Hayes, Denis American Environmentalist; Organizer of First Earth Day (1944-) Encyclopedia Article

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Denis Hayes, at the time a twenty-five-year-old Harvard law student, organized the first Earth Day celebration on April 22, 1970. Earth Day inspired the **grassroots** participation of twenty million people in the United States and marked the coming-of-age of the environmental movement. It brought concerns about pollution and the environment into the awareness of the American public, and Congress responded by passing a series of environmental acts during the following years.

As an intern for Wisconsin's Democratic senator and environmentalist Gaylord Nelson, Hayes was selected to organize and coordinate **teach-ins**, addressing topics such as pollution and environmental degradation, on college campuses across the United States. Students inspired by the teach-ins and the ensuing publicity that Hayes orchestrated went on to organize thousands of cleanup activities and protest actions to mark the first Earth Day in 1970.

Following the first, overwhelmingly successful, Earth Day, Hayes became an alternative energy expert: He worked for Worldwatch Institute, wrote *Rays of Hope* (1977) about solar energy, and directed the government's Solar Energy Research Institute. He organized a twentieth-anniversary Earth Day celebration in 1990, in which 200 million people from 141 countries worldwide participated.

In 1978, Hayes was awarded the American Institute for Public Service's Jefferson Medal for Greatest Public Service by an United States citizen under thirty-five years of age. He was also recognized by the Audubon Society in 1998 as one of the twentieth century's one hundred "Champions of Conservation."

Since 1993, Hayes has directed the Bullitt Foundation of Seattle, which funds environmental protection and restoration projects in the Northwestern United States.

Denis Hayes. (©DanLamont/Corbis. Reproduced by permission.)

Bibliography

Hayes, Denis. (2000). *The Official Earth Day Guide to Planet Repair.* Washington, DC: Island Press.

Internet Resource

Earth Day Network Web site. Available from http://www.earthday.net.