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What We Leave Behind

Aric McBay
Derrick Jensen
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Our current way of life cannot continue. The co-authors are upfront with this warning to readers: we must radically change our lifestyles and our mindsets about keeping Mother Earth alive if we expect to leave a healthy planet to future generations. Right now, they emphasize, we are failing miserably.

Unfortunately, the necessary changes go far beyond the recycling of soda cans and newspapers. This text leads readers to the logical-and uncomfortable-conclusion that by embracing industrial capitalism and the consumption associated with it, we have accepted a culture that is killing our planet.

Both authors have previously published books on the environment and lectured extensively, so they have already established enough credibility to make a serious argument without sounding like alarmists. Still, their thesis is alarming. “The planet is collapsing. Now,” they write. “This culture is causing this collapse. This culture is killing the planet. Dont listen to me. Listen to the planet.”

They remind us that much of our so-called “green” movement towards sustainability is merely a window-dressing so we can keep our current lifestyles without the guilt trip. A case in point is the Ford Motor truck factory near Detroit. Yes, the roof of this sprawling industrial complex is covered with thriving, green plant life that insulates, reduces electricity and recycles rainwater. But the factory produces the same trucks that have been polluting the environment and expending natural resources for years.

The authors remind us that the trappings we embrace as symbols of civilization-pharmaceuticals and cell phones, for example-can also wreak havoc on the environment. Medicines dumped into our waterways irreparably alter many ecosystems, potentially jeopardizing the next generation. Billions of cell phones use up resources and are not easily recycled.

The co-authors use the collective “I” to tell their story in first person. As a result, readers unfamiliar with each author may not be quite sure who is doing the talking. But the point gets across. Jensen and McBay do not attempt to be impartial scribes and are candid about that stance. The text moves frequently from personal narrative to hard, scientific fact to disturbing news accounts about the ongoing, wanton destruction of our planet by corporate interests.

What We Leave Behind is not light reading, but a reader willing to stay on this circuitous journey to the end will be rewarded.

KARL KUNKEL (April 15, 2009)

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