and ‘oppositional consciousness’ through which to challenge the criminalizing measures. And, as many have argued, the ‘war on terror’ continues to be a war on civil rights and liberties that is ever widening.

De-centering of Incarcerated Activists

The centering of people of color, and the recognition of the shared fate of radical environmentalists communities and communities of color, has been fairly consistent in the Earth First!’s analysis of the prison-industrial complex. Furthermore, with the understanding of the criminal justice system as a racialized system of control, Earth First! has attempted to center the experience of color, and to use radical environmentalists’ position to deconstruct dominant ideas about incarceration, not just of activists, but people in general. Examples of this perspective arose both in my interviews and in the *Earth First! Journal* from the late 1990s to present. In the face of governmental harassment, repression, and

¹⁹⁵ “FBI: 2002/2005—Chronological Summary of Terrorist Incidents in the United States 1980-2005,” http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/terrorism-2002-2005/terror02_05#terror_05sum

incarceration, radical environmentalists had a choice to either frame themselves as different than other criminalized communities, or to find solidarity with other criminalized communities. In many instances, radical environmentalists chose the latter in recognition of the ongoing injustice of the prison-industrial complex.

One strong example of the centering of people of color takes place in the article “Federal Sentencing: You May Be Headed up Shit Creek Without a Paddle.” This article directly centers and humanizes the experience of criminalized people of color—in this particular case the story of an “undocumented Mexican worker” is used to demonstrate the unjust implications of new federal sentencing laws.¹⁹⁶ This article connects environmentalists to the possibility of repression, but the connection continues to be made even when the possibility of repression is realized:

“What’s happening to us is part of a much broader and very serious problem. The fact is that we live in a police state. Some people first realized that in the streets of St. Paul during the convention, but many others live with this reality their whole lives. People of color, poor and working class people, and immigrants are targeted and criminalized on a daily basis. We understand what that context suggests about the repression of the eight of us now.”¹⁹⁷

Similarly, articles such as “Wild Rockies EF! Targeted by a Legal System that Locks Everyone Up” and “Lockdown Society” expose the radical environmentalist community’s experience with the criminal justice system, but only as part of a larger system of control that affects diverse communities.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Delyla Wilson, *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Dec-Jan 1999, 28.

¹⁹⁷ “A Letter from the RNC 8,” *Earth First! Journal*, Nov-Dec 2008, 18.

¹⁹⁸ *Earth First! Journal*, June-July 2001; *Earth First! Journal*, Aug-Sep 2001, 8.

One contributor situates the criminalization of the Earth First! movement in the context of many other marginalized and/or rebellious communities, framing the radical environmental movement as only one of many:

“[t]he general body of law used to label today’s Earth and animal liberation activists as “terrorists” has also been used to do the same to or to oppress indigenous peoples, people of color, immigrants, LGBTQ folks, labor rights activists, anarchists, communists, feminists, journalists, peace activists, sex workers, and anyone else who dared to think or act in ways that might pose a threat to the social order (see, for example, the 1903, 1917, 1918, and 1952 immigration laws and the 1798 Enemy Alien Act, among others.)”¹⁹⁹

Similarly, Claire expressed solidarity in her intimate experience of jail, but also in her broader analysis of the criminal justice system: “It’s all the same but it’s all different. Up here, we’re fighting for [the forest], and people who are crossing the border are trying to come up for work so they can provide for their families, and that’s their way of life [...], and so I think everyone should show solidarity.”²⁰⁰ Like the aforementioned contributor, Claire recognizes the plight of the radical environmental community as one of many. In doing so, the struggle to resist systems of domination, rather than treat their individual experience with those systems, becomes necessary.

The Widening Net of the Criminal Justice System

When people of color become central to radical environmentalists’ understanding of the criminal justice system, radical environmentalists are moved

¹⁹⁹ “AETA: Animal Enterprise Terrorist Act and the Assault on Academic Freedom,” *Earth First! Journal*, Samhain/Yule, 2010.

²⁰⁰ See that section

from an unjust anomaly within the system to a predictable outcome of the expanding system. As Parenti argues in Lockdown America, “Capitalism always creates surplus populations, needs surplus populations, yet faces the threat of political, aesthetic, or cultural disruption from those populations. Prison and criminal justice are about managing these irreconcilable contradictions.”²⁰¹ While radical environmentalists are not usually thought of as coming from “surplus” populations, like inner-city communities with high rates of unemployment, they do represent a community that threatens to “disrupt” capitalism. Parenti also writes that “the introduction of new social-control-and-surveillance technologies always starts by targeting society’s weakest and most marginalized groups. From these social margins the strategies and technologies spread in toward the mainstream.”²⁰² Similarly, Potter warns that

“All of the defendants—Muslims, environmentalists, animal rights activists—are housed there (Communications Management Unit (CMU) because of their ethnicity, their religion, their ideology, or all of the above. The mere existence of CMUs should be a warning not just to other prisoners but to all Americans, for the power to create and maintain secretive prisons for political prisoners is antithetical to a healthy democracy. If there is one thing that should be learned from history, from governments that have gone down this path, it is this: secretive prisons for “second-tier” terrorists are often followed by secretive prisons for “third-tier terrorists” and “fourth-tier terrorists,” until one by one, brick by brick, the legal wall separating “terrorist from dissident” or “undesirable” has crumbles.”²⁰³

As early as 1996, in a “biocentric anarchist” insert within the *Earth First! Journal* there has been a critique of the widening net of militarization, surveillance,

²⁰¹ Parenti, *Lockdown America*. 238-239.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁰³ Potter, *Green Is The New Red*, 216.

and incarceration.²⁰⁴ This insert, called the “BLACK & GREEN” warned of militarization of the police force as a literal “war on crime,” the growth of profit and privatization in the criminal justice system, and the growth of anti-terrorism legislation. Furthermore, the insert highlighted the popular notion of common people to disregard these trends because: “that’s ok. I ain’t no terrorist like he was,” thus calling to attention the conception of ourselves as safe, and that only the “other,” or the “terrorist,” needs to worry about such things. Anarchist rantings such as these are usually dismissed, as told in Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*, “Yeah, the criminal justice system is racist in many ways, but it really doesn’t help to make such an absurd comparison. People will just think you’re crazy.”²⁰⁵

Looking again to Guinier and Torres, and their understanding of political race “as a concept [that] encompasses the view that race still matters because racialized communities provide the early warning signs of poison in the social atmosphere,” it becomes clear that the criminalization of people of color and other marginalized communities could have served as a ‘warning sign’ to radical environmentalists.²⁰⁶ As mentioned earlier, Earth First! has long been aware of the growing threat of the criminal justice system; however, for the first 15 years of Earth First! history, the EF! community rarely expressed solidarity with other communities affected by processes of criminalization and incarceration. These communities could have been perceived to be “the miner’s canary;” however, it was not until the criminalization of radical environmentalists via anti-terrorism,

²⁰⁴ “BLACK & GREEN,” *Earth First! Journal*, Vol. XVI, No. VIII, November 1, 1996.

²⁰⁵ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 3.

²⁰⁶ Guinier and Torres, *The Miner’s Canary*, 12.

war on drugs, and anti-tree spiking legislation that they responded in solidarity with other marginalized communities. Now, as radical environmentalists recognize themselves as only one community affected by the criminal justice system, rather than as political prisoners that are especially different from everyone else in the prison, the opportunities for organizing resistance are much more plentiful. Instead of focusing on release, radical environmentalist communities have the opportunity to focus on more systemic issues such as racism, environmental injustice, militarization of the police and border, and the profit-motives of incarceration.

Freedom as Action, Action as Philosophy

For all that he has come to represent in the Earth First! movement, Dave Foreman fostered a philosophy and tradition in the movement that has remained present to this day: “a willingness to let our actions set the finer points of our philosophy and a recognition that we must indeed act.”²⁰⁷ Almost twenty years later, Earth First! remains a group that is committed to enacting their politics, and has continued to do so in regards to their somewhat-recently developed abolitionist politics.

Within Earth First!, structural changes such as anti-oppression policies, along with accountability and restorative justice models have grown.²⁰⁸ In some cases, their abolitionist politics collide with their feminist and anti-capitalist

²⁰⁷ Foreman, “Whither Earth First!...?”

²⁰⁸ “Adopt an Anti-Oppression Policy” pg. 49, May-June 2003; Sep-Oct 2007
“Anti-Oppression Policy for Earth First! Journal”

policies, as in the treatment of abusers within their community treating “the exploitation of women, the Earth, and animals as different elements of the same crime.”²⁰⁹

The Trans and Womyn’s Action Camp (TWAC), which is an annual action camp that was founded in response to the male-dominance in Earth First!, also recently organized a protest at a GEO Group headquarters, charging the corporation with a “profit-driven influence on legislation that increases criminalization of offenses which has resulted in millions of people behind bars, record deportation rates, and longer jail sentences.”²¹⁰ Rather than centering political prisoners, the movement centered the industry responsible for their own community members’ incarceration along with millions of others whose life and health were also recognized as important.

Another interesting case in the environmental movement is that of Tim DeChristopher, who was sentenced to twenty-one months in prison after illegally (and successfully) bidding on BLM lands being sold to mining interests. DeChristopher’s experience was deeply educational for him, and widened the focus of his activism to include more “social justice” issues.²¹¹ Now, he raises awareness

²⁰⁹ Pattrice Jones, “Violation and Liberation Grassroots Animal Rights Activists Take on Sexual Assault,” *Earth First! Journal*, Sep-Oct 2005, 22.

²¹⁰ “TWAC Storms Prison Industry Giant GEO Group’s HQ in Boca Raton | Earth First! Newswire.” *Earth First! Newswire*. N.p., n.d. Web. 31 Dec. 2013. <<http://earthfirstjournal.org/newswire/2013/04/09/twac-storms-prison-industry-giant-geo-group-hq-in-boca-raton/>>.

²¹¹ “Released from Prison, Climate Activist on Civil Disobedience & Building Movements.” *Democracy Now!*. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Jan. 2014. <http://www.democracynow.org/2013/5/17/released_from_prison_climate_activist_tim>.

and does activism in relation to the jury system, and continues to be critical of the criminal justice system because of his intimate experience with the system.²¹²

These are just a few ways that the environmental movement has challenged criminalization, both of their own movement and in wider trends. Furthermore, through both their action and rhetoric, groups such as Earth First! challenge our notions of right and wrong, and create a conflict of morality with the state. As Jeff Luers said in our interview, “just because it’s the law, it doesn’t make it right.” In the tradition of civil disobedience and direct action, Earth First! keeps corporations and the state on their toes when it comes to resource extraction and environmental justice. While Earth First! and other associated groups continue to forge and navigate alliance with many different groups, they also continue to do important work by enacting their values in courageous and creative ways.

Limits to “Linked Fate”

Despite the growth of relationships of solidarity in the radical environmental movement, some resistance to enacting conception of ‘linked fate’ still remains. For one, it requires the radical environmentalists conceive of the freedom of others, oftentimes complete strangers, as equally valuable as and as necessary as their own. Secondly, it requires that active solidarity continue even after incarcerated activists move out of the shared political space. Finally, it requires that another community’s cause comes before your own, which is

²¹² "Tim's Official Statement at his Sentencing Hearing." *Peaceful Uprising*. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Jan. 2014. <<http://www.peacefuluprising.org/tims-official-statement-at-his-sentencing-hearing-20110726>>.

politically risky for single-focus activist groups. In the words of one interviewee, Sam, “It is not easy to orient your work toward the idea of collective liberation because that means actually being invested in a lot more people than what you would have considered ‘your community.’” While radical environmentalists have acted in solidarity with criminalized and incarcerated communities, many of the relationships are rhetorical. Whether these are rhetorical relationships and goals are realized in any meaningful way remains a large question.

One example of the conflict between differentiation or solidarity with took place in radical environmentalists’ opposition to House Bill 2595, an Oregon bill that would have created 13 month mandatory minimum for a first offense of “interfering with state forestland management,” one environmentalist argued that “I don’t think that I’m the kind of person that the State of Oregon wants to see behind bars at any cost to the state.”²¹³ Rather than speaking against mandatory minimums, which have quickly crowded Oregon’s jails since the passing of Measure 11 in 1994, the environmentalist invoked their identity, and the identity of the imagined ‘other,’ in order to demonstrate that she does not ‘belong’ in jail—without questioning the notion of who ‘does belong.’ At the same hearing, another environmentalist did speak out against the system of mandatory minimums in protest of the bill, thus demonstrating the different tactics that environmentalists use to combat criminalization, even within the same hearing. The bill passed with some amendments.

²¹³ Erin Grady, “Cascadia Forest Defenders vs. State of Oregon,” <http://www.forestdefensenow.com/2013/03/cascadia-forest-defenders-vs-state-of.html>; see also “House Bill 2595” <http://gov.oregonlive.com/bill/2013/HB2595/>

Somewhat similarly, in frustration of the targeting of protesters by law enforcement, one contributor wrote to the *Earth First! Journal* “Anyone who significantly defies absolutely absolute private property rights or who radically upholds the rights of other species to flourish is a threat to the state. Why else was so much law enforcement time and funding spent to prosecute these defendants when thousands of suspected rapists, child abusers, murderers, and harmful drug pushers are not prosecuted in Multnomah County, Oregon, alone?”²¹⁴ While the author shows the political use of law enforcement in an interesting way, he unfortunately validates, and exaggerates, the same system that targets his own, environmentalist, community. Interestingly, this author was involved with Earth First! back into the ‘80s, and expresses a similar contempt for “regular” prisoners to that of the early years of EF!.

These examples might highlight the ways in which the rhetoric of solidarity is used as a tool for survival of the radical environmental movement, rather than the ethical motive of liberating all people. Of course, these motivations are not exclusive of one another, and while radical environmentalists may feel the necessity to differentiate themselves in strategic and politically useful ways, they may also recognize a deep sense of shared fate with their fellow incarcerated communities. In the case of Oregon House Bill 2595, radical environmentalists expressed both of these sentiments.

Finally, one of the largest potential failures of radical environmentalists enacting “linked fate” is that, even when they do charge the criminal justice system

²¹⁴ “The Political is Personal,” *Earth First! Journal*, Nov-Dec 2006, 24.

with destroying communities, enacting institutional racism, and/or failing to rehabilitate either offenders or victims of crime, there is (for some) the possibility of walking away from these problems. If white communities' increased use of marijuana can tell us anything, it is that "when the effects of the criminal law reach the sons and daughters of the white majority, our response is not to get tough, but rather to get lenient. Americans have been able to sustain an unremittingly harsh tough-on-crime attitude precisely because the burden of punishment falls disproportionately on minority populations. The white majority could not possibly maintain its current attitude toward crime and punishment were the burden of punishment felt by the same white majority that prescribes it."²¹⁵ If the solidarity of radical environmentalists is going to mean anything, it must continue even after radical environmentalist prisoners are free from prison.

VIII. Conclusion

Throughout its history, Earth First! has navigated many relationships in order to disrupt processes of environmental destruction and environmental injustice. With its unique conceptions of morality, criminality, and solidarity, actions and rhetoric have been constantly shifting as the movement has attempted to balance traditional ideas of environmentalism, social justice, and different political ideologies like feminism, anarchism, and anti-capitalism. Alliances and relationships of solidarity have changed form consistently, but have increasingly

²¹⁵ David Cole, "No Equal Justice: The Color of Punishment," in *Rethinking the Colorline*, 311.

incorporated humanizing and mutual relationships with diverse communities—including loggers, immigrants, and incarcerated people—that were once deemed antagonistic to the Euro-American environmentalist conception of “conservation.”

Drawing upon inspiration from previous social movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power movement, radical environmentalists have engaged in a variety of tactics, including everything from letter-writing campaigns and lawful demonstrations, to direct action campaigns and sabotage. The use of these direct action tactics and sabotage poses a substantial threat to hegemonic conceptions of law, property, and profit as sacred, and thus radical environmentalist communities have earned the label of ‘terrorist,’ along with other racialized and/or politically active communities. The criminalization of radical environmentalists, however, has opened up new possibilities to expand the analyses and actions of the movement, and has in many ways forced the radical environmentalist community to re-examine its relationship with other criminalized communities, especially communities of color. I used Guinier and Torres’ conception of “linked fate” and shared space, both political and physical, to describe the growth of these relationships of humanizing and mutual solidarity, and in hopes to inspire further thoughts and discussion about how to create relationships between abolitionist, anti-racist, and environmental movements. There remains ample opportunity for these coalitions to be built.

I also argued that the uncompromising actions of radical environmentalists may be examples of Guinier and Torres’s idea of “political race,” and Martinot’s conception of destabilizing the category of whiteness. While recognizing that

radical environmentalists, who are predominantly white, have a unique relationship with the criminal justice system and perhaps challenge our ideas of “whiteness” (and the loyalties that whiteness might imply), I also argued that radical environmentalists must continue to center the experiences of people of color in their opposition to the criminal justice system. In agreement with Angela Y. Davis, Michelle Alexander, and Guinier and Torres, I believe that social movements that seek to dismantle racialized systems of control, such as the criminal justice system (among many others), ought to be led by those most heavily affected—communities of color.

Earth First! and the radical environmental community continue to challenge criminalization in a variety of ways—from internal changes that reflect abolitionist ideals of negotiating conflict and accountability without the state, to external challenges to systematic oppression including disrupting GEO Group, a company that promotes the growth and privatization of prison industries. Even as Earth First! continues to develop actions and rhetoric that reflect abolitionist ideals, much potential remains for radical environmentalists, in coalitions with communities of color that are affected by criminalization, to more systematically confront the criminal justice system.

As history has demonstrated many times, the demonization and marginalization of one community of people does not often limit itself to that community. In the United States, political repression has consistently been coupled with a racialized ‘other,’ and in both the ‘war on terror’ and the ‘war on drugs,’ this has remained true. Currently, the trend of criminalization and mass

incarceration continues to grow and, as Guinier and Torres suggest, racialized communities might demonstrate these trends as a shortfall of this democratic project. Now, we might also look to radical environmentalist communities as the growth of a racialized and politicized system of incarceration. Furthermore, in struggling for a more free and democratic society, it becomes necessary to amplify the voices of those most affected by repression, and to build humanizing and mutual relationships with these communities—for our freedom is dependent on one another.

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