Environmentalism in Toronto
Urban Environmental Concern

• Uneven over time and space
Environmental Concern

- Public environmental concern seems to rise in economic booms
  - Later 1960s
  - Late 1980s
  - Mid 2000s
- And recedes in recessions
  - 1970s, early 1990s, post 2008
Environmental Concern

• Why should concern rise in boom times, and fall in recession?
Public concern about air pollution in Toronto

• Surfaces in early 1870s (boom)
• Resurfaces in later 1880s (boom)
• Strong 1905-1912 (boom)
• Surge 1945-1955 (boom)
• Surge in later 1960s (boom)
• Surge in later 1980s (boom)
Variation over space

• Tendency for wealthy communities/neighbourhoods to
  – Seek out high environmental quality
  – Demand, implement environmental improvements
Cities and the Environment

• Cities put huge pressure on the environment
  – Wide and deep environmental footprints
  – Consume resources, create wastes
  – Eat food, create sewage

• Cities are a big factor in the global environmental predicament
  – There should be some politics
Cities and the Environment

• We should care politically about the environment, and about cities in the environment
• Toronto is a place where people claim to care about the environment
• But a lot of this “environmentalism” is class culture
Victorian Toronto

• The late Victorian middle class were into bathing
• Part of their class culture
Ladies' Waiting Room.

Ladies, you come off the train; you are covered with dust, begrimed with smoke; you feel unrefreshed; you don't wish to beg anyone to allow you to make your toilet in their rooms without paying them for it; you possibly have a long day's shopping before you; probably you have a number of packages, wraps, etc.; you are getting disgusted. Listen! Get off your train, take a Yonge or Queen street car, as it may be, and bring your parcels with you straight to Eaton's. Why? In the south corner of Yonge and Queen street stores is an office expressly for you to consider as your own. Here you can leave your parcels and get a cheque for them free of charge, send your telegrams, telephone, ask questions, leave your over garments, umbrellas, anything. Should you have too many parcels, there are trunks from 90c. to $10 in the basement quite convenient. So much for your parcels. Now you want to wash, arrange your toilet, and take a rest. Take the elevator to the second floor, and right south of the freight elevator you will find a nicely curtained waiting-room, a clean toilet room, with towels, soap, etc. Other waiting-rooms are scattered throughout the building for your convenience. These rooms are yours; we give them to you. Wash as often as you please; wait as long as you like. Get thoroughly refreshed before you start your shopping. We give you the invitation, and will be delighted with your acceptance.

SHOPPING BY MAIL.
Victorian Toronto

• Bathing culture pretended to be about hygiene and decency
  – But was really a class culture
  – Victorian middle class described the poor as “the great unwashed”
C21st Toronto

• Environmentalism is big among the inner city creatives, downtowners, gentrifiers
• Outwardly this environmentalism is about saving the planet
• But in reality it is probably more to do with class
  – Our version of Victorian bathing culture
  – I wish it were otherwise
The West Toronto Railpath

- A $4-million initiative to create a recreational green railside corridor through Toronto’s west end
  - Inexpensive high-quality urban greening
  - A great asset to a dense urban neighbourhood

- Great for the local gentrifiers, helps drive up the value of their homes
The West Toronto Railpath

- Urban greening co-opted by gentrifiers
- Helps gentrifiers fight diesel trains, Solways scrapyard, auto body places
- The railpath a central resource in gentrifiers naming and claiming their new neighbourhood
  - And driving out the remaining blue collar jobs & people
Rise of the Modern Environmental Movement

• Before 1967 the word “ecology” was limited to specialists in biology, conservation

• From spring 1967 “ecology” is used politically
  – and enters mainstream use.
  – Alderman Tony O’Donahue the first Toronto politician to use it
Why the late 1960s?

• Why did “ecology” become political at this time?
• The 1960s an era of Civil Rights agitation, anti-Vietnam war protest, counterculture
  – Environmentalism boosted by 1960s counterculture?
  – Linked to political coming-of-age of the Baby Boomers?
Why the late 1960s?

• The later 1960s saw the shortcomings of western industrial civilization become apparent?
• Environmental concern rising in a time of relative affluence?
• Nobody is sure
• But I have a theory of my own
Later 1960s

- I’m arguing that the city’s unpleasant land uses reach the point of serious conflict with suburban and exurban residents in the 1960s.
- Most of the major headlining environmental conflicts of Toronto in the late 1960s-early 1970s are from the urban fringe.
  - Over dumps, airports, quarries, auto wreckers.
Another Trend

• The middle classes traditionally fled the inner city for the suburbs
  – Inner city congested, messy, expensive
  – Inner city abandoned to the poor and the ethnic
1950s-1960s

• Toronto abandons low-efficiency coal burning
  – The smoke, which played a big role in driving out the middle class, fades away

• Adventurous, bohemian members of the middle class begin to re-settle the inner city
  – Countercultural coffee houses flourish in Yorkville and Gerrard St W
Protest brings kicks, judo chops

Police beat up hippies during Yorkville sit-in

50 jailed seeking auto ban

By FRANK ADAMS and JOHN CRAWFORD

Violence broke out in Yorkville last night as police stopped, kicked, punched, and subdued a group of hippies who were trying to escape from a patrol wagon.

About 16 had been arrested following a sit-in on Yorkville Avenue at Hastings Avenue in a protest against the city’s failure to close the street to car traffic.

Screaming, shrieking and yelling, the hippies were beaten as they sat on the road, their arms in casts. One detective, wearing a grey jacket and blue pants, was doused with beer.


A constable grabs hold of a hippie’s face as two others struggle with a youth beside a group of policemen carrying a girl toward the paddy wagon as an anti-traffic Yorkville Avenue sit-in ended in violence last night.
1960s-1970s

• Growing trend of middle-class baby boomers establishing themselves in the inner city
• They come into conflict with urban redevelopment, slum clearance
• Gentrification accompanies emergence of reform politics in Toronto
1960s-1970s

- **Formation of Pollution Probe at the University of Toronto in 1969-70**
- Holds a summit at City Hall to inquire into the deaths of ducks at Toronto Island
  - Invites Marshall McLuhan
- Probe becomes a major environmental NGO
- 1968: Faculty of Environmental Studies created at York U
1970s-1980s

• Growing gentrification in Toronto raises the issues of inner city environmental contamination
  – The contaminated districts around the old lead smelters, non-ferrous metals recyclers
  – Inner-city children sick with lead exposure
  – Ontario forced to clean up lead districts
1980s-1990s

• Older industries abandon their inner city locations
  – Perhaps forced out by NAFTA, Globalization
• Continued gentrification leads to an effort to decontaminate empty industrial sites
  – 1985 Site Decommissioning Guidelines
  – 1996 Site Cleanup Guidelines
• Procedures for reclaiming “brownfields”
1980s-1990s

- David Crombie runs a Royal commission to look at mismanagement of a brownfield conversion
  - Toronto's Harbourfront
- Recommends major changes for the Toronto waterfront, region
- City of Toronto creates a taskforce to
  - Bring Back the Don
1980s-Present

• Emergence of a varied mixture of environmental groups
  – North Toronto Green Community
  – The Green Party
  – Evergreen
  – Riversides
1990s-Present

- 1994 onwards abandoned Don Valley Brickworks rehabilitated and converted into a ecological programming centre
- 1997 Evergreen begins ecological restoration on-site
- Evergreen takes the site over
  - 2006 farmers’ markets begin
  - 2009 Charles & Camilla visit
1990s-2000s

• Growing realization that Toronto faces a deepening environmental crisis
  – The end of cheap petroleum and fossil-fuel based energy
  – The disruptions of climate change
  – Problematic auto-dependent sprawl
1990s-2000s

- Toronto’s middle class intelligensia increasingly lives in the inner city
- Most of Toronto’s public intellectuals, academics, journalists, environmentalists
- They admire their inner-city lifestyle choice
  - Can cycle, walk or take transit to work
1990s-2000s

• Suburbs derided as ‘inefficient’ and hopelessly sprawling
  – John Sewell, Christopher Hume writing about this.

• But most Toronto people live in the suburbs
  – And seem to be happy

• Inner city intellectuals out of touch with suburban reality?
Inner City Environmentalism

• Various communities trying to improve their local environment
  – Community gardens
  – Carbon-trading co-operatives
  – Urban agriculture/community food schemes such as Foodshare
  – Friends of Dufferin Grove Park
Dufferin Grove Community Association

• A community group dedicated to citizen control over Dufferin Grove Park
• Enhanced play spaces for children
• Community events
• Community food initiatives, food sharing, farmer’s market
DUFFERIN GROVE
ORGANIC
FARMERS’ MARKET
THURSDAYS 3-7 PM YEAR-ROUND
www.dufferingrovepark.ca
Dufferin Grove Community Association

- Aids the poor but makes the area attractive to environmentally-minded gentrifiers
- Gentrifiers will inevitably price the poor out of the local housing market
  - It’s already happening
Not Far from the Tree

• Founded in 2008
• Harvests tree fruit that would otherwise go to waste
• Provides most of the harvest to local food banks, needy communities
• Growing, but still largely rooted in the gentrified postal codes
Wychwood Car Barns

• Old TTC streetcar barns refurbished as an urban park and community centre with an arts/environmental theme
  – Weekly farmers’ market
  – NGO offices

• Another gift of public funding to environmentally-minded gentrifiers

• Boosts adjoining property values
  – People already cashing in
Local Environmentalism

- Environmental movement has a long and complex history in the Toronto region
- Since the 1960s it has become part of middle-class culture
  - Emerging wherever the middle-classes settle
Local Environmentalism

- Toronto environmentalists recognize that first nations, rural areas, poor urban communities face environmental problems
  - But find it easier to mobilise the middle classes in their own areas
Local Environmentalism

• Certain forms of gentrification are accompanied by environmental activism
  – Often with a social justice component
• But socially needy areas lack environmentalist activity
  – Just as they lack middle-class participation
• And environmentalism may aid gentrification
Local Environmentalism

• Comes in local varieties
• Those in the USA often inclined to talk about “Environmental Justice”
  – Concerns less relevant to urban Canada
Environmentalism

- Environmentalism is a human activity
  - Becomes shaped and patterned by human identity, personal agendas
  - Becomes adapted to suit class culture, gentrification, the goals of NGO careerists

- Its humanity sustains it
  - It must be humanly meaningful to survive
  - But allows it to get captured by influential minorities
Environmentalism

• Should have broader goals, must escape from its class culture
• Like political ecology it is only partly about ‘nature’ and the ‘environment’
  – Human factors play an enormous role