


REVIEW

The intersectional environmentalist: how to dismantle systems of oppression to protect people + planet

Book by Leah Thomas. (2022) New York, Boston: Voracious.

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The Intersectional Environmentalist enlightens the reader about the way issues of environmental injustice are interconnected with social injustices including racism, in the past and at present. This book effectively reveals to the reader the unamplified moments when entire communities have been put in environmental danger, neglected, and systemically silenced. *The Intersectional Environmentalist* captures the reader's interest right from the start simply through how the author presents the ordinary silenced facts; like the poisoned Altgeld Gardens communities in chapter two. Considering the list of things that are plaguing the world today and how many of those have been compartmentalised in little boxes of knowledge, Leah Thomas has accomplished a great task with her intersectional environmentalist theory. When the author lays these facts bare to the reader through real examples, she calls on everyone to unite and advocate for the silenced voices. This clear appeal to the reader compels a sense of agency in them. This is how *The Intersectional Environmentalist* may effectively turn the reader into an environmental justice activist. This book emphatically points out to the reader that when one claims to advocate for the well-being of the planet, they need to equally consider the same for *all* the human and non-human inhabitants of the planet.

I cannot give enough praise to the "pledge breakouts" and "chapter discussion questions" at the end of each chapter. They capture the readership in an active stance of reflexive learning which helps to highlight meaning in all the significant educational concepts. Through the pledges, the author reaches out to the just nature of humanity in her readership and in this way appeals to them to think rationally about how both human inhabitants of the planet need as much healing as the environment because both have been hurt for a very long time. Through the pledge breakouts a significant call to everyone's commitment is made. The pledge breakouts have been strategically placed at the end of the chapters after the reader has been given all the information and left in no doubt that the logical and just thing to do is unite in advocating for the justice of all humanity and the environment. The interactive end of chapter discussion questions would also be helpful to educators who might choose to use this book as an instructional text for Environmental Justice, Social Justice or even Legal Studies.

In chapter one, "Intersectional Theory, Feminism plus Intersectional Environmentalism," the author explains intersectionality and acknowledges the role of the Black Woman in the development of the theory of intersectional environmentalism. Here, the author highlights the silenced voices of women of colour in the early Feminist movements in the USA and shows how

the struggle for women's rights should have been a struggle for all women regardless of race. The disregard for the Indigenous People's rights is also highlighted in this chapter. With examples of this discrimination, the author shows how these silenced and disregarded people always came up with ways to resist this injustice. The author demonstrates sustainability, a concept that underscores environmentalism, when she depicts the underprivileged people always finding ways of raising awareness of their situations and tirelessly seeking for justice.

In the second chapter, "Environmental Justice: A Wider Lens," the author tackles the issues of environmental justice and how that very concept became an injustice to the minority and poor communities in the early 1980s in the USA and for decades thereafter. The author gives us detailed accounts of some exemplary figures and their struggle for environmental justice for the underprivileged communities in America. This chapter significantly highlights the seventeen principles of environmental justice drafted and adopted by the delegates to the first National People of Colour Environmental Leadership Summit held in 1991, in Washington D.C.

The third chapter, "Unpacking Privilege," explores the meaning of privilege and continues to show how racism as a social construct continues to disadvantage many people. Here, the author encourages all members of a given community to acknowledge inequality in the society and strive to build a society in which everyone has a fair chance to succeed in life. In her warm, passionate style, the author calls upon the privileged in society to stand up for equality and inclusion.

In the fourth chapter, "Who's Affected: The Reality for BIPOC Communities," the author explicates how often communities that are least responsible for causing the climate crisis are often the most impacted and burdened by it. The author further explores the environmental injustices that have impacted the minority communities in the USA; some of these are the Black Americans, Latinx Americans, the Indigenous Americans, the Asian Americans, and the Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders. Some of the environmental injustices that the author points out in this section include poor air quality, food scarcity, genocide, and other inhumane atrocities. The author argues that environmental injustice exceeds geographic boundaries, specifically the way in which the Global North disposes off their waste burden to the Global South.

In the last chapter, "People Plus the Planet," the author discusses, through the intersectional lens, how current cultural practices affect the environment. The practices that the author examines are fashion, renewable energy, and veganism; all of which are advertised and marketed as the better ways to reduce harm to our environment. The author explains the dangers of fast fashion and how current fashion market trends have led to the instant gratification complex which is disastrous for the consumer and the environment. In addition, the author shows how the fashion industry has contributed to human rights and civil rights violation through poor working conditions of the workers as well as underpayment. The author calls for slow fashion, sustainable fashion, or ethical fashion. To realise these eco-friendly lifestyle changes, the author calls for change of attitudes of manufacturers as well as consumers towards fashion.

In this same chapter, the author discusses the dark side of renewable energy, especially to the places and the people in places where those resources are extracted. The author calls to the responsible governments to always include the Indigenous communities in these places of extraction, both in the decision-making and the actual extraction processes of these green energy resources. In this way, the impact of these extractions on the people and the planet can be reduced. Lastly, the author examines veganism, or plant-based living as a means of reducing over reliance on meat or dairy. The author points out the lack of representation, both in literature and online, of the communities of colour in published plant-based living practices. The author argues that these communities have practised plant-based living for centuries. Some countries cited are India, Mexico, and Brazil; all of which lie in the Global South. However, most literature and online sources centre plant-based living on White, wealthy vegan perspectives from the Global North. This according to the author, dismisses the narratives of these communities and therefore denies the communities the credit they deserve in reducing their environmental footprint.

The book ends with resources on the various issues of intersectionality with quotations and thoughts from influential, worldwide leaders in the struggle for social and environmental justice. This book is a must read for everyone who has a platform to change the world for the better for everyone.

Reference

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