

How the Sierra Club's Enron Scandal Went Nowhere

In Oct. 2004, the *Los Angeles Times* presented a detailed profile of Wall Street investor David Gelbaum, who had recently been revealed as having given a fortune to the Sierra Club in order to purchase and protect some scenic land in California. The piece, "The Man Behind the Land," also disclosed that the gift came with strings attached. Gelbaum was quoted as saying, "I did tell Carl Pope in 1994 or 1995 that if they ever came out anti-immigration, they would never get a dollar from me."

It was shortly after that time when the Sierra Club ended its official position of 30 years duration that "Immigration to the U.S. should be no greater than that which will permit achievement of population stabilization in the U.S." The Club reversed this policy to reflect "neutrality" on the domestic population explosion, when the engine of growth was no longer births to traditional Americans, but immigration.

A group of Sierra members formed in 1996 (still alive on the web at www.SUSPS.org) to return the Sierra Club to its earlier, responsible policy. The resistance from management was surprisingly ferocious, particularly considering that reformers merely wanted a reinstatement of a long-held position.

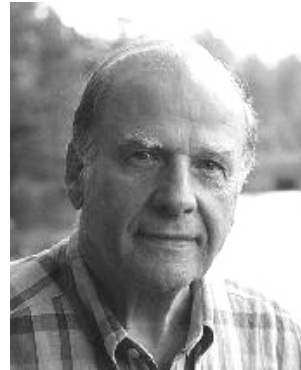


David Brower

After growing success in getting population realists on the Board of Directors (chosen by membership vote), management's long knives came out in 2004. Aided by far leftists MoveOn.org and the Southern Poverty Law Center, vicious personal attacks were perpetrated against highly reputable Board candidates seeking reform (including former Gov. of Colorado Richard Lamm, former executive director of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Frank Morris, and Cornell Prof. David Pimentel). The bad guys won, mostly because they

had the most money and the least scruples.

One reason for the success of evil is the laziness of the media. They will accept a press release from a known organization as entirely truthful, without the necessary skepticism required to check facts. The Sierra Club is a multimillion-dollar operation, so those entrenched in power might reasonably



Gaylord Nelson

be expected to hang on tightly to their cushy positions. But in 2004 when the San Francisco head office declared oppositional candidates to be racists (including a black man and a local NAACP founder), reporters wrote accordingly.

Truth be told, the media has never been that concerned with reporting the environment. It's too complicated to cover easily, a difficulty which the decline of science education has not helped. The important stories are often gradual in nature, not dramatic. The fascinating founders of the modern environmental movement who once provided good copy, like David Brower and Gaylord Nelson, are no longer alive.

The press' current interest in global warming may have as much to do with its Bush antipathy as anything else. Since the President plays perfectly the role of pave-over Republican, the media can easily forget how disappointing Clinton and Gore were as environmentalists.

The Sierra Club bribe story had no legs. There was almost no follow-up coverage. Many environment reporters never heard about it, and even if they did, they probably couldn't imagine the inheritors of John Muir to behave more like Tony Soprano than Teddy Roosevelt. It was sad to see the Enron scandal of the environmental movement quickly disappear from view, but not surprising. ■

—Brenda Walker