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healthy farms, healthy food, healthy land

November 13, 2018

Possible questions and selected notes for book club: *Silent Spring*, by Rachel Carson

1. In his forward to the 25th anniversary printing, author and publisher Paul Brooks chronicled the difficulties Rachel Carson encountered in finding a publisher for her envisioned project (only selected text presented, separated by ellipses):

“Immediately after the war, when these dangers had already been recognized, she had tried in vain to interest some magazine in an article on the subject... A decade later... again she tried to interest the magazines in an article. Though by now she was a well-known writer, the magazine publishers, fearing to lose advertisers, turned her down... Many of her strongest admirers questioned whether she could write a salable book on such a dreary subject...”

Today, most content we receive is algorithmically-targeted to appeal to specific audiences. Further, many people today actively avoid negative information due to burnout, secondary traumatic stress and other psychological factors.

Q: In today’s algorithmic information marketplace, information such as that in *Silent Spring* may only be supported if we demand it – something we apparently don’t want to do. What are possible solutions to this dilemma?

2. In an introduction to a later printing copyrighted in 1994, Vice President Al Gore wrote, “The present system is a Faustian bargain – we get short-term gain at the expense of long-term tragedy. And there is reason to believe that the short term can be very short indeed. Many pesticides do not cause the total number of pests to decline; they may do so at first, but the pests eventually adapt by mutation and the chemicals become useless.” The parallels between the pesticide issue and the climate issue, as explained in <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/08/01/magazine/climate-change-losing-earth.html>, are clear. **Q:** What would it take for people to take a long-term view before it’s too late?
3. Again in his 1994 forward, Al Gore says, “We must begin to bridge the cultural divide between the pesticide-production and agricultural community on the one side and the public health community on the other. People in the two communities come from different backgrounds, go to different colleges, and have very different viewpoints. As long as they face each other across a gulf of suspicion and enmity, we will find it hard to change a system in which production and profit are tied to pollution.” Polarization –



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sound familiar? **Q:** Have you witnessed any actions that served to bridge cultural/social divides and increase mutual understanding?

4. On October 6, 2018, a month after our September book club on *Whitewash*, author (and [WC19](#) keynote) Carey Gillam was awarded the prestigious Rachel Carson Environment Book Award by the Society of Environmental Journalists: <https://www.sej.org/winners-sej-17th-annual-awards-reporting-environment#Book>. Her work has been thrust into the spotlight with the jury verdict in Dewayne Johnson's monumental case against Monsanto. The initial award of \$289mm was reduced to \$78mm, but Bayer is still expected to appeal. **Q:** What do you think will happen with this case?
5. In a Pew Research Center survey conducted June 15-26, 2016, "Environment" did not make it into the top 10 issues for voters (it ranked 12th). **Q:** Where would you rank it, roughly?
6. Notes on favorite passages: last paragraph, p12; p18; p31; p86 paragraph 2; last paragraph, p127; last paragraph, p152; entire p246; final paragraph, p251; final sentence p261; p363 final sentence of E.O. Wilson's Afterword.