

***Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* by Rob Nixon. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011. Pp. 370. \$45.00 (Hardcover). ISBN: 978-0674049307**

**Reviewer:** Claudia J. Ford\*

*[Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2012 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]*

When I have completed the final pages of the latest environmental studies tome or walked to the parking lot after an environmentally themed public lecture, whether the subject is climate change, habitat destruction, biodiversity loss or transition town planning, I am predictably feeling breathlessly apprehensive, pessimistic, and more than slightly wrung out. There is no question that humans have royally screwed up the planet as a place to sustain ourselves and that we have come close to or past the tipping points on the most critical of abrupt and irreversible changes for all life on earth. We have, as Aboriginal Australian culture tells us, “eaten our future.”

As an environmental studies book destined, therefore, to be depressing, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* does not disappoint. After all, in this ambitious book, Rob Nixon -- Rachel Carson Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Madison -- expounds on the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the destruction of the Niger Delta, The Deepwater Horizon Gulf of Mexico debacle, the slow cancers and fetal mutilations from depleted uranium bombs, landmines, Bhopal, Chernobyl, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, the Sardar Samovar Dam, and other catastrophes and disasters. Early on in this text Nixon says of his graduate school mentor and professor, Edward Said, “He thrived on intellectual complexity while aspiring to clarity; he taught and wrote as if he yearned to be widely understood.... He understood that it is far more difficult to theorize with the cunning of lightness.”<sup>1</sup> *Slow Violence* can be

---

\* Address correspondence to: Claudia J. Ford; e-mail: [claudiajford@gmail.com](mailto:claudiajford@gmail.com).