Excerpt from "Worshiping the Womb:
American Feminism and Neopaganism in the Mid-To-Late Twentieth Century"
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Note: This is an abridged version of the author's senior thesis. The sections titled, "Wicca," "The Pre-Patriarchy Matriarchy" and "The Noble Savage: Neopaganism and Cultural Appropriation," as well as discussions on the sexual revolution and other content have been cut for brevity.

Leftists adopted Neopaganism as a response to postwar evangelical Christian conservatism. In a nation where women's role models consisted of housewives and actresses, Neopaganism brought forth different, more autonomous role models from folklore and mythology. In a nation where technology dominated the environment, Neopaganism encouraged connection with nature rather than subduing it. In a nation where political strife ruled the people, Neopaganism brought community and peace to leftists. Even so, Neopaganism itself made no effort to tear down the Western Patriarchy, as it claimed to do. Existing in the realm of relational feminism, a sort of feminism where women's rights activism is based on the differences between women and men, Neopaganism upheld many conventional gender standards, particularly for women. Neopagans saw women as inherently nurturing figures. Some sects scrutinized women's physical appearances to such an extent that it limited their abilities to hold leadership positions within their communities. Although Neopaganism in the United States was shaped by the values of the second wave of feminism, it did not actively overturn gendered roles and at times welcomed conservative culture.

Defining Neopaganism and its Practitioners

One of the most difficult parts of studying Neopaganism lies in finding its definition. Even the name holds controversy. Who considers themselves Neopagan varies from group to group, even individual to individual. So, what is Neopaganism? Margot Adler's book, *Drawing Down the Moon*, introduced many Americans to Neopaganism. She uses Isaac Bonewits's definition of Neopaganism. Therefore, Bonewits's definition of Neopaganism became the main

definition in the United States. Isaac Bonewits was an expert in Neopaganism with a Bachelor of Arts in Magic from the University of California, Berkeley.[1] He wrote books, appeared in documentaries, and normally was the main speaker for panels on Neopaganism that he attended. He also founded the Aquarian Anti-Defamation League, a civil rights group for those of minority religions and spiritualities. Bonewits defines Neopaganism as "polytheistic (or conditional monotheistic) nature religions that are based upon the older or Paleopagan religions; concentrating upon an attempt to retain the humanistic, ecological and creative aspects of these old belief systems while discarding their occasional brutal or repressive developments."[2] Essentially, Bonewits presents Neopaganism as an altered form of ancient paganism to fit better the standards of modern civilization. This definition seems to align with the perception of the Neopagan movement of the mid-to-late twentieth century, so it will be used throughout this essay.

Not only does the controversy surrounding the definition of Neopaganism lead to an underrepresentation of people who claim the practices within the movement, but representative census data simply does not exist. The United States census does not record religious affiliation as part of the mandatory census; this is in accordance with 13 United States Code 221(c), which states that "no person shall be compelled to disclose information relative to his religious beliefs or to membership in a religious body."[3] This law was first passed in August 1952. This was two years before Gerald Gardner would publish his famous book *Witchcraft Today*, which introduced Wicca (the most popular religion within Neopaganism) to the world. Therefore, the American census would not have accurate numbers pertaining to how many Americans considered themselves Neopagan. Alongside that, Neopagans are what social scientists call "a hidden population."[4] This suggests that those who identified as Neopagan, especially those living in conservative areas, may not have felt safe to disclose their practices. This leads to yet more underrepresentation of the Neopagan community. Finally, the lack of bureaucratic structure and record-keeping provides a third major obstacle in determining Neopagan demographics. Without

[1] Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon* (New York: Viking Press, 1981); "Berkeley Student Will Graduate with Bachelor of Arts in Magic," *New York Times*, June 1, 1970, accessed September 24, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/1970/06/01/archives/berkeley-student-will-graduate-with-bachelor-of-arts-in-magic.html.

[2] Isaac Bonewits, "The First Epistle of Isaac," *The Druid Chronicles (Evolved)* (Berkeley Drunemeton Press, 1976), 2:4, quoted in Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 10.

[3] Refusal or Neglect to Answer Questions; False Answers, 13 U.S.C. § 221 (1952).

[4] Helen A. Berger, Evan A. Leach, and Leigh S. Shaffer, *Voices from the Neopagan Census* (University of South Carolina Press, 2003), xvii.

membership records, like those that most Christian organizations maintain, it is difficult to determine how many members Neopagan organizations have and how those numbers have changed over time.[5] Helen A. Berger, alongside fellow sociologists Evan A. Leach and Leigh S. Shaffer, recorded one survey of Neopagans spanning from 1993 to 1995, which they refer to as a census. In 1999, at the publication of this census, scholars estimated that there were between 150,000 and 400,000 practicing Neopagans in the United States of America.[6] Though not during the target era of the Second Wave of American Feminism, this data can provide insight into Neopagan lifestyles and political views. According to the findings of Berger, the white, middle class dominates the American Neopagan community.[7] Also, Berger's survey of Neopagans in the United States reports that a disproportionate number of Neopagans identify as women, with multiple surveys recording over 55% of respondents identifying as women.[8] Therefore, white, middle-class women now make up a majority of Neopagans.

Neopaganism serves as an umbrella term for many spiritual paths. (Note the use of the term "spiritual paths," which many Neopagans, especially those in all-women groups, preferred to use because the term "religion" often felt too structured, limiting, and oppressive to fit in with Neopagan culture.)[9] The most studied of these paths include Wiccans, women-only groups, the Reclaiming Tradition, Shamans, Odinists (the only group not started through a leftist or liberal movement, and instead through a Neo-Nazi movement), and Druids; but scholars cannot determine just how many spiritual paths existed due to Neopaganism's fluid culture.[10] While white demographics dominate Neopaganism, white people were not the only group to found new spiritual movements during the mid-to-late twentieth century. Lucumi culture was brought to the continental United States by Caribbean immigrants. The combined practices of Yoruba, Palo, and Curanderismo attracted African-American, Latino, and Asian audiences. In contrast to white Neopaganism, which mostly exists in middle-class suburbs, Lucumi culture finds its place in the urban sprawl.[11] Lucumi culture, being diasporic in nature, evolved throughout the twentieth

[5] Helen A. Berger, "Introduction," in *Witchcraft and Magic*, 1–7, 6.
[6] Helen A. Berger, "Witchcraft and Neopaganism," in *Witchcraft and Magic*, 28–54, 28.
[7] Berger, "Witchcraft and Neopaganism," in *Witchcraft and Magic*, 28–54, 29.
[8] Berger, Leach, and Shaffer, *Voices from the Neopagan Census*, 27–28.
[9] Helen A. Berger, "Background," in *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neopaganism and Witchcraft in the United States* (University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 4–25, 5.
[10] Berger, "Witchcraft and Neopaganism," in *Witchcraft and Magic*, 28–54, 41.
[11] Ysamur M. Fores-Pena, "Lucumi: The Second Diaspora," in *Witchcraft and Magic,* 102–119, 102.

century.[12] Due to the nature of these new, non-white spiritual paths – especially their ties to slavery – many practitioners do not place themselves under the Neopagan umbrella. In fact, the total number of African-American, Native-American, Asian, Hispanic, and Latino respondents to Helen A. Berger's demographic survey adds up to only 2% of Neopagan respondents.[13] Even so, scholars of Afro-Caribbean culture find discussion of Lucumi culture necessary when talking about Neopaganism, as shown by the inclusion of Ysamur M. Fores-Pena's article, "Lucumi: The Second Diaspora," in *Witchcraft and Magic: Contemporary North America*.

To understand who the Neopagans were, it is important to understand which groups are not included under the Neopagan "umbrella term," like the Lucumi. Most Neopagans separate themselves from the culture of Satanism and New Age religion, as they consider those religions as something other than Neopaganism. However, due to the amorphous nature of Neopaganism, there will always be exceptions.[14] The exclusion of New Age religion from Neopaganism is the most significant exclusion because the two spiritual paths hold many of the same beliefs, demographics, and practices. The main difference between the two appears to be how the spiritual paths are taught. While Neopagan spiritual paths operate through covens and depend on knowledge that has been passed down, New Age spirituality tends to be taught through paid classes and lectures.[15] According to sociologist Michael York, Neopagans consider New Age as "more expensive, more superficial… commercial, consumerist, fraudulent, spiritual marketing schemes, a Yuppie phenomenon, gameplaying for shock value, mostly Christian, more generalized, undisciplined, insensitive, ungrounded and seeking a quick fix."[16] The disconnect is even more interesting because Neopaganism also has many of these traits, and the feminists who consider themselves Neopagan even pride themselves on the fluidity of Neopaganism. So, what makes Neopaganism and New Age religion different? It is all in the name.

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[12] Fores-Pena, "Lucumi: The Second Diaspora," in *Witchcraft and Magic*, 102–119, 103.
[13] Berger, Leach, and Shaffer, *Voices from the Neopagan Census*, 29–30.
[14] Berger, Leach, and Shaffer, *Voices from the Neopagan Census*, 15.
[15] Berger, Leach, and Shaffer, *Voices from the Neopagan Census*, 24.
[16] Micheal York, "New Age Commodification and Appropriation of Spirituality," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 16, no. 3 (2001), 365, quoted by Berger, Leach, and Shaffer, in *Voices from the Neopagan Census*, 25.

The Second Wave and Feminist Spirituality

In 1963, Betty Friedan published a book titled *The Feminine Mystique*. This book catered to white, middle-class, married women and their feelings unfulfilled as housewives. The same year, President John F. Kennedy (alongside the director of the Women's Bureau, Esther Peterson) established a Commission on the Status of Women to investigate women in the workplace. Additionally, President Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act, the first attempt to eliminate sex-based wage discrimination.[17] These three major events led to American realization of major gender discrimination in the postwar United States, especially among white, middle-class Americans. . This movement attacked the conservative ideal of "traditional" gender roles, including many aspects of Christianity.

The section of *The Feminine Mystique* titled "The Passionate Journey" provides insight as to why so many women turned to Neopaganism. Friedan discusses the First Wave of Feminism, which officially started in 1848. She states, "At every step of the way, the feminists had to fight the conception that they were violating the God-given nature of women."[18] With this statement, Friedan immediately places the clergy in a position that is in opposition to feminism. She continues by claiming that "Clergymen interrupted women's rights conventions, waving Bibles and quoting from the Scriptures… 'Let your women be silent in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak' … 'And if they learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.'"[19] Thus, Friedan presents not just the church, but also the Bible and its teachings as something to hold back not just feminism, but women. Later in *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan suggests that ministers, priests, and rabbis exist as barriers to women's emancipation due to their respective institutions' "dogmatic definitions of marriage and motherhood."[20] The women reading and reacting to *The Feminine Mystique* most likely experienced this confining, misogynistic rhetoric in their own churches, especially women in more orthodox churches.

Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* kicked off the Second Wave of Feminism, encouraging housewives to toss away their aprons and become something more Since she attacked the Christian Church as an obstacle to equal rights, it should not come as a shock that

[17] Wendy Griffin, "Webs of Women: Feminist Spiritualities" in *Witchcraft and Magic*, 55–80, 56.
[18] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1963), 33.
[19] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 34.
[20] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 351.

many people tossed away their crosses and rosary beads as well, especially with the lack of women with autonomy as role models. With the lack of strong female role models in their modern lives, women turned to ancient mythoses. There, a woman could find powerful figures like Athena and Artemis in Ancient Greek mythos, Diana in Ancient Roman mythos, and Freyja in Norse mythos. Margot Adler called them, "stronger and healthier 'role models' than the images of women projected in the late 1950s."[21] Compared to the housewife ideal of the 1950s, the women of pagan mythologies appear to have more agency and tend to be more central or significant in the stories that they appear in. Aligning with ancient female deities that were strong and autonomous would have empowered women and provided an example of what women could be outside of a wife and a mother.

American feminism quickly took over the development of Neopaganism in North America. When Raymond and Rosemary Buckland brought Wicca from the United Kingdom to the United States in the 1960s, it spread quickly throughout North America. Since Wicca originally started as a fertility religion, the "English Traditionalists" often held family values that aligned more closely with American conservatism.[22] This was where Gerald Gardner's attachment to patriarchal standards for women thrived. In contrast, the swift spread of Neopaganism in the United States can be accredited to three major groups: those involved in counterculture movements, women seeking a more female-leaning religion, and environmentalists.[23] All three of these groups make up what was the Second Wave of American Feminism.

The ties between Neopaganism and Second-Wave Feminism originated in California with an all-female sect of Wicca led by Zsuzsanna Budapest, who called themselves "Dianic Wiccans" or "Dianic Witches." Dianic Wiccans altered Gerald Gardner's original rituals so much that they oftentimes did not consider themselves Wiccans, even though that is a part of their name. Despite Gerald Gardner's original vision for covens to have six women and six men, Dianic Wiccan covens are mostly – if not entirely – made up of women.[24] The first Dianic Wiccan coven formed in California, with Zsuzsanna Budapest as the high priestess alongside six

[21] Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 16.

[22] Alexei Kondratiev, interview with the authors, in Ellen Evert Hopman and Lawrence Bond, *People of the Earth: The New Pagans Speak Out* (Destiny Books, 1996), 128.

[23] Berger, "Witchcraft and Neopaganism," in *Witchcraft and Magic*, 28–54, 36.

[24] Berger, "Witchcraft and Neopaganism," in *Witchcraft and Magic*, 28–54, 28.

other women. They founded Dianic Wicca because they believed that women's bodies and souls needed to be "reclaimed" from male-dominated religion.[25]

A unique part of Dianic Wicca's development focused on the violence against women under patriarchy. Budapest outlined spells to help women begin healing from rape as well as a hex to cast against rapists. According to Zsuzsanna Budapest, "A witch who cannot hex cannot heal," suggesting that retaliation to patriarchal violence was the only way these women could truly heal from their experiences.[26] Due to the Dianic Wiccan perspective on patriarchal violence, Dianic Wicca was considered a religion for the radical feminist. As one feminist poet in the Dianic craft, Oriethya, stated in an interview, "the more radical I became, the more I got off the beaten path in women's politics… politics alone wasn't any kind of full answer… I needed to ask myself what the world would look like if God were a woman."[27] Oriethya discovered a community built by women like Zsuzsanna Budapest that satisfied her desire for feminism and a feminist lifestyle outside of politics. With the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1982 concluding the Second Wave of American Feminism, a spiritual and cultural feminism may have seemed like the only option. Before that point, Dianic Wicca acted as a political extension to feminism.

Many of the causes backed by feminists during the Second Wave of American Feminism are mirrored in Neopagan rituals, especially in all-women groups. In her Dianic Wiccan instructional manual, *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries: Feminist Witchcraft, Goddess Rituals, Spellcasting and Other Womanly Arts*, Zsuzsanna Budapest recalled one of the rituals her coven performed:

> A young woman… came to us after her rape… We shared a hex with her to bring this man to justice… She performed the hex, with our help, and buried the remnants in a nearby cemetery. The rapist was caught … after raping someone else. The police put him away for all his crimes. He is still in jail. In San Francisco, we performed a spell against the Briggs Initiative, which would have made it illegal for gays to teach. The initiative bit

[25] Zsuzsanna Budapest, Janet Roslund, Helen Hancken, Ann Doczi, Nina, Anna Kria, Tannie Braziel, Mildred Schmidt, Miki Jackson, and Joya, *The Feminist Book of Lights and Shadows* (Feminist Wicca, 1979).

[26] Wendy Griffin, "Webs of Women: Feminist Spiritualities" in *Witchcraft and* Magic, 55–80, 64.

[27] Oriethya, interview with the authors, in Ellen Evert Hopman and Lawrence Bond, *People of the Earth*, 128.

> the dust. The success stories are endless and miraculous. Spells are powerful prayers and they do work. Practice your powers and you will never again believe you're inferior.[28]

Budapest suggests Neopagan groups participated in activism through their rituals. They believed that, by performing spells, they actively fought against rape and homophobia. Budapest and her followers believed that their rituals produced tangible results and empowered women in the process. Therefore, some saw these women as critical figures in the Second Wave's fight for autonomy and equal rights.

The American public was unaware of how connected feminism and witchcraft were until 1975, when authorities arrested Zsuzsanna Budapest for tarot card readings. Specifically, police charged Budapest with "foretelling the future" out of her shop in Venice, California.[29] Budapest's arrest received enough recognition for a small article in *Ms.* magazine, a feminist publication, which made her a national figure amongst feminists.[30]

Additionally, one of the major feminist action groups established during the Second Wave (making its first appearance on Halloween in 1968) called itself "W.I.T.C.H." Founded by "hip Left style politicos," W.I.T.C.H. took its name from a Bible verse.[31] In 1 Samuel 15:23, the Bible declares "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft."[32] The acronym may have come before the full name itself, as members of W.I.T.C.H. claimed that the acronym stood for a variety of phrases including "Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell" and "Women Inspired to Commit Herstory."[33] The irony of using a concept seen as negative in the Bible for a political movement further demonstrates the anti-Christian sentiments of the Second Wave of Feminism. According to Robin Morgan, the only criteria for being a "W.I.T.C.H." was "being female, untamed, angry, joyous, and immortal."[34] W.I.T.C.H. encouraged women to exist outside of their preconceived role of the housewife and display emotions that society deemed as "unfeminine." While W.I.T.C.H. did not necessarily seek to replace the Christian Church that they criticized,

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[28] Zsuzsanna Budapest, *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries: Feminist Witchcraft, Goddess Rituals, Spellcasting and Other Womanly Arts* (Wingbow Press, 1976), 42.

[29] Zsuzsanna Budapest, interview with the authors, in Ellen Evert Hopman and Lawrence Bond, *People of the Earth*, 354.

[30] Griffin, "Webs of Women: Feminist Spiritualities," in *Witchcraft and* Magic, 55–80, 62.

[31] Griffin, "Webs of Women: Feminist Spiritualities," in *Witchcraft and Magic*, 55–80, 57.

[32] Samuel, 1:15–23 (King James Version).

[33] Griffin, "Webs of Women: Feminist Spiritualities," in *Witchcraft and Magic*, 55–80, 56.

[34] Robin Morgan, *Sisterhood is Powerful* (Vintage Books, 1970), quoted by Griffin, "Webs of Women: Feminist Spiritualities" in *Witchcraft and Magic*, 55–80, 56–57.

they did establish a link between feminism and witchcraft and showed the influence that images of witchcraft had on the feminist movement.

Radical leftists rejected Christianity and many of the ideals that came along with it. As theological scholar David Miller claims, "The revolution does not look like monotheism, Christian or post-Christian. What it looks like is polytheism." [35] Polytheism, by definition, involves the worship of multiple deities or beings. Christianity's doctrine focuses on the worship of a singular God, making it monotheistic. While the Christian doctrine is strict in terms of its worship, with its first commandment reading "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me," polytheism provides a much broader range that allows multiple groups to exist alongside each other.[36] What makes Neopaganism unique is that someone could practice one set of traditions and worship one set of deities without invalidating another person's practice.

Many factors led to the explosion of the Second Wave of American Feminism. The radical feminists of the Second Wave critiqued the existing culture surrounding marriage, love, heteronormativity, and rape. They also fought for access to contraception, abortion, and childcare.[37] Overall, the movement was about female autonomy. In the United States, religious culture influenced how much autonomy women had. This led to a new question alongside the "women question" of equal rights: can women be liberated under Christianity? Some feminists, such as Mary Daly, did find their voices in Christianity. Others found solace in the image of the witch.

The women who integrated feminism into their spirituality practice form what scholars now call "feminist witchcraft" or "feminist spirituality." Feminist spirituality, in scholarship on Neopaganism, usually refers to Christian feminists or, more often, Dianic Wiccans (or Dianic Witches).[38] Within feminist spirituality, women from various religious backgrounds find themselves in solidarity. Mary Daly, a Catholic feminist and self-described "crone," described witches as women who use their strength and as women who work in harmony with nature. Daly led the charge in Christian scholarship discussing women's treatment and oppression within the Christian Church. Daly's 1975 *The Church and the Second Sex* even included a "Feminist

[35] David Miller quoted by Adler in *Drawing Down the Moon*, 29.
[36] Exodus 20:3–17 (King James Version).
[37] Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad* (University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 3–4.
[38] Griffin, "Webs of Women: Feminist Spiritualities" in *Witchcraft and Magic*, 55–80, 55.

Postchristian Introduction."[39] So, while not every feminist turned towards Neopaganism and witchcraft, many non-Neopagan feminists supported the movement.

Ultimately, what distinguished feminist spirituality and Neopaganism from the conservative Christians they fought against was that feminist witches worshiped beings or deities that are female or have a feminine energy. For some, such as Alison Harlow, who was a priestess in a spiritual path that deals mostly with women, their call to Neopaganism started as a feeling. Harlow was taking a break from the Christmas Eve Mass at her church when she felt a presence, which she called, "ancient and wise and definitely female."[40] In her description of her call to Neopaganism, Harlow's descriptors of "ancient" and "wise" suggested that whatever feminine entity she encountered provided something more connected and stimulating than the Christian God.

Environmentalism, Eco-Feminism, and the Goddess

Across various Neopagan cultures, issues of the environment seemed to be a top priority. According to Berger's survey, 92% of Neopagans believed that the American government spends too little money on the environment, a significant difference when compared to the 55.7% of the general American population who answered the same way.[41] The environmental crises of the mid-twentieth century included deforestation, drought, desertification, toxic waste, and decreasing biodiversity. According to feminist environmentalists (or eco-feminists), the impacts brought on by these issues disproportionally affected women, people of color, the working class, and children, due to oppressions such as racism, classism, and colonialism.[42] Therefore, many feminists viewed environmental issues as feminist issues. Neopagan connection to nature increased the desire to participate in eco-feminism.

Environmentalists rejected Christianity because early ecologists blamed western culture – especially Christian culture – for contemporary environmental crises. In Christian mythos, the creation of the Earth and its inhabitants occurred in a linear timeline. First, God had made light and darkness, then the sky. Next came the Earth, the seas, and vegetation. Then God created the sun and the moon. Next, God made animals that did not live on the land. Then, God created land

[39] Griffin, "Webs of Women: Feminist Spiritualities" in *Witchcraft and Magic*, 55–80, 59.
[40] Alison Harlow, conversation with the author, quoted in Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 14–15.
[41] Berger, Leach, and Shaffer, *Voices from the Neopagan Census*, 61.
[42] Karen J. Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* (Rawman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2000), 1.

animals and, finally, man. As an afterthought, God created woman to keep man company. (There are other versions of the creation story, but this is the best known.)[43] The order that God made things in the Christian creation story did not happen at random. It was so everything else could exist for man. As historian Lynn White explains "no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes."[44] Due to the philosophy that everything on Earth exists to serve man, centuries of Christian civilizations aimed to dominate the natural world rather than work with it. A prime example of this was America's dream of "Manifest Destiny" in the western United States. Thanks to "Manifest Destiny," the United States has lost over 90% of its native grasslands. With the degradation of prairie habitat, Native American tribes in the area lost food sources and sacred land, invasive species encroached on the land, and the natural biodiversity plummeted.[45] The American grasslands may be the most extreme example of the degradation of the environment through American philosophies under Christianity, but the same principles apply to every ecosystem across the United States.

Christianity tends to be both anthropocentric and androcentric. By framing nature as the creation of a separated deity and with a purpose to serve man, Christianity led civilizations to "exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feeling of natural objects," according to ecologist Lynn White.[46] In addition, the Christian God existed entirely separate from the environment, which gave Christians another degree of ambivalence about the environment.[47] Paganism, on the other hand, allowed for more human connection with nature. In pre-modern folklore and mythos, nature spirits resided everywhere. These spirits were more accessible to the common man than gods. For example, in Ancient Greek mythology, oftentimes communing with local stream, hill, or woodland spirits was much easier than going to a temple and communing with the gods and goddesses who live upon Mount Olympus.[48] Within these religions, spirits had to be appeased if people altered the natural landscape for any purpose. These examples demonstrate that many of these religions followed the philosophy of animism: the idea that every natural object has a spirit or an energy associated with it. Margot Adler theorized: "Neo-Paganism is an attempt to

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[43] Genesis, 1:1–27 (King James Version).

[44] Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203–1207, 1205.

[45] "Central Grasslands Conservation: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service," FWS.gov, accessed November 3, 2025, https://www.fws.gov/program/central-grasslands-conservation/about-us.

[46] White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," 1205.

[47] Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 18–19.

[48] White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," 1205.

reanimate the world of nature; or, perhaps more accurately, Neo-Pagan religions allow their participants to reenter the primeval world view, to participate in nature in a way that is not possible for most Westerners after childhood."[49] By this logic, the evolving disconnect between humans and nature contributed to the growing population of Neopagans.

The rejection of Christianity and the consciousness of environmental issues all led to eco-feminism. One of the contributors to this is "Goddess Spirituality." Goddess Spirituality evolved from the belief that matriarchies dominated in prehistory. "The Goddess" did not have one distinct look or manifestation. Neopagan feminist Starhawk claimed that "The Goddess" had two manifestations: the moon and the Earth. First, she explained that "Our great symbol for the Goddess is the moon, whose three aspects reflects the three stages in women's lives and whose cycles of waxing and waning coincide with women's menstrual cycles."[50] This symbolism tied the Goddess to women in a deeper sense, both figuratively and literally. Paralleling the Christian idea that God made man in his own image, the Neopagan ideal attached the Goddess to the menstrual cycle, an intimate aspect of womanhood that had long been shamed by the patriarchy. In the same article, Starhawk also claimed, "The Goddess is also the Earth – Mother Earth, who sustains all growing things, who is the body, our bones and cells."[51] This definition of the Goddess pulled her from some unreachable heaven and placed her existence within the natural world. This definition also established the Goddess as a creator who sustains all growing things, representing another significant part of women's sexual health: the womb. Starhawk's definitions attached a central deity to both nature and womanhood. Even with its dubious origins, Goddess Spirituality provided one of the paths that led to eco-feminism by placing the divine within nature.

Eco-feminists believed that an understanding of nature led to understanding the oppression of women and other marginalized groups across the world. Eco-feminism utilized sex and gender as the starting point for criticizing the "isms of domination," referring to sexism, racism, ableism, and ageism.[52] The root of these "isms" was patriarchy. According to eco-feminist philosopher Karen J. Warren, the patriarchy was an unhealthy social system comprised of four parts: faulty beliefs, impaired thinking and language of domination, behaviors of

[49] Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon*, 25.
[50] Starhawk, "Witchcraft and Women's Culture," *Womanspirit Rising*, 263.
[51] Starhawk, "Witchcraft and Women's Culture," *Womanspirit Rising*, 263.
[52] Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, 43.

domination, and unmanageability of life.[53] Essentially, Warren argued that the belief system of the patriarchy led to an obsession with domination over other groups, which made life unmanageable for everyone, not just marginalized groups. That unmanageability just led back to or intensified the patriarchal belief system. Therefore, patriarchy was an unhealthy social system. Early eco-feminism focused on two results of this system: war and rape (especially military rape). Rape makes life unmanageable for women and war makes life unmanageable for both humanity and the ecological systems in which humanity lives. As for the environment, Karen Warren targeted the military as a main contributor to environmental degradation. Warren claimed, "Military action makes life unmanageable… by releasing toxins, pollutants, and radioactive materials into the air, water, and food."[54] With the comparison of bombs to sex and with the domination the military holds over the environment, it made sense that eco-feminists equate rape with environmental destruction and domination at the hands of the patriarchy. When the idea of the Goddess gets tangled into these concepts, Neopagans view environmental destruction as the rape of the Goddess.

Using this lens, spiritual eco-feminists believed that feminist spirituality was essential to eco-feminism. Starhawk even defined eco-feminism as a spiritual movement, saying, "Ecofeminism is a movement with an implicit and sometimes explicit spiritual base… it encompasses a dimension that profoundly challenges our ordinary sense of value, that counters the root stories of our culture and attempts to shift them."[55] In the last part of the quote, Starhawk talked about eco-feminism countering the root stories of our culture and shifting them. This shift aligned with the drive to pull away from Christianity for both environmentalism and Neopaganism. Eco-feminism, like both environmentalism and Neopaganism, aimed to take power away from forces of oppression and spread it more evenly among the population. For some environmentalists, such as Lynn White, Jr., that force was Christianity because of its contribution to the capitalist point of view on ownership and imperialism. For Neopaganism, that force was patriarchy. For eco-feminism, that force encompassed both drivers of oppression, leading to intersectional activism that attracted many leftists.

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[53] Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, 207.

[54] Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, 209.

[55] Starhawk, "Feminist, Earth-Based Spirituality and Ecofeminism," in *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecological Feminism*, ed. Judith Plant (Santa Cruz: New Society Publishers, 1989), 174–185, quoted in Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, 32.

To further the point of environmental consciousness and activism, Helen A. Berger's survey of Neopagans suggested that the majority of Neopagans, like most Americans, lived in metropolitan areas.[56] A safe assumption would be that those living in metropolitan areas would not get much access to nature in general, let alone the natural world. Margot Adler argued that the rise of cities provided a major push for the American population to turn towards Neopaganism, claiming that, "The Pagan revival seems to be a survival response to the common urban and suburban experience of our culture as 'impersonal,' 'neutral,' or 'dead.'"[57] Adler suggested that people turned to Neopaganism as a response to the monoculture found within early suburbs and the destruction of green spaces in cities. Like with Goddess spirituality, Neopagans sought to reconnect with a long-gone connection. In this case, the lost connection was between people and nature.

Conclusion

Between feminism and environmentalism, the ideals of most Neopaganism groups represented an era of new thought in the United States of America in the face of political conflict, one that would parallel the reaction to the twenty-first century's new era of political unrest. Even with the faults of Neopaganism in its origins and its methods, it provided a refuge for many women in the mid-to-late twentieth century. Many victims of patriarchal violence, especially women, sought support after experiencing patriarchal violence, and Neopagan covens welcomed victims with open arms. That alone makes Neopaganism a significant part of the Second Wave of American Feminism.

[56] Helen A. Berger, Evan A. Leach, and Leigh S. Shaffer, *Voices from the Neopagan Census*, 30.
[57] Margot Adler, *Drawing down the Moon*, 25.

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