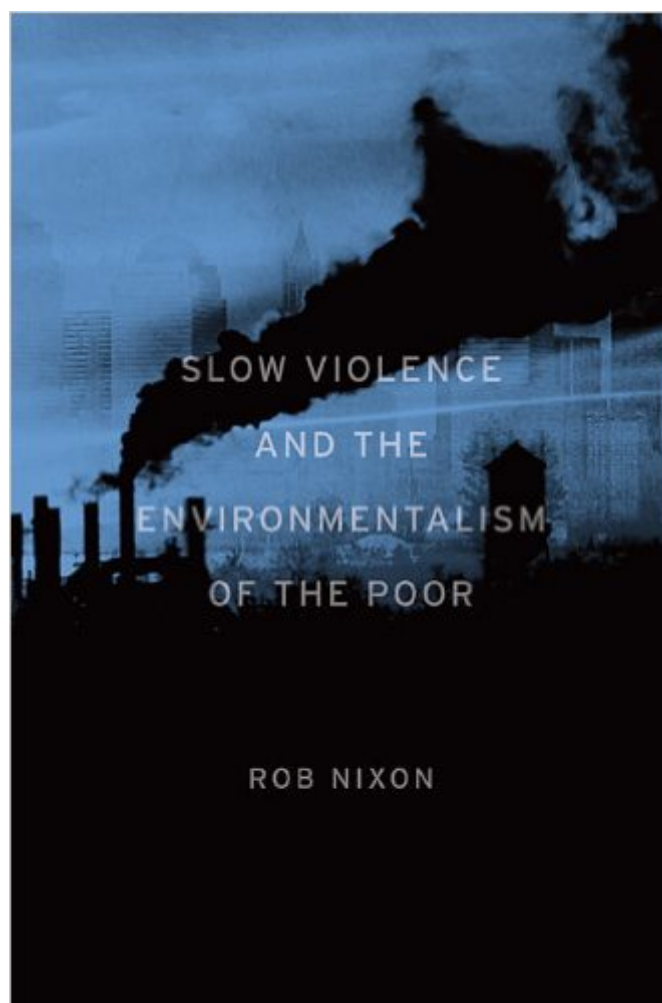


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# Slow Violence And The Environmentalism Of The Poor



## Synopsis

The violence wrought by climate change, toxic drift, deforestation, oil spills, and the environmental aftermath of war takes place gradually and often invisibly. Using the innovative concept of "slow violence" to describe these threats, Rob Nixon focuses on the inattention we have paid to the attritional lethality of many environmental crises, in contrast with the sensational, spectacle-driven messaging that impels public activism today. Slow violence, because it is so readily ignored by a hard-charging capitalism, exacerbates the vulnerability of ecosystems and of people who are poor, disempowered, and often involuntarily displaced, while fueling social conflicts that arise from desperation as life-sustaining conditions erode. In a book of extraordinary scope, Nixon examines a cluster of writer-activists affiliated with the environmentalism of the poor in the global South. By approaching environmental justice literature from this transnational perspective, he exposes the limitations of the national and local frames that dominate environmental writing. And by skillfully illuminating the strategies these writer-activists deploy to give dramatic visibility to environmental emergencies, Nixon invites his readers to engage with some of the most pressing challenges of our time.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Beyond the lens of a media trained on the dramatic scenes of hurricanes, wars, and terror attacks, the real violence at work, according to Rob Nixon's new book, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, is one that works insidiously over time and outside of view on the poorest and most vulnerable citizens of the planet. Instead of just chronicling the despicable

practices of energy conglomerates, big oil, armament manufacturers and the coalition of the willing--the IMF, World Bank, and neoliberal governments like our own, Nixon's book does something much more interesting. He focuses on the literary and imaginative responses of writer-activists around the world as they have joined forces with indigenous peoples and the poor to save their lands and ways of life. Nixon, who grew up in South Africa under apartheid and who has spent much of his own literary and scholarly work on environmental justice issues, is a keen observer of how writer-activists have learned to use a whole range of literary forms (novels, plays, essays, blogs, testimonial protest, and literary journalism) to counter the powerful forces at work in the name of globalization, economic development, progress, and democracy. With lucidity and careful contextualization, Nixon presents the work of several key writers and describes how their passion, outrage, and intellectual and artistic influences find a voice in their causes. We learn of the heroic work of Ken Saro-Wiwa exposing the horrific poisoning of the lands and fishing culture of the Ogoni people of Nigeria by Shell Oil. We follow the work and life of Nobel Peace Prize-winning Wangari Maathai as she helps to organize farmers and women to plant trees to save the depleted soils in Kenya. And, In India, Nixon examines the powerful protest essays and journalism of Arundhati Roy's in her support of indigenous Indians trying to save their lands against transnational mining and the mega-dam industry. But throughout the book, Nixon gives us a whole range of writers from the global south and north who have found "imaginative strategies," as he calls them, to shed light on various slow forms of cultural and environmental degradation from e-waste dumping, depleted uranium from US bombings in Iraq and Afghanistan, and even the seemingly benign billion dollar global tourism industry. From the viewpoint of the writer-activist, Nixon reminds us that writers since the monumental works of Rachel Carson and Nadine Gordimer have always played an indispensable role in speaking truth to the powerful forces of industry and in inspiring local activism in the protection of the environment and those who depend on its health.

This book has transformed the way in which I think about and work within the realm of environmental inequality. Nixon's original concepts (starting with the concept of "slow violence") ring loud and true and he conveys them with beauty and power. He draws from diverse thinkers and mind-blowing history. Environmental injustices are so sprawling, convoluted, and abysmal -- from waste to water to air to war to soil to toxins to climate change -- that they can be overwhelming and difficult to internalize in an organized way. Nixon has provided me with a loom that I can use to structure all these loose threads of feelings I could never quite articulate and knowledge I could never quite emote. If you consider yourself an "environmentalist," this must be the next book in your

queue. No way around it. If you don't consider yourself an "environmentalist," this book will teach you why that label is just an unnecessary facade; you don't need to be one to understand history, facts, injustice, and truth. This is a revolutionary work and the sooner we all read it, the closer we are to the revolution.

A deeply important book--not only for its precise and timely intervention at such a tenuous political/ecological moment, but for the accessibility, thoughtfulness, and grace of its delivery. Not only does this work broaden our thinking about the environmental politics in the sphere of the postcolonial, it allows us to think about violence itself in new ways. Specifically, violence not simply as an effect of imbalanced political histories, but violence as a text we have to learn (and relearn!) how to read. This is a contribution that directly faces the entanglement of neoliberalism, deepening toxification of natural spaces/resources, growing economic disparities, and a widespread cultural illiteracy about questions of global crisis itself. For this reason, it's a book that speaks across disciplinary contexts more effectively than any other, in recent environmental studies. *Slow Violence* is a text written in and for a cultural moment that struggles to see beyond the politics of the momentary. As such, it is an opportunity to learn to think differently about global crisis, not only in a variety of disciplinary contexts, but in the course of the everyday.

Having been both a Geographer by profession and a moving Theologian by education, I thought that before I read *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* I was reasonably educated about Climate Change and world ethics. But Professor Nixon's book in many ways shook me to the core and laid out historical political and social events that left me searching for air to breathe. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* was for me a journey through literature, culture and politics that revealed much that has been kept below the radar of our awareness, and deeply stamps the American way of life complicity in our accelerating race to destroy the world as we know it.

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