

Black Tides, Green Waves, Ebb & Flow:
Environmental Reaction and Reform in the Watershed 1969 Santa
Barbara Oil Spill

Khaos Kook

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Perhaps unexpectedly, this project emerged from a burgeoning interest in my father's profession of trading crude oil futures. My fascination led me to an initial exploration of topics related to crude oil economics, but after digging deeper, I found myself drawn to the partisan politics and adverse environmental impacts surrounding U.S. energy policy. Ultimately, I chose to focus on the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill, as I hold Santa Barbara County dear from childhood memories. Incidentally, I recently visited multiple Santa Barbara beachfronts and spotted dehydrated blobs of petroleum littered across the coastline, likely originating from less catastrophic oil leakages.

I was pleased to discover that my topic fit the 2026 National History Day theme well. Because the spill directly inspired modern environmental activism, legislation, and ongoing controversy, it clearly exemplifies the interplay between reaction, reform, and further counter-reaction. Additionally, among the various major oil spills recorded in U.S. history, the Santa Barbara spill is relatively understudied, therefore leaving room for fruitful, original analysis.

I commenced research with secondary sources, obtaining a detailed overview before primary source analysis. I also sought out multiple perspectives on the spill's legacy, consulting industry viewpoints, activist accounts, legal documents, and legislative records to fairly portray competing interests. Many sources referenced federally archived documents and newspaper articles, both of which proved incredibly helpful for deciphering contemporaneous perspectives. This "rabbit hole" research methodology allowed me to identify linkages between relevant subjects. For example, studying NEPA led me to U.S. Senator Henry Jackson's long fight for

environmental policy, which in turn introduced me to Senator Gaylord Nelson and the inaugural Earth Day. Discovering that the spill inspired this worldwide observance proved fascinating!

I ultimately chose the paper format as I believed it the most effective and rewarding way of communicating my research. As I developed my argument, I realized a key component would highlight the recursive nature of environmental politics and progress which Santa Barbara initiated, especially as this concept was quite novel compared to topics oft-discussed in the historical literature. This approach allowed me to combine the more frequently discussed topics of activism and political reform with original analysis.

My thesis therefore hinges on the idea that the oil spill initiated a perpetual cycle of reaction and reform. I contend that while Santa Barbara introduced bipartisan incentives for environmental activism and legislation, such progress rendered the push for preservation vulnerable to powerful backlash. This dynamic, as I have realized, is the spill's most enduring legacy. Furthermore, the topic's significance extends to our present climate and pollution crisis. Deconstructing and understanding the Santa Barbara spill provides valuable insight into how best to engage with political resistance to green politics. The spill offers a model for successful civic activism and political lobbying, as well as a blueprint for anticipating and analyzing industry pushback. In this manner, the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill serves as both a valuable ecological case study in reaction and reform and an illumination of the challenges environmental advocacy must resolve today.

Introduction

On January 28, 1969, an “inflamed abscess bursting with reddish-brown” oil erupted from Union Oil Platform A in the Santa Barbara Channel.¹ In under a week, Santa Barbara’s idyllic beachfronts would be ravaged by the “greatest single” ecological disaster “the country had ever known.”² This singular spill roused the outrage of an aggrieved citizenry, swiftly unifying the hitherto disjointed environmental movement of the 1960s on a national scale. Popular protests fomented unprecedented bipartisan reaction, engendering sweeping policy reform that produced landmark legislation on local and federal levels. Yet, these successes in nationalizing ecological awareness provoked counter-reactions from industrial and conservative blocs, stemming the initial momentum of green-conscious reform. Even today, this perpetual cycle of reaction and reform shapes environmental discourse.

A Laissez-Faire Regulatory Approach

Decades of permissive ecological oversight cemented the conditions for catastrophe long before Platform A ever spewed an iota of black sludge. In the 1960s, marine science had yet to fully appreciate the consequences of petroleum pollution on oceanic ecosystems,³ and thus, existing policies prioritized economic growth over environmental stewardship.⁴ Accordingly, offshore drilling contended with few regulatory statutes prior to the 1969 spill.⁵ The 1953 Outer

¹ Robert Anson, “Nation: Environment: Tragedy in Oil,” *Time*, February 14, 1969, <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,900613-1,00.html>.

² *The Santa Barbara Oil Spill Exposes the Costs of Offshore Drilling*, “Our Vanishing Wilderness,” NET (National Educational Television) and American Archive Broadcasting, 1970, broadcast episode, https://americanarchive.org/primary_source_sets/environmental/03-75-26m0cjt7.

³ U.S. Executive Office of the President, Office of Science and Technology, *The Oil Spill Problem: First Report of the President's Panel on Oil Spills* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1969), 11, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CZIC-gc1080-u52-1969/html/CZIC-gc1080-u52-1969.htm>.

⁴ Dennis M. O’Connell, “Continental Shelf Oil Disasters: Challenge to International Pollution Control,” *Cornell Law Review* 55, no. 1 (1969): 115, 127, <https://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/clr/vol55/iss1/7>.

⁵ Richard Nixon, “Statement on Coastal Oil Pollution at Santa Barbara, California,” *The American Presidency Project*, February 11, 1969,

Continental Shelf Lands Act authorized the Interior Secretary to lease submerged lands for drilling, but called only for “reasonable regulations... [promoting] safety of life and property.”⁶

A similar lack of specificity in the 1924 and 1961 Oil Pollution Acts rendered them largely ineffectual.⁷ Even executive actions, such as President Lyndon Johnson’s 1967 memorandum urging the enactment of measures to preserve nature,⁸ failed to spur any substantive change.

It was within this environment that the “Interior Department [enforcing] laws governing drilling” expressly permitted Union Oil to “cut some corners”⁹ when installing the faulty Platform A prior to its 1969 blowout. The absence of federally-mandated environmental provisions ensured that the American public would clamor when tar blanketed American coastlines for the first time at Santa Barbara.

Black Beaches, Green Fury

Initially, Union Oil downplayed repercussions stemming from the spill. Company president Fred Hartley, voicing the oil industry’s perspective, dismissed Congress’ concerns, testifying that halting drilling off Santa Barbara’s shores would be like “shutting down the California education system because [of] a riot at San Francisco State.”¹⁰ Despite Hartley’s remarks, Union Oil failed to extricate itself from its financial responsibility, later shouldering

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-coastal-oil-pollution-santa-barbara-california>; O’Connell, “Continental Shelf Oil Disasters,” 121, 126.

⁶ U.S. Congress, *Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act*, Public Law 83-212, 67 Stat. 462–463 (1953), 463, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-67/pdf/STATUTE-67-Pg462.pdf>.

⁷ Gary Shigenaka, “The Oil Pollution Act of 1990: A History of Spills and Legislation,” *NOAA Office of Response and Restoration Blog*, August 17, 2020, <https://blog.response.restoration.noaa.gov/oil-pollution-act-1990-history-spills-and-legislation>.

⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Memorandum on the Need for Action To Prevent Oil Pollution of Coastal Waters,” *The American Presidency Project*, May 26, 1967, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/memorandum-the-need-for-action-prevent-oil-pollution-coastal-waters>.

⁹ Anson, “Environment: Tragedy in Oil.”

¹⁰ Warren Weaver Jr., “Senate Hearing Held,” *New York Times*, February 6, 1969, <https://www.nytimes.com/1969/02/06/archives/senate-hearing-held.html>.

over \$10.5 million in clean-up costs and \$6 million in civil lawsuits.¹¹ Unfortunately, no amount of restitution could restore Union's stained reputation. When a county judge later levied a fine of \$500 in criminal penalties, incensed critics deemed the meager sanction offensive, likening the decision to letting a "drunken driver off with only a nominal fine after [paying] the... funeral costs."¹²

Local and national grassroots activists refused to stop at mere denunciations of Union Oil. Mobilizing en masse, campaigners displayed their zeal for preservation through an eclectic range of reactions. Only days after the fouling of Santa Barbara's prized beaches, by then covered with dead, oil-coated maritime fauna,¹³ residents quickly formed organization Get Oil Out! (GOO!)¹⁴ to combat the spill and engender a collective environmental consciousness, primarily through protest. Looking to garner momentum, GOO! circulated a petition to ban drilling in the Santa Barbara Channel.¹⁵ By the time President Richard Nixon received the document, over 100,000 signatures had accumulated upon his desk.¹⁶ Eliciting further media coverage, activists staged a dramatic fish-in protest halting a new oil rig installation, with GOO! President Alvin Weingand "implor[ing]" Nixon to pause all "oil activity in the Santa Barbara Channel" indefinitely.¹⁷ The whirlwind of furor from both Santa Barbara residents and citizens

¹¹ "Environment: Costs of an Oil Spill," *Time*, January 31, 1972, <https://time.com/archive/6816198/environment-costs-of-an-oil-spill/>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ See Appendix A.

¹⁴ Kate Wheeling and Max Ufberg, "The Ocean Is Boiling: The Complete Oral History of the 1969 Santa Barbara Oil Spill," oral history compilation, *Pacific Standard*, April 18, 2017, <http://psmag.com/news/the-ocean-is-boiling-the-complete-oral-history-of-the-1969-santa-barbara-oil-spill/>.

¹⁵ "Santa Barbara Oil Spill," PopHistoryDig, accessed Jan 5, 2026, <https://pophistorydig.com/topics/santa-barbara-oil-spill/>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "Nixon Asked To Halt Coastal Drilling," *Toledo Blade*, November 23, 1969, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1350&dat=19691123&id=cskjAAAAIBAJ&sjid=sgEEAAAAIBAJ&pg=7276,1981898&hl=en>.

across the country increased the urgency of the spill's impacts, compelling the government to mitigate damage.

Facing sustained public pressure, Interior Secretary Walter Hickel conceded to shortcomings in governmental oversight.¹⁸ Adopting a hard stance against Big Oil, he instituted "stringent rules for petroleum regulations"¹⁹ and endorsed the unlimited "liability of... oil compan[ies]"²⁰ to decontaminate federal waters. Even Nixon visited the sullied beaches to survey damage, and once on site, assured residents that new "effective regulations" would prevent future "crises of this kind."²¹ He would honor the promise, canceling "twenty federal leases... and establish[ing] a marine sanctuary in the Santa Barbara Channel."²²

These varying reactions in the spill's wake worked concurrently to awaken a national consciousness of stewardship. Despite the oil seepage's localized ecological repercussions,²³ citizens across the country rallied, promoting environmentalism from a counterculture of lesser importance to a mainstream imperative.

A change of such proportions would have seemed unimaginable only years earlier. Throughout the 1960s, environmentalism existed in a nascent state, with rudimentary public awareness scattered across a multitude of competing priorities. In a 1965 message to Congress on the preservation of nature, President Johnson focused almost exclusively on beautification

¹⁸ James MacDonald, "History Repeats: The Santa Barbara Oil Spill," *JSTOR Daily*, June 11, 2015, <https://daily.jstor.org/history-repeats-santa-barbara-oil-spill/>.

¹⁹ "Hickel Issues Oil Rules," *Daily Illini*, March 22, 1969, <http://idnc.library.illinois.edu/cgi-bin/illinois?a=d&d=DIL19690322.2.29&e>.

²⁰ "Congress Urged by Interior Secretary Toughen Oil Pollution Liability Bill," *Bulletin*, February 28, 1969, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1243&dat=19690228&id=2P1XAAAIBAJ&sjid=CfcDAAAIBAJ&pg=3113,209375&hl=en>.

²¹ Nixon, "Statement on Coastal Oil Pollution."

²² "Good News for Santa Barbara," *Time*, June 22, 1970, <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,944099,00.html>.

²³ Dale Straughan, *Biological and Oceanographical Survey of the Santa Barbara Channel Oil Spill 1969-1970*, vol. 1, *Biology and Bacteriology*, Sea Grant Publication No. 2 (Los Angeles: Allan Hancock Foundation, University of Southern California, 1971), https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/40385/noaa_40385_DS1.pdf.

and “recreation,” or in other words, “natural beauty.”²⁴ Meanwhile, Rachel Carson, an influential proponent of the fledgling environmental movement, centered her activism on pesticide usage, cautioning against “contamination... penetrat[ing]... the bodies” of men.²⁵ Others, such as conservation group Sierra Club, organized around provincial threats to the biosphere,²⁶ and counterculture publications marketed environmentalism as a means of developing “intimate, personal power” and self-sufficiency.²⁷

Further hindering concerted action was the existence of several other pressing social concerns, as national attention was “already consumed by civil rights, feminism, and the Vietnam War.”²⁸ During the 1968 presidential campaign, neither candidate gave “more than lip service to environmental issues” that stirred “little interest.”²⁹ As Earth Day visionary Senator Gaylord Nelson aptly noted, Americans lacked a “unity of purpose” to address increasingly potent environmental threats.³⁰

However, the Santa Barbara spill provided Nelson’s “unity of purpose,” with several factors converging to unify the disparate, disorganized environmental movement and galvanize a national reaction. Foremost among these was the debacle’s rampant televisibility. In fact, it was

²⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Special Message to the Congress on Conservation and Restoration of Natural Beauty,” The American Presidency Project, February 8, 1965, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/special-message-the-congress-conservation-and-restoration-natural-beauty>.

²⁵ Rachel Carson, “Statement before Congress,” Iowa State University Archives of Women's Political Communication, June 4, 1963, <http://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2018/01/09/statement-before-congress-june-4-1963/>.

²⁶ David Brower, “Should We Also Flood the Sistine Chapel so Tourists Can Get Nearer the Ceiling?” Sierra Club, 1966, <http://infomarketingblog.com/sistine-chapel/>.

²⁷ *Whole Earth Catalog*, “Spring 1969” (Portola Institute, Inc., 1969), 2, https://ia800406.us.archive.org/26/items/wholeearthcatalo00unse_10/wholeearthcatalo00unse_10.pdf.

²⁸ Wheeling and Ufberg, “The Ocean Is Boiling.”

²⁹ John C. Whitaker, “Earth Day Recollections: What It Was Like When the Movement Took Off,” U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), 1988, <http://www.epa.gov/archive/epa/aboutepa/earth-day-recollections-what-it-was-when-movement-took.html>.

³⁰ “Gaylord Nelson Promotes the First Earth Day,” U.S. Senate Historical Office, accessed Jan 3, 2026, http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Gaylord_Nelson_Promotes_the_First_Earth_Day.htm.

“doubtful whether the event would have sparked a national outcry”³¹ if not for television continually broadcasting graphic images of oil-lathered carcasses.

The impact also owed much to the characteristics of Santa Barbara itself. The city, known mainly as a vacation destination, was densely populated and highly visible, with a predominantly white, affluent, and Republican demographic. Because the spill occurred in such a pristine location, the “crisis of environment”³² seemed an indiscriminate, intractable threat. As such, the United States’ first “technicolor disaster”³³ delivered disturbing tidings of the environmental crisis nightly into American households. This novel sense of shared angst for the natural world further bolstered the appeal of the inaugural 1970 Earth Day,³⁴ which attracted millions nationwide³⁵ and contributed to the emergence of environmental studies as a common academic discipline.³⁶ The Santa Barbara oil spill thus operated on a variety of local and national components to position green advocacy at the forefront of national psyche, thereby uniting a heterogeneous assemblage of groups harboring distinct interests into a cohesive movement.

Reform: A Green Decade

With pervasive public engagement demanding environmentally-minded legislative change, public servants who had long struggled to advance the environmental cause suddenly found their political philosophies favorably received. One such lawmaker, Senator Henry

³¹ Martin Miller, “The Oil Spill That Sparked the Green Revolution,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 30, 1999, <http://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1999-nov-30-me-38862-story.html>.

³² Daniel Polk, “Environmental Impacts,” *Polar Journal*, June 26, 2019, <http://polarjournal.org/2019/06/26/environmental-impacts/>.

³³ Teresa Sabol Spezio, *Slick Policy: Environmental and Social Aftermath of the Santa Barbara Oil Spill* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018).

³⁴ Gaylord Nelson, “Letter to Frank Stanton, CBS News, regarding Earth Day’s true origins,” April 7, 1971, <https://nelsonearthday.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/nelson-2-15-cbs-news-letter.pdf>.

³⁵ See Appendix B.

³⁶ Roderick Frazier Nash, *The Greening of Higher Education at UCSB*, letter to UC Santa Barbara, January 2020, http://es.ucsb.edu/sites/default/files/Program%20History/Nash_GREENING%20HIGHER%20ED%20AT%20UCS%20B_2020_50th.pdf.

Jackson, held a well-established record as a champion of preservation. Having fought for federal environmental policy since before 1966³⁷ and first introducing environmental acts in 1967,³⁸ Jackson did not hesitate when Santa Barbara provided the opportunity to pass meaningful legislation. He successfully introduced the most influential environmental law to date, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA),³⁹ which Nixon signed on January 1, 1970.⁴⁰

This newly minted act required executive agencies to rigorously analyze the environmental impacts of proposed bureaucratic actions, also introducing the crucial oversight of local constituencies into the regulatory process.⁴¹ Importantly, NEPA created a federal council advising the president on matters pertaining to the natural world,⁴² thus successfully institutionalizing environmental concerns. Most remarkably, in a premonition of future developments, NEPA passed through both Congressional houses with “near unanimity,”⁴³ a powerful demonstration of bipartisan consensus.

The absence of political polarization surrounding NEPA invited a “parade of [environmental] regulatory statutes... the likes of which [the U.S.] will probably never see

³⁷ Teresa Sabol Spezio, "The Santa Barbara Oil Spill and Its Effect on United States Environmental Policy," *Sustainability* 10, no. 8 (2018): 2750, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10082750>.

³⁸ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, *National Environmental Policy Act of 1969: Report to Accompany S. 1075*, 91st Cong., 1st sess., July 9, 1969, S. Rep. 91-296, 11, <https://ceq.doe.gov/docs/laws-regulations/Senate-Report-on-NEPA.pdf>.

³⁹ U.S. Congress, *National Environmental Policy Act of 1969*, S. 1075, 91st Cong., 1st sess. (1969), Congress.gov, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/91st-congress/senate-bill/1075/all-info>.

⁴⁰ "President Richard Nixon Signing the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, January 1, 1970," *Nixon White House Photographs, 1969–1974, White House Photo Office Collection (Nixon Administration)*, Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, CA, accessed Mar 15, 2026, <https://docsteach.org/document/nixon-sign-nepa/>.

⁴¹ U.S. Congress, *National Environmental Policy Act of 1969*, Public Law 91-190, 83 Stat. 852-856 (1970), 1-5, 15, <https://www.govinfo.org/content/pkg/COMPS-10352/pdf/COMPS-10352.pdf>.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴³ James Conant and Peter Balint, "The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Rise of Environmental Protection in the 1970s, and the Political Drama of the Next Three Decades," in *The Life Cycles of the Council on Environmental Quality and the Environmental Protection Agency: 1970–2035* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190203702.003.0005>.

again.”⁴⁴ Within five years, additional pieces of seminal federal legislation, such as the 1970 Clean Air Act Amendments⁴⁵ and 1972 Amendments to the Water Pollution Control Act,⁴⁶ passed into law with negligible resistance. These regulations established stricter national benchmarks for acceptable emissions conduct⁴⁷ and, when paired with court enforcement,⁴⁸ federal agencies and energy corporations were left with no recourse but to comply.

However, political reform extended well beyond lawmaking alone. Amidst the tsunami of policy change, activists successfully lobbied to oust the Dirty Dozen,⁴⁹ a cohort of twelve congressmen with notoriously poor environmental records. Upon removing “seven of the incumbent” Dozen, environmental advocates gained additional political traction.⁵⁰ Even Nixon, who in past years had exhibited limited interest in preservation, seized upon the moment to reverse his stance, pronouncing the 1970s as “the time when [the U.S.] regained a productive harmony between man and nature.”⁵¹

At long last, environmentalism had unequivocally asserted itself on the national stage. With substantive policy reform catalyzed by the unprecedented flood of nonpartisan mobilization following Santa Barbara, preservation reached its high tide.

⁴⁴ Zygmunt J. B. Plater, quoted in “Moving Past Environmental Proceduralism,” *Asterisk Magazine*, April 2024, <http://asteriskmag.com/issues/05/moving-past-environmental-proceduralism>.

⁴⁵ U.S. Congress, *Clean Air Act Amendments*, Public Law 91-604, 84 Stat. 1676–1683 (1970), 1676, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-84/pdf/STATUTE-84-Pg1676.pdf>.

⁴⁶ U.S. Congress, *Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments*, Public Law 92-500, 86 Stat. 816–819 (1972), 816, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-86/pdf/STATUTE-86-Pg816.pdf>.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 816–819; California Environmental Quality Act, California Public Resources Code, §§21000–21189.81 (1970), https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=21000.&lawCode=PRC; *Clean Air Act Amendments*, 1678–1683.

⁴⁸ *No Oil, Inc. v. City of Los Angeles*, 13 Cal. 3d 68 (1974), <https://law.justia.com/cases/california/supreme-court/3d/13/68.html>.

⁴⁹ Smithsonian Institution, “The Dirty Dozen’ Poster,” National Museum of American History, 1974, https://www.si.edu/object/dirty-dozen-poster:nmah_526704.

⁵⁰ “Earth Days: The Modern Environmental Movement,” PBS American Experience, accessed Dec 23, 2025, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/earth-days-modern-environmental-movement/>.

⁵¹ Richard Nixon, “Statement About the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969,” The American Presidency Project, January 1, 1970, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-about-the-national-environmental-policy-act-1969>.

Reaction: Economic Backlash and Partisanship

Nevertheless, even the mightiest waves eventually recede. Opposition interests constrained the initial outflow of reform by reacting against the era's prevailing ethos of stewardship. In fact, the very federalization of environmental policy secured in the spill's aftermath would ultimately invite environmentalism's political stagnation.

Contrarian disposition towards federal environmental policy first surfaced in mainstream politics through Nixon, who moved early to placate oil industry members "alarmed by the... wave of new environmental regulation."⁵² Creating an official council to liaise between government and disgruntled businessmen,⁵³ Nixon solicited prospective business opinions involving "[environmental] policies affecting industry."⁵⁴ Such executive concessions to "appease the business community"⁵⁵ presaged the imminent, more consequential halting of green momentum.

When the 1973 Oil Crisis destabilized the U.S. energy sector and economy,⁵⁶ both producer and consumer priorities shifted radically against environmentalists. Americans felt the "first nip of what was to become the energy crisis in... winter of 1972," forming queues at gas stations and worrying "whether next week... [would] be worse."⁵⁷ Nixon, deeming the energy

⁵² Joe Greene Conley II, "Chapter Four: 'Hungry? Eat an Environmentalist': From Earth Day to Regulatory Reform and the Rise of Cost-Benefit Analysis, 1965-1980," in *Environmentalism Contained: A History of Corporate Responses to the New Environmentalism* (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2006), 11, https://thecre.com/pdf/20050430_quality.pdf.

⁵³ Richard Nixon, "Executive Order 11523—Establishing the National Industrial Pollution Control Council," The American Presidency Project, April 9, 1970, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-11523-establishing-the-national-industrial-pollution-control-council>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Conley, "Chapter Four," 41.

⁵⁶ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, "Oil Embargo, 1973–1974," Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations, accessed December 17, 2025, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/oil-embargo>.

⁵⁷ Linda Charlton, "Decades of Inaction Brought Energy Gap," *New York Times*, February 10, 1974, 1, <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/02/10/archives/decades-of-inaction-brought-energy-gap-secret-1950-decision.html>.

shortage an emergency, authorized an immediate relaxation of environmental regulations.⁵⁸ With enforcement weakened and the energy crisis in full swing, corporate executives pounced, employing public relations strategies designed to blame environmentalists for national economic turmoil. Affected businesses lobbied to “weaken environmental laws... in [their] time of economic hardship,”⁵⁹ and on a more personal level, oil executives charged “environmentalists with blocking construction of new power plants and refineries.”⁶⁰ In kindred spirit, American Electric Power’s chairman presented shareholders with a “28-minute... movie” protesting “[environmental] consumer groups” and economic restrictions.⁶¹

Even so, many initially viewed the deluge of industry rhetoric as nothing more than sophistry. Officials “sharply criticized” allegations imputing the nation’s energy crisis “to antipollution efforts,” decrying the inflammatory narrative treating environmentalism as the “whipping boy for... energy problems.”⁶² Public opinion polls similarly indicated that most Americans did not fault environmentalists for the energy crisis.⁶³ However, industry-financed marketing campaigns, which included advertisements dismissing ecological warnings,⁶⁴ eventually proved effectual in swaying public opinion. By the 1980s, Americans began

⁵⁸ Richard Nixon, "Address to the Nation About Policies To Deal With the Energy Shortages," The American Presidency Project, November 7, 1973, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-nation-about-policies-deal-with-the-energy-shortages>.

⁵⁹ "The Ground Is Shifting Under Earth Day," *New York Times*, April 21, 1980, A18, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/ground-is-shifting-under-earth-day/docview/121302973/se-2>.

⁶⁰ "Nixon Aide Denies Energy Gap Is Caused by Ecological Effort: Morton Sees Easing Conservation Urged," *New York Times*, June 14, 1973, 34, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/nixon-aide-denies-energy-gap-is-caused-ecological/docview/119867235/se-2>.

⁶¹ "American Electric Shows Energy Plea," *New York Times*, April 24, 1975, <http://www.nytimes.com/1975/04/24/archives/american-electric-shows-energy-plea.html>.

⁶² "Nixon Aide Denies Energy Gap Is Caused by Ecological Effort," 34.

⁶³ Conley, "Chapter Four," 32.

⁶⁴ See Appendix C.

“cool[ing] to the pursuit of clean habitats and conservation,” with financial concerns instead stealing the limelight.⁶⁵

Indeed, the prospect of further environmental reform withered away as President Ronald Reagan’s administration implemented an agenda of aggressive deregulation. Reagan, adopting a conservative perspective, believed the “evergrowing web of rules and regulations”⁶⁶ blighted the economy, and in their place, implemented free market ideals, hoping to dismantle “unnecessary environmental restrictions” and the “cumbersome regulatory apparatus.”⁶⁷ Personifying the anti-regulatory, environmentally adverse ethos of the administration, Interior Secretary James Watt went so far as to liken preservation advocates to Nazis and Bolsheviks,⁶⁸ railing against their “frivolous” utilization of public land.⁶⁹

With Reagan’s conservative bureaucracy promoting overt hostility to preservation, partisanship became inevitable. By the early eighties, environmentalism was no longer a topic of bilateral consensus, but rather an exclusively liberal priority. Already in 1982, a Republican study committee concluded that environmentalists, predominantly Democrats and “liberal[s]... motivated to thwart economic development,”⁷⁰ posed a threat to national growth.⁷¹

⁶⁵ "The Ground Is Shifting Under Earth Day," A18.

⁶⁶ Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," The American Presidency Project, January 25, 1984,

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-before-joint-session-the-congress-the-state-the-union-4>.

⁶⁷ Ronald Reagan, "Message to the Congress Transmitting the National Energy Policy Plan," Ronald Reagan Library, July 17, 1981,

<http://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/message-congress-transmitting-national-energy-policy-plan>.

⁶⁸ "Watt Says Environmentalists Have Objectives Like Nazis," *Harvard Crimson*, January 21, 1983,

<http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1983/1/21/watt-says-environmentalists-have-objectives-like/>.

⁶⁹ "Watt Says He's in Environmental Mainstream," UPI Archives, May 12, 1981,

<http://www.upi.com/Archives/1981/05/12/Watt-says-hes-in-environmental-mainstream/9260358488000/>.

⁷⁰ U.S. Congress, Republican Study Committee, *The Specter of Environmentalism: The Threat of Environmental Groups*, Public Liaison Office, 1982, 11,

https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smf/publicliaison/blackwell/box-008/40_047_7006969_008_016_2017.pdf.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

Simultaneously, other conservatives disparaged ecology, newly associated with leftists, as a hippie fad in opposition to capitalism and technological progress.⁷²

These attacks on environmentalism were potent and enduring. The partisan divide of the 1980s, wherein the “Democratic Party became the party of environment and the Republican Party became the party of business,”⁷³ sowed the seeds of today’s stark polarization. Polls from 2020 noted that while a majority of Democrats considered climate change a major threat, few Republicans shared their sentiments.⁷⁴ Because federalization officially instituted regulations for environmental protection in U.S. law, the movement’s efforts to advance further legislative change grew vulnerable under partisan scrutiny and criticism. With intensifying backlash, Reagan-era deregulation, and deepening partisanship fostering a broader national apathy towards environmentalism, the broad public coalition sustaining reform withered. Subsequently, political support waned, and the newly-potent cause was effectively stymied. From low to high tide, and finally to its inevitable collapse, the environmentalist wave had completed its journey. It would wait patiently for fresh currents to be propelled into yet another cycle.

A Cyclical Paradigm

Ultimately, the 1969 Santa Barbara Oil Spill’s success in provoking widespread reaction and reform acted as both progenitor and roadblock for environmentalism. Never-before-seen achievements in grassroots activism and a green-conscious national uproar led to massive

⁷² U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 93rd Cong., 2nd sess., vol. 120, pt. 10 (1974): 13567–13618, 13577, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CRECB-1974-pt10/pdf/GPO-CRECB-1974-pt10-4-3.pdf>.

⁷³ Frank T. Manheim, *Fateful Collision: How Revolutionary Environmental Laws of the 1970s Led to a Rift in American Society*, C. Boyden Gray Center for the Study of the Administrative State Research Paper, October 7, 2020, 1, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN_ID4069010_code837374.pdf?abstractid=3706466&mirid=1&type=2.

⁷⁴ Brian Kennedy and Alec Tyson, "How Republicans View Climate Change and Energy Issues," Pew Research Center, March 1, 2024, <http://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/03/01/how-republicans-view-climate-change-and-energy-issues/>.

political upheaval, creating the environmental movement as known today. Yet, these triumphs subjected reformers to the vicissitudes of economic downturns and stark partisanship, preventing environmentalism from truly cementing itself as an indubitable mainstay in national policy.

The oscillating interplay between reaction and reform established at Santa Barbara remains a constant in contemporary environmental discourse, particularly as oil spill magnitudes steadily rise. The 1989 Exxon Valdez spill, for example, exposed the insufficiencies in government capabilities of large-scale spill response.⁷⁵ Implementation of the 1990 Oil Pollution Act soon followed, attempting to improve federal response competency.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, Exxon's relentless appeals in courts considerably reduced the punitive damages which they owed,⁷⁷ displaying the courts' greater emphasis on economic concerns over a "restoration of the commons."⁷⁸ Congressmen also later opposed revisions to environmental bills on the basis that the proposed amendments would harm the Midwest's "industrial base."⁷⁹ Two decades later, a similar dynamic reemerged following the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster. President Barack Obama pledged uncompromising "new reforms for offshore oil production,"⁸⁰ yet such initiatives stalled in the face of comparable regulatory pushback.⁸¹ Even now, President Donald Trump's

⁷⁵ National Response Team, "The Exxon Valdez Oil Spill," The U.S. National Response Team, May 1989, ES-1, <https://nrt.org/sites/2/files/Valdez%20spill%20RTP.pdf>.

⁷⁶ U.S. Congress, House, *Oil Pollution Act of 1990*, H.R. 1465, 101st Cong., 1st sess., introduced September 20, 1989, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/house-bill/1465/summary/20>.

⁷⁷ James Liska, "Lessons from the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill: A Case Study in Retributive and Corrective Justice for Harm to the Environment," *Ethics and the Environment* 15, no. 2 (2010): 1–30, 2–3, <https://doi.org/10.2979/ete.2010.15.2.1>.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁹ U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record*, 101st Cong., 2nd sess., vol. 136, pt. 3 (1990): 4324–4328, 4326, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CRECB-1990-pt3/pdf/GPO-CRECB-1990-pt3-9.pdf>.

⁸⁰ Barack Obama, "Statement by President Obama Marking the One-Year Anniversary of the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill," White House, April 20, 2011, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/04/20/statement-president-obama-marking-one-year-anniversary-bp-deepwater-hori>.

⁸¹ Lois Capps, interview by Janet Bridgers and Toby, transcript, Earth Alert Heroes of the Coast video archive, 2010, 2, <https://earthalert.org/hotc/transcripts/Capps-Lois-re-69-SB-oilspill.pdf>.

administration actively works to “expand fossil fuel production” and “cut restrictions”⁸² on nonrenewables, in essence dismantling past environmental headway.

The black tides and green waves of a half century past, having carried oil onto Santa Barbara beaches and ferried the torch of sustainable progress, thus remain clearly pertinent today. Even so, in the interminable ebb and flow of environmental politics, reactionary and reformist waves are continuously met, and quenched, by counter-reactionary currents. Amidst today’s fractured polity and the pressing issues of our own climate crisis, recognizing this push and pull remains essential. Only with unyielding effort and attention can the American people ensure that environmental consciousness does not recede irrevocably under the ever-present pull of short-sighted partisanship.

⁸² "How Project 2025 and Agenda 47 Could Shape US Climate Policy," Bank Green, accessed November 30, 2025, <https://bank.green/blog/project-2025>.

Appendix A



Images of marine life poisoned by the oil spill helped to fuel the emerging environmental movement. 1969. Photograph. <https://psmag.com/news/the-ocean-is-boiling-the-complete-oral-history-of-the-1969-santa-barbara-oil-spill/>.

Appendix B



Millions Join Earth Day Observances Across the Nation: Throngs jamming Fifth Avenue yesterday in response to a call for the regeneration of a polluted environment. Apr 23, 1970. Photograph. <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/mood-is-joyful-as-city-gives-support/docview/119025936/se-2>.

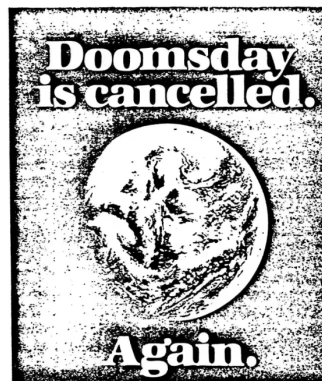
Appendix C



Who told you the earth was warming... Chicken Little?



Chicken Little's legend about the sky falling was based on a fact that has become one of our greatest.
It's the same with global warming. There's no hard evidence it is occurring. In fact, evidence the Earth is warming is weak. Proof the oceans double has been the primary cause is non-existent. Climate models cannot accurately predict the future global change. And the existing physics of climate change are still wide open to debate.
If you care about the earth, but don't want your imagination to run away with you, make sure you get the facts.
Write Informed Citizens for the Environment, P.O. Box 1013, Grand Forks, North Dakota 58201 or call (701) 746-4573. We'll send you the facts about global warming.



The twentieth century has seen many predictions of global destruction. In the 1950's, some scientists claimed we were in the middle of a disastrous warming trend. In the mid 1970's, others were sure we were entering a new Ice Age. And so on.
It's the same with global warming. There's no hard evidence it is occurring. In fact, evidence the Earth is warming is weak. Proof that carbon dioxide has been the primary cause is non-existent. Climate models cannot accurately predict far-future global change. And the underlying physics of the climate change are still wide open to debate.
If you care about the environment, but don't care to be pressured into spending money on problems that don't exist, make sure you get the facts.
Write Informed Citizens for the Environment, P.O. Box 1013, Grand Forks, North Dakota 58201 or call (701) 746-4573. We'll send you the facts about global warming.



Forgotten oil ads that told us climate change was nothing. Both ads from the Informed Citizens for the Environment. Newspaper. 1962-1991.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/>

18/the-forgotten-oil-ads-that-told-us-climate-change-was-nothing.

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"American Electric Shows Energy Plea." *New York Times*, April 24, 1975.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1975/04/24/archives/american-electric-shows-energy-plea.html>.

This source provided me with detailed information on one of the many avenues corporate backlash strategy took – in this case, the screening of a brief film. In addition to offering substantial evidence of organized industry resistance in response to the energy crisis, I also understood how elite businessmen utilized creative and sophisticated methodologies to shift blame for the economic troubles plaguing America onto environmentalists.

Anson, Robert. "Nation: Environment: Tragedy in Oil." *Time*, February 14, 1969.

<https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,900613-1,00.html>.

This contemporaneous news article from *Time* magazine provided me with valuable information on the initial, visceral sight of the spill. Beyond quoting it in my paper, however, the article also provided me with a detailed summary of legal, activist, and corporate perspectives and actions in response to the incident.

Brower, David. "Should We Also Flood the Sistine Chapel so Tourists Can Get Nearer the Ceiling?" Sierra Club, 1966. <http://infomarketingblog.com/sistine-chapel/>.

This provocative Sierra Club advertisement exemplified early environmental advocacy as focused on conservation. The full-page advertisement is republished in full within a blog, with a digitized transcript of the text within the source.

California Environmental Quality Act. California Public Resources Code, §§21000–21189.81 (1970).

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=21000.&lawCode=PRC.

This piece of state legislation, a stricter version of NEPA, allowed me to compare and contrast the two acts, facilitating my understanding of how reform extended beyond federal action to state-level policies. It was also interesting to learn that Ronald Reagan, who later adopted a deregulatory approach to preservation during his terms as president, approved this specific bill during his tenure as governor of California.

Capps, Lois. Interview by Janet Bridgers and Toby. Transcript. Earth Alert Heroes of the Coast video archive, 2010.

<https://earthalert.org/hotc/transcripts/Capps-Lois-re-69-SB-oilspill.pdf>.

Former representative Lois Capps discusses the visceral impact and lasting changes ensuing from the 1969 Santa Barbara spill. From reading this transcript, I realized that the historical obstacles to preservationist policy arising in the wake of ecological disasters have remained prevalent even in the twenty-first century. As such, this source helped me to pinpoint the recurrent aspect of environmental politics in my thesis.

Carson, Rachel. "Statement before Congress." Iowa State University Archives of Women's Political Communication, June 4, 1963.

<http://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2018/01/09/statement-before-congress-june-4-1963/>.

Carson, an early, influential proponent of environmental preservation, makes a speech which reveals the conflicted, disunified nature of pre-1969 ecological concern. Specifically, she focuses on the health impacts of pesticide usage and how protecting the environment can improve human health. I used this source to establish the fragmented nature of environmentalism before the Santa Barbara oil spill.

Charlton, Linda. "Decades of Inaction Brought Energy Gap." *New York Times*, February 10, 1974, 1.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1974/02/10/archives/decades-of-inaction-brought-energy-gap-secret-1950-decision.html>.

Charlton's article, reporting on U.S. energy policy as well as the imminent economic crisis, further provided evidence of pressures that diverted the American public's gaze away from preservation. Charlton also contextualizes the background in which the energy crisis came about. She explains that the government failed to address over-reliance on foreign energy sources, with blowback from Nixon's Watergate scandal further limiting federal capacity to handle various other issues.

Cimberg, Robert, Mann, Steven, and Straughan, Dale. "A Reinvestigation of Southern California Rocky Intertidal Beaches Three and One-Half Years after the 1969 Santa Barbara Oil Spill: A Preliminary Report." *International Oil Spill Conference Proceedings* 1973, no. 1 (1973): 697–702. <https://doi.org/10.7901/2169-3358-1973-1-697>.

One of the first academic sources I reviewed, this paper reports on mortality rates of marine life and substrate stability in areas of close proximity to the spill. The preliminary results indicate that although certain species died in swaths, population rates in a majority

of marine biota remained relatively stable. I used this evidence in initial reasoning, concluding that the spill's location and visibility contributed to the national reaction more than ecological damage.

"Congress Urged by Interior Secretary Toughen Oil Pollution Liability Bill." *Bulletin*, February 28, 1969.

<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1243&dat=19690228&id=2P1XAAAIBAJ&sjid=CfcDAAAIBAJ&pg=3113,209375&hl=en>.

This source demonstrates Hickel's pro-regulatory stance with respect to the oil industry, detailing his propositions to strengthen a new oil pollution liability bill, as well as establishing additional accountability measures for oil companies. From this source, I clearly understood that there was a rapid progression from disaster to policy proposals, as within days of the spill, federal officials had begun negotiating environmental legislation.

"Environment: Costs of an Oil Spill." *Time*, January 31, 1972.

<https://time.com/archive/6816198/environment-costs-of-an-oil-spill/>.

This source provides specific data about Union Oil's fiscal troubles in the spill's aftermath, and how the reduction of financial liability for oil companies sparked fury from residents. I used this source to provide information on the legal punishments levied upon the corporations and how they were considered severely inadequate by many.

"Good News for Santa Barbara." *Time*, June 22, 1970.

<https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,944099,00.html>.

This source records President Nixon taking proactive measures to reduce environmental risk factors posed by oil corporations and canceling offshore drilling leases. After reading it, I realized that the voices of environmental advocates had been heeded in a significant way as Nixon established a marine sanctuary in the Santa Barbara Channel.

"Hickel Issues Oil Rules." *Daily Illini*, March 22, 1969.

<http://idnc.library.illinois.edu/cgi-bin/illinois?a=d&d=DIL19690322.2.29&e>.

This source documents Hickel's crackdowns on the oil industry, instituting stricter regulations as well as reviewing existing oil leases. From this source, I understood that Hickel's department moved swiftly to analyze existing failures, and that Hickel started leaning towards a more green-supportive policy approach. The source also offered a more comprehensive understanding of the legal response timeline, as I learned governmental action was quite immediate and significant.

Johnson, Lyndon B. "Memorandum on the Need for Action To Prevent Oil Pollution of Coastal Waters." The American Presidency Project, May 26, 1967.
<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/memorandum-the-need-for-action-prevent-oil-pollution-coastal-waters>.

President Johnson sent this memorandum to the Interior and Transportation Secretaries following an earlier 1967 spill in the United Kingdom, forming a team to audit existing preservation legislation and recommend alternative courses of action. Nonetheless, the Santa Barbara spill occurred in the United States only two years later. The source showed me that even presidential directives could not institute adequate environmental protection.

Johnson, Lyndon B. "Special Message to the Congress on Conservation and Restoration of Natural Beauty." The American Presidency Project, February 8, 1965.
<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/special-message-the-congress-conservation-and-restoration-natural-beauty>.

This message from President Johnson revealed that environmentalism, as a wholesale concern for nature in general, was not prevalent before the Santa Barbara spill. I used this source as evidence to support my argument that environmental priorities shifted from a collection of various, separate topics to a more cohesive, inclusive idea.

Lelyveld, Joseph. "Mood is Joyful as City Gives its Support: Millions Join Earth Day Observances Across the Nation Mood is Joyful here." *The New York Times*. April 23, 1970.
<https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/mood-is-joyful-as-city-gives-support/docview/119025936/se-2>.

This newspaper article provides a powerful image of a tightly-packed crowd of Earth Day observers during the event's inauguration. I used this evidence to provide impactful visual confirmation of the reaction. Though I did not cite the article in my paper, it states that on the inaugural Earth Day, there were few opponents to environmentalism, contrasting with the idea of an already brewing environmental backlash.

Nanda, Ved and Stiles, Kenneth. "Offshore Oil Spills: An Evaluation of Recent United States Responses." *San Diego Law Review* 7, no. 3 (1970): 519–540.
<https://digital.sandiego.edu/sdlr/vol7/iss3/9/>.

This academic work is a contemporary analysis of U.S. oil spill responses in the wake of the Santa Barbara oil spill. While I did not utilize this source directly in the paper, it

provided important contextual information; for example, how Interior Secretary Hickel played a major role in the Santa Barbara spill response. I also perused the footnotes for an extensive list of additional primary sources.

Nash, Roderick Frazier. *The Greening of Higher Education at UCSB*. Letter to UC Santa Barbara, January 2020.
http://es.ucsb.edu/sites/default/files/Program%20History/Nash_GREENING%20HIGHER%20ED%20AT%20UCSB_2020_50th.pdf.

Nash, one of the foremost founders of the environmental-studies major, recounts how he created the discipline. By reading this letter, I understood that Nash drew inspiration directly from the oil spill and realized how immediately the disaster sparked enduring change in the American education system. Although this document is from 2020, I consider this to be a primary source as Nash simply recounts his experience as a firsthand witness to the chaos of post-spill 1969 Santa Barbara without additional retrospective analysis.

National Response Team. "The Exxon Valdez Oil Spill." The U.S. National Response Team, May 1989. <https://nrt.org/sites/2/files/Valdez%20spill%20RTP.pdf>.

This government report provides extensive documentation of the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill, focusing both on the chronology of the incident and recommendations for future pollution mitigation. This source was particularly interesting to me because it showed that even two decades after Santa Barbara revolutionized environmental policy, federal spill response was still inadequate. As a result, I realized that backlash to legislation beginning during the energy crisis of the early 1970s was significant enough to render the prior, momentous political reform fragile.

Nelson, Gaylord. "Letter to Frank Stanton, CBS News, regarding Earth Day's true origins." April 7, 1971.
<https://nelsearthday.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/nelson-2-15-cbs-news-letter.pdf>.

Nelson, the founder of Earth Day, writes to CBS president Dr. Frank Stanton on the creative process behind Earth Day. As the first Earth Day is perhaps one of the most visually impactful successes of early environmentalism, I deemed it prudent to include details about this event in my paper, demonstrating the explicit link between the Santa Barbara spill, Earth Day, and American environmental activism.

Nixon, Richard. "Address to the Nation About Policies To Deal With the Energy Shortages." The American Presidency Project, November 7, 1973.

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-nation-about-policies-deal-with-the-energy-shortages>.

In this source, Nixon emphasizes the importance of energy conservation from all residents and organizations nationwide, as well as providing the government with the necessary authority to relax environmental regulations. This source exemplified my paper's turning point: namely, that economic concerns superseded environmental priorities. Eventually, such a shift would reverse the momentum behind reform.

Nixon, Richard. "Executive Order 11523—Establishing the National Industrial Pollution Control Council." The American Presidency Project, April 9, 1970.

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-11523-establishing-the-national-industrial-pollution-control-council>.

This source revealed contradictions between Nixon's purported environmental zeal and his actual actions. I understood his creation of a liaison between government and industry as an act of hedging, reassuring energy corporations even while maintaining a pro-ecological public image. This executive order allowed me to understand that backlash had begun even amidst the height of environmental momentum in 1970.

Nixon, Richard. "Statement About the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969." The American Presidency Project, January 1, 1970.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-about-the-national-environmental-policy-act-1969>.

Nixon displays his apparent readiness to enact environmental policies in this statement about NEPA, as he enthuses about the positive ecological change he hopes to realize during his term. This source thus served to capture the environmental optimism and bipartisanship in the aftermath of the spill, which would contrast starkly against the polarization of a decade later.

Nixon, Richard. "Statement on Coastal Oil Pollution at Santa Barbara, California." The American Presidency Project, February 11, 1969.

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-coastal-oil-pollution-santa-barbara-california>.

Nixon communicates his action plan to prevent future spills of similar magnitudes, including, but not limited to, the creation of a federal, academic advisory panel on preventing oil pollution, as well as a wholesale review of existing regulations. He admits that prior legislation must be reviewed in order to create a safer, cleaner future. I used this

information to show that the intensity of public pressure compelled even the president to be proactive in favor of environmentalism shortly after the disaster.

"Nixon Aide Denies Energy Gap Is Caused by Ecological Effort: Morton Sees Easing Conservation Urged." *New York Times*, June 14, 1973, 34.
<https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/nixon-aide-denies-energy-gap-is-caused-ecological/docview/119867235/se-2>.

Government workers' resistance and criticism of green-hostile industry advertisements helped me to understand all sides of the backlash against environmentalism. On one hand, initial resistance was apparently powerful, yet through indifference, it would quickly fade away.

"Nixon Asked To Halt Coastal Drilling." *Toledo Blade*, November 23, 1969.
<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1350&dat=19691123&id=cskjAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=sgEEAAAIAIBAJ&pg=7276,1981898&hl=en>.

This newspaper article covers the fish-in protestors staged to halt the installation of a new oil rig, as well as the appeals GOO! president Alvin Weingand made. This source provided me with concrete evidence of the sustained passion for environmentalism nearly a year after the spill, as well as the creativity of activists to keep their cause on the radar of mainstream media.

No Oil, Inc. v. City of Los Angeles, 13 Cal. 3d 68 (1974).
<https://law.justia.com/cases/california/supreme-court/3d/13/68.html>.

From this court case, I understood that the newly instituted regulations were no longer insubstantial. While I did not include extensive legal analysis in my paper due to word-limit constraints, I factored into my argument how courts of law were actively enforcing environmental legislation, thus showing the efficacy of initial spill reaction and the resulting reform.

Obama, Barack. "Statement by President Obama Marking the One-Year Anniversary of the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill." White House, April 20, 2011.
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/04/20/statement-president-obama-marking-one-year-anniversary-bp-deepwater-horizon>.

President Obama promises to hold any liable parties responsible for the 2010 Deepwater Horizon spill, also pledging new reforms for offshore oil production. I used this to demonstrate the first part of my thesis: namely, initial reaction and reform in response to

oil spills, before the inevitable counter-reaction. Again, identical presidential and federal promises were made even four decades after Santa Barbara, yet such reforms eventually stalled, providing evidence for the ongoing cycle of reaction, reform, and reaction again.

O'Connell, Dennis M. "Continental Shelf Oil Disasters: Challenge to International Pollution Control." *Cornell Law Review* 55, no. 1 (1969): 115, 127.
<https://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/clr/vol55/iss1/7>.

O'Connell's analysis, partially inspired by the events of less than a year past, critiques the government's inadequate response to oil spills. I used this source to obtain a broader understanding of the political and legal context leading up to and following the Santa Barbara spill.

Photograph 2713-11, *President Richard Nixon Signing the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969*, January 1, 1970, Nixon White House Photographs, 1969–1974, White House Photo Office Collection (Nixon Administration), Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, CA. Online image, accessed December 17, 2025.
<https://docsteach.org/document/nixon-sign-nepa/>.

In this photograph, Nixon signs the landmark piece of ecological legislation, NEPA. I originally included this image as an appendix, but upon further re-evaluation, it seemed less impactful than justified to include, especially in a limited appendix. Nonetheless, discovering this image provided a visual accompaniment to the symbolic peak of federal environmental momentum.

Reagan, Ronald. "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union." The American Presidency Project, January 25, 1984.
<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-before-joint-session-the-congress-the-state-the-union-4>.

Reagan used his State of the Union speech to address the growing U.S. economy and his plans for deregulation. It is clear that environmentalism did not constitute a significant concern, and in fact, was an obstacle that the Reagan administration would maneuver around or tear down if necessary. I found this source quite valuable, as it was one of my first glimpses into the regulatory policy of the Reagan era.

Smithsonian Institution. "'The Dirty Dozen' Poster." National Museum of American History, 1974. https://www.si.edu/object/dirty-dozen-poster:nmah_526704.

This source is a campaign poster targeting the Dirty Dozen, an anti-environmental group of Congressmen. This historical artifact helped me to realize the activists' sophistication; beyond policy change, activists had the foresight to remove political opponents, effectively restructuring Congress.

Straughan, Dale. *Biological and Oceanographical Survey of the Santa Barbara Channel Oil Spill 1969-1970*, vol. 1, Biology and Bacteriology. Sea Grant Publication No. 2. Los Angeles: Allan Hancock Foundation, University of Southern California, 1971.
https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/40385/noaa_40385_DS1.pdf.

This lengthy monograph, compiled by scientist Dale Straughan, provides crucial information on the ecological state of offshore Santa Barbara and important framing for my argument. His documentation of the ecological impact as less severe than was initially expected allowed me to realize that while the spill's environmental damage was still considerable, the national reaction and political reform far exceeded the ecological scope. I realized that there were clearly other factors contributing to the uproar besides pure harm to the marine habitat.

"The Ground Is Shifting Under Earth Day." *New York Times*, April 21, 1980, A18.
<https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/ground-is-shifting-under-earth-day/docview/121302973/se-2>.

This article reports on how the nation began to care less about preservation and environmental issues, shifting its focus to fiscal concerns in times of economic hardship. I used this source as a firsthand, contemporaneous report to understand broadly that the pathos which underlay the movement's initial explosion was wavering. This led me to the conclusion that public apathy, in part, contributed to the movement's eventual loss of influence.

"The Santa Barbara Oil Spill Exposes the Costs of Offshore Drilling." *Our Vanishing Wilderness*, NET (National Educational Television) and American Archive Broadcasting, 1970, broadcast episode.
https://americanarchive.org/primary_source_sets/environmental/03-75-26m0cjt7.

This excerpt from a television broadcast allowed me to not only understand the spill as the largest ecological disaster in American history up to that point, but also to witness the havoc wreaked upon the surrounding ocean, coastlines, and wildlife. As a result, I more completely understood how crucial a role television publicity played in amplifying outrage.

U.S. Congress. *Congressional Record*. 93rd Cong., 2nd sess., vol. 120, pt. 10 (1974): 13567–13618.

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CRECB-1974-pt10/pdf/GPO-CRECB-1974-pt10-4-3.pdf>.

This 1974 congressional record provides further evidence of animosity between conservatives and liberals on the subject of preservation. I used this source to understand how such an ideological divide was already forming relatively early on. The language used throughout the statements in this document would only intensify throughout later years as debate on the issue generated increasing controversy.

U.S. Congress. *Clean Air Act Amendments*. Public Law 91-604, 84 Stat. 1676–1683 (1970). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-84/pdf/STATUTE-84-Pg1676.pdf>.

This piece of updated legislation establishing standards for air quality and emissions represented one of the many historical policies achieved following Santa Barbara. I used this source to demonstrate the breadth of reform beyond merely offshore drilling regulations, extending to various other facets of the natural world.

U.S. Congress. *Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments*. Public Law 92-500, 86 Stat. 816–819 (1972). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-86/pdf/STATUTE-86-Pg816.pdf>.

These amendments to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act created strict water quality standards, similar in rigor to those of the newly amended Clean Air Act. I combined this act with various other pieces of environmental legislation to display the sheer volume of policy change; namely, to illustrate the window for sweeping reform the Santa Barbara oil spill had thrown open.

U.S. Congress, House. *Oil Pollution Act of 1990*. H.R. 1465, 101st Cong., 1st sess., introduced September 20, 1989. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/house-bill/1465/summary/20>.

This act, introduced in response to the Exxon-Valdez oil spill, demonstrated the recurring pattern of disaster-prompted reform (and again is presented against a later regression to counter-reaction and apathy). I used this source to demonstrate the parallels between Exxon-Valdez and Santa Barbara, showing that despite legislative change, both faced similar resistance. The reader observes that, regardless of the spill, the dynamic of environmental politics is predictable.

U.S. Congress. *National Environmental Policy Act of 1969*. Public Law 91-190, 83 Stat. 852-856 (1970). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-10352/pdf/COMPS-10352.pdf>.

NEPA, the most significant piece of environmental legislation in all of post-Santa Barbara reform, was central to my paper, representing the apex of national activism and political change. Through this document, I learned of all the specific requirements NEPA introduced into federal action, and interpreted this as a watershed moment for governmental regulatory action. As this was the first legal document I read for my project, analyzing this document greatly facilitated my understanding and processing of similar sources.

U.S. Congress. *National Environmental Policy Act of 1969*. S. 1075, 91st Cong., 1st sess. (1969), Congress.gov. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/91st-congress/senate-bill/1075/all-info>.

This source is the official Congress record of all legislative actions relevant to the passage of NEPA in 1970. From this record, I understood that NEPA achieved ratification remarkably rapidly (in under a year). This provided initial confirmation of my argument that the Santa Barbara oil spill engendered bipartisan consensus and allowed for new environmental legislation to pass unhindered.

U.S. Congress. *Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act*. Public Law 83-212, 67 Stat. 462–463 (1953). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-67/pdf/STATUTE-67-Pg462.pdf>.

This statute, in essence the only major piece of drilling-related environmental legislation passed prior to the 1969 spill, provided an example of the vague regulatory language that preceded more modern environmental legislation. I incorporated phrasing from this source as an example that no substantive checks on Big Oil existed at the time.

U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs. *National Environmental Policy Act of 1969: Report to Accompany S. 1075*. 91st Cong., 1st sess., July 9, 1969, S. Rep. 91-296. <https://ceq.doe.gov/docs/laws-regulations/Senate-Report-on-NEPA.pdf>.

This document contains the 1969 version of NEPA, in addition to extensive background on its inception. I found it interesting to read in detail about Jackson's past efforts to pass green legislation, the amendments and proposal process Congress went through before the bill's ultimate ratification, and the original purpose behind NEPA.

U.S. Executive Office of the President, Office of Science and Technology. *The Oil Spill Problem: First Report of the President's Panel on Oil Spills*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1969. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CZIC-gc1080-u52-1969/html/CZIC-gc1080-u52-1969.htm>.

This government report concludes that the U.S. lacked sufficient knowledge and capability to adequately address large-scale oil spills, proposing measures to remedy this insufficiency. Referencing this document allowed me to avoid anachronistic value judgments in my analysis, as I could more readily depict contemporary limitations in knowledge without relying on modern environmental standards.

U.S. Republican Study Committee. *The Specter of Environmentalism: The Threat of Environmental Groups*. Public Liaison Office, 1982.
https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/digitallibrary/smof/publicliaison/blackwell/box-008/40_047_7006969_008_016_2017.pdf.

This source is contained in a collection with various other documents advocating for environmental deregulation, and this specific report explicitly characterizes environmentalists as liberals, critiquing their motivations and ideals. I used this source to exemplify the partisan battleground surrounding environmentalism that had developed roughly a decade after the Santa Barbara spill.

Weaver, Warren Jr. "Senate Hearing Held." *New York Times*, February 6, 1969.
<https://www.nytimes.com/1969/02/06/archives/senate-hearing-held.html>.

This newspaper article documents Union Oil president Fred Hartley's somewhat insensitive responses in court, allowing me to understand the effect such rhetoric would have on an already incensed public. I used Hartley's quote to demonstrate a specific case of the energy industry's initial defensive response to the spill.

Wheeling, Kate and Ufberg, Max. "The Ocean Is Boiling: The Complete Oral History of the 1969 Santa Barbara Oil Spill." Oral history, *Pacific Standard*, April 18, 2017.
<http://psmag.com/news/the-ocean-is-boiling-the-complete-oral-history-of-the-1969-santa-barbara-oil-spill/>.

This collection of oral histories, obtained from witnesses and responders to the spill, provides a comprehensive overview of the event from various firsthand perspectives. This document, brimming with emotion even years after the spill, was among the first to really bring the disaster to life in my mind. I used this source to understand the chronological sequence of events, in addition to obtaining an idea of the complexity associated with the spill.

Whitaker, John C. "Earth Day Recollections: What It Was Like When the Movement Took Off." U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), 1988.

<http://www.epa.gov/archive/epa/aboutepa/earth-day-recollections-what-it-was-when-movement-took.html>.

John Whitaker, former Interior Undersecretary and Cabinet Secretary to President Nixon, writes about the rise of the environmental movement and its implications throughout the years. I mainly utilized this source to understand the legal, public, and economic contexts behind Earth Day. I categorized this source as primary, given that Whitaker experienced the impacts of the Santa Barbara oil spill firsthand.

Whole Earth Catalog. "Spring 1969." Portola Institute, Inc., 1969.

https://ia800406.us.archive.org/26/items/wholeearthcatalo00unse_10/wholeearthcatalo00unse_10.pdf.

This counterculture publication categorizes the environmental cause as a tool for self empowerment, listing various products to help one become self-sufficient. I found it particularly striking how this individualistic philosophy contrasted with the more prevalent theme of collective action that manifested after the 1969 spill.

Secondary Sources

Conant, James and Balint, Peter. "The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Rise of Environmental Protection in the 1970s, and the Political Drama of the Next Three Decades." In *The Life Cycles of the Council on Environmental Quality and the Environmental Protection Agency: 1970–2035*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190203702.003.0005>.

This scholarly source concentrates on the political perspective of the Santa Barbara spill, analyzing NEPA and its long-term political consequences. After reading this source, I better understood the positive, lasting impacts of NEPA. I was later able to juxtapose this side of the argument with the more negative backlash contained in the latter section of my paper.

Conley, Joe Greene II. "Chapter Four: 'Hungry? Eat an Environmentalist': From Earth Day to Regulatory Reform and the Rise of Cost-Benefit Analysis, 1965-1980." In *Environmentalism Contained: A History of Corporate Responses to the New Environmentalism*. PhD diss., Princeton University, 2006. https://thecre.com/pdf/20050430_quality.pdf.

This source, a dissertation chapter on the economic backlash arising in response to increasing environmental regulation, proved essential in my initial thesis formation. Covering corporate strategies to provoke reaction against existing legislation, among

many other interesting details, Conley's work allowed me to comprehend how cohesively the energy industry resisted environmental regulation. I incorporated specific examples with other primary sources to arrive at the final version of my backlash section.

"Earth Days: The Modern Environmental Movement." PBS American Experience. Accessed December 25, 2025.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/earth-days-modern-environmental-movement/>.

This source provides evidence of environmental activists' power, especially as applied to remove seven of the Dirty Dozen from Congress. I used this source to show how activism and reform extended into electoral politics, contrasting with how these political victories were later reversed during the Reagan era.

Frank, Richard. "Commemorating a Major Environmental Disaster—One With a Transformative Legacy." UC Davis School of Law Blog. February 3, 2019.

<https://law.ucdavis.edu/faculty-blog/commemorating-major-environmental-disaster-one-transformative-legacy>.

This U.C. Davis blog piece presents an argument for why the Santa Barbara oil spill is the most consequential ecological catastrophe in U.S. history. Although I did not incorporate this post in my paper directly, I used it to understand why the spill was so impactful. Additionally, it provided me with early food for thought in developing my own arguments.

"Gaylord Nelson Promotes the First Earth Day." U.S. Senate Historical Office. Accessed January 3, 2026.

http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Gaylord_Nelson_Promotes_the_First_Earth_Day.htm.

This source provided background information on Earth Day visionary Senator Gaylord Nelson, as well as the event itself and its ensuing impacts. I used this article to understand the timeline of Earth Day's creation and execution, as well as the nature of its inception. Learning that this event contributed greatly to the green fervor of 1970s America, I also utilized this source to understand the context behind environmentalism's popularity.

"How Project 2025 and Agenda 47 Could Shape US Climate Policy." Bank Green. Accessed January 7, 2026. <https://bank.green/blog/project-2025>.

This article discusses President Trump's economically incentivized initiatives to increase oil production and deregulate the energy industry. I used this source to demonstrate the current significance of my thesis, as the cyclical pattern this paper identifies is clearly relevant, particularly with the Trump administration in charge.

Kennedy, Brian and Alec Tyson. "How Republicans View Climate Change and Energy Issues." Pew Research Center, March 1, 2024.
<http://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/03/01/how-republicans-view-climate-change-and-energy-issues/>.

This recent poll illustrates the current partisan divide over energy and climate issues. The paradigm of Democratic concern and relative Republican apathy for the environment appears yet again, thus providing me with evidence of today's environmental polarization and allowing me to trace this pattern's roots back to the business backlash of the 1970s and 1980s.

Liszka, James. "Lessons from the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill: A Case Study in Retributive and Corrective Justice for Harm to the Environment." *Ethics and the Environment* 15, no. 2 (2010): 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.2979/ete.2010.15.2.1>.

Liszka analyzes the legal side of the Exxon-Valdez spill, presenting an economics perspective and arguing that the case's financial aspects assumed precedence over concern for the welfare of any surrounding habitats. I thus understood that not only did policies and industry action provide avenues for backlash towards green policies, but judicial decisions also presented significant obstacles to environmental action.

MacDonald, James. "History Repeats: The Santa Barbara Oil Spill." *JSTOR Daily*, June 11, 2015. <https://daily.jstor.org/history-repeats-santa-barbara-oil-spill/>.

MacDonald, writing in 2015 after another, albeit lesser, Santa Barbara spill, tracks the evolution of cleanup technology and political contexts over the years. This source allowed me to understand that while cleaning machinery has remained largely similar, the willingness of government officials to admit culpability in the oil sector has declined drastically since post-spill 1969.

Manheim, Frank T. *Fateful Collision: How Revolutionary Environmental Laws of the 1970s Led to a Rift in American Society*. C. Boyden Gray Center for the Study of the Administrative State Research Paper, October 7, 2020.
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN_ID4069010_code837374.pdf?abstractid=3706466&mirid=1&type=2.

This scholarly work provided me with extensive information on the friction between early 1970s environmental legislation and business backlash. This source also inspired me to include arguments on the enduring nature of such backlash, and how today the initial partisan divide has proliferated. Lastly, although not mentioned in my paper, I also learned of the impact such a response had in terms of global environmental relevance, with Europe now leading the way toward climate-amenable policies.

Miller, Martin. "The Oil Spill That Sparked the Green Revolution." *Los Angeles Times*, November 30, 1999.
<http://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1999-nov-30-me-38862-story.html>.

This piece, a news article written thirty years after the event, gave me a broad overview of the various impacts and consequences following the spill. It also introduced me to the important role of television in publicizing the incident.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. "Santa Barbara Well Blowout; Santa Barbara, California." *IncidentNews*. Last revised May 27, 2022.
<https://incidentnews.noaa.gov/incident/6206>.

This government source was one of my first secondary sources, containing various subpages pertinent to different aspects of the Santa Barbara spill. While I did not directly quote from this source in my paper, I more readily comprehended specific data about the spill, as well as obtained credible figures and records, which aided in drafting my initial thesis.

Plater, Zygmunt J. B. Quoted in "Moving Past Environmental Proceduralism." *Asterisk Magazine*, April 2024.
<http://asteriskmag.com/issues/05/moving-past-environmental-proceduralism>.

I learned from this article about two categorizations of environmental legislation (procedural versus substantive) and how each type has benefits and disadvantages in the current state of U.S. environmental policy. I also used this source for its quotation of scholar Zygmunt Plater on the shocking torrent of regulations passed in the wake of the spill.

Polk, Daniel. "Environmental Impacts." *Polar Journal*, June 26, 2019.
<http://polarjournal.org/2019/06/26/environmental-impacts/>.

Polk dissects and analyzes another scholar's arguments on environmental policy following the Santa Barbara oil spill, and this source helped me realize how crucial Santa

Barbara's characteristics and demographic were in raising public awareness of the spill. As such, this source enabled me to interrogate my own claims about how exactly the oil spill engendered such outcry.

"Santa Barbara Oil Spill." PopHistoryDig. Accessed January 5, 2026.
<https://pophistorydig.com/topics/santa-barbara-oil-spill/>.

This in-depth resource documents the various facets of the oil spill, including information on the GOO! petition that collected over 100,000 signatures from citizens around the nation. I used this information to understand the magnitude of pressure upon President Nixon to act, and also to show the extent of nationwide mass mobilization calling for government response – especially in the pre-digital world.

Shigenaka, Gary. "The Oil Pollution Act of 1990: A History of Spills and Legislation." NOAA Office of Response and Restoration Blog, August 17, 2020.
<https://blog.response.restoration.noaa.gov/oil-pollution-act-1990-history-spills-and-legislation>.

This article, covering multiple oil landmark spills in U.S. history, provided me with more information on the necessary context, background, and relative impact of each spill. It also provides information on the history of drilling regulations, further supporting the claim that pre-1969 environmental legislation lacked any bite whatsoever.

Spezio, Teresa Sabol. *Slick Policy: Environmental and Social Aftermath of the Santa Barbara Oil Spill*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018.

Spezio conducts an in-depth and comprehensive evaluation of the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill, providing me with an important baseline understanding of the event and its historical nuances. Her work influenced my arguments on media coverage and spill publicity, as well as why Santa Barbara specifically was such a momentous occurrence, much more so than prior spills that had failed to generate comparable reactions.

Spezio, Teresa Sabol. "The Santa Barbara Oil Spill and Its Effect on United States Environmental Policy." *Sustainability* 10, no. 8 (2018): 2750.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/su10082750>.

Spezio's academic article, similar to her book, centers on the change in ecological legislation as a result of the spill, examining in detail the tribulations of Senator Henry Jackson throughout his endeavors to pass green policies. As this was one of the first academic papers I read, I realized that the story of Jackson and NEPA would be an

interesting component of political reform; in essence, enhancing the drier facts with a more compelling narrative of a real historical figure.

Supran, Geoffrey and Oreskes, Naomi. "The Forgotten Oil Ads That Told Us Climate Change Was Nothing." *The Guardian*, November 18, 2021.
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/18/the-forgotten-oil-ads-that-told-us-climate-change-was-nothing>.

This *Guardian* article covers oil industry discountenance against climate concerns over the decades. Compiled in the article is a collection of newspaper article headers. I used this collage to provide visual examples of the campaign oil corporations launched to discount environmental problems and attempt to sway the public.

UC Santa Barbara Library. Anguish, Anger, and Activism: Legacies of the 1969 Santa Barbara Oil Spill. Exhibit. UC Santa Barbara Library. Accessed December 29, 2025.
<https://spotlight.library.ucsb.edu/starlight/oil-spill/about/about-this-exhibit>.

This online exhibit conveys information through eyewitness quotes and incorporates accompanying visuals. While I did not use this source directly in my paper, I obtained valuable information early in my research process by seeing the event through firsthand spectators. Furthermore, the wealth of primary and secondary sources within this exhibit provided a rich basis for further research.

U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian. "Oil Embargo, 1973–1974." Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations.
<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/oil-embargo>.

This article explains how the American energy crisis, attributable to the OPEC oil embargo of the early 70s, greatly disrupted the U.S. economy. This context was central for my research. By allowing me to grasp the scale of the economic crisis working and middle-class Americans faced, I better understood why corporate arguments blaming environmentalism eventually persuaded.

Welsh, Nick. "Santa Barbara's 1969 Oil Spill Reverberates Today." *Santa Barbara Independent*, January 24, 2019.
<https://www.independent.com/2019/01/24/santa-barbaras-1969-oil-spill-reverberates-today/>.

This article served as a foundation for my understanding of the spill's chronology and broader impacts. The visual impact of images incorporated in this article helped me select

this topic over all others. Although this article provided me with the basis of my understanding, I did not directly cite it in my paper.