Ecopsychology and the Deconstruction of Whiteness

AN INTERVIEW WITH CARL ANTHONY

[Theodore Roszak, Interviewer]

CARL ANTHONY HAS come to play a special role in the environmental movement. As president of Earth Island Institute and director of the Urban Habitat Program, he has insisted on keeping the political issues surrounding race at the center of the environmental crisis. As an architect and town planner, he has emphasized the ecological role of the city, not simply in terms of economic impact but as the moral barometer of our society. He reminds us that without justice in the cities, there will be no solution to problems of wilderness and open space, endangered species and natural beauty. In this interview with Theodore Roszak, he offers an astute ecopsychological insight into the mystique of "whiteness," showing how the delusionary pursuit of "purity" has distorted the relationship of the dominant culture with both people and the planet. Moreover, he offers a way forward based upon a respect for the many stories that make up our human diversity.

ROSZAK: Carl, your interest in ecopsychology comes as a great gift to the movement. You bring a special perspective to both ecology and psy-

FROM: Roszak, T., Gomes, M., & Kanner, A. (1995). *Ecopsychology*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

chology, one that places the troubled cities of our planet at the very center of the world environmental crisis. It's encouraging to know that you feel ecopsychology can make a contribution to your work. At the same time, your view of ecopsychology is a challenging one. For a moment, let's try to imagine that you are speaking to an aspiring ecopsychologist who is seeking, in some sense, to hear the "voice of the Earth." You have said that the "success of ecopsychology will depend not only upon its ability to help us hear the voice of the Earth, but to construct a genuinely multicultural self and a global civil society without racism." Will you expand on that remark?

ANTHONY: Ecopsychology tells us that the healing of the self and the healing of the planet go together. The environmental justice movement could benefit from that insight; it needs a greater understanding of the psychological dimensions of environmental racism. But a framework for such an understanding hasn't yet been established. There is a blind spot in ecopsychology because the field is limited by its Eurocentric perspective, in the same way that the environmental movement as a whole has been blind to environmental racism. There are a lot of people who would like to hear the voice of the Earth who are not currently being reached by the movement for Deep Ecology, which, I believe, can be seen as the basis for ecopsychology. That's partly because these people are confronted with a series of traumatic losses that don't show up on the radar screen of those who are approaching ecological issues from an aesthetic point of view and whose concern is for preserving the beauties of wilderness. The people I have in mind could include small farmers who really love what they were doing but who have been evicted from the land. But, in particular, I am thinking of the sense of loss suffered by many people who live in the city, who are traumatized by the fact that they don't have a functional relationship with nature. It is not just a question of being able to walk along the beach and enjoy the ocean or the sky.

I think of my next-door neighbor, a woman seventy years old: her parents were sharecroppers who were driven off the soil in the South by a combination of mechanization and the boll weevil. They were also driven away by the Ku Klux Klan and the inability to go the polls to vote. If you search the pages of ecological literature, you don't find anything

FROM: Roszak, T., Gomes, M., & Kanner, A. (1995). *Ecopsychology*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

about that kind of pain. People in that situation are generally not the people who are being reached by the Deep Ecologists. Deep Ecology is in touch with something, but the desire of a tiny fraction of middle- and upper-middle-class Europeans to hear the voice of the Earth could be in part a strategy by people in these social classes to amplify their *own* inner voice at a time when they feel threatened, not only by the destruction of the planet, but also by the legitimate claims of multicultural human communities clamoring to be heard.

I agree that, as point of departure, we need to acknowledge that, no matter what the noise level, each person is entitled to hear his or her own inner voice. That's an important first step to hearing the voices of others as well as the cry of the Earth. But the ability to respond intelligently, creatively, and compassionately to the claims of human communities is undermined by the false sense of privilege that comes from the propensity to think of oneself as white. Wanting to hear the voice of the Earth, the notion that nature is crying out in pain, has a limited potential for reaching and touching a lot of people who are living much more prosaic life-styles than those who think about these matters in a more intellectual and philosophical way. People of color often view alarmist threats about the collapse of the ecosystem as the latest stratagem by the elite to maintain control of political and economic discourse.

ROSZAK: How would the "multicultural self" help Deep Ecology get through to these people?

ANTHONY: In order for the themes of Deep Ecology to have resonance for the people I'm imagining, we have to know *who they are*. People who believe, as I do, that the ecological threat is real, believe we have to construct a self that's capable of harboring the voices of many different people and cultures, not just so-called white people. This is what I mean by a genuinely multicultural self. The truth of the matter is: we have an official story about who we are as a people, who's really important, who's in the mainstream and who isn't. This story is like refined sugar. It's not a real story about real people. It's been packaged and processed beyond recognition. I don't believe it includes the stories of most people in this country; but in particular it's very deficient for dealing with the reality of people of color.

FROM: Roszak, T., Gomes, M., & Kanner, A. (1995). *Ecopsychology*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

ROSZAK: I agree that for many people, mainly middle-class whites, the environmental movement seems to pole-vault over a whole range of problems that really cannot be ignored. For example, there's a cliché that runs through the environmental movement—and this includes ecopsychology. It has to do with people being "alienated" from nature. But the alienation is usually treated as a subtle, long-term, psychological process. This overlooks the fact that simple coercion has been very effective in divorcing some people from nature.

ANTHONY: Exactly. Talk about the long-term process: a lot of people reach back into mythical times to find a story that can make the connection with the land. One of the reasons people do that is because it makes divorce from nature more socially acceptable and less painful because it has a mythical quality. There is a story I came across recently in the book *Black Rage* by William Grier and Price Cobbs that touched me deeply. This was about a man eighty years old who describes a time when he was twelve. He saw his friend placed in a cage and taken off to be lynched because he was accused of raping a white woman. When he experienced that, he knew that he had to get out of town. For almost seventy years, he found it impossible to settle down. He became an itinerant preacher who never stopped being tortured by memories of violence. Sometimes in the middle of a sermon he would cry out: "How could they do that to a little boy?" Now there's an example of being uprooted simply because the level of hostility is so great that you have to keep moving.

There's something else that comes to mind when we talk about having a sense of place: the way violence can blight our experience of place, even our home. There's a character in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, her name is Sethe. She can't let herself remember the beauty of the plantation she escaped from because it is drenched in memories of slavery. She wakes up from nightmares wondering if hell might not also be a pretty place.

ROSZAK: Or there's another assumption that is frequently made: that we have lost our sense of place in the modern world almost voluntarily, because of career opportunities or the generally footloose character of in-

FROM: Roszak, T., Gomes, M., & Kanner, A. (1995). *Ecopsychology*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

dustrial society. Once again, this overlooks the fact that some people have lost their place in the world for much more obvious and brutal reasons.

ANTHONY: Yes, because of direct political or economic force. I think this is a theme that runs throughout American history. Many people have experienced this sense of being driven away from a place that was once their home. If they haven't had that experience personally, then their very-near ancestors, their parents or grandparents have. And they never talk about it. Instead, we reach back into prehistory, back to the time when the hunting and gathering people decided to settle down and become agriculturalists. Of course, that history is also real, but it doesn't capture the experience of people who were driven out by the Enclosure Acts of Britain, or the people who were subjected to pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe, or the black people who were captured and put in the holds of ships and then forced to work on plantations. There is a tendency to romanticize the Native American struggle; but even "the trail of tears," the uprooting of the Cherokee people who were forced to march a thousand miles across the South to settle in Oklahoma—things like this are not dealt with directly. The sense of alienation and loss is either dealt with mythically or in some sanitized version.

ROSZAK: I've had the feeling that often the Native American experience, which is such a clear act of conquest, is used to concentrate the whole sense of violation in one ethnic group without realizing that this is far from being the exclusive experience of one group. The Native American experience comes to serve as a way of packaging all the shame in one convenient parcel.

ANTHONY: I think that's right. And there's another aspect to this. For the national community, it is less threatening to deal with the Native American population because, first of all, they are a relatively small group; and, second, they generally are far away from the places where most Americans live out their daily lives. So most people don't have to con-

FROM: Roszak, T., Gomes, M., & Kanner, A. (1995). *Ecopsychology*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

front the reality of what the Bureau of Indian Affairs has done directly. They can be concerned about these things when they choose and can turn the concern off when they choose.

ROSZAK: There's a strange irony surrounding the role of blacks in America, isn't there? Here are a people who were forcibly brought to this continent primarily to work on the land; they were bonded to the soil by violence as the society's most basic farming population. Now in the late twentieth century we think of blacks almost exclusively as people of the city, of the inner city. Our cities are becoming more and more a black community produced by white flight into suburban areas. Could you reflect on the environmental implications of that?

ANTHONY: It's incredibly ironic. And it's never talked about in the environmental literature. There's simply no acknowledgment of that experience. I see it as central to the ecological issue that when blacks were forced to work the land, the process of human domination and the exploitation of nature occurred at exactly the same time. Murray Bookchin has discussed this in a general way in *The Ecology of Freedom*. You could see it happening in places like Virginia when the opportunity arose for people to exploit the land by moving away from subsistence agriculture to the cash crop of tobacco. Some people were so crazy about this crop that they weren't even raising enough food to eat; they would rather sell tobacco for cash and buy food. At the point they realized that this one crop was a source of great potential wealth, they looked around for a labor force to cultivate the land. That's when slavery began to develop and harden. So you can see this pattern of lack of caring, a pattern of ruthless exploitation of the land coming precisely at the time of the institution of slavery.

In this connection, I find the whole question of "whiteness" so interesting. About the time that slavery was introduced, the first English settlers called themselves "Christians," and they called the populations that they encountered "pagan," or sometimes "savage." As more Europeans arrived, they called themselves "English" or "Dutch" or "French." But then came Bacon's Rebellion in 1676. A group of indentured servants and African slaves organized a rebellion in order to kick the aristocratic elements out; this was a precursor of the American Revolution. And the

FROM: Roszak, T., Gomes, M., & Kanner, A. (1995). *Ecopsychology*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

colonists realized that if the indentured servants ever got together with the black people and the native people, they wouldn't have a future. That's when the word "white" was invented as we use it. What "whiteness" did was to unify all the Europeans who were coming here, people who, in Europe, would not at all be unified. Many of them spoke different languages, and many had been at war with each other for centuries. "Whiteness" was very effective in creating a sense of solidarity, especially among those who had suffered hardship. Now they could see a real opportunity for them to get some action. They could say, "I've had my problems back there in the old country, but now I have a good shot at being an aristocrat or living high on the hog." The result was this cultivated contempt for black people and for indigenous people. The important environmental aspect of this social polarization was that people had to visualize the wilderness as being "empty."

ROSZAK: Meaning belonging to nobody, available to be occupied, and having no rights of its own to be honored.

ANTHONY: Exactly. They couldn't say, "We've arrived at this place and here are these other people and why don't we talk to them in a neighborly way and find something that everybody can live with." Ruth Frankenberg refers to the "social construction of whiteness." She speaks of whiteness as being "intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination." I see it as an unmarked, unnamed status, a structured invisibility that lends itself to false, universalizing claims that reduce other people to marginality simply by naming them as different races.

But now here's the complication. For two hundred years, very few white women came over for the European settlers. So the settlers intermarried with Native Americans. Our stories never say anything about how the trappers and the pioneers ended up in relationships with Indian women—whether it was rape or whether it was love or whatever. We have a whole set of populations that actually represent the coming together of indigenous people and Europeans. Their story never gets mentioned. We don't talk about them. That's why the construction of a multicultural self means the deconstruction of the idea of whiteness, and the corresponding ability to meet others as equals.

What I find really curious is: there doesn't seem to be any interest in

FROM: Roszak, T., Gomes, M., & Kanner, A. (1995). *Ecopsychology*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

finding out what those people experienced, what the traumas were, what the confusions were. Why not? I think the insistence on "purity" blocks that out. You see, there is enormous power that comes from abstraction and purity. The minute you start getting involved with people, taking their stories seriously, you don't know where your loyalties are, you're not sure who you represent, or what your basic mission is. Things start getting confused. If basically these white people are pure, and if their destiny is to dominate this continent, and if other people don't exist, the domination can't be seen as transgression. You don't need to embrace the truth; you can maintain this thrust across the land without coming to terms with the human or ecological consequences. But the minute you recognize that there is *a human being* there who might happen to be *your child*—you see? Which is the story of most African Americans in this country; they have European-American roots.

We take our definition of race to be a real hard line; we take it to represent some real division among the people in the world. Actually it is not that at all. It's an ideological and equivocal concept that has very little biological basis. So then you have to ask yourself, if that's true, *what is really going on here?* And I would argue that this separation within the human community is deeply reflected in the separation between people and nature. Nature is also defined as "other," in the same way as these "other" people.

ROSZAK: I've noticed in your writing that you sometimes use the words "abstraction" and "purity" interchangeably. Are you in fact using them synonymously? Purity strikes me immediately as having a positive value, whereas abstraction has the sense of being emptiness, nothingness.

ANTHONY: The fact that you think that "purity" is positive really troubles me.

ROSZAK: Well, the word is usually used that way. If something is "pure," you think . . .

ANTHONY: . . . that it's one hundred percent pure. Like pure granulated sugar, pure white bread. Meaning unsoiled, unsullied, undamaged, unconnected with dirt. So white people are "pure" and clean. And black

FROM: Roszak, T., Gomes, M., & Kanner, A. (1995). *Ecopsychology*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

people are "dirt." If you want to get into the psychoanalysis of this, I think there is a very rich and interesting set of connections here dealing with anality and excrement. These associations echo in a frightening way in our cities. Some parts of cities are considered attractive and other parts are waste. It's a bodily metaphor: you eat one part and you shit the other part. It's not an accident, for example, that the environmental justice movement is focused on both toxic waste *and* race. If you throw people away and you throw material away, it is no accident that they are not separated: you just throw them away together. When I talk about purity, what I'm really saying is that there's been an obsession with this question of white people not getting soiled.

ROSZAK: In every society where working the land has involved class distinction, getting your hands dirty has been low status. After generations of that, it's no wonder a society develops an environmental crisis. The people who have the power to make a difference are people who no longer want to get their hands dirty. But getting your hands dirty is an integral part of having a healthy environmental movement—for example, when it comes down to recycling your own garbage.

ANTHONY: And all this gets magnified by racism because then certain kinds of work are considered "nigger work." Only the lowest sort of people did that in the Old South. Even the poor whites said, "Well, at least I don't do nigger work." That is what replaces a caring set of relationships to the land. If you're white, you're part of that group of people who are getting the benefit of manifest destiny; you get the whole package. You get to dominate the land and everybody on it. Other people are marginalized. White people benefit from a whole series of relationships that have an enormous confluence. One is obviously the perfection of the market as a device for making decisions about everything. Then there's science, which extends your mechanical power. And then, in a curious way, even in art, we find this preoccupation from the Renaissance on with perspective as a way of scientifically controlling things in the distance. You can now check out what's happening miles away, and you can place it all on this grid that goes off to the vanishing point. With the coming of the European expansion there has been a whole series of inventions that have increased the potential power for domination by

FROM: Roszak, T., Gomes, M., & Kanner, A. (1995). *Ecopsychology*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

abstraction. Abstraction means distance from immediate experience, from annoyingly concrete particulars, the substitution of a remote symbol for a given sensuous reality. But that's what ecology is all about: *the real complexity*. You have to deal with the fact that there is a river here, or deal with the fact that bugs come. In contrast, the whole idea of "perfection" leads to monoculture: flatten the land, have only one crop, come along with an airplane and spray. You don't have to deal with the fact that this is an organic process. That's one of the reasons why racism is so hard to deal with. It brings up a much richer tapestry of human emotions, a much greater sense of either humor or tragedy, than most Americans are willing to deal with. A friend of mine, Margot Adair, calls this monocultural ideal the "Wonder Breading of America." This is where the ecology of the matter has to come in. We are coming to the end of the monoculture. Manifest destiny is over; now we start seeing the diversity. My feeling is that the ecological metaphor gives us the opportunity to be able to be comfortable with a more diverse sense of ourselves as well as other people. But I think we have to learn the stories.

ROSZAK: I notice that you use the word "story" a lot. The more stories, the better. But some of the stories are cover stories. A people can have a collective cover story.

ANTHONY: That's true. Partly we have stories that are lies. But what may be worse, we only have a limited range of stories, when we ought to have a much fuller range of stories. I've been studying my way through the American story, especially black culture, black history. I've gotten to the point where I grew up in Philadelphia. What did we learn? We learned about Peter Stuyvesant, we learned about William Penn, we learned about the Mennonites, we learned about the Vikings. But we didn't learn a thing about the Italians. A third of the people at my school were Italians, but I don't know why they came over here. We didn't learn anything about the Poles, nothing. A lot of the kids were from Poland: Polish Catholics or Polish Jews. And God knows we didn't learn anything about black people.

So here I am, growing up in this place, surrounded by these people. I have no idea who I am, I have no idea who they are. But I knew who William Penn was. Now what does that do to my ability to function with

FROM: Roszak, T., Gomes, M., & Kanner, A. (1995). *Ecopsychology*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

the people around me? I'm dealing with a blank deck here. Think of all the problems that came up during the late sixties in Boston or Cicero. The whites in Cicero, near Chicago, didn't want black people moving into their neighborhoods; they were trying to defend their ethnic identity. But if we had known all the stories, it would have been a lot easier to say, "I see, I understand, I know what happened to those people and why they came here." If we really know everybody's story in a rich way, you are not dealing with a mystery.

ROSZAK: I'd like to come at this point from an ecopsychological perspective. You and I were at a conference together where the Council of All Beings ritual was performed. The Council of All Beings is a way of working through environmental despair; it involves imaginative exercises, some theater, some forms of grieving. It was invented by Deep Ecologists John Seed and Joanna Macy. Among ecopsychologists, the council is becoming a well-known gesture of emotional and sympathetic solidarity with the planet. The catch phrase for the ritual is a quotation from the ecologist Aldo Leopold, who suggested that we have to learn to "think like a mountain." I know you have some reservations about the council that have to do with what you refer to as the importance of "stories."

ANTHONY: Well, it was funny to me. I've been saying to my friends for a long time, "Why is it so easy for these people to think like mountains and not be able to think like people of color?" That always struck me as being curious. But the reason for that has nothing to do with color; it has to do with stories. Let's take your book, for example, *The Voice of the Earth*. I don't believe you told any stories about any people of color in your book; you probably don't even know them.

ROSZAK: That's true.

ANTHONY: You see, if you have stories about Crazy Horse or Chief Seattle, then you can say, "This reminds me of what Crazy Horse said." But then you might also say, "This reminds me of what Nat Turner said or did, or Frederick Douglass or Zora Neale Hurston."

FROM: Roszak, T., Gomes, M., & Kanner, A. (1995). *Ecopsychology*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

ROSZAK: Let's stay with the Council of All Beings for a moment longer. Maybe the reason people prefer to take on the guise of a mountain or a wolf is because mountains and wolves can't talk back and tell you how wrong you are. On the other hand, suppose you were in a group where you said you were going to tell the story of someone of a different race or ethnicity. They might tell you that you don't know what you're talking about.

ANTHONY: I think that's one of the reasons. But this needn't be a big problem, because if you are actually in dialogue with people, and somebody tells you you don't have it right, then you say, "Well, tell me what is right." And then you say, "Okay, I'll remember that." And the next time, you tell it differently. Not being right is only a problem when you have a very tenuous, fearful relationship with somebody. But if you are in substantial dialogue with another person, then you learn through trial and error. Fear is really the problem.

ROSZAK: I'd like to bring something up that has to do with stories. There is one wing of the environmental movement that plays a special role in ecopsychology. I'm referring to the ecofeminists, many of whom feel that women have a special role to play in speaking for the imperiled Earth. They feel that in many ways the treatment of the Earth and the treatment of women are parallel. And then too, Native Americans have been readily identified as people close to the land, whose fate and the fate of the land are sympathetically recognized. Now there are a whole set of references that the dominant white society has with blacks and these include nature references. But in the case of blacks, the psychological associations don't come out favorably. They come out as references to jungles, savages, and wildness, and they take on a threatening aspect. Has it ever occurred to you that this is a strange reversal of the way in which nature metaphors and associations work?

ANTHONY: It's interesting to me that you used the word "jungle," because now we call it "rainforest."

ROSZAK: Rainforest, right. More benign. "Jungle" is the more menacing word.

FROM: Roszak, T., Gomes, M., & Kanner, A. (1995). *Ecopsychology*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

ANTHONY: And when I was growing up we always talked about "swamps." Now we talk about "wetlands." Do you know what a "wetland" is? It's a swamp that white people care about.

In the thirties, there was a huge amount of effusive romantic description of black people; some of it sounds really weird now when you read it. It had a lot of the same qualities that people talk about these days with respect to Native Americans: beat the drum, take me back to the Earth. And people fed into it. Then at some point it began to become incongruous with the reality of how people were living, so it stopped.

I think the problem is projection: white people want to be able to project on the world the images that have allowed them to control the world. *Why is there so much energy put into that?* I mean, it's not natural, is it, this need to control? You have to ask yourself what is really going on here. What I see from a psychological point of view is a whole series of lies and denials that white people have built up about the world and they can't let go of them.

ROSZAK: You're saying that there is an ecology of human diversity that has not been comprehended by the environmental movement. We know more about the ecology of nonhuman species than about ourselves in our diversity. The ecology of human stories, especially as they appear in an urban civilization, has not been taken into account. It is not normally understood to be an environmental or ecological matter; it's shelved in another category, as sociology or politics. But in fact, it's an integral part of what's got to be dealt with. Because the *city* has to be dealt with.

ANTHONY: That's right.

ROSZAK: Then let's talk about the city and all that it has come to represent in environmental philosophy, policy, and ecopsychology. Tell me about the role of the city in solving what we call the environmental crisis.

ANTHONY: Well, most obviously, many of our environmental problems are directly related to the way we live in cities. Fifty percent of the world's population now live in cities, and seventy percent of the people in the United States live in cities. One of the more dramatic illustrations of this is a report that was prepared by the South Coast Air Quality Man-

FROM: Roszak, T., Gomes, M., & Kanner, A. (1995). *Ecopsychology*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

agement District about the Los Angeles air basin. It pointed out that one percent of global warming comes from Los Angeles alone. What more dramatic illustration do you need than this? That this one tiny place on the map produces one percent of global warming. Seventy percent of the city is paved over; people ride around in single-occupancy automobiles, pushing out exhaust. Fifteen to twenty thousand people a year die in Los Angeles from respiratory conditions directly related to air quality. Most of them are people of color and poor people. This was supposed to be a garden city; people went there because they thought it was going to be Utopia. That, by and large, is the story of our cities: most of them are now unlivable.

We make our cities more miserable than they need to be. You could probably get rid of eighty percent of the paving in Los Angeles and make it infinitely more habitable. If you had mass transportation, and if you had places that people could walk, if you had neighborhoods that were more self-reliant, you'd have more space, it could be made livable. If we really want to solve our environmental problems, instead of running from the city we have to rebuild it.

ROSZAK: If the city is at the heart of every environmental issue we might want to talk about, and if the cities are becoming ungovernable, then the issue of justice is at the core of the environmental crisis.

ANTHONY: I think that's true, but I also think the issue of beauty is at the core. If you are incapable of seeing the beauty that's around you and the beauty of the people around you, if you are constantly running from them, then you can never make your peace, you're always trying to escape to somewhere else. But if we appreciated living in a multicultural neighborhood, appreciated something beautiful there, the beauty of people from different places who have different stories, then instead of running from it you'd be drawn to it.

ROSZAK: You are talking about the human and social beauty that you can find in cities if you look for it. But of course the word "beauty" in the environmental movement is almost entirely reserved for natural, nonhuman beautiful things.

FROM: Roszak, T., Gomes, M., & Kanner, A. (1995). *Ecopsychology*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

ANTHONY: I've read stories about people traveling across the desert and not finding any beauty in it. "This is a wasteland, there's no water, it's dead. Let's get the hell out of here." But now, of course, people look at deserts and marvel at them, at all the rich life and the diversity of beings that are there. In order to do that you have to be willing to slow down and be there a little bit. Of course, the other problem has to do with the fact that our manufactured environment is so hideous. If you go to any poor country that has any kind of indigenous traditions—Portugal, Africa. . . . I mean look at this photograph I took of this house in a West African village. The people make these homes out of grass; it's woven with incredible care. It's just grass but it's like a symphony. The fact that we have increased our power over nature can take a lot away from us. We drive around at eighty miles an hour rather than having to walk. That means you make a place like San Pablo Avenue, here in my neighborhood, a street where it's impossible to walk. *That's* like being in a wasteland.

ROSZAK: I want to ask you one final question. Suppose we wanted to frame a curriculum in ecopsychology. What is the one thing you feel would be a necessary part of it that you don't see there now?

ANTHONY: I think of two things. What I believe is most urgent has to do with the idea of "whiteness." The monolithic human identity that has been built around the mythology of pure whiteness is destructive. We have to find a way to build a multicultural self that is in harmony with an ecological self. We need to embrace human diversity in the way we deal with each other—as opposed to the notion that white people are the mainstream and everybody else is "other." An ecopsychology that has no place for people of color, that doesn't deliberately set out to correct the distortions of racism, is an oxymoron.

Second, and related to this, is the importance of the urban issue. I am obviously trying to put these two concerns together. That's what my work is about in the Urban Habitat Program. Respect for cultural diversity, for social justice, and for multicultural leadership must be at the heart of restructuring our cities to protect and restore natural resources by meeting basic human needs. That's the framework we need to rebuild our cities and become balanced with nature in order to protect the

FROM: Roszak, T., Gomes, M., & Kanner, A. (1995). *Ecopsychology*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

planet. But the only way we can do that is also to respect human diversity and social justice so they can be incorporated into doing what we have to. There is a lot of work that has to be done among the people of color. This is really difficult for me. Among the people of color, among the black people, particularly, we have to learn a whole new attitude toward ourselves and the people around us. When I talk about multicultural leadership, I mean that black people need to move away from a mode in which we simply identify with our victim selves. I'm not saying we should deny the victim part; but I'm saying that we lose part of our humanity if we don't also accept our capacity to provide leadership for the whole community. We have to learn how to *own* that part of our experience, spiritually and psychologically. We have to be willing to take responsibility for the outcome, not only for our own communities but for everybody. There is no other way.

Carl Anthony, Architect and Social Justice Advocate

FROM: Roszak, T., Gomes, M., & Kanner, A. (1995). *Ecopsychology*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.