

Edward Abbey: We Rest Our Case

E.B. Maple (Peter Werbe)

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Edward Abbey, author of the fictional eco-sabotage novel, *The Monkeywrench Gang*, and numerous other volumes on the Southwestern deserts and wilderness is both the eminence grise and bête noire of Earth First! Abbey is highly revered by the EF! leadership and many of its supporters for his eloquence in expressing a sense of things wild, but also for his misanthropic irreverence towards “humanistic” values.

Although there have always been troublesome aspects to his writing (even though declaring himself an anarchist), Abbey has recently emerged within the context of the debate over deep ecology as the Ezra Pound of the environmental movement. (Pound, one of the most influential poets of the first half of the 20th century, embraced fascism in his declining years, going so far as to make broadcasts from Italy praising Mussolini during WW II.)

We have noted in the last two issues of this paper that Abbey willingly admits to being what he describes as a “national chauvinist,” but increasingly he has slipped into a full-blown racist, xenophobia where immigrants, particularly from Latin America, arise in his view as the root of all “our” country’s problems. If this seems like a harsh assessment, perhaps a few quotes from his latest collection of essays, *One Life at a Time, Please*, offered with glowing praise by the EF! newspaper, should suffice.

In a short piece entitled, “Immigration and Liberal Taboos,” where he bemoans the fact that it is now unacceptable to call Mexicans “wetbacks,” he finally concludes that “it might be wise for us as American citizens to consider calling a halt to the mass influx of even more millions of hungry, ignorant, unskilled, and culturally-morally-genetically impoverished people.” When you hear the phrase “genetically impoverished” uttered in describing people, is it really inappropriate to haul out the charge of “fascist” or even “nazi”? What other political philosophy delves into biology as the basis for an asserted hierarchy of ethnic or racial quality?

In order to stop the importation of what Abbey refers to in his essay as the immigrants’ “alien mode of life,” this “anarchist” offers a solution to what he describes as “a simple technical-military problem.” How solved? He states, “We’ve got an army somewhere on this planet; let’s bring our soldiers home and station them where they can be of some actual and immediate benefit to the taxpayers who support them.” In other words, guard our borders along with the wealth this nation loots from the rest of the world against the tiny fraction of the empire’s victims who try to reach the center of the apparatus which has destroyed their culture. Racist? His desire to stop the brown hordes from entering “our” (remember the Native Americans?) shores sounds no different than the calls from the eugenicists and racialists of the 1920s who inveighed against the wave of Eastern and Central European immigration.

We probably should rest our case against this bitter and pathetic character who has retreated into the dark corners of patriotism and race hatred, but he keeps letting out gems that cannot be ignored.

In the Nov./Dec. 1987 *Utne Reader*, in a debate with social ecologist Murray Bookchin, Abbey refers to Bookchin as a “fat, old woman” and then flippantly admits to being a “male, sexist pig” as if the description carries with it no negative condemnation. Is Abbey so callous that he doesn’t care what sort of insult and hurt such a remark might carry for the millions of portly and elderly women who no longer fit the image of a Playboy centerspread?

For whatever value Abbey’s ideas may have had in the past, his current utterances are so reprehensible as to make us want to ask Dave Foreman (now head of the EF! book department after resigning as the paper’s editor)

why Earth First! continues to sell and promote books such as the one quoted from above? Maybe it's that they agree with him, huh?

FE Note: If any reader is interested in seeing Abbey's essay, "Immigration and Liberal Taboos," we can furnish a copy.

More of the debate on deep ecology appears in *Kick It Over*, Box 5811, Stn. A, Toronto Ont. Canada M5W 1P2, issue 20, \$2; and from *Green Perspectives*, Box 111, Burlington VT 05402.

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