Reading Guide – Rethinking Nature in a Nuclear Age (plus quick review of The Student Movement and the New Left)

This week we continue Unit 6 of the course, which examines the rise of dissent and the end of consensus, from the 1960s into the 1980s. To make up for our cancelled class last week, we will devote a short portion of Session 21 to reviewing materials on student movements and the New Left. The bulk of our discussion, however, will be focused on the emergence of modern environmentalism and the readings assigned for Session 21.

Assigned Materials for Session 20

Assigned Materials for Session 21
- [Optional] The Ehrlich-Commoner Debate (1972)

Questions to Consider
I’d like to focus our catch-up conversation at the start of class during Session 21 on the Lubar article and the SDS “Port Huron Statement.” How does the Lubar make sense with earlier units from the course? Why do many historians consider the Port Huron Statement a “Cold War document”?

The May and Tyrell readings both offer background on the emergence of modern environmentalism and the changing American relationship to technology and scientific “progress.” Feel free to skim through the Tyrell if you are short on time. Robertson offers a more analytic account of the emergence of late twentieth-century environmentalism and its relationship to growing concerns about rising global population – concerns most notably advanced by the ecologist and best-selling author Paul Ehrlich. What links do you see between the nuclear age/Cold War and Ehrlich, the Population Bomb, and growing fear of overpopulation during the late 1960s and early 1970s?

Rachel Carson’s classic, Silent Spring, is mentioned in most of the other readings assigned for Session 21. What do you think made this book so popular and important? How does it fit into the larger themes and questions of the course?