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In the post-war years, The Wilderness Society broadened its arguments for wilderness preservation, particularly in response to new threats posed by increased timber harvesting and dam building by the federal government and new developments in the biological sciences. Led by Executive Secretary Howard Zahniser and Director Olaus Murie, the Society played an instrumental role in the passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964, which defined a wilderness as “an area where the Earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” Since then, The Wilderness Society has helped to add 104 million acres to the National Wilderness Preservation System, often in collaboration with other environmental organizations that share its worldview. Despite the growth of its membership and the evolution of its arguments, The Wilderness Society remains committed to its founders’ emphasis on preserving wilderness for the recreational and spiritual renewal of future generations.

Daniel J. Philippon

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 See also: Leopold, Aldo; Marshall, Robert; Muir, John; Murie, Olaus J.; National Parks and Monuments (United States); Sierra Club; Wilderness Religion.

Williams, Delores S. (1937–)

Delores Williams is an African-American Presbyterian theologian who has played a formative role in the development of womanist theology, centering on historical and present testimonies of black women. Like other types of feminist and liberation theology, Williams’ womanist theology rejects traditional dichotomies between body/spirit and humanity/nature that pervade mainstream Christian thought. Williams offers a theological response to the defilement of black women’s bodies and identities in antebellum and postbellum America. She analyzes the surrogacy roles that were imposed on black women’s bodies, raped and forced to substitute for white women sexually and economically and used to breed slave offspring. She makes parallels between such surrogacy and the exploitative rape of nature perpetrated by strip-mining the land and clear-cutting forests – both cases represent sin involv-

ing efforts to exploit and control the productive and reproductive capacities of nature.

Williams argues that these types of sin have been nearly invisible in Christian theology. Along with her expansion of the notion of sin, she also proposes a non-anthropocentric concept of salvation, indicating her hope for the end of violence and the liberation of creation from oppression. Using the biblical story of Hagar, the concubine of Abraham banished to the wilderness with her son Ishmael, Williams represents black women as “sisters in the wilderness.” The metaphor of wilderness symbolizes a place of danger, fear and vulnerability, but also a place where God is present and strength is discovered. However, her theology lacks reflection on “wilderness” in itself as threatened. Wilderness is viewed as a projection of the human fear of exile. Given the strategic need to articulate black women’s voices and theological responses to racism and sexism, Williams has made major strides toward an “ecowomanist” theology that exposes exploitative sins against black women’s bodies and nature and points toward salvation.

Sarah Pinnock

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 See also: Christianity (7g) – Womanism; Walker, Alice.

Williams, Terry Tempest (1955–)

Author, activist, naturalist, desert mystic, poet, and green prophet, Terry Tempest Williams is made up of nearly as many layers as the geological cross-sections of Utah’s canyon country she brings to life in her writing. Steeped in the Mormon culture of her upbringing, Williams is also a feminist, environmentalist, and outspoken anti-war activist. A descendant of Brigham Young and able to trace her heritage back through five generations of Latter-Day Saints, Williams possesses an intense passion for the sacred landscape of her Utah home and for the larger American West – a landscape she experiences as inspired by wildness and grace. Her sojourns in the desert assume a revealing quality that leaves her heart open and exposed, vulnerable to her readers. This is precisely the point and in this respect Williams leads by example. For instance, she writes,

It is time for us to take off our masks, to step out from behind our personas – whatever they may be: educators, activists, biologists, geologists, writers, farmers, ranchers, and bureaucrats – and admit we are lovers, engaged in an erotics of place. Loving the land. Honoring its mysteries. Acknowledging, embracing the spirit of place – there is nothing more legitimate and there is nothing more true (Williams 1994: 84).

Williams is best known for *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* (1991), which interweaves natural history and personal family narrative. In this work, she juxtaposes her experiences “midwifing” her mother through her ovarian cancer death to the simultaneous destruction of the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge from human-produced flooding. Williams’ grief over both is palpable. More than anything, she witnesses to the environmental cancer that is upon the Earth and the continuity between the earthbody and the human body. In “Clan of the One-Breasted Women,” the epilogue to *Refuge*, Williams recites the list of (clean-living, non-smoking, non-drinking) Mormon mothers, aunts, and grandmothers in her family who have all been stricken with breast cancer and who have died or been rendered unlikely Amazons through mastectomies. She also links these cancers to the years that the U.S. Government bombed the American West, conducting atmospheric testing of atomic weapons in Nevada and exposing other western states as well to radioactive fallout drifting on wind currents. Williams rails at this injustice and deems the cancers a price far too high to be paid for obedience – the unquestioning acceptance of authority instilled and reinforced in Mormon culture. She writes,

as a Mormon woman of the fifth generation of Latter-day Saints, I must question everything, even if it means losing my faith, even if it means becoming a border tribe among my own people. Tolerating blind obedience in the name of patriotism or religion ultimately takes our lives (Williams 1991: 286).

Williams is a self-described “edge-walker,” who travels the narrow space between the religious tradition she credits for having “forged her soul,” and her direct and very personal experiences in nature that have revealed a truth of their own. Throughout her work, she negotiates this edge by embracing themes that resonate for both Mormons and environmentalists – the importance of community, home, family, heritage, and commitment. Her co-edited anthology, *New Genesis: A Mormon Reader on Land and Community* (1998), carefully presents essays from a variety of Mormon writers who promote principles of ecological care and conservation as grounded in

Mormon scriptural sources. The ideal of the nineteenth-century Mormon village is revisited as a model of self-sufficiency and sustainability, and Brigham Young’s advocacy of water conservation is repeatedly invoked. The anthology ultimately succeeds in marrying Mormon and environmental perspectives in a way that is inviting rather than threatening to more conservative readers.

If Williams is an “edge-walker,” then her “edgiest” book is *Desert Quartet: An Erotic Landscape* (1995). In this work, she explores the land as mystical lover and embodies a kind of “eco-eroticism” that blurs boundaries between skin and rock, wind and breath, blood and water, and fire and flesh. Williams leads the reader on a poetic journey through the desert and into intimate encounters with the Earth’s four basic elements (Earth, air, fire, water). In so doing, she engages the Earth’s “body” in a primal mystical union that pulses with pleasure and erotic intensity.

Williams sounds similar “eco-erotic” themes in her collections of essays, *An Unspoken Hunger* (1994) and *Leap* (2000), a book dedicated to her obsession with painter Hieronymus Bosch’s medieval triptych “The Garden of Delights.” The burning question within Williams while she was writing *An Unspoken Hunger* was “How do we make love to the land?” (1995), a question she confesses intrigues her in part because eroticism is so taboo in Mormon culture (Jensen 1995: 312). In *Leap*, Williams explicitly draws parallels between a fear of intimacy and eros within Mormon culture and the narrow valuing of nature solely for its practical human utility. She observes, “I see my community’s fear of homosexuality, even wilderness, as a failure of imagination. Sex is like land. It must be used for something” (Williams 2000: 195).

Issues of land use and wilderness preservation are indeed central to Williams’ activism. She has testified to protect Utah’s wild lands before a U.S. Senate subcommittee hearing on the Utah Public Land Management Act and has spoken before Congress on behalf of “America’s Redrock Wilderness Act.” She has also compiled and presented to Congress a volume of writers’ witness to the historical and spiritual importance of preserving America’s public lands. At a time when the idea of “wilderness” has been exhaustively deconstructed and its use aggressively critiqued within academia, Williams continues to “buck this trend,” boldly making the case for the spiritual, psychological, and ecological importance of protecting wild places. “I choose to err on the side of preservation,” writes Williams,

and stand shoulder to shoulder with brothers and sisters in our shared desire to protect the last large expanses of wilderness we have left . . . I want to speak the language of grasses, rooted yet supple in the presence of wind before a storm. I want to write in the form of migrating geese like an arrow pointing south toward a direction of safety. I want to keep

my words wild so that even if the land and everything we hold dear is destroyed by shortsightedness and greed, there is a record of beauty and passionate participation by those who saw it coming (Williams 2001: 19).

In 1995, the *Utne Reader* named Terry Tempest Williams one of its “100 visionaries.” She is a Rachel Carson Institute Inductee in recognition of her work as an environmental leader; she is also the winner of a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Lannan Literary Fellowship for her creative non-fiction.

Sarah McFarland Taylor

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- See also: Autobiography; Church of Jesus Christ, Latter Day Saints; Memoir and Nature Writing; Sexuality and Green Consciousness.

Wilson, Edward O. (1929–)

An entomologist by training, E.O. Wilson’s hypotheses have had far-reaching influence not only in the biological sciences, but in the humanities and social sciences as well. Wilson’s ideas connect religion and nature on two levels. First, he argues that religion, like social behavior in general, is subject to natural selection. Second, Wilson’s primary intellectual endeavor has been to demonstrate the religiosity implicit in the natural sciences. His litany of publications includes several well-respected contributions to the field of ecology, but he is most widely known for his theory of sociobiology, and for his championship of

environmental issues. This hypothesis established a scientific field devoted to finding the biological origins of animal social behavior at both the genetic and the environmental levels. Sociobiology presents challenges to current conceptualizations in the biological sciences as well as the social sciences. Sociobiological studies seek to understand the evolutionary foundations of social behaviors in animals, and to apply an ecological model to the social sciences. At the heart of E.O. Wilson’s ideas is the assertion that scientific investigation can radically improve the production of knowledge, and can be synthesized with other disciplinary systems.

Due to a boyhood fishing accident, Wilson’s vision is good in only one eye; and he has subsequently trained himself for close observation. His career in insect biology supplied him with many resources for the extension of scientific study into other fields. He is renowned for his work on the behavior of social insects, but has branched out tremendously into studies of ecology, gene-culture co-evolution, sociobiology, biogeography, environmental ethics, environmentalism, and environmental policy. He is the recipient of two Pulitzer prizes: one for his work in *On Human Nature*, and the other for his co-authorship of the definitive entomological work *The Ants*. Following his fieldwork in Cuba and New Guinea, Wilson joined the Harvard faculty of biology. He remains active there as a professor in the Department of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology, and as the honorary curator in entomology at the Museum of Comparative Zoology.

As a part of his larger project to understand human social life scientifically, Wilson has argued that religion is a product of natural selection. Beyond Wilson’s sentiments that religion is biological in origin, he also believes that traditional religions are ill-equipped to deal with the environmental and social problems of the modern world. In *Consilience*, one of his most accessible works, Wilson seeks to renew the enlightenment project of finding ultimate meaning through science. As a voice of twentieth-century biology, Wilson presents a continued call for an empirically grounded metaphysics, a religion based in fact, sounded a century earlier by such thinkers as Auguste Comte. Such a worldview would invalidate anthropocentric conceptualizations of the universe, and seek to create social harmony based on a coordinated effort between biology and the social sciences. His quest is lofty; not only does he advocate a massive research endeavor to establish scientific consensus on moral issues, he further believes that this new faith in facts needs to be created in poetic form, as an epic cultural narrative. He is a board member of the Epic of Evolution Society, and collaborates with those engaged in the consecration of scientific narratives in this way. His call for such a scientific undertaking has, however, been refuted directly by Wendell Berry in *Life is a Miracle*, and many non-scientists look at sociobiology as a highly controversial theory. Feminists,