



The Last Refuge: Patriotism, Politics, and the Environment in an Age of Terror

By David W. Orr

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"Patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels" -SAMUEL JOHNSON, 1775
"a tightly reasoned, excellently written book that should be lethally effective in helping readers who aren't experts understand the contours of the crisis." - TOLEDO BLADE

Updated and revised following the 2004 elections, The Last Refuge describes the current state of American politics against the backdrop of mounting ecological and social problems, the corrosive influence of money, the corruption of language, and the misuse of terrorism as a political issue.

Setting out an agenda that transcends conventional ideological labels, David Orr contends that partisan wrangling is only a symptom of a deeper dysfunction: The whole political machinery that connects Americans' fundamentally honorable ideals with public policy is broken. The book offers a withering critique of the failings of the Bush administration, supplemented by new essays that look at the national-level dominance of the Republican Party and examine the fallacy that the evangelical right represents a Christian majority.

After analyzing the challenges of reforming the current system, Orr offers an empowering vision of a second American Revolution that peaceably achieves sustainability and charts a hopeful course for forward-looking citizens.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In 13 essays, Orr, professor of environmental studies and politics at Oberlin, critiques what he says is the current Bush administration's lack of environmental policy and calls for a more engaged citizenry. Orr sets the scene by relating a 2001 meeting with noncommittal White House staffers in which he and other leading environmentalists presented an environmental status report, entitled "Common Ground/Common Futures." "The news was delivered," he writes. "But no one was home." The present state of environmental affairs, he says, reflects "an unconstrained managerial and well-armed plutocracy intent on global plunder." Orr advocates a coherent environmental agenda, vigorous public information, restored political leadership and increased emphasis on environmental study in higher education. Specific essays focus on particular figures in the debate: one exposes Bjorn Lomborg, a favorite author of Dick Cheney's, as "scientifically dishonest," while another praises writer Wendell Berry's commitment to agrarian ideals. Perhaps the most informative essay in the collection, entitled "Leverage," examines the meager patchwork of U.S. environmental regulations and the nation's libertarian tendencies. Orr's politics will be familiar to all left-wing readers. There is little originality in his criticisms of the right and its attitude toward natural resources and energy efficiency. Orr's writing is steeped in sometimes utopian antimodern longings for small family farms, ecologically sound urban planning, increased public transportation and ecological diversity. While it's not hard to imagine how these essays might energize a readership committed to Orr's brand of politics, their rhetoric is too repetitive and ponderously moralizing to win wider audiences for their ideas.

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Review

"A tightly reasoned, excellently written book that should be lethally effective in helping readers who aren't experts understand the contours of the crisis."

(Toledo Blade)

"David Orr asks us to imagine a world where our politicians are informed, one where we actually care about the kind of earth our children will inherit. He's got to be nuts. Or, just maybe, he's on to something big."

(Jim Hightower publisher of The Hightower Lowdown and author of Thieves in High Place)

About the Author

DAVID W. ORR is the Paul Sears Distinguished Professor of Environmental Studies and Politics at Oberlin College. The recipient of the Bioneers Award and the Lyndhurst Prize, he has written three previous books (including *Earth in Mind*, Island Press 1994) and scores of articles on subjects ranging from education to agriculture.

Users Review

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