

Coming Full Circle: A Sweeping Saga of Conservation Stewardship Across America

Budd Titlow

Mariah Tinger

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Coming Full Circle is an ambitious historical novel that covers the centuries-long development of the environmental movement in the US.

Budd Titlow and Mariah Tinger's epic historical novel *Coming Full Circle* covers the development of conservation stewardship in the United States.

Spanning centuries, the book first honors the natural world before detailing encroachments on it and people's efforts to preserve it across generations. Native Americans are seen caring for the land; Young Strong Bow and the Oglala Nation live in idyllic equilibrium with nature long before European settlers arrive, and they believe that harmony with the planet is a virtue. Later, Thaddeus—a farmer in the Shenandoah Valley—migrates west, observing trends and changes in the land.

Over time, there are dramatic changes to the landscape and threats to its wildlife. In the story, these are observed through generations of people, some of whom become environmental activists. Notable events, including the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, the melting of Greenland's ice sheet, and instances of fracking are seen through their eyes. And the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss are shown, too, as the book works toward an imagined bright and sustainable future, ending in 2050.

There are adventures and instances of personal growth in this book that humanize its coverage of broad ecological issues: people have horrified reactions to the millinery industry's preying on wild birds; others get involved in legislation to protect such creatures, including the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. They witness the Sierra Club's efforts to preserve public lands and activists' movements to save fish in the Colorado River and grizzly bears in Alaska too.

However, because the book is so focused on serving as a witness to the environment's glory—and to human threats to it—the characters' personal milestones are often rushed through. They become secondary to endangered species and habitats in peril, as well as to narrative cautions against exploiting natural resources. The book's purpose is education, not entertainment: information about environmental degradation is delivered when environmental activists go scuba diving in the Great Barrier Reef, for example; rising sea levels are shown to jeopardize Florida's coastline as well. Further, there are frequent additions of historical information that come outside of the narrative itself; these are assertive deviations, delivering clear points of view on topics like the Wilderness Act of 1964, the accomplishments of inaugural Sierra Club executive director David Brower, and the appeal of certain environmental documentaries.

In the end, the book's characters are mouthpieces; while they sometimes "apologiz[e] for the lecture," their deliveries are still expository. They challenge short-sighted and apathetic authority figures in scenes that become repetitive, and they are prone to one-upmanship and sermonizing. Still, while their stories aren't wholly convincing on their own merit, they do make a passionate and compelling case for conservation, and they provide plentiful examples of how human

beings can live in harmony with nature.

Highlighting sustainable pathways forward alongside instances of environmental degradation, *Coming Full Circle* is an ambitious historical novel that covers the centuries-long development of the environmental movement in the US.

JOSEPH S. PETE (March 27, 2023)

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