

# THE LEOPOLD WRITING PROGRAM

2020 ALDO LEOPOLD WRITING CONTEST AWARD WINNER

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HONORABLE MENTION, GRADES 10-12

On December 11, 1929, New Mexico oil and gas barons met to discuss economic solutions for the state as the Great Depression ravaged through the country. From this meeting, the modern-day New Mexico Oil and Gas Association was formed. The oil industry boomed and increased New Mexico's economy in a time of nation-wide decrease. A suitable combatant against a sick economy, the NMOGA was partly responsible for the state's general stability. Despite their saving economic actions in the past, however, power plants have come to inflict pain on the ecological planet.

As the New Mexican economy surges from oil and gas profits, the ecological world collapses under the pressure. This is because economy and ecology, though branched from the same root word, have changed in meaning over time and lost common purpose. Land subsidence is the greatest result of their divergent perspectives. Reuniting our understanding of economy and ecology will help solve this issue in our modern world.

Land subsidence is the sinking of ground surface due to underground destabilization. Human-induced land subsidence is caused by excessive mining or extracting. Land subsidence disrupts ecologies living in the area and damages, beyond repair, our precious terrain. Aldo Leopold writes in his book, *A Sand County Almanac*, that "we abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect" (Leopold xix). The maltreatment of our earth is the result of a polluted perspective of it. The question is, then, what could be so paramount as to allow the scathing hand of decimation to fall upon our ecologies? The answer is wealth. Our economy is driven by monetary gain and conquering. In a world where the success of a civilization is determined by its capital, the negative consequences of the unmitigated actions it takes to succeed are often minimized. However, these consequences are inevitably the downfall of such civilizations.

In the instance of mining-induced land subsidence, economy's greed harms itself. As land subsidence weakens surrounding earth, building foundations are damaged and the possibility of development is devastated. In mines, mine subsidence, with or without insurance, can cost a business greatly. Not only do greed-driven economic aspirations upset environmental societies but also their own. Aldo Leopold writes that "in human history, we have learned (I hope) that the conqueror role is eventually self-defeating. Why? Because it is implicit in such a role that the conqueror knows, *ex cathedra*, just what makes the community clock tick, and just what and who is valuable, and what and who is worthless, in community life. It always turns out that he knows neither, and this is why his conquests eventually defeat themselves" (Leopold 240). Without ecology governing our actions, enterprising economic campaigns are doomed to fail. We need to understand and appreciate the natural world in a more respectful manner. We need, for our true success as a civilization, economy to be educated by ecology.

However, mere knowledge of the problem does not solve it. The community may understand that mining has its consequences but until it is affecting the individual, the individual won't defend the ecological community. Leopold addresses this situation by commenting that "when one asks why no rules have been written, one is told that the community is not ready to support them; education must precede rules. But the education actually in progress makes no mention of obligations to land over and above those dictated by self-interest" (Leopold 245). Aldo Leopold is emphasizing the inefficiency of education without obligation. It is worthless to know that oil drilling causes land subsidence when nothing is done to improve the situation. Reuniting economy and ecology will establish a societal position conducive to the solving of such modern environmental problems.

As our economy progresses through the future, may we work to ensure that ecology progresses alongside it. With every inch drilled, another biological community saved; with every case of subsidence, another lesson learned; and with every economic increase, another environmental breakthrough. The future of a flourishing world, our world, lies in the harmonious reuniting of those which were once the same: economy and ecology.

