

4. According to Williams, the Atomic Energy Commission, which is made up of mostly male members, declared the "desert terrain" to be "virtually uninhabited" (paragraph 38). What factors (socioeconomic, geographic, political, psychological, cultural) might prompt continued disregard for the inhabitants? How does the existence of new, heavily populated desert communities in Arizona and Nevada (not to mention Middle Eastern countries) affect your answer?
5. What are the differences, for Terry Tempest Williams, between writing as a form of advocacy and the act of civil disobedience she describes in "The Clan of One-breasted Women"? Consider in your response Martin Luther King Jr.'s advocacy of a "direct-action campaign" in support of civil rights and the role his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (p. 494) played in influencing protesters' behavior.
6. Using Terry Tempest Williams, Henry David Thoreau (p. 594), and Annie Dillard (p. 599) as examples, write an essay in which you argue for or against the precept that where we live determines what we live for. Or argue the converse, that what we live for determines where and how we live, to whom we belong, and indeed, who we are.

AL GORE

A Planetary Emergency

Albert Arnold "Al" Gore Jr. (b. 1948), son of liberal Tennessee Senator Al Gore, graduated from Harvard in 1969, served in Vietnam although he opposed the war, and attended law school before dropping out to run for the U.S. House of Representatives, where he represented Tennessee for four terms, 1976–84. He then served in the U.S. Senate, 1985–93. As vice president under Bill Clinton, 1993–2000, Gore continued the activities he had begun while in the Senate to develop national information infrastructure, "The Information Superhighway," and to promote environmental preservation. Although he received the popular vote for the presidency in 2000, a Supreme Court decision gave the Florida election recount to George W. Bush.

*Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) shared the Nobel Peace Prize for 2007 for their efforts to inform the world "about man-made climate change," and their work to counteract such change. "A Planetary Emergency" is Gore's Nobel speech. The Nobel press release called Gore "probably the single individual who has done most to create greater worldwide understanding of the measures that need to be adopted" to strengthen "the struggle against climate change." His highly popular books on ecology are *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit* (1992) and *An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It* (2006); the movie version won an Oscar for Best Documentary. Gore is dedicated to warning people of*

the rapid climate changes causing world crisis, and to impel them to the "moral imperative to act."

We, the human species, are confronting a planetary emergency—a threat to the survival of our civilization that is gathering ominous and destructive potential even as we gather here. But there is hopeful news as well: we have the ability to solve this crisis and avoid the worst—though not all—of its consequences, if we act boldly, decisively and quickly.

However, despite a growing number of honorable exceptions, too many of the world's leaders are still best described in the words Winston Churchill applied to those who ignored Adolf Hitler's threat: "They go on in strange paradox, decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity, all powerful to be impotent."

So today, we dumped another 70 million tons of global-warming pollution into the thin shell of atmosphere surrounding our planet, as if it were an open sewer. And tomorrow, we will dump a slightly larger amount, with the cumulative concentrations now trapping more and more heat from the sun.

As a result, the earth has a fever. And the fever is rising. The experts have told us it is not a passing affliction that will heal by itself. We asked for a second opinion. And a third. And a fourth. And the consistent conclusion, restated with increasing alarm, is that something basic is wrong.

We are what is wrong, and we must make it right.

Last September 21, as the Northern Hemisphere tilted away from the sun, scientists reported with unprecedented distress that the North Polar ice cap is "falling off a cliff." One study estimated that it could be completely gone during summer in less than 22 years. Another new study, to be presented by U.S. Navy researchers later this week, warns it could happen in as little as 7 years.

Seven years from now.

In the last few months, it has been harder and harder to misinterpret the signs that our world is spinning out of kilter. Major cities in North and South America, Asia and Australia are nearly out of water due to massive droughts and melting glaciers. Desperate farmers are losing their livelihoods. Peoples in the frozen Arctic and on low-lying Pacific islands are planning evacuations of places they have long called home. Unprecedented wildfires have forced a half million people from their homes in one country and caused a national emergency that almost brought down the government in another. Climate refugees have migrated into areas already inhabited by people with different cultures, religions, and traditions, increasing the potential for conflict. Stronger storms in the Pacific and Atlantic have threatened whole cities. Millions have been displaced by massive flooding in South Asia, Mexico, and 18 countries in Africa. As temperature extremes have increased, tens of thousands have lost their lives. We are recklessly burning and clearing our forests and driving more and more species into extinction. The very web of life on which we depend is being ripped and frayed.

We never intended to cause all this destruction. . . .

But unlike most other forms of pollution, CO₂ is invisible, tasteless, and odorless—which has helped keep the truth about what it is doing to our climate out of sight and out of mind. Moreover, the catastrophe now threatening us is unprecedented—and we often confuse the unprecedented with the improbable.

We also find it hard to imagine making the massive changes that are now necessary to solve the crisis. And when large truths are genuinely inconvenient, whole societies can, at least for a time, ignore them. Yet as George Orwell reminds us: "Sooner or later a false belief bumps up against solid reality, usually on a battlefield."

In the years since this prize was first awarded, the entire relationship between humankind and the earth has been radically transformed. And still, we have remained largely oblivious to the impact of our cumulative actions.

Indeed, without realizing it, we have begun to wage war on the earth itself. Now, we and the earth's climate are locked in a relationship familiar to war planners: "Mutually assured destruction."

More than two decades ago, scientists calculated that nuclear war could throw so much debris and smoke into the air that it would block life-giving sunlight from our atmosphere, causing a "nuclear winter." Their eloquent warnings here in Oslo helped to galvanize the world's resolve to halt the nuclear arms race.

Now science is warning us that if we do not quickly reduce the global warming pollution that is trapping so much of the heat our planet normally radiates back out of the atmosphere, we are in danger of creating a permanent "carbon summer."

As the American poet Robert Frost wrote, "Some say the world will end in fire; some say in ice." Either, he notes, "would suffice."

But neither need be our fate. It is time to make peace with the planet. . . .

We must understand the connections between the climate crisis and the afflictions of poverty, hunger, HIV/AIDS and other pandemics. As these problems are linked, so too must be their solutions. We must begin by making the common rescue of the global environment the central organizing principle of the world community. . . .

The world needs an alliance—especially of those nations that weigh heaviest in the scales where earth is in the balance. I salute Europe and Japan for the steps they've taken in recent years to meet the challenge, and the new government in Australia, which has made solving the climate crisis its first priority.

But the outcome will be decisively influenced by two nations that are now failing to do enough: the United States and China. While India is also growing fast in importance, it should be absolutely clear that it is the two largest CO₂ emitters—most of all, my own country—that will need to make the boldest moves, or stand accountable before history for their failure to act.

Both countries should stop using the other's behavior as an excuse for stalemate and instead develop an agenda for mutual survival in a shared global environment. . . .

We have to expand the boundaries of what is possible. In the words of the Spanish poet, Antonio Machado, "Pathwalker, there is no path. You must make the path as you walk."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. What is the "planetary emergency" (paragraph 8) to which Gore refers? Identify the evidence he offers (paragraphs 10–19) to characterize the emergency. Because the Nobel Prize address is necessarily brief, what sorts of additional evidence would a longer speech allow? Where could good evidence be found? (See pieces in this chapter by Havel, Rees, Carson, Postel, Diamond, and Berry, and Gore's own books.)
2. In what ways has the "entire relationship between humankind and the earth been radically transformed"? If the changes are so great, why have we "remained largely oblivious to the impact of our cumulative actions" (paragraph 21)? What does Gore mean by the "mutually assured destruction" that will certainly occur if the world continues on its current trajectory (paragraph 22)? In contrast to a "nuclear winter," what is a "carbon summer" (paragraph 16)?
3. What might individuals do to help reduce global warming? Are you and your companions making conscious efforts to reduce global warming? If so, what are you doing? With what consequences? If not, why not?
4. Using other essays in this chapter and other sources of information as needed, pick a principle (such as the worldwide reduction of carbon emissions), research it, and present a plan to put it into effect. What consequences would you predict for your proposal?
5. What does Gore predict for the future if people combine to act to reduce global warming? And if they don't? Might you be living in the end of the world as you know it?

WANGARI MAATHAI

The Green Belt Movement

The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded in 2004 to Wangari Maathai for her "contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace." The Awards Committee noted, "Peace on earth depends on our ability to secure our living environment. Maathai stands at the front of the fight to promote ecologically viable social, eco-

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