

ECOMODERNISM

# The Death of Environmentalism at Twenty

*Perspectives from Senior Fellows and Others*



**Jim Proctor**

20 YEARS

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The year 2024 marks the 20th anniversary of the manifesto that in many ways launched The Breakthrough Institute.

**Jennifer Bernstein**

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penned by Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger in the [Breakthrough Institute](#) ["Death of Environmentalism"](#) (DoE).

In the opening sentence, Nordhaus and Shellenberger honor their environmental legacy:

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*Those of us who are children of the environmental movement must never forget that we are standing on the shoulders of all those who came before us.*

[How I Became an EJ Advocate](#)



by [Chris Foreman](#)

In just a few more sentences, however, the stark thesis of DoE appears:

*[W]e believe that the best way to honor their achievements is to acknowledge that modern environmentalism is no longer capable of dealing with the world's most serious ecological crisis.*

In sections such as "Environmentalism as a special interest," "Environmental group think," and "Environmentalism as though politics didn't matter," the remainder of this 34 page manifesto finds little to praise in a movement which, up to then, had failed to create meaningful progress on global warming. According to Nordhaus and Shellenberger, then, environmentalism—at least as it was back then—must die.

DoE, as well as its followup 2007 volume [Break Through, rocked the environmental world](#). But that was 20 years ago, and much of the political, ideological, and ecological landscape has changed. How does DoE read today? Is it still timely? What did it achieve, in hindsight?

We posed these questions to Breakthrough Institute [Senior Fellows](#), an enviable group of advanced environmental scholars, practitioners, and activists, who by no means march in lock step to the Institute, nor to each other. What do they find—if anything—that remains of value?

We are pleased to share, throughout this spring, Senior Fellow and BTI staff essays revisiting DoE. You will read a variety of responses, all insightful, none the same. All may whet your appetite for the upcoming Breakthrough Dialogue in June 2024 honoring this 20th anniversary of DoE and will appear as related articles; check back soon for more.

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