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Saving the Planet with Class: Professional-Managerial Virtue and the Emergence of Neoliberal Conservation

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Abstract

Conservation's moral significance for capitalist reproduction has been vividly evident through its neoliberal formations, in which conservationists exalt the virtues of "natural capital" for "saving the planet." Political ecologists and human geographers have critically engaged conservation's neoliberalization but not explained how and why conservation emerged as a prominent and durable realm of capitalist virtue-making. To address these questions, we focus on the relationship between neoliberal conservation's emergence, capitalist class formations, and their moral ideologies, particularly the convergent ascendance of conservation and the professional-managerial class (PMC) following WWII. We trace how modern conservation became a key domain of PMC virtue-making during this period and continued as such through the shift from state-centric managerialism to market-centric technocracy that began in the 1970s. During the late twentieth-century neoliberal policy turn, PMC actors refashioned their virtue-making around market logic, enabling mainstream conservation to endure and expand as a prime source of capitalist moral authority. Its prospects appear less certain amid rising authoritarianism.

Keywords

Class formation, neoliberal conservation, professional-managerial class, virtue

Introduction: The Virtues of Neoliberal Conservation

Through recent decades, biodiversity conservation has increasingly appeared as a prominent realm of capitalist virtue-making. The critical literature on modern conservation's neoliberal formations has thoroughly examined these dynamics, frequently taking high-profile events and initiatives celebrating conservation-capitalist convergence as their analytic point of departure (Prudham 2009; MacDonald 2010; MacDonald and Corson 2012; Fletcher 2014a; Igoe 2017). These dramatize intensifying alignments and mutual imperatives between conservationists and capitalists, in moral and virtuous terms.

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Such events and initiatives have become routine features of conservation discourse, as corporations signal that they are taking conservation seriously. A McKinsey report on the 2022 UN Biodiversity Conference that defined the *Global Biodiversity Framework* until 2030 points to a dramatic increase in private sector participants from 3,800 in 2018 to 20,000 in 2022, around their common concern of "protecting natural capital and limiting biodiversity loss … and the growing recognition that the state of nature is now a cause of widespread and immediate concern."[1] A growing number of conservation organizations are reciprocally signaling that they take capitalism seriously. According to "Business for Nature," a global coalition of more than 85 conservation and corporate partners, "caring for biodiversity is the right thing to do, and it makes economic and financial sense."[2] These coordinated claims to complementary virtues cast conservation and corporate actors as moral leaders for our planetary future.

So far, the persistent alignments and dynamics outlined above have been analyzed through the framework of neoliberal conservation, which we and others defined as "an amalgamation of ideology and techniques informed by the premise that natures can only be 'saved' through their submission to capital and its subsequent revaluation in capitalist terms" (Büscher et al. 2012, 4). Scholars working from this framework have thoroughly documented and critiqued how these logics reshape conservation discourses and practices (Sullivan 2006; 2013; Igoe and Brockington 2007; Fletcher 2010; Fletcher and Breitling 2012; Fairhead et al. 2012; Büscher et al. 2014; Büscher and Fletcher 2020; Apostolopoulou et al. 2021) and the socio-ecological effects of these transformations (Dressler and Roth, 2010; Büscher 2013; Holmes and Cavanagh 2016; Lund et al. 2017; Anand and Mulyani 2020; Nel 2021). This literature has effectively explained neoliberal conservation's persistent win–win appeal and its ability to tenaciously "fail forward" despite glaring contradictions and flaws (Fletcher 2023).

What remains to be addressed is how and why conservation emerged as a favored realm of capitalist virtue-making and has been able to maintain that status through shifting capitalist configurations. These questions matter because the fate of biodiversity under capitalism starkly belies conservationists' claims to virtue in the common sense of "doing the right thing" (Fletcher 2023). Our approach to them extends and refines the analysis of previous studies, which emphasize conservation's reorientation to capitalist power and market ideologies through neoliberal policy shifts of the 1970s (Büscher and Whande 2007; Corson 2010) In this framing, "the neoliberal conservationist model does not appear until the Reagan-Thatcher period achieved its current mature form and became the hegemonic international political framework" (Vaccaro et al. 2013, 263). It does not explain how this "reorientation" took place and how conservation managed to retain its moral authority through these capitalist transformations and related shifts in class power. In contrast, we resituate this neoliberal "pivot" through a longer process of capitalist transformation during which modern conservation successfully reconfigured itself while retaining its virtuous aura. We do this by focusing on its evolving relationships to shifting terrains of class power (Harvey 2010) and tracing the types of virtue it embodies to historically contingent class-based moral struggles that are a crucial but overlooked dimension of neoliberal conservation's emergence and endurance.

Our analysis is informed by Harvey's (2010, 232) conceptualization of class as the "multiple roles" actors and groups hold vis-à-vis dominant processes of capitalist accumulation. It attends to the way classes jockey for "intellectual, moral, and political hegemony" (Gramsci 2005, 58) through the contested dynamics of historical and social totalities, known as blocs in Gramscian terminology (Boothman 2000, 120–127). We approach modern conservation as a distinctive socio-institutional bloc, an alignment of actors, institutions, and interests that coheres around projects of common concern.[3] Its durability depends on maintaining that coherence, even as its elements and relationships change and adjust to larger transformations in global capitalist systems (MacDonald 2010; Corson 2016; Suarez 2026). In this sense, modern conservation is not equivalent to its constituent elements, nor is it monolithic (cf. Jeanrenaud 2002). It is, however, dominated by hegemonic strains of Western

conservation (Brockington et al. 2008, 9) and their colonial legacies (Kashwan et al. 2021; Dawson et al. 2023).

For example, modern conservation's emergence in the late nineteenth century was part of a defining moment of settler colonialism in the Western United States: the so-called "closing of the frontier" and the National Parks Movement (Nash 1967; Fox 1981; Cronon 1995; Spence 1999). This movement was advanced through networks of hunting elites, corporate sponsors, and conservation celebrities (Jacoby 2001; Tsing 2005; Brockington, 2009). While the continuing influence of these class-based networks on modern conservation informs our analysis in this article, our central concern is with the concurrent formation and consolidation of the professional-managerial class (PMC).

The PMC consists of "salaried mental workers" (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1977a, 17), distinguished by their learned expertise and management functions. In contrast to the patrician and capitalist class networks described in the previous paragraph, members of the PMC constitute the rank and file of modern conservation through its institutional ecosystem of state agencies, global policy forums, NGOs, universities, and corporate social responsibility programs. PMC leaders are also among its agenda-setting figures, such as Julian Huxley, a central architect of post-WWII international conservation, and Pavan Sukhdev, the study leader and spokesperson of The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB), a defining initiative for contemporary neoliberal conservation (MacDonald and Corson 2012).

The crucial yet underconsidered role of the PMC in modern conservation began with the field's professionalization in the early twentieth century and flourished with its globalization after WWII. This period coincided with the zenith of PMC power and influence. That power revolved around performances of expertise and neutrality, as a unique PMC virtue deployed for the good of people, the economy, and the environment. It was bolstered by its association with the emergence of modern institutional networks of global governance and international development, which were also essential to the globalization of conservation during this period. As such, and in spite of its claims to ideological neutrality, PMC power was strongly aligned with the then dominant economic philosophies and policies that prescribed government regulation of markets and economic growth through public investment and the rule of experts. As we shall show, prominent PMC intellectuals of this period, like Julian Huxley, played a key role in articulating and promoting these ideologies and discourses, while simultaneously working to modernize conservation and promote it as indispensable to planetary flourishing.

These transformations and related virtue performances were driven by the defining moral challenge of their time: preventing devastating wars and genocide from ever happening again by building peaceful, modern societies. Prevailing Keynesian managerialism and nascent modes of neoliberalism each promised the most effective path to modernization through economic growth, which their proponents held would end poverty and related social and later environmental ills. However, their radically different moral visions hinged on competing understandings of freedom in society, which were further allied to competing class bases (PMC versus the global capitalist class) and their interests. We argue that long-cultivated modes of virtue performance are the enduring element of PMC authority that has been essential to its adaptation to the shifting fortunes of these class-based moral ideologies over the intervening decades, most notably the late twentieth-century neoliberal turn. This, we conclude, sheds crucial light on the role of conservation within broader capitalist transitions, the remarkable contemporary endurance of neoliberal conservation, and its potential undoing under ascendant authoritarianism.

Our analysis of the post-WWII convergence of the PMC and modern conservation necessarily begins with the PMC itself, its formation, position, and modes of virtue-making. We then turn to the significance of PMC virtue for hegemonic managerial moral authority during this period, in contrast to the competing moral claims of nascent neoliberalism. In the remaining sections, we trace the dynamics of these competing moral ideologies in modern conservation from mid-century managerialism

through late-century neoliberalism. We examine the ways in which PMC actors adjusted their virtue-making practices across these capitalist reconfigurations, responding to transformations in modern conservation while also influencing them. We conclude with the implications of emergent authoritarianism for the institutional ecosystems, virtue performances, and moral claims that have so far sustained modern conservation.

The Global Ascendancy of the professional-Managerial Class and its Connections to Modern Conservation

Given the obvious significance of class dynamics to everyday environmental concerns, there is a notable paucity of class analysis in the literature on capitalism and conservation, and even environmentalism more broadly (Arsel 2023, 68). Literature on the formative role and continuing influence of elite networks identifies class actors and distinguishes modern conservation from broader environmental movements (Bonner 1993; Dowie 1991/1992; Neumann 1998; Brockington et al. 2009). However, it does not take class formation as its analytic focus. Our focus on the PMC highlights the crucial role of this class in the consolidation and expansion of modern conservation. Its members constitute a wide array of conservation professionals and supporters, including biologists, ecologists, economists, social scientists, accountants, administrators, government officials, and NGO workers. Across their diverse professions, their work is organized around the management of people, institutions, and the environment. This common orientation, as we shall see, is a distinctive element in the formation of the PMC.

A small number of studies offer insights of relevance to this formation, illuminating dimensions of class dynamics in conservation-related contexts that inform our analysis in this section. Fletcher's *Romancing the Wild* (2014b) describes the emergence of the PMC as a small but influential class that plays a central role in producing modernity as an expression of its own unmarked cultural norms.[4] It shows how white Western PMC actors achieve social distinction through ecotourism and its curated nature encounters that affirm their class-specific values. Haenn's *Middle-Class Conservationists* (2016) engages the expansion of professional managerialism through modern conservation. It focuses on how Mexican conservation professionals navigate contexts in which the dominant values of their class are not the norm: rural peasant communities that many of them call home. Finally, Nelson (2015) traces how ecologists and economists, professions associated with the PMC in modern conservation, began recasting ecological processes as monetizable flows in the 1970s. This recasting can be read as a class-based innovation aimed at demonstrating conservation's value for capitalist reproduction.

Where these studies collectively point to significant interactions between class positioning and modern conservation, we trace how PMC formations developed with and through modern conservation. While separate at their outset, the PMC and modern conservation both emerged with the consolidation of capitalist state systems in the late nineteenth century, particularly in settler colonial contexts. Forsyth (2023, 1) argues that influential groups of educated professionals in England and Anglo-settler colonies made themselves into the class that would become the PMC during this period by investing "a combination of virtue and money into society and the economy for the purpose of moral and financial profit" (ibid.:1).

Forsyth (ibid.: 2–3) characterizes the PMC as "virtue capitalists," explaining how their work made economic activity reliable, efficient, and socially valuable. By embodying virtues like accuracy, discipline, and duty, members of the PMC converted moral actions into economic value, an embodied performance of virtue that became a signature element of their class identity. While associated with classical notions of moral excellence,[5] modern PMC virtue was not reducible to the righteousness or goodness of its members' roles in educating, healing, and informing society. Rather, Forsyth argues, it also involves achieving these outcomes through their unmatched expertise and problem-solving capacity, making virtue a material

force. Its proof lay in PMC facilitation and management of extraordinary capitalist growth, so that PMC actors came to see themselves as having:

> a special relationship with those they deemed 'below' them. Morally, this was nearly everyone, even the aristocracy, though the social circumstances produced by settler colonization gave their work a pioneering quality. The British middle class who became settler colonial elites sought a social order on frontiers where race, class, and gender uncertainties disrupted smooth commercial and governmental operations. Resolving the social order, according to their values, demanded a kind of expertise that they made into professions (Forsyth 2023, 1–2).

This class project of "resolving social orders" in settler colonial contexts shared a great deal in common with concurrent initiatives to protect wild nature from the expanding frontier. Moreover, as we shall see, PMC expertise became essential to the professionalization of modern conservation in the ensuing decades. Both reflected a rapid acceleration in the complexity and reach of modern capitalist society and its management, which drove the growth and increasing power of the PMC in the twentieth century.

By the mid-twentieth century, the PMC was achieving "intellectual, moral, and political hegemony" (Gramsci 2005, 58) among other classes, as it "presided over post-war reconstruction … redesigned the modern economy … [and] set about extending virtue into every corner of the world" (Forsyth 2023, 3). Comprehensive modernizing projects that sprang from these reconstruction efforts generated unprecedented opportunity for the expansion and consolidation of PMC world-ordering capacities and sensibilities. Notably, the global institutional infrastructure that was created during this period also served the global expansion of modern conservation, which became an attractive field for PMC aspirations, both in terms of professional opportunities and class influence at expanding scales.

In his 1949 Inaugural Address, U.S. President Truman's Point Four Program proclaimed a new era of U.S. support for international development, building on New Deal public works and the ongoing Marshall Plan for Europe. These initiatives, together with the creation of the Bretton Woods Institutions and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), projected an apparently universal faith in the power of state-led, managerial solutions to foster economic growth and social progress on a global scale. Significantly, they also reinforced PMC moral authority as the architect and executor of global development and with managerial as the essential mechanism for progress. President John F. Kennedy then doubled down on these commitments, proclaiming the 1960s as "the Decade of Development," and establishing the United States Agency for International Development and the Peace Corps as cornerstones of U.S. Cold War diplomacy. The central role of managerial expertise across these interlocking initiatives (Ekbladh 2010, Ch.3) cast PMC actors as virtuous stewards of global progress. Subsequent U.S. deployment of development expertise as a foreign policy tool (ibid.: 191–193)—then widely emulated by other nations—linked PMC virtue with the moral authority of nations during the Cold War period.

PMC ascendance through development and diplomacy expressed a broader cultural consolidation of what Srinivas (2022, 194) calls "high managerialism," a period in which "a common view of management was predominant and highly influential." Through the institutionalization of management science at colleges and universities worldwide, management was cast as a "coherent and unified set of ideas, techniques, and methodologies," promising a universal solution for all social problems without concern for race, creed, or political ideology (Srinivas 2022, 194). By extension, scientific management techniques promised the means to transcend ideologies in favor of rational problem-solving. The PMC's presumed mastery of these techniques promised to deliver solutions—proof of both efficacy and virtue—for the good of society through development, and for the good of the environment through conservation.

As part of these global transformations, mid-twentieth-century PMC hegemony was strongly aligned with moral claims about progress, most

notably Keynesian economic philosophies that prescribed scientific management of capitalist development to promote modernization and protect people from the vagaries of unmanaged free markets (Srinivas 2022, Chapter 5). Keynes's vision of economic stability was inextricably linked to moral authority and virtue, positioning the PMC as ideally suited to uphold them: "It would take expert navigators, like economists, to steer the world through the purgatory of capitalism and arrive at a future not just of leisure but also of morality" (Singerman 2016, 565).

This hegemonic vision overshadowed competing ideologies, also aimed at aligning ethical imperatives and socio-economic progress. Early neoliberal intellectuals of this period labored to supplant what they saw as managerialism's misplaced morality with a moral vision of capitalist progress based on market spontaneity and individual freedom. While marginal in its day, their vision would become supremely influential through the shifting conditions of the ensuing decades. Modern conservation's evolution through these decades was entangled with these contests over the moral direction of capitalism, as PMC actors strategically navigated and repurposed these competing visions. As we shall show, these dynamics shaped modern conservation as a realm of PMC virtue-making and capitalist moral authority, as well as its subsequent neoliberalization. We now turn to these struggles in greater detail.

Class Projects and Competing Moral Ideologies

The ideological struggles of the 1940s–1960s drew intellectuals of the PMC and early neoliberalism into broader debates about the moral and institutional foundations necessary for ordered capitalist societies. PMC intellectuals occupied a pivotal position in these struggles at the intersection of class formation and capitalist reproduction. With managerialism in ascendance, John Maynard Keynes, Julian Huxley, and others operated as "organic intellectuals" of the PMC. Following Gramsci (2005), organic intellectuals are marked by their ability to transform the "raw, inchoate experiences" of their own class into "articulate, coherent narratives" on behalf of that class (Crehan 2016, 36).[6]

While laboring to promote capitalist progress, PMC intellectuals maintained a primary loyalty to their own class and its distinctive worldview. They articulated their class's moral narratives, enacting and proclaiming its virtues as essential to the legitimacy and optimal functioning of capitalist modernity. Their fortunes and dispositions were intricately tied to the fortunes of their class, as they helped shape their class narrative around being the legitimate stewards of human progress, and, by extension, the environment. Hence, the mid-twentieth-century PMC enjoyed a privileged position vis-à-vis the dominant modes of capitalist accumulation (Harvey 2010), positioned to become the dominant class of the post-war era (Forsyth 2023; Srinivas 2022).[7] PMC intellectuals operated as both architects of capitalist culture and aspirants to hegemonic dominance. They shaped moral narratives for capitalist rule while advancing their class's claims of being the sole legitimate organizers of human progress.

While also from PMC backgrounds, early neoliberal intellectuals such as Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises operated as "traditional intellectuals" in the Gramscian schema (see endnote viii), aligning themselves with the capitalist class. They rejected Keynesian hegemony as an overreach of managerialism and, thus, a threat to market freedom. They also fundamentally opposed the PMC's increasingly global program, which was central to its bid for hegemonic reproduction through state-led governance, development, and cultural influence. Accordingly, the early neoliberal intellectual project went straight to the heart of the central PMC virtue of public service, which emphasized coordinated and "benevolent" (inter-)governmental state power and underpinned the PMC's moral claims to leadership and societal management. For people like Keynes, Beveridge, and other PMC elites, "public service was a duty and a privilege, a noble vocation for educated experts and their talents. The ethos of service did not require profit. Instead, the knowledge and reason of what Keynes referred to as the right-thinking elite would solve intractable problems of government and public affairs" (Stedman Jones 2012, 55).

Mises, by contrast, held that "nobody can be at the same time a correct bureaucrat and an innovator. Progress is precisely that which the rules and regulations did not foresee; it is necessarily outside the field of bureaucratic activities" (von Mises, in Stedman Jones 2012, 54). While acknowledging that bureaucrats may be competent and virtuous, he argued that their duty to defend and execute the law foreclosed innovative thinking and problem-solving. In this critique, the PMC ethic of public service is emblematic of dangerous bureaucratic overreach, stifling individual and market freedoms while entrenching PMC cultural dominance. For early neoliberal intellectuals, "[s]tate-dictated morality of any kind, whether religious dicta or secular social justice principles, is the signature of totalitarianism. Thus, the state can secure only the *prerequisites* of moral life—freedom, property, universal rules of justice, and political deference to tradition. It cannot legislate moral conduct or belief" (Brown 2019, 103).

According to Mises and other early neoliberals like Popper, Hayek, and Röpke, democracy could only truly flourish in the market. It was here that individuals could—indeed, *had* to—mold their behavior and preferences to the demands of other citizen-consumers. Stedman Jones (2012, 56) concludes: "the point, for Mises … was that neoliberalism was a theory that, unlike Marxism, did not entrench the interests of particular classes or ideas. Instead, the market liberated the individual to experiment and thus to improve". That this would lead to inequality and new forms of estrangement was openly acknowledged by the neoliberals, who accepted it as a necessary trade-off for fostering innovation and individual freedom indispensable to their vision of progress. In contrast to Keynesians, who sought to manage capitalism to minimize its harmful excesses, neoliberals like Hayek grappled with how "to recover traditional moral principles from the corrosive effects of capitalism" (Brown 2019, 103).

Indeed, Hayek perceived an organic "symmetry" between (traditional) morals and markets: "both are evolved practices, not simply natural, but are "good" because they are evolved, adaptive, and have stood the test of time" (idem: 106). Accordingly, he prescribed the expansion of what he called the "personal protected sphere" to "extend the purview of traditional morality beyond the confines of church and family" (idem: 104). This emphasis on tradition promised a moral alternative to the appeal of PMC public service through state-sanctioned action by fostering community cohesion and a sense of belonging amidst the inequality and alienation of modern capitalist markets. Thus, "for Hayek, the great error of social democracy rests in its attempt to replace historically evolved spontaneous order—borne by tradition and settled into custom—with rational master designs for society" (idem: 107).

These early neoliberal intellectuals advanced a counter-hegemonic alternative to prevailing PMC managerialism, grounded in the guiding imperative that a functioning competitive market requires a robust moral and legal foundation (Whyte 2019, 14). This imperative gained hegemonic legitimacy during neoliberal ascendancy at the turn of the 1980s, as reflected in Milton Friedman's influential maxim that capitalism and freedom go hand-in-hand. Struggles over how to best ensure a moral foundation for capitalism unfolded in the post-war years, including through the integration of the global domains of human rights, economic development, and nature conservation.

Post-WWII human rights thinking emerged alongside global governance systems, aligning the virtues of universal dignity with global capitalist priorities (Whyte 2019, 206). Modern conservation similarly promised to reconcile competing moral imperatives of ecological sustainability and economic growth. As the following section will show, modern conservation's consolidation through this promise coincided with the shift in dominant class formation from the PMC to the capitalist class in the 1970s, reflecting global transformations of capitalist systems and intensifying struggles over moral authority.

Changing Class Fortunes and Shifting Professional-Managerial Class Virtue

The significance of these struggles is illuminated by Gramscian formulations of the historical bloc: a

period in which groups sharing particular interests and values coalesce into a dominant ruling coalition, through which different classes jockey for hegemonic leadership (Boothman 2000; Gramsci 2005; Igoe et al. 2010).[8] By the mid-twentieth century, the PMC stood at the center of a globally hegemonic "state-centric managerial" historical bloc (Cox 2004). Yet several dynamics conjoined to ultimately lead to its displacement by a capitalist-dominated neoliberal historical bloc (Jessop 1982).

In the context of the decline of European empires and the formal decolonization of African and Asian countries post-WWII, PMC efficacy and legitimacy was severely tested through the 1960s, as its promises of technocratic neutrality and enlightened state-led cooperation failed to resolve critical global challenges. The tragic outcomes of prominent interventions like the U.N. peacekeeping in the Congo Crisis (1960–1965) and U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War (1964–1973) disrupted global faith in modernization's promise to win the hearts and minds of anti-colonial movements.[9] The situation for managerial economic stewardship worsened in the 1970s, as the end of the Bretton Woods System, stagflation, and the 1973 global oil crisis plunged the global economy into crisis (Stedman Jones 2012, 215–216; Ikeler and Limonic 2018, 557–560). Countries in the so-called developing world were unable to achieve growth through managerial modernization and began to default on their national debts, threatening the global economy. This ushered in the era of IMF structural adjustment programs that exacerbated hardships for borrower nations and their citizens.

The social upheavals of this period presented profound ethical challenges to new generations of PMC actors. Large numbers of them directed their energies into overseas volunteerism through programs like the U.S. Peace Corps and British Voluntary Service Overseas. Many also joined new social movements opposing the Vietnam War, racism, and settler colonialism, while pursuing visions of a just and democratic society. These spheres often overlapped, as returning volunteers became activists, and many activists transitioned into professional roles within the nonprofit and public sectors. Reflecting on these dynamics, Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich (1977b) argued that a PMC "new left" had assumed an outsized role in progressive political spaces and the management of coalitional social movements. At the same time, other PMC actors drifted into the economic mainstream—a shift often narrated as the rise of the "yuppie," or what David Harvey (2010, 241) called "the great betrayal of the intellectuals." On the macro-political front, as Stedman Jones (2012, 241–254) shows, liberal leaders like UK Prime Minister Callaghan and U.S. President Carter had already begun adopting key elements of neoliberal monetarism by the late 1970s. Their concessions to market-led policy signaled the looming sea change that the rising PMC generation would have to navigate.

In the course of these tumultuous transitions, the foundations of PMC virtue and moral authority became thoroughly eroded. With the disintegration of the managerial historical bloc and the decline of PMC influence over capital, PMC virtue once based in "organic" societal recognition of its members' sovereign expertise and public service ethic was no longer tenable. In the ascendant neoliberal historical bloc, members of an embattled PMC no longer appeared as the self-evident stewards of society and allies of the welfare state. In turn, their expertise became a commodity to be purchased by the neoliberalizing state, which relied on competitive bidding processes in which private firms and NGOs took on regulatory responsibilities previously held by the state (Jessop 1982; Picciotto 2011).

Classic managerial PMC virtue steeped in public service was thus supplanted by yuppie variants of PMC virtue, flaunting "entrepreneurship and acquisition."[10] Barbara Ehrenreich (2020, 227) describes this "class survival strategy" as a response to the neoliberal revolution of the 1980s and its growing wealth gaps. Although the visibility of yuppies waned by the late 1980s, their cultivation of rule-breaking, speculative risk-taking, and imaginative productivity became central to the diversification of PMC work across finance, the tech industry, and the expanding NGO sector, which continues in the present day. By pursuing virtue strategies that disregarded distinctions between these sectors, PMC actors were becoming what

Graeber (2014, 74) calls "corporatized public and private bureaucrats." Under these transformed conditions, PMC intellectuals were forced to rebrand themselves without recourse to the class-based moral authority that they previously enjoyed. This entailed creatively marketing their expertise and virtue as scarce and valuable commodities in the competitive neoliberal marketplace, driven by the entrepreneurship of self (Foucault 2003; Christiaens 2020; Liu 2021).

As previously asserted, PMC strategies for navigating these historical bloc transitions were substantially intertwined with the ascendance and reconfiguration of modern conservation across the same period. PMC moral authority and expertise figured centrally in modernizing conservation following WWII and securing its status as a globally significant moral concern. In the late twentieth century, PMC entrepreneurship was likewise essential to its reorganization in the neoliberal historical bloc. We now turn to the ways in which modern conservation emerged and endured as a crucial realm for extension, refinement, and repurposing of PMC expertise and virtue throughout these transformations.

The Convergence of Modern Conservation, the Professional-Managerial Class, and Their Virtue Adaptations

Although they emerged simultaneously in the same late nineteenth-century settler colonial contexts, modern conservation and the PMC began as (mostly) separate formations with distinctive modalities of virtue and moral authority. While they intersected increasingly through the professionalization of conservation in the first half of the twentieth century, they converged most fully through their shared global ascendance following WWII. This included the confluence of two virtue streams, which came to operate powerfully together: elite sanctification of nature and practically applied PMC expertise.

As noted in the introduction of this article, early modern conservation was driven by influential conservation celebrities, in association with capitalist and patrician class networks. This group embodied formative virtues such as rugged, masculine, and individualized reverence for nature. These were initially distinct from the PMC virtues outlined in the previous section: accuracy, discipline, and duty, expressed through competent expertise. The former virtues played a key role in the creation of U.S. national parks in the late nineteenth century (Nash 1967; Cronon 1995; Spence 1999). The latter proved essential to the global expansion of parks and protected areas, and their scientific management in the mid-twentieth century. The convergence of these virtues in modern conservation has resulted from its "collaborative legacy: cooperation and network building between specific groups and interests (as specified above) that became strengthened and institutionalized over time" (Brockington et al. 2008, 9).

The professionalization of modern conservation was an early driver of this convergence, responding to a growing recognition that reverence for nature alone could not generate the broad political support that conservation causes required. Advocates of professionalization—many of whom were part of the emerging PMC—argued that conservation success required rational scientific management undertaken by a well-organized cadre of conservation experts, with diverse and complementary expertise (Sellars 1997; De Bont 2021). This process of professionalization brought modern conservation into alignment with twentieth-century societal and institutional priorities (Cameron and Rössler 2013; Schleper 2019; De Bont 2021, 213–216). In doing so, it laid the groundwork for the postwar consolidation of modern conservation as a global project that extended Keynesian logics to ecological concerns.

Like their contemporaries in economics and policymaking, mid-century conservation PMC intellectuals generally regarded modernization as an inevitable, and ultimately positive process. Yet, they also recognized its potential harm and were dedicated to mitigating its attendant dangers. Whereas Keynesian developmentalists sought to minimize economic modernization's harmful social effects while promoting prosperous societies, professional conservationists sought to minimize

capitalism's harmful ecological effects while promoting vibrant ecosystems. These overlapping missions required modern bureaucracies and scientific management, overseen and implemented by management professionals (Schleper 2019). As the adverse effects of modernization intensified in the ensuing decades, PMC actors in modern conservation intensified their advocacy for managerial interventions, including the expansion of scientifically managed protected areas and stricter regulatory frameworks.

PMC virtue—expressed as expertise, care, and scientific objectivity—was essential to promoting the global projects of both development and conservation as universally necessary and free from ideological bias. Conservationists vigorously promoted this vision, institutionalizing it through the creation of entities like the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), UNESCO, and, later, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). In the years following WWII, IUCN leaders, many from PMC backgrounds, leveraged Cold War tensions "to distinguish themselves [from other conservation entities] as a politically neutral, scientific expert platform for questions pertaining to the global environment" (Schleper 2019, 43).

Through the 1960s and 1970s, these leaders asserted "full rights to ensure the perpetuation and enhancement of the living world" and to ensure "that governments would take into consideration the 'ecological value' of ecosystems in their territories," leveraging their influential claims to scientific neutrality (Schleper 2019, 44). They thereby promoted modern conservation as a natural extension of "socially valuable" PMC work, as outlined above. Where Forsyth (2023, 2–3) argued in general that "accuracy, probity, efficiency, and discipline made business and share trading more reliable, allowed railways to function, and prevented mines from caving in", post-war conservationists, similarly, argued that "proper" natural resource management and conservation prevented ecosystems from caving in. They also worked to make the values of newly conserved ecosystems legible to business and amenable to economic growth, a move they portrayed as a win–win for economy and ecology (Nelson 2015).

As an institutional architect of modern conservation, Julian Huxley was a leading figure among post-war PMC intellectuals. He also embodied the intersection of modern conservation's formative virtues—loving nature and technocratic expertise—and actively promoted both. The first director-general of UNESCO, he was later instrumental in founding IUCN and the WWF, entities that would assume crucially complementary functions in the global institutional infrastructure of mainstream conservation (Bonner 1993; Schleper 2019). In the 1960s, a taskforce of IUCN experts crafted the criteria for natural heritage that would be formally codified in the UNESCO World Heritage Convention in 1972 (Cameron and Rössler 2013). In pursuit of this transformative institutional agenda, Huxley played a key role in organizing the 1961 symposium, *Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources in African States* (IUCN 1963), which positioned the IUCN, WWF, and the African Wildlife Foundation as indispensable pillars of post-colonial African conservation (Bonner 1993; Lekan 2020).

In the lead-up to this field-defining symposium, Huxley undertook a UNESCO mission in 1960 to assess conservation in East and Central Africa and provide recommendations for its improvement and expansion through the transition to independence. As a prominent evolutionary thinker, scientist, administrator, and nature lover, Huxley (1946) envisioned an enlightened world order in which science and managerial expertise would guide human progress and ecological stewardship (Weindling 2012, 480). This would entail replacing what he regarded as maladapted Indigenous livelihood systems with scientifically managed conservation systems (Huxley 1961). In response to anti-colonial critiques, he promoted conservation as essential to post-colonial African development (Lekan 2020, 9). He proposed a managerial approach to African parks, combining scientific planning, market-based tourism, and local communities transitioning into conservation and tourism livelihoods. He stressed the need to prepare Africans to assume the reins of conservation management, advocacy, and policymaking (Huxley 1961).

Huxley's efforts at this time prefigured global sustainable development paradigms institutionalized

in subsequent decades, geared to reconciling capitalist growth and ecological care (Macekura 2016). Alongside other conservation intellectuals of this era, he began conceptualizing and operationalizing what he called the "non-material" values of nature, which could be mobilized to generate economic returns and minimize ecological harm (Huxley 1961, 22). While operating in a state-centric managerial milieu, these PMC intellectuals experimented with reframing ecosystemic processes in monetary terms, with the aim of establishing conservation's economic value. Their conceptual experiments, as Nelson (2015) has shown, were antecedents to ecosystem services thinking, which underpinned the emergence of "natural capital" in the neoliberal era (Sullivan 2013; Dempsey 2016).[11]

These efforts responded to a growing awareness of capitalism's environmental harm that was becoming a unifying concern of modern conservation, grassroots social movements, and environmental policymaking. Resulting coalitions helped to bring about transformative legislation and policy reforms in the 1970s. These were short-lived, however, as conservation NGOs turned to promoting "market-based incentives [to mitigate environmental harm], constructive engagement [with corporations], and regulatory flexibility [to address the trade-offs of these processes]" (Dowie 1991/1992, 76). This was less a departure than a return to modern conservation's longer alliances with state power and corporate sponsorship (Dowie 1995; Brockington et al. 2008; Taylor 2016).

Indeed, connections between the environmental movement, state power, and policymaking were forged throughout the 1960s and 1970s. This is exemplified by the career of another prominent conservation PMC intellectual, Russell Train. In the early 1960s, Train founded the African Wildlife Leadership Foundation (later the AWF). The organization was instrumental in establishing Tanzania's College of African Wildlife Management, to equip Africans with professional-managerial knowledge, skills, and ethics essential to the continent's parks and wildlife following independence (Flippen 2006; Schauer 2018).[12] He served as President, and later Chair, of WWF-US, between 1965 and 1977 (Flippen 2006). In 1968, he was appointed to lead President Nixon's Council on Environmental Quality (Cameron and Rössler 2013, 18), serving as Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency from 1973 to 1977. He remained a leading figure in the WWF through the neoliberal turn of the 1980s, when he was an influential advocate of debt-for-nature swaps (Flippen 2006, 206–207), which became a significant element of modern conservation's successful adaptation to the ascendant neoliberal historical bloc.

Train's career also reflects adaptations in PMC virtue performance from authorized managerial stewardship to entrepreneurial brokerage across state, NGO, and market domains. Such adaptations were responsive to the consequential reorganization of conservation institutions and funding in the mid-1980s. As Corson (2016, 1010) has shown, the USAID-NGO partnership of 1986 supported cross-domain coordination between private foundations, NGOs, and USAID. This included a noncompetitive $85 million grant to WWF-US, Nature Conservancy, and World Resources Institute to guide its Biodiversity Support Program (BSP) between 1989 and 2001. According to Corson (ibid.), the BSP operated as both project manager and intellectual force, "shaping the future USAID biodiversity program and institutionalizing close informal collaboration among the staff of NGOs, contractors, and USAID."

This period of neoliberal consolidation was one of significant expansion for modern conservation's institutions and territories, as increasing government and corporate "sustainability" funds were channeled to the largest conservation NGOs (Chapin 2004, 22; Corson 2016, 107). Meanwhile, the global expanse of parks and protected areas grew more than at any other time in its history (Brockington et al. 2008, 1). The rationale for this growth combined the imperative of protecting nature at scale, in response to global climate and extinction crises, with PMC virtues of managerial acumen and scientific expertise. The bulk of global conservation funds were being put in the hands of organizations claiming the capacity and expertise to tackle this monumental task (Chapin 2004), while parks and protected areas were being established and managed using "complicated GIS software models, which distribute protected areas optimally across

landscapes … while minimizing costs" (Brockington et al. 2008, 1).

As we have outlined in our introduction, this was a period of intense critique and pushback against these consolidations and expansions, articulated in scholarly and activist engagements with neoliberal conservation. Prominent actors and institutions leaned into the putative synergies of ecosystem health and economic growth—expressed through the pursuit of corporate partnerships by large conservation NGOs (Chapin 2004; MacDonald 2010; Corson 2016) and the promotion of their potential for "mobilizing capital, expertise and innovation at unprecedented speeds and scale." (Igoe 2017, 103).[13] This entailed a proliferation of events, initiatives, and spectacles (Igoe 2010) dramatizing these alignments and mutual imperatives in moral and virtuous terms. They thus provided key "fields" (MacDonald 2010) in which increasingly diverse PMC actors performed, promoted, and adapted their class virtues through modern conservation's neoliberal reconfigurations.

The example of TEEB vividly illustrates the shift in PMC virtue strategies under neoliberal conditions, as well as the diversification of the PMC itself. As a "quantitative force for morality" (MacDonald and Corson 2012, 159), TEEB facilitated PMC virtue performances across sectors. TEEB spokesperson Pavan Sukhdev transitioned from a career in international banking to become a convert to modern conservation and champion of natural capital. His position as a conservation-cum-outsider lent credibility to his vision for TEEB, as he successfully directed the integration of TEEB accounting models into "conservation institutions like the Convention on Biological Diversity, Conservation NGOs, states, and private sector actors" (ibid.: 171). His "enactment of expertise and authority" helped to enroll actors across sectors, providing conservation NGOs with access to previously unavailable decision-making tools. His performances also generated new kinds of value and virtue for accountants, economists, modelers, and other PMC professions through modern conservation's neoliberal reformations.

PMC reproduction, diversification, and virtue performances in this period are further illustrated by the example of IBM's Corporate Service Corps (CSC). IBM describes this initiative as a "Peace Corps for the corporate world." It mobilized "small teams of high-performing employees tasked with helping communities develop sustainable economic solutions."[14] CSC assembles diverse cohorts of young PMC leaders from around the world, some of whom have worked on conservation initiatives. In 2008, an inaugural CSC team, comprised nine volunteers from eight countries, worked with the AWF to help develop a business plan for the organization's Maasai Steppe Heartland Initiative (Igoe 2017, 65).[15] In a video depicting the team's visit, a volunteer explains their mission is to develop a plan that will "balance the needs of conservation with those of the local Maasai community," while "providing ideas for capitalizing on the vibrant tourism industry already present around Arusha" (Igoe 2021, 43).[16]

The team's online videos feature a montage of their Maasai Steppe Heartland visit: receiving a briefing from a Tanzanian AWF employee, interacting with students at an AWF-funded school, and enjoying a Maasai women's dance performance. These depictions situate the volunteers in the communities and desired transformations that they virtuously support (see Igoe 2021 for details). Like the Peace Corps before it, IBM CSC works to reproduce and create opportunities for new generations of young PMC leaders, with an innovative emphasis on private sector leadership, diversity, and global team building. For the volunteers, the experience becomes part of their virtue portfolio, distinguishing them as hands-on and entrepreneurial experts, uniquely situated to find creative solutions to the pressing problems of our day. Neoliberal conservation provides a compellingly visible proving ground for their endeavors, which enact and celebrate its virtues for sustainable and inclusive capitalist growth. This returns us to the broader relationship between PMC adaptations and the emergence of neoliberal conservation.

Neoliberal Conservation Revisited with Class

Through the adaptations described in the previous section, modern conservation's original virtuous

disposition—an individuated ethic of care rooted in sacralized attachments to nature—merged with PMC epistemic authority, as conservation leaders and scientists often treated parks as their personal estates, insulating them from social and political forces that might besmirch the ideological purity and scientific focus of their work (Bonner 1993; McDermott-Hughes 2010; Lekan 2020; Büscher 2025). This disposition proved remarkably compatible with fundamental neoliberal moral imperatives —particularly Hayek's emphasis on the sanctity of individuals, private property, and the "personal protected sphere" from broader social and political impositions. It also clashed with social movements and democratic reforms of the 1970s and 1980s, which pressured conservationists to engage with local communities and the social contexts surrounding parks (Dowie 2009). Many conservationists resisted this significant departure from their cherished norm of exclusionary ecological protection. Consequently, by the 1990s, a neo-protectionist backlash called for a return to conservation's original mission of protecting nature, advocating for top-down enforcement of rules grounded in scientific expertise and framing community engagement as an undue "burden" on conservation efforts (Wilshusen et al. 2002).

This neo-protectionist backlash coincided with the induction of PMC actors from beyond conservation into this disposition, as exemplified by the "conversion" of Pavan Sukhdev to conservation causes and the touristically mediated experiences of IBM CSC volunteers in the Maasai Steppe. These actors' adaptations to neoliberal transformations included refined techniques and technologies for circumventing the social and the political in competitively virtuous terms. TEEB made nature's values visible by making them "virtual" (MacDonald and Corson 2012), abstracting and distancing them from the specific situations from which they were derived (Büscher 2010). IBM CSC volunteers used similar techniques in developing a business plan for a conservation landscape designed to balance economic growth, ecosystem health, and community well-being. They also navigated and represented these spaces in ways that projected entrepreneurial spirit, love of nature, and community engagement, while avoiding political entanglements that would disrupt the status quo of protected area exclusions (Büscher 2025).

Such adaptations participate in reframing modern conservation as an entrepreneurial field in which PMC actors compete for legitimacy and resources by performing their virtue as ecological stewards, while offering capital-friendly environmental solutions without political rancor. Large conservation NGOs invited supporters to "buy into" conservation without altering their lifestyles or engaging politically (Igoe 2017). This entailed symbolic participation in conservation causes, such as purchasing memberships or conservation-themed products (Igoe 2013). They also cultivated alliances with state and corporate actors. To avoid burdening allies with social and political issues, modern conservation pursued corporate partnerships and closer alliances with powerful state actors (Garland 2008; Chapin 2004; Corson 2010; Holmes 2010; Sachedina 2010; Igoe 2021). While camouflaging corporate and state environmental misdoings, this also entailed genuine—and at times far-reaching—engagements across these sectors.

Through these renewed and refined alliances, conservationists embraced the virtue of economic growth as essential to saving the planet, while capitalists lauded the necessity of environmental managerialism for sustaining market growth. This reciprocal recognition enabled modern conservation to position itself as a moral foundation for global capitalism's environmental engagement in the neoliberal historical bloc, as human rights had for its social engagement (Whyte 2019). Its moral authority and economic appeal are derived from its hard-won modernist legitimacy and maintained through continuous self-marketing and virtue performances of PMC actors, as they endeavored to distinguish themselves in a field increasingly crowded by celebrities, philanthropists, entrepreneurs, consultants, and corporate actors.

Critiques of these arrangements gain little traction against cultivated dispositions of individuated care and epistemic authority, ingrained in modern conservation's "structure of feeling": a cultural sensibility internalized by the PMC actors involved in its administration and reproduction (Büscher

2025). This sensibility is reinforced by the concomitant growth of the global protected area estate and the budgets of large international conservation NGOs. It is also entangled with neoliberal conservation's capacity to "fail forward," in spite of its evident failures in effectively addressing the global climate and extinction crises (Fletcher 2023). While increasingly anxious about these failures, conservationists seem unable to channel their anxiety into meaningful political action beyond business-as-usual. This inability is increasingly concerning given contemporary global class realignments and what they portend for PMC virtue performances and neoliberal conservation as a durable realm of capitalist moral authority.

Conclusion: Professional-Managerial Class Virtue Meets Authoritarian Vice

This article has examined how modern conservation has positioned itself as a realm of capitalist virtue and moral authority, claiming transformative change while avoiding structural concerns like economic redistribution and capitalist reorganization. Its progressive co-constitution with the PMC has been a key element of this positioning. During post-WWII managerial hegemony, PMC virtue was performed and institutionalized as ideologically neutral expertise, mobilized for the good of society and the environment, and validated through the globalization of modern conservation. With the rise of neoliberal hegemony, PMC virtue became more precarious and competitive, increasingly treated as a currency hoarded by diverse actors seeking social and economic advantage. This competition over expertise has been central to preserving neoliberal conservation's entrenched norms. As Catherine Liu (2021, 73) observes, it also makes "PMC elite workers … unable and unwilling to face their identity as a class."

Competition and fragmentation within the broader PMC explain why modern conservation's class dynamics remain ambiguous. Nevertheless, PMC virtue has served as a powerful force for aligning modern conservation with broader capitalist priorities and values. A caveat that Sandbrook et al. (2013) may offer in response is that while many conservationists have turned to the market, they are less motivated by a deep commitment to capitalism than by the instrumental pursuit of their virtuous goal of "saving the planet." This is a common refrain in conservation circles, which likely reflects many conservationists' understandings of their relation to capitalism. However, its emphasis on "pragmatic necessity" shields conservationists' alignments with capital from critique, reasserting the virtue of their cause. As we have shown, neoliberal conservation's engagement with the market extends beyond pragmatism. It reflects a deeper alignment with capitalist virtue that reshapes the conservation sector in the service of capital accumulation—commodifying ecosystems and generating markets for conservation services that embed conservation work within neoliberal economic structures.

By deflecting a reckoning with the contradictions of its alignments with capital, the conservation PMC has positioned itself as an essential moral authority within neoliberal capitalist structures for decades. However, it has also taken for granted the institutional and financial arrangements of capitalism underpinning its position. The second Trump administration's shuttering of USAID in February 2025 targets a globally significant bastion of PMC prestige and power, which had subcontracted its overseas environmental work to large conservation NGOs (Corson 2010). This move has had catastrophic effects on professional jobs and NGO networks, already suffering from the dismantling of the larger administrative systems on which their work depends (Muirhead and Rosenblum 2022).

It is unlikely these transformations can be readily reversed, as they are part of the global ascendance of populist authoritarianism that threatens to displace the neoliberal historical bloc. Against neoliberal conservation's promise to save the planet through global green growth, enlightened consumerism, and inclusion, this ascendant bloc embraces fossil capitalism, nationalist protectionism, climate denial, and the scapegoating of immigrant and minority groups (Stubenrauch 2026, 7). Its vision disdains key elements of PMC power and authority: independent science, waged professions, and love of nature as capitalist virtue. Its "structure of feeling"

fosters dispositions of cruelty, dominance, exclusion, and the right to "freedom" at the expense of society and nature (ibid.).

All of this signals a future for modern conservation without liberal reason(s), hewing to its illiberal legacies of "ecological white supremacy" (Murdock 2021, 245), nationalist concentration of power and wealth (ibid.: 244), and eugenicist logics (Spiro 2009). While modern conservation's neoliberal alignments muted these legacies, they are reemerging and intensifying through the militarization of conservation (Lunstrum et al. 2025) and direct private control of protected areas by the ultra-wealthy (Moore and Lenggenhager 2025). These are compounded by the embroilment of protected area management in authoritarian state power and populist politics that cast Indigenous peoples as outgroups to national purity and prosperity, disparaging their living relationships to land, sky, and water, and legitimizing violence against them (Keeler 2017; Weldemichel 2020; Dapash and Poole 2025).

Under ascendant authoritarianism, modern conservation's status as a realm of capitalist virtue-making appears in jeopardy. PMC virtue signaling has consistently upheld prevailing capitalist alignments by embodying distinctive modes of expertise and projecting their universal social and environmental good. Authoritarian "vice signaling" (Táíwò 2026), by contrast, seeks to upend prevailing alignments by targeting "the outgroup's thoughts, moral compass, and evaluative norms" (Táíwò 2022, 308). Their popular portrayals of PMC actors as a corrupt and elitist outgroup undercut their tried-and-true virtue performances. Our analysis of these performances clarifies how modern conservation's moral authority has been sustained across shifting configurations of class power from the 1940s to the 2010s. Over the past 10 years, however, hegemonic moral economies that have sustained modern conservation are being reconfigured in ways that reverse the moral logics of its alignments with dominant capitalist classes. The reversal of these logics unsettles relationships and structures of feeling that have shaped PMC horizons. Along with the uncertainty and precarity this brings, it reopens possibilities for more convivial and coalitional thought and action in modern conservation and beyond.

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Notes

1. https://mck.co/4b6Nat6, accessed June 26, 2025.
2. Founded in 2019, Business for Nature includes conservation organizations like The Nature Conservancy, African Wildlife Foundation, Birdlife

International, Conservation International, IUCN and World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF), along with corporations and international organizations like Walmart, World Economic Forum and Unilever, https://www.businessfornature.org, accessed June 26, 2025.

3. This formulation distinguishes modern conservation, in any of its formations, from Gramscian formulations of the historical bloc: a period in which groups sharing particular interests and values coalesce into a dominant coalition at national and global scales (Boothman 2000; Gramsci 2005). This distinction delinks bloc and class formations, which were conflated in previous applications of this analytic to neoliberal conservation (Igoe et al. 2010: 489). It also helps more clearly situate the organizational fields that conservation actors navigate in relation to differently situated hegemonic formations (Suarez 2026: 88). As many observers have noted, even mainstream conservation occupies a consistently marginal position in relation to prevailing historical blocs.
4. While Fletcher (2014b: 62–63) does not use the term PMC in this passage, he characterizes fragment of the middle-class as professional and managerial. His analysis builds on Barbara Ehrenreich's *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (1989). In this trade book, written for a non-specialist audience, she also uses these qualifiers in place of her earlier PMC analytic. Nevertheless, both accounts frame this class fragment in the same terms that we are using in this article.
5. The word 'virtue' comes from the Latin "*virtus*," which initially referred to manliness or excellence in a general sense but later came to denote moral excellence, a shift influenced by philosophical traditions like Stoicism and Aristotelian ethics, https://www.etymonline.com/word/virtue, accessed March 22, 2026.
6. Gramsci's (2005) formulation of intellectuals does not refer to a distinct social type defined by innate capacities, but to social function. In this framing, intellectuals are differentiated by their roles within the division of labor, class formation, and hegemony. In this sense, "organic intellectuals" emerge with specific social groups to articulate their experiences and advance their interests, while "traditional intellectuals" present themselves as autonomous but operate as functionaries of existing hegemonic orders. Gramsci characterized traditional intellectuals as ideological functionaries. He also described intellectuals (both organic and traditional) as "permanent persuaders," actively organizing consent and shaping moral and political common sense. This formulation underscores that PMC intellectuals are not merely thinkers, but are embedded in managerial, administrative, and ideological practices central to the reproduction of capitalist social order at all levels, including the kinds of prominent intellectual leaders we engage in this section.
7. An aspiration vividly portrayed by Aldous Huxley in his dystopian modernist classic, *Brave New World* (1932), in which a managerial class called the controllers runs that entire planet. Aldous Huxley is brother to Julian H.
8. Gramsci and others note historical bloc consolidation in these terms is only fully discernable in retrospect; here we use the term to describe the alignment process as it became apparent in historical hindsight.
9. These failures were personified by two high-profile PMC intellectuals: U.N. Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, who died while negotiating peace in the Congo in 1961, and U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, who recanted his technocratic approach to the Vietnam War after becoming President of the World Bank in 1968.
10. While yuppies mimicked the capitalist classes, they remained a distinct class of professionals, who worked for wages, and increasingly commissions and contract payments.
11. It is likely that Julian Huxley would have strenuously objected to these later developments (Bashford 2022). Nevertheless, his formulation of "enjoyment value" stands as a direct antecedent to ecosystem services such as recreation and spiritual refreshment.
12. Train's African Wildlife Leadership Foundation (later the African Wildlife Foundation) provided funding for the College, which was also supported by USAID and the UNDP (Schauer 2018: 532–533).
13. This quote comes from transportation magnate Richard Branson, in a video promoting the partnership between the Virgin Unite (the nonprofit arm of Virgin Airlines) and Conservation International in 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8YhUVIoanX0, accessed April 4, 2026.
14. https://www.ibm.com/history/ibm-service-corps, accessed April 20, 2026.

15. In addition to the Maasai Steppe Heartland, CSC volunteers are working with the Nature Conservancy in the Brazilian Amazon to help it develop a land management tool the organization has created to facilitate enforcement and monitor compliance with the country's forestry regulations, https://www.forbes.com/sites/ibm/2014/12/22/a-new-approach-to-combating-deforestation-in-the-amazon/, accessed April 6, 2026.
16. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9mYQWH5zJY, accessed April 6, 2026.

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