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Review: Lynton Keith Caldwell: An Environmental Visionary and the National Environmental Policy Act

By Wendy Read Wertz

Reviewed by Byron Anderson
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Wertz, Wendy Read. *Lynton Keith Caldwell: An Environmental Visionary and the National Environmental Policy Act*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014; xvi, 483 pp. ISBN: 9780253010308 US \$45.00 cloth. Also available as an ebook: 9780253010377 US \$38.99.

A prolific author, writer and speaker, Lynton Keith Caldwell (1913-2006) was a visionary who believed that “humans had the responsibility for ensuring that future generations would continue to inherit a diverse and healthy planet” (p. 4). He was influenced by the writings of Aldo Leopold, a leading proponent of land conservation management, which lead Caldwell to believe in an ethics-based environmental consciousness. As early as 1941, Caldwell commented on the connections between ecological mismanagement and lack of government controls. His legacy includes recognition as the “architect” of the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the legislation that provided provisions for environmental impact assessments. As professor of political science at Indiana University—Bloomington, Caldwell was put in charge of a new public administration program, and at the age of 50, created a new direction for his profession by proposing a cross-disciplinary study for public policy and environmental management. This culminated in 1972 in the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University, now one of the top schools in the U. S. for environmental studies. Caldwell was also involved in numerous environment endeavors, especially his work with the Nature Conservancy, and in providing assistance in preparing many background documents for Congressional hearings, including occasional testimony at the hearings. He became well-versed in bio-politics and global environmental problems, and was recipient of many honors and awards.

The 1970s and 1980s era is well covered outlining the successes, setbacks and failures of various proposals and legislation. An interesting aspect is in following the many changes in environmental politics via the election of a new President and appointment of a cabinet, from Nixon to Carter to Reagan. Much detail is provided in examining the enactment of a national environmental policy, including, the numerous bills and revisions introduced into Congress, the role of the Council on Environmental Quality, and the key players, for example, Senators Henry Jackson, George McGovern, Gaylord Nelson, and certain prominent environmental groups. Caldwell saw success in his introducing the idea of an interdisciplinary approach to environmental studies, saw

setback in seeing NEPA go from a powerful tool to being overpowered by the politics of energy interests, and experienced failure in not being able to persuade enough members of Congress to pass an environmental amendment to the Constitution. In the end, it can be said that Caldwell was a true champion of managing the environment.

Despite his accomplishments, Caldwell is generally not well known for them, something that this book should help correct. Not surprisingly, Caldwell was not without critics, especially those who considered him to exaggerate and be overly pessimistic. He referred to himself as an “optimistic pessimist.” The book covers not just his professional years, but also his childhood, youth and active retirement years. He made his last public appearance was in 2005. The author was provided unrestricted access to Caldwell’s memorabilia, photos and records, and was granted a number of interviews with Caldwell. The text is complemented with photos, notes, and an index. This book is recommended for students, academics, and professionals in the fields of environmental studies, public administration, and/or political science.

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