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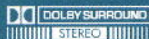


Marilyn Waring on the Environment

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VHS

9196 007



The
Who's Counting? SERIES

A three-part series for classroom use

Marilyn Waring on the Environment

"The system recognizes no value other than money, regardless of how that money is made. This means that there is no value to peace. This means there is no value to the preservation of natural resources for future generations. This means there is no value to unpaid work, including the unpaid work of reproducing human life itself, including the unpaid work of women who feed and nurture their own families. This system cannot respond to values it refuses to recognize...this is an economic system that will eventually kill us all." — Marilyn Waring

During World War II, Sir Richard Stone and John Maynard Keynes devised a system for measuring economic activity that was used to help Britain pay for the war. In 1953, this system became the basis for the United Nations System of National Accounts (UNSNA), which was quickly adopted as a world standard. All nations must conform to the rules of the UNSNA or they cannot belong to the UN, obtain loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), or be funded by the World Bank.

The problem with the UNSNA — which, like the IMF and the World Bank, is a system devised by the world's wealthiest countries — is that it only values activities that produce money. This places developing countries at a distinct disadvantage, forcing them to conform to Western ways of managing their economies. As a result, many Third World countries have become trapped in a cycle of producing goods for export to help pay off their escalating debts to the World Bank. By using their farmland, labour and natural resources to supply the rest of the world with cheap goods, the indigenous peoples of these countries often suffer increased hardship.



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Because the UNSNA only measures whatever passes through the marketplace, it doesn't take into account "hidden economy" activities that can have a huge impact on people's lives. There is no way of factoring in unpaid labour, particularly that of women, who, in some countries, routinely put in 16- or 18-hour days caring and providing for their families. There is no acknowledgment of the poverty, illness, suffering and environmental destruction that results from profit-generating activities such as war, industrial development and child prostitution. In short, the quality of life is simply not part of the equation.

Discussion questions:

- ◆ Using Waring's definition of "value" as something that is worthy, what would you consider to be of the most value to society?
- ◆ Do you think that Waring's constituents were foolish not to mine the gold in their region?
- ◆ What other social institutions/professions operate in their own special language (i.e. law)? Is a special language necessary, or does it serve only to exclude the average person?
- ◆ Can the Maori principle of *Kaimoana* — of only taking what you need — be applied to today's world? Is it realistic in urban societies?

- ◆ What causes depletion of the ozone layer, and what effects are we already experiencing? What would you be willing to give up, or what would you be willing to do, to help save the ozone layer?
- ◆ Do you think that Marilyn Waring should have stayed in politics?
- ◆ In your opinion, are there any politicians in your government that are effectively addressing the problems that Marilyn Waring has outlined?
- ◆ Will any of these issues affect your decision when it comes time to vote?
- ◆ What if Waring's proposed environmental indicators were broadcast on the news along with standard economic indicators like the stock market and Dow Jones Index? What difference do you think that would make?

Chapter breakdown:

1. The Voyage of the *Exxon Valdez* (7:48)

Current barometers of productivity do not take into account the effects of economic activity on the air, the water, and the ecosystems that support life on the planet. In this segment, the pristine beauty of New Zealand seascapes is juxtaposed with the damage to marine life caused by oil slicks. Waring uses the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill as an example of how environmental devastation is not counted as a deficit...in fact, it increased Alaska's GDP.

2. More Valuable Than Gold (8:30)

Waring recalls her campaign to save Mt. Pirongia (in her riding) from a mining development. She argues that ecosystems are engaged in important and invisible economic activity all the time, and that these unrecognized activities are crucial to the long-term well-being of everything on the planet. The problem is that in the language of economists, there is no way to attribute value to such "intangibles" as clean air or water. In their world, a forest has no value until it has been cut down for profit.

3. *Kaimoana*: The Maori Way (3:15)

Two of Marilyn's Maori friends collect shellfish at a local beach as they explain their traditional customs, which are based on thousands of years of conservation. Waring emphasizes the wisdom of practices that have served people and the earth well for millennia, and discusses how this has affected her world view.

4. On the Beach (1:37)

Waring contrasts the innocence of two children playing on the beach with the disastrous side-effects of a depleted ozone layer, pointing out that creating an unlivable world might ironically bring about an increase in the GDP.

5. What are the Alternatives? (3:14)

In front of an audience at her Montreal lecture, and at home amongst her goats and sheep, Waring reflects on the daunting task of taking on the problems of the world, and the importance of taking small steps to effect big changes, in a message that bears hope for the future.



Marilyn Waring on the Environment

(selected excerpts from *Who's Counting? Marilyn Waring on Sex, Lies & Global Economics*)

"When I was writing If Women Counted, I got up very early in the morning and at the window the grass would be covered in dew. All you could hear was the wind in the trees, the waves. And the sea and the sky were so clear and blue, and the beach would be empty. When you'd look around the view, you could see the hills rising out of the sea. When I look at them, just untouched, they look so beautiful. Apparently they're of no value at all, at least according to the economic system."
— Marilyn Waring

Marilyn Waring, ex-MP in the New Zealand Parliament, and foremost spokesperson for global feminist economics, now lives and works on her farm in the lush green hills of New Zealand.

While in office, Waring fought to preserve the priceless natural resources of her riding, drawing on the pragmatic wisdom of her neighbours — farmers whose livelihoods depend on sustainable land use, and the Maori, who have lived in harmony with their environment for countless generations.

Waring makes a convincing argument for changing a system that does not value what may be our most precious assets: clean air, water, and the unspoiled ecosystems that sustain and enrich life on earth.

Marilyn Waring on the Environment is divided into five short chapters:

- *The Voyage of the Exxon Valdez* (7:48)
- *On the Beach* (1:37)
- *More Valuable Than Gold* (8:30)
- *What are the Alternatives?* (3:14)
- *Kaimoana: The Maori Way* (3:15)

The three-volume *Who's Counting?* classroom series challenges the myths of economics, its elitist stance, and our tacit compliance with political agendas that masquerade as objective economic policy. Each volume will stimulate debate on a wide range of issues, serving as entertaining and compelling springboards for further study. Chapter synopses and suggested study questions are included.

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26 minutes 50 seconds

Director: Terre Nash

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