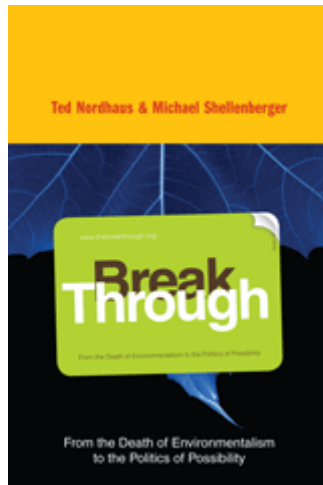


Press Release



Break Through

by Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger

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"BREAK THROUGH helps to structure a much needed political dialogue of possibility."— Richard Florida, author of *Rise of the Creative Class*

"BREAK THROUGH illuminates a new and empowering politics for America."— Ross Gelbspan, author of *The Heat Is On* and *Boiling Point*

"BREAK THROUGH is a bracing manifesto sure to launch a debate long overdue in the environmental movement."— Michael Pollan, author of *The Omnivore's Dilemma*

"For anyone who is sick of seeing progressive politics reduced to 'an aggregation of the aggrieved,' **BREAK THROUGH** is a must-read."
— Ariel Levy, author of *Female Chauvinist Pigs*

About the Book

In 2004 Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger sparked a firestorm of controversy with their essay "The Death of Environmentalism." In it, they argued that the politics used to help reduce acid rain and smog would not work to diminish global warming. Environmentalism must die, they said, so that something new can be born. At the time, Bill McKibben wrote: "The bad boys of American environmentalism made their case . . . and they made it well."

This fall, ***BREAK THROUGH: From the Death of Environmentalism to the Politics of Possibility*** (Houghton Mifflin, October 4, 2007) delivers on their promise to articulate a new politics for a new century, one focused not on complaints and ecological limits but on aspirations and human possibility. The book continues the conversation about how best to address the threat of global warming, but also examines the larger failure of American liberalism to reinvent itself.

BREAK THROUGH speaks with the clarity and sense of purpose of

the post-boomer generation. The authors believe that instead of tearing down the old energy economy, the future demands that we invent a new clean-energy economy. After all, we didn't create the Internet and the personal computer by banning or taxing typewriters. Nor did we create the petroleum economy by regulating or taxing whale oil. Similarly, ambitious projects such as the space program and the European Union were made possible through huge investments. Overcoming global warming requires not just pollution control but a new kind of economic development: we need to build far-reaching private/public investment partnerships. To confront today's ecological crises, we must unleash human creativity and sound economic development, not constrain them.

Ted Nordhaus and **Michael Shellenberger** have spent their entire careers working for environmental organizations. They are managing directors of American Environics, a social values research and political strategy firm, and founders of the Breakthrough Institute.

In ***BREAK THROUGH***, Nordhaus and Shellenberger tell readers that the era of small thinking is over. They challenge conventional environmentalist, conservative, and progressive thought, and go beyond partisan politics to explain how we can begin to prepare for life on a hotter planet.

For more information, visit www.thebreakthrough.org.

About the Authors

MICHAEL SHELLENBERGER and **TED NORDHAUS** have spent their entire careers working with environmental organizations. The two are managing directors of American Environics, a social values research and political strategy firm, and are senior fellows with the Breakthrough Institute. Their vision of a new, more effective environmentalism is reflected in these proposals already introduced in Congress: "The New Apollo Project," by Representative Jay Inslee; "Health Care for Hybrids," by Senator Barack Obama; and "Global Warming Preparedness," by Senators John Kerry and Olympia Snowe.

A Conversation with Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger

In a nutshell, what's *Break Through* about?

Break Through is an argument for a new politics for a new century, a politics that is aspirational and expansive, not small, narrow, and complaint-based.

Break Through argues that environmentalism can't deal with today's ecological crises because it conceptualizes global warming strictly as an "environmental" problem. Environmentalists have long imagined ecological problems to be the result of human violations of a supposedly separate and pure nature. The only solution environmentalists have thus been able to offer is to limit and constrain human power. What the new ecological crises demand is

not that we *constrain* human power but *unleash* it. Overcoming global warming demands not simply pollution control but rather a new kind of economic development.

Break Through sees a connection between environmentalism as a political movement and the range of other liberal interest groups that collectively make up what passes for progressive politics in America. These interest groups — labor, civil rights, environmental, etc. — were part of a larger vision in the 1960s and early 1970s, but since then have fragmented into a collection of narrowly defined, complaint-based, single-issue special interests. *Break Through* proposes a new political vision appropriate for our changed world that emphasizes possibility rather than limits, and breaks down old barriers to pave the way for new pragmatic thinking.

[Read more: Introduction; Chapter 5: Pollution Paradigm; Chapter 10: Greatness]

You argue that environmentalists are ignoring “four inconvenient truths about global warming.” What are they?

The first is the failure of the Kyoto Protocol to reduce emissions even among the developed nations that ratified it. Between 2000 and 2004, the developed nations that ratified Kyoto saw their emissions go up, not down, four percent. And it turns out that the countries that actually *have* reduced their emissions, such as Britain and Germany, would have done so regardless of Kyoto.

The second inconvenient truth is that China and India have long refused to limit their emissions, and simply will not do so if it hurts their prosperity. The third is that deforestation in places like Brazil and Indonesia has accelerated since the 1992 U.S. environmental summit in Rio, and is contributing more to global warming than cars and trucks do. And the fourth is that global warming will continue — and will continue to create serious impacts — even if we halted all emissions immediately.

[Introduction; Chapter Five: The Pollution Paradigm]

That sounds pretty bleak. What’s the good news?

The good news is that there are a number of very exciting things happening in the economy and society that are driving the birth of a new politics. New investments and innovations in clean energy, the rise of the creative postindustrial economy in the developed world, and rising prosperity in developing countries like China and India are the conditions for the new politics and a clean energy economy.

It is our contention that we have to begin building the new energy economy before we can tear down the old one. We believe that the same thing is true of the new politics. We need to create a politics of possibility to replace the old politics of limits.

[Chapter Five: The Pollution Paradigm; Chapter Ten: Greatness]

You argue for a focus on investment. Don’t we also need regulations?

All new markets require new rules and regulations. Our point is that we cannot create these new markets through new regulations alone. If we are to create the mass markets we need for things like solar,

wind, hydrogen, biofuels, and cleaner coal, we need major public investments. None of us today would have computers hooked up to the Internet had the Pentagon not guaranteed the market for microchips in the 1960s — and not literally invented the Internet in the 1970s. The bottom line is that the transition to a new clean-energy economy will require both major new investments *and* new regulations.

[Chapter Five: The Pollution Paradigm; Chapter Ten: Greatness]

You place great emphasis on prosperity as a precondition for ecological awareness and progressive politics in general. Can you explain that?

Economic prosperity, and the security it brings, allows people and entire cultures to focus on their higher needs. History bears this out. American environmentalism, and indeed the great social programs of the 1960s and early 1970s, were all a consequence of the postwar boom, and not, as many believe, a reaction to new industrial pollution. We point out that the Cuyahoga River had been catching fire for at least one hundred years before the famous 1969 fire, which is commonly seen as an instigator of the environmental movement. Many of the landmark environmental laws were signed by President Richard Nixon, who was also a product of the times.

A failure to grasp this history has serious consequences. Liberals and environmentalists too often see an inherent opposition between business and progressive initiatives — which is a false opposition and politically suicidal. Another serious consequence is that, in the international realm, we try to force the concerns of the developed world on nations still struggling to attain material security. What those nations need first and foremost is economic development.

America over the past half century has moved from an industrial to a postindustrial economy, from a material to a postmaterial society. Our needs and values are categorically different from those of developing nations, and we must understand them if we are to find smart solutions to our shared problems, whether they are global warming or immigration.

For the developed world, and especially for the United States, prosperity is the foundation for a politics of possibility. We describe the current moment in America as one of “insecure affluence,” which demands that we abandon our obsession with deficits and acknowledge and celebrate our unprecedented wealth. It is only from this position of strength that great things can be accomplished.

[Chapter Six: The Death of Environmentalism]

Is there any sign that a shift to the politics of possibility is already under way?

In 2005 Senator Barack Obama introduced legislation called “Health Care for Hybrids,” which we worked with his staff to create. It could play a key part in saving the American auto industry and creating the next generation of high-quality, high-efficiency vehicles. Senator Hillary Clinton recently embraced the call for a new Apollo project on clean energy, and though the amount of money she’s proposed is too small, in our view, to make things like solar and wind competitive with coal and natural gas, it’s still a very good start, and a sign, we

hope, of things to come.

A politics of possibility requires old oppositions like those between business and the environment, humans and nature, government and markets, to be abandoned in favor of more expansive, pragmatic, and holistic solutions. Obama's and Clinton's initiatives show signs of this, and there are others on the horizon.

[Chapter Seven: Status and Security; Chapter Eight: Belonging and Fulfillment]

What about China and India?

These two waking giants underscore that prosperity and material security are preconditions for ecological concern. China, which this year or next will pass the United States as the largest greenhouse gas emitter in the world, has long said it won't accept mandatory caps on its emissions because its per capita emissions rate remains roughly a tenth that of the United States. The only way China will take action on global warming is if doing so is in its economic self-interest. The same is true of countries like India and Brazil. All of which is why the new politics must, in our view, be focused centrally on possibility, investment, and innovation — not limits, regulation, and pollution.

[Chapter Five: The Pollution Paradigm; Chapter Ten: Greatness]

You point out that the environmentalist story is tragic, focusing on humankind's fall from Nature — and its coming punishment. But hasn't this story worked pretty well?

Traditional environmentalism was successful when it dealt with traditional environmental problems like smog and acid rain, and to a limited degree in other areas. But the truth is that the environmentalist story of global warming apocalypse has done as much harm as good. Elites and editorial writers are extremely worried about global warming, which is good, but the general population is not. Global warming today ranks at about 20 on a list of 21 issues presented to voters. Jobs, health, security — these things are always going to be more important to people than global warming, especially as long as the story of global warming is about human guilt for sinning against Nature.

Global warming needs to be reconceptualized, not as an environmental problem, but as something that encompasses our entire civilization — our jobs, our health, our aspirations. The story of human overcoming that can emerge from this will be anything but apocalyptic.

[Chapter Six: The Death of Environmentalism]

Do you suggest an alternative narrative to global warming apocalypse?

The political narrative we propose is one of overcoming adversity. In our 200,000 years as a species, we have overcome poverty, disease, and political oppression. We haven't done so everywhere, but human life has generally improved, not worsened. The fact that there are nearly seven billion human animals is not the story of collapse and failure but rather of success and overcoming.

We ought to be grateful for what our ancestors did to make a better world for us. This story of human overcoming is more likely to inspire feelings of gratitude, hope, and strength — whereas the story of humankind's sins against the earth evoke resentment and fear, and resistance among those who don't want to feel guilty or shamed.

This is a narrative that can inspire and get political traction, because it speaks to where we are and what we truly want.

[Chapter Six: The Death of Environmentalism]

Other environmental leaders seem to be more positive, focusing on the economic opportunities associated with clean energy.

And to the extent that that's happening, we applaud it. What's still missing, in our view, is a *politics* focused squarely on possibility, investment, and innovation, not limits, pollution, and regulation. It was an innovation-through-investment strategy that guaranteed the market for microchips and the creation of the Internet, as well as rebuilt Europe after World War II and led to the existence of the European Union. We need the same kind of strategy, but this time between Europe, America, and Asia.

[Chapter Five: The Pollution Paradigm; Chapter Ten: Greatness]

Is liberalism dying along with environmentalism?

Liberalism, like environmentalism, is captive to an outdated legacy and in serious need of updating. This legacy has its roots in the Great Depression and FDR's New Deal, and reached its high point in the sixties and seventies, the era when the civil rights acts, the great environmental acts, and the Great Society programs were all enacted. Since then, without a new vision appropriate for our age, progressive politics has fragmented into a loose coalition of single-issue interest groups. Over time, these groups and their agendas have become narrow, more technocratic, even as the problems they were originally meant to address have morphed into categorically different, more complex ones.

Liberalism needs a reality check, needs to see that the world has changed, that new problems call for new solutions. Liberals are still saddled with a Depression-era focus on poverty and inequality, when what most distinguishes our era is its wealth and opportunity. Liberals have been more obsessed with the loss of blue-collar industrial jobs than with the creation of good new-economy ones. And Democratic Party leaders — though not Democratic voters — are today overwhelmingly deficit-oriented. This deficit orientation is the liberal equivalent of the politics of limits, which means we are always talking about our weaknesses rather than our strengths.

[Chapter One: The Birth of Environmentalism; Chapter Seven: Status and Security]

Earlier, you mentioned “insecure affluence,” and you discuss this concept in your chapter on status and security. What does it mean?

By insecure affluence we mean that, since the mid-1970s, Americans have become increasingly *insecure* financially even as they also became increasingly *affluent* materially. You still hear liberals claim that the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. And you still hear

conservatives claim that everyone's getting richer. The truth is that everyone's getting *materially* wealthier but we are also spending more than we're saving and are increasingly in debt, and we feel more insecure as a consequence.

Prosperity and security are fundamental to any positive social change and must be put first on any aggressive political agenda. Liberals have too often misread this dynamic as simply rich against poor and have thus failed to advance a new and meaningful social contract that would support a progressive social agenda.

The right has been far more successful than the left when it comes to promising greater security, whether in terms of crime, terrorism, or finances. Democrats try to tap security fears, but more often than not in ways that make voters feel less secure, less powerful, and less in control of their lives. Democrats and progressives today often try to patiently explain to voters how poor, insecure, and low status they are — a discourse that is destined to backfire every time.

[Chapter Seven: Status and Security]

What's the alternative for environmentalists and progressives?

What we need is a discourse and a politics that begin by acknowledging all the ways in which we are already secure, affluent, and high status. At a material level, almost all of us are far, far better off than our grandparents were. We live longer. We have better medical care. We live in bigger houses and have more material wealth. We need a politics that starts from this recognition, and then builds on the assets and strengths we already have.

If conservatives need to keep people in a state of fear, we progressives need to keep people in a state of security and aspiration. This is as true now as it was when FDR said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." The truth is, the only thing progressives have to fear is fear itself. Conservatives have done very well keeping people scared.

[Chapter One: The Birth of Environmentalism; Chapter Seven: Status and Security; Chapter Nine: Pragmatism]

The book ends with a chapter on greatness. What is a politics of greatness?

A politics of greatness emphasizes our strengths rather than our weaknesses, our assets rather than our deficits. It acknowledges our great wealth and celebrates it. It acknowledges our history of global leadership, our collective identity as a nation of innovators, and our optimism — and celebrates these as well. It is a politics that speaks to who we are as a nation and where we are at this point in history. And because of this, it is a politics that is capable of inspiring us all to great things.

More practically, the politics we are proposing would aim to restore American greatness through a major investment in the clean-energy economy. Such a strategic investment would make America an economic and ecological leader globally. At the same time, it would allow for the kind of economic development and prosperity in the United States that would allow for individual Americans to overcome their lower material and postmaterial needs and re-create themselves

as unique individuals. This is the dream of a new national purpose for a new century.

[Chapter Ten: Greatness]

Praise for Break Through

"Green groups may carp, but the truth is the book could turn out to be the best thing to happen to environmentalism since Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*." - **Wired Magazine**

"Smart . . . not least because it would allow greens to frame climate change as an inspiring challenge, not just a pending catastrophe. And that's a contrarian position that just might help win the climate wars." - **Time Magazine**

"Their overall message - the enviros 'must choose between a resentful narrative of tragedy and a grateful narrative of overcoming' - will resonate with even dedicated tree huggers." - **Outside Magazine**

"[**BREAK THROUGH**] is unremittingly interesting, sharp, and wide-ranging, and it provides a great deal of thoughtful comment for anyone trying to figure out how to rally public support behind action on climate change, or indeed behind any progressive change." - **Bill McKibben, New York Review of Books**

"Elegant... Think *Fast Food Nation* meets *The Audacity of Hope*... Expect to underline a lot and then grab a friend or co-worker and say, 'Listen to this!'" - **Plenty Magazine**

"**BREAK THROUGH** is a provocative case against an erstwhile declaration of defeat." - **Seed Magazine**

"Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger speak with authority about environmentalism as a movement fatally out of touch with its mission." - **Los Angeles Times**