

MAY 22

DEBUNKING ECOFASCIST MYTHS

ANTI  
CREEP  
CLIMATE  
INITIATIVE  
COMICS



AGAINST <sup>THE</sup>  
ECOFASCIST  
CREEP

# *AGAINST THE ECOFASCIST CREEP DEBUNKING ECOFASCIST MYTHS*

*BY THE  
ANTI-CREEP CLIMATE INITIATIVE*

## From Avengers: Infinity War

**Thanos:** Going to bed hungry. Scrounging for scraps. Your planet was on the brink of collapse. I was the one who stopped that. You know what's happened since then? The children born have known nothing but full bellies and clear skies. It's a paradise.

**Gamora:** Because you murdered half the planet!

**Thanos:** It's a simple calculus. This universe is finite, its resources finite... if life is left unchecked, life will cease to exist. It needs correction.

**Gamora:** YOU DON'T KNOW THAT!

**Thanos:** I'm the only one who knows that. At least I'm the only one with the will to act on it...

---

Thanos saw a world experiencing rapid climate change, staggering social inequality, and violence. His plan was to gather the Infinity Stones and cull half of all life to help those people that remain. Though Thanos was a powerful supervillain, he wasn't original. His plan repeated long-held ideas that extreme violence is necessary to save the environment.

**It isn't.**

# WHAT IF???

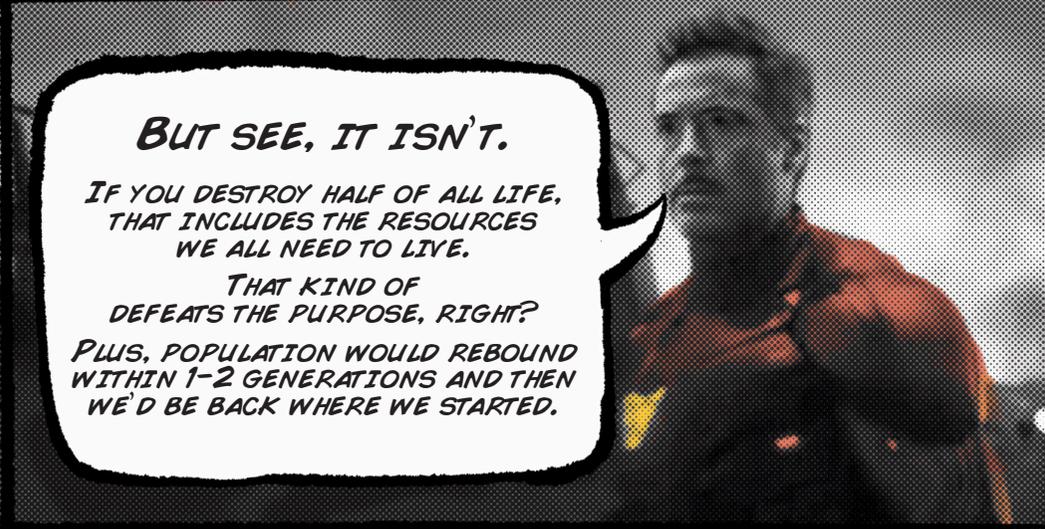


*YOUR PLAN IS SO DARN RIDICULOUS, DON'T YOU SEE THAT?*

*WE CAN'T REASON WITH HIM. HE KNOWS HIS PLAN MAKES NO SENSE!*



*YOU MAY NOT LIKE MY PLAN, BUT IT IS THE ONLY WAY...*

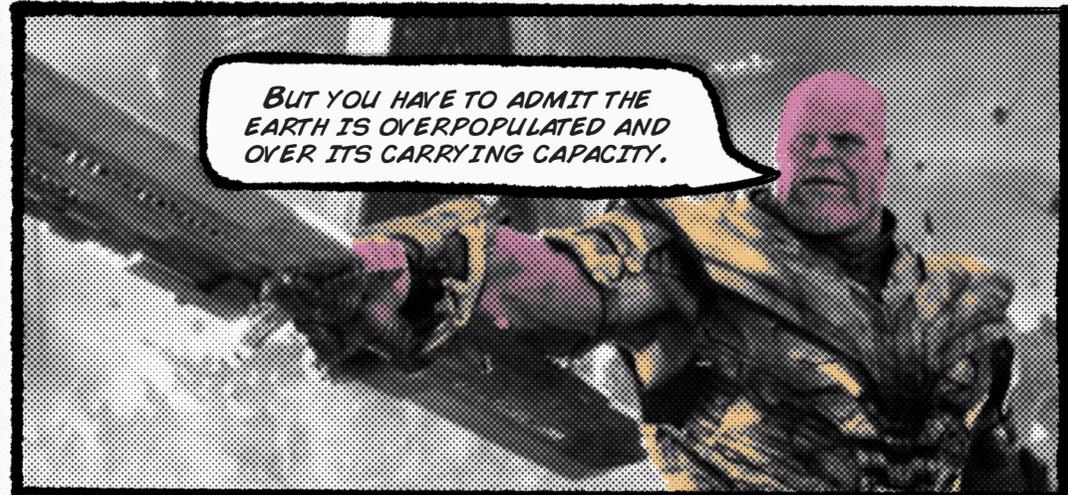


**BUT SEE, IT ISN'T.**

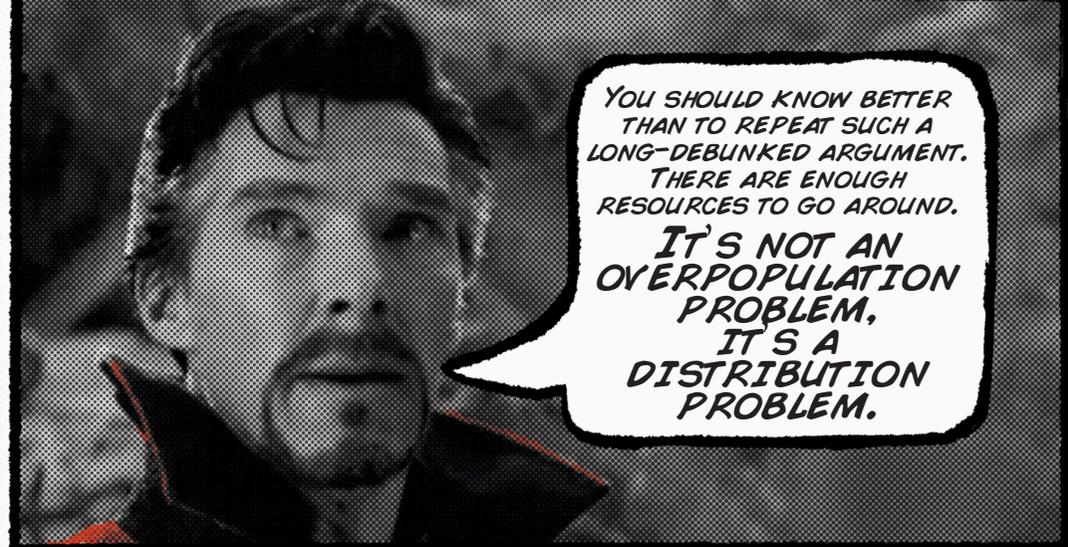
*IF YOU DESTROY HALF OF ALL LIFE, THAT INCLUDES THE RESOURCES WE ALL NEED TO LIVE.*

*THAT KIND OF DEFEATS THE PURPOSE, RIGHT?*

*PLUS, POPULATION WOULD REBOUND WITHIN 1-2 GENERATIONS AND THEN WE'D BE BACK WHERE WE STARTED.*



*BUT YOU HAVE TO ADMIT THE EARTH IS OVERPOPULATED AND OVER ITS CARRYING CAPACITY.*

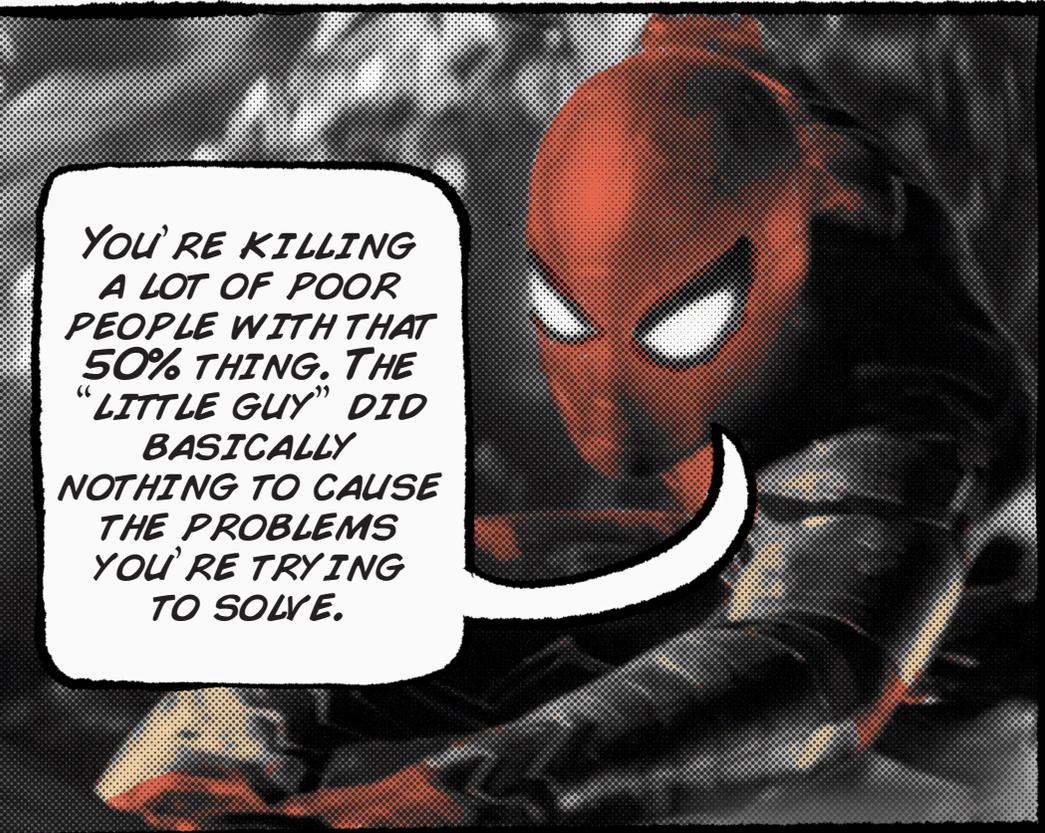


*YOU SHOULD KNOW BETTER THAN TO REPEAT SUCH A LONG-DEBUNKED ARGUMENT. THERE ARE ENOUGH RESOURCES TO GO AROUND.*

**IT'S NOT AN OVERPOPULATION PROBLEM, IT'S A DISTRIBUTION PROBLEM.**



*POPULATION WOULD ONLY BE A PROBLEM IF EVERYONE CONSUMED AT THE SAME UNSUSTAINABLE RATE. ONLY SOME PEOPLE CONSUME TOO MUCH.*



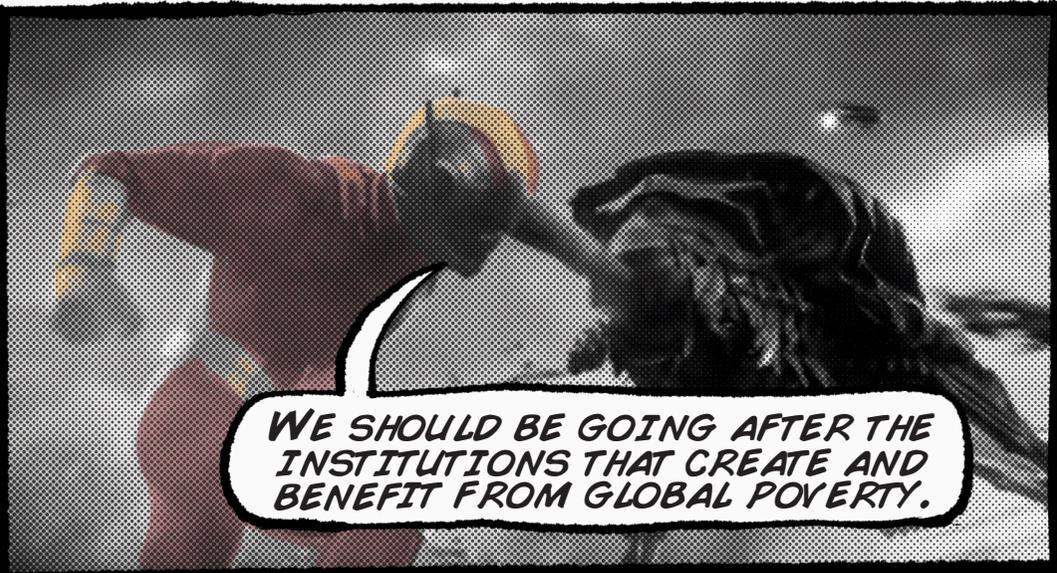
*YOU'RE KILLING  
A LOT OF POOR  
PEOPLE WITH THAT  
50% THING. THE  
"LITTLE GUY" DID  
BASICALLY  
NOTHING TO CAUSE  
THE PROBLEMS  
YOU'RE TRYING  
TO SOLVE.*



*THE GENOCIDE  
I PROPOSE IS RANDOM  
AND DISPASSIONATE.  
EVERYBODY CONTRIBUTES  
TO ENVIRONMENTAL  
DECLINE.*



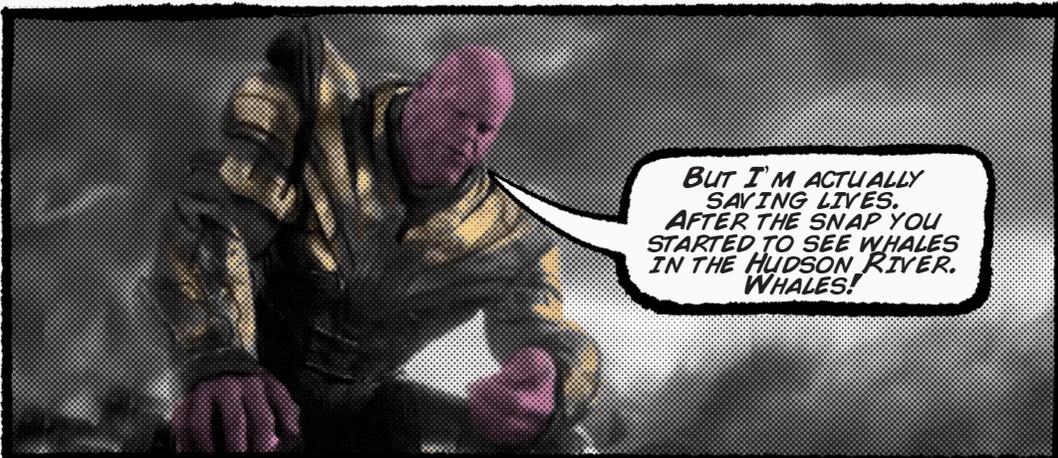
*NOT ONLY IS IT COWARDLY-  
IT'S JUST PLAIN  
WRONG TO SAY THAT WE  
ARE ALL EQUALLY TO  
BLAME FOR THE  
WORLD'S SUFFERING.*



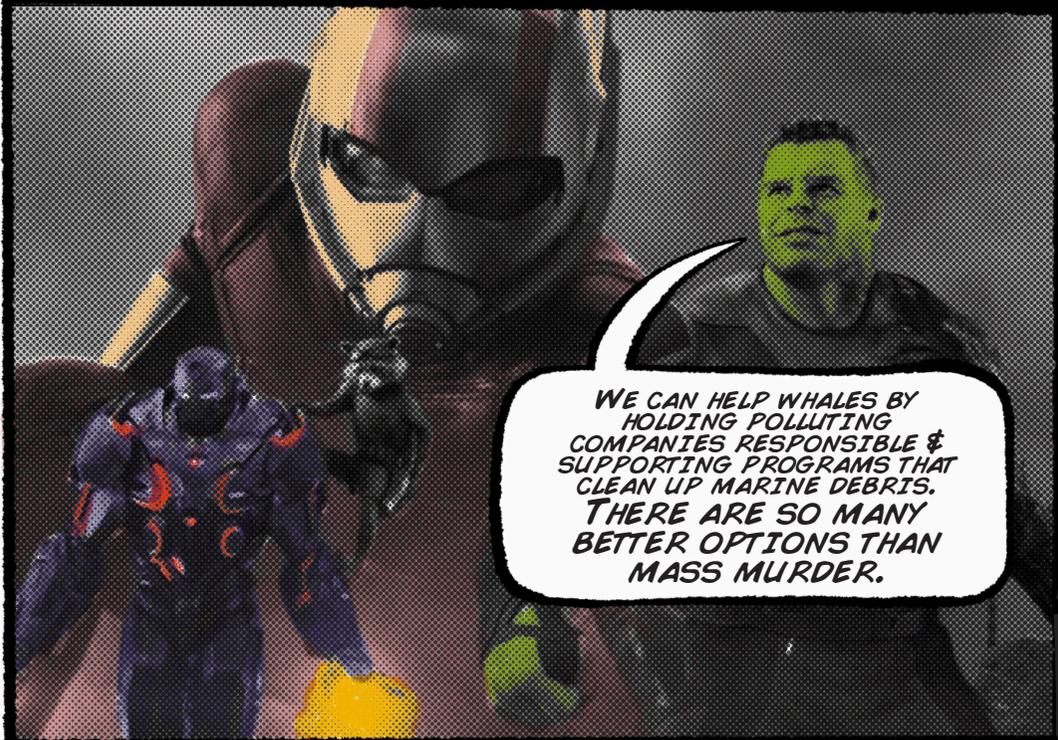
*WE SHOULD BE GOING AFTER THE  
INSTITUTIONS THAT CREATE AND  
BENEFIT FROM GLOBAL POVERTY.*



*MASS MURDER ONLY  
LEADS TO MORE VIOLENCE.  
YOU WOULD LEAVE THE  
UNIVERSE FULL OF  
RAGE AND CONFUSION.  
THAT IS NO WAY TO BUILD  
A PEACEFUL SOCIETY.*



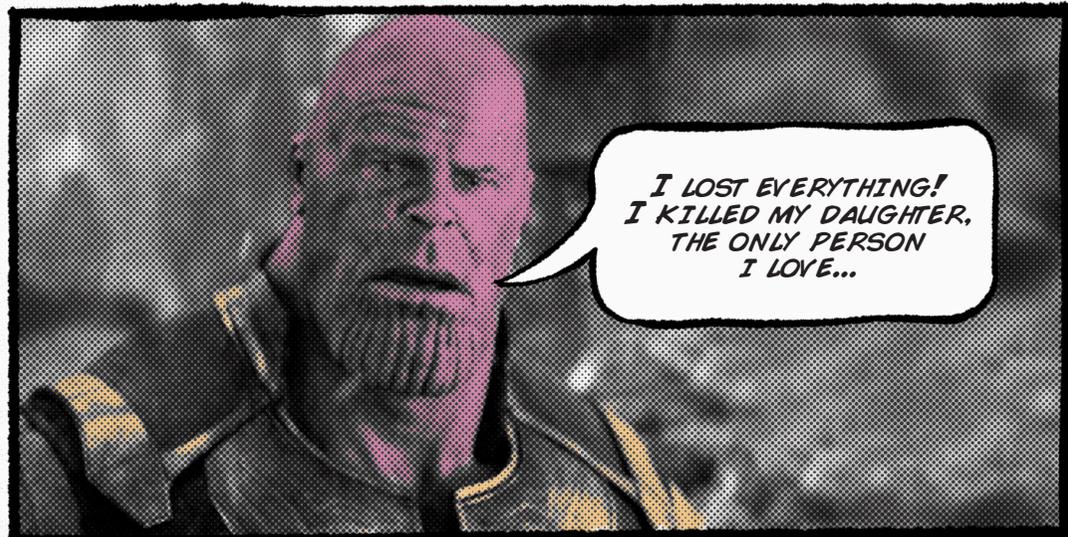
*BUT I'M ACTUALLY  
SAVING LIVES.  
AFTER THE SNAP YOU  
STARTED TO SEE WHALES  
IN THE HUDSON RIVER.  
WHALES!*



*WE CAN HELP WHALES BY  
HOLDING POLLUTING  
COMPANIES RESPONSIBLE &  
SUPPORTING PROGRAMS THAT  
CLEAN UP MARINE DEBRIS.  
THERE ARE SO MANY  
BETTER OPTIONS THAN  
MASS MURDER.*



*PLUS, THERE ARE  
WHALES IN THE HUDSON  
SOMETIMES ANYWAY.*



*I LOST EVERYTHING!  
I KILLED MY DAUGHTER,  
THE ONLY PERSON  
I LOVE...*



*THE FACT THAT YOU  
KILLED YOUR OWN  
DAUGHTER ONLY  
PROVES HOW  
**CALLOUS &  
NARCISSISTIC**  
YOU REALLY ARE,  
AND HOW YOU HAVE  
NO IDEA WHAT  
LOVE IS ALL ABOUT.*



I JUST WANTED TO HELP,  
TO SAVE THE UNIVERSE...

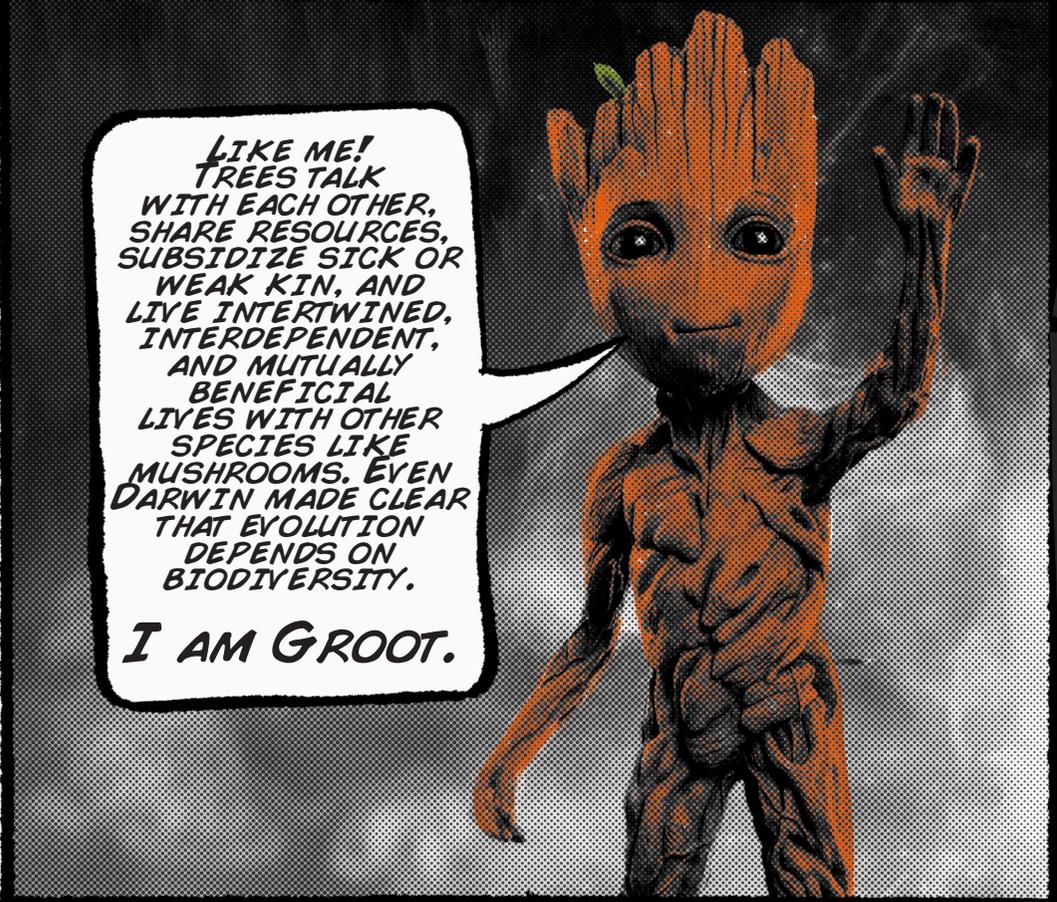


WE CAN  
ONLY SOLVE  
THE UNIVERSE'S  
PROBLEMS  
TOGETHER.  
THERE IS NO SUCH  
THING AS A  
SINGLE SAVIOR.

COMPOUND DISASTERS REQUIRE COMPOUND SOLUTIONS.



WE ALL WISH WE COULD  
SOLVE THE UNIVERSE'S  
PROBLEMS WITH A QUICK  
AND EASY FIX,  
BUT IT WILL NEVER BE THAT  
SIMPLE. YET WE ALREADY  
TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER,  
ALL THE TIME, IN ALL SORTS  
OF WAYS.



LIKE ME!  
TREES TALK  
WITH EACH OTHER,  
SHARE RESOURCES,  
SUBSIDIZE SICK OR  
WEAK KIN, AND  
LIVE INTERTWINED,  
INTERDEPENDENT,  
AND MUTUALLY  
BENEFICIAL  
LIVES WITH OTHER  
SPECIES LIKE  
MUSHROOMS. EVEN  
DARWIN MADE CLEAR  
THAT EVOLUTION  
DEPENDS ON  
BIODIVERSITY.

I AM GROOT.



*I WAS CREATED TO  
FIGHT FASCISTS.  
THAT INCLUDES  
ECO-FASCISTS.*



*YOU'RE THE FASCIST!  
YOU'RE TRYING TO  
CENSOR MY BELIEFS...*



*WELL,  
SO MUCH FOR  
DEFEATING THANOS  
IN THE  
MARKETPLACE OF IDEAS.*

**\*SNAPS FINGERS\***

## Against the Ecofascist Creep

Ecofascism is environmentalism that **1.** Advocates or accepts violence and **2.** Reinforces existing systems of power and inequality. Ecofascism suggests that certain kinds of people are naturally and exclusively entitled to control environmental resources. Ecofascism offers the same old s\*\*\* but worse. Some people proudly self-identify as ecofascists. Others unintentionally repeat busted myths that support ecofascism. Ecofascism is a slippery idea. What we do know is that ecofascist myths fuel white supremacy, ultra-nationalism, patriarchy, ableism, authoritarianism, and mass murder. They are also common misconceptions or deliberate misunderstandings about the world. Ecofascist myths can creep into actual environmentalists' rhetoric and efforts—and doom a real chance at a just, sustainable future. Our goal is to work together to recognize and remove ecofascist ideas from the way we think and talk about the world.

Thanos, the central villain in two of the highest-grossing films of all time *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018) and *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), was an ecofascist. The films suggest Thanos truly believed he was helping solve real problems and many fans felt he made some good points.

But Thanos mis-identifies the problem. Then he becomes part of the problem. His philosophies continue to normalize the creep of ecofascism.

Fascism never springs from nowhere. It creeps through our language, metaphors, visual media, narratives, and ideas of environmental health and security.<sup>1</sup>

**Here are some of the most familiar myths of ecofascism and the realities those myths cover up.**

## Everyday Ecofascist Myths

“Overpopulation is an Environmental Crisis”	14
“Humans are Naturally, Tragically, Selfish”	15
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“City People are the Problem”	17
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REALITY

## “Overpopulation is an Environmental Crisis”

**Myth:** The more people, the more environmental problems. Drastic population decline is necessary to reach climate goals, save humanity, and save the planet.

**Reality:** Fears of overpopulation are essential to ecofascist ideology. The concept of “overpopulation” originates with Thomas Malthus, a nineteenth-century imperialist who thought societal collapse would happen when population growth overtook the pace of food production. To ward off such a disaster, Malthus advocated preventing certain peoples from having children, and targeting them with plagues and starvation.

But Malthus was wrong.<sup>2</sup> Population growth is slowing<sup>3</sup> while global food production efficiency has ballooned. The world produces 1.5 times the food to feed all the people on the planet.<sup>4</sup> Hunger isn’t an “overpopulation” problem—it’s a distribution problem. Moreover, the Global South, where population continues to rise, isn’t causing climate change. 10% of the world’s wealthiest people emit 50% of the greenhouse gasses, while the poorest 50% emit less than 7%.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the crisis is caused by the wealthy few, not the many.

As Thanos’s “Snap” plan illustrates, the “overpopulation” myth can actually lead to indifference toward—or even outright support for—mass death.<sup>6</sup> To actually fight environmental destruction we should be fighting against inequalities, and for political and economic systems that prioritize human dignity and environmental regeneration.

## “Humans are Naturally, Tragically, Selfish”

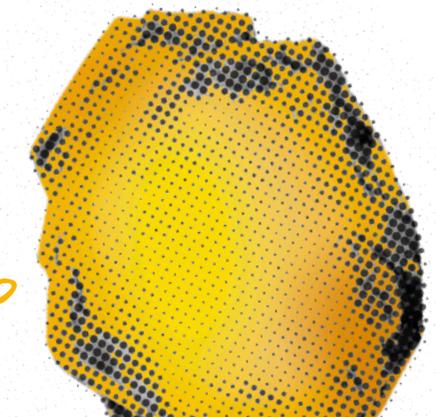
**Myth:** Humans are naturally driven by greed and they are doomed to deplete the resources of our planet.

**Reality:** This argument was popularized in the mid-twentieth century by Garrett Hardin, whose famous fable, “the tragedy of the commons,” argues all humans are selfish, will use more resources than they need, and that selfishness on a finite planet necessitates violence to survive.<sup>7</sup>

But Hardin provided no factual evidence for his claims.<sup>8</sup> Before he even published “Tragedy,” Elinor Ostrom, who won the 2009 Nobel Prize in Economics, proved him wrong.<sup>9</sup> Hardin ignored the global decline in poverty<sup>10</sup> and used scientific-sounding rhetoric to cloak his white supremacist,<sup>11</sup> anti-immigrant,<sup>12</sup> and eugenicist beliefs.<sup>13</sup> Hardin’s “Tragedy” baldly argues against reproductive freedom and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He advocated racially pure societies,<sup>14</sup> a vision that drove Hardin to lobby Congress to stop sending food to poor nations.<sup>15</sup>

The myth of universal human selfishness distracts from systemic inequality and environmental devastation. It discounts all the ways humans work together and care for one another.<sup>16</sup> When we ignore these nuances, we ignore the real problem: the primary driver of climate change is not poor people, it is the greed of carbon-intensive industries and the global 1%.<sup>17</sup>

MIND



## “Humans are a Virus”

**Myth:** Humans are like a virus or a cancer on planet Earth, and catastrophes like climate change or COVID-19 are nature’s ways of defending itself.

**Reality:** When we assign “cancerous” behavior to all humans, we limit our vision to a very recent economic system of resource exploitation. This ignores most of human history, where the majority of human beings have not caused global environmental destruction and climate collapse.<sup>18</sup>

The humans-are-a-cancer metaphor was popularized in the mid-20th century by James Lovelock’s Gaia Hypothesis in work funded by Royal Dutch Shell.<sup>19</sup> Lovelock’s metaphor mimics fossil fuel companies’ climate change disinformation campaigns: covering up the causes, shoring up profits, and continuing to harm those least responsible.<sup>20</sup> The metaphor suggests climate change is nature’s revenge, offering a simple cause-and-effect logic that suggests those who suffer deserve it.<sup>21</sup> As such, the humans-as-cancer metaphor avoids explicit racism, while it perpetuates harm by naturalizing the vastly unequal impacts of climate change.<sup>22</sup>

When we universalize humans as cancerous or a disease, we propagate a nihilism that prevents us from joining the movements fighting for more just and regenerative environmental futures.



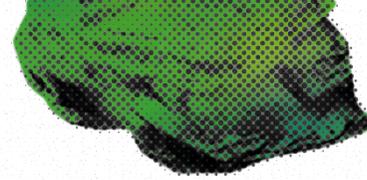
## “City People are the Problem”

**Myth:** Cities are dirty and overcrowded! “City people” don’t know how to appreciate nature, and they lack basic survival skills and the means to self-sufficiency. And cities are huge centers of pollution.

**Reality:** People who live in cities actually consume fewer resources per capita than those in the suburbs or most rural areas. They have shorter commutes, smaller homes, use public transit, and take part in other efficiency measures.<sup>23</sup> What’s more, we all have city-dwelling, working-class folks—and particularly people of color, whose communities have often borne the brunt of urban pollution—to thank for the environmental regulations that protect clean air and water both inside and outside urban areas.<sup>24</sup> Environmental justice coalitions have been fighting to keep their neighborhoods clean for decades, and their victories have inspired broader environmental regulations beyond the city.<sup>25</sup>

That’s because many people who live close to or work for polluting industries don’t have much of a say in how those industries operate: a slim minority of owners and managers make those decisions—and often live outside the city themselves.<sup>26</sup> On top of that, many of the biggest carbon emitters and other polluters—industrial agriculture and coal, for example—operate on sites outside the city.

Some cities, or at least parts of cities, can still seem dirty or overcrowded. But this is the product of historical urban planning policies, segregation and redlining, and economics.<sup>27</sup>



TIME

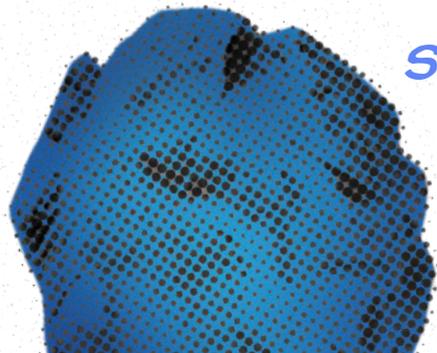
## “Strong Borders Protect Our Scarce Resources”

**Myth:** Without strong borders, immigrants and environmental refugees will flood nations like the USA, and overburden these countries’ limited resources.

**Reality:** Border walls allow people to imagine that countries are islands or “lifeboats,” sealed off from the rest of the world, even though nations are constantly exchanging people, resources, ideas, and ecologies.<sup>28</sup> Instead of preserving environmental resources and civil liberties, borders erode both.<sup>29</sup>

Climate change is a crisis for migrants, not a crisis of migrants. Most people displaced by climate chaos (e.g. desertification, rising seas, extreme weather) move within borders, not across them.<sup>30</sup> Weaponized borders, militarized police, rogue militias, and hardline anti-immigrant policies don’t address the real threats posed by climate change; instead they target those made most vulnerable to its effects.<sup>31</sup>

Fascism always blames social problems on “outsiders” and “others” who must be kept out or rooted out of the body politic by a strongman leader and his military police.<sup>32</sup> Ecofascism is no different—ecofascists have a long history of scapegoating immigrants and migrants for environmental damage.<sup>33</sup> Fears that waves of “climate refugees” will swamp the limited capacity of wealthy nations or unleash political unrest is only the latest version of this sort of xenophobia.<sup>34</sup> There are no climate barbarians at the gates—migration is a human right.<sup>35</sup>



SPACE

## “Environmental and Social Collapse are Desirable”

**Myth:** Environmental and social collapse are not only inevitable but desirable. Nothing will change until everything goes down in flames first—and if people have to die, then so be it: that’s just less strain on resources and the environment.

**Reality:** Societal change is necessary, but things like environmental catastrophe, pandemics, and economic downturns often serve the goals of “disaster capitalism,” enriching those most responsible for our ecological predicament at the expense of those who lack a safety net.<sup>36</sup> Such events might cause a momentary dent in production, emission, and consumption, but those with the most social and political power are frequently the ones who benefit the most from a catastrophe.<sup>37</sup> For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic the world’s ten richest men doubled their fortunes while incomes fell for 99% of humanity.<sup>38</sup> And simply celebrating a dip in population likewise pretends that all human lives are the problem—rather than exploitative political and economic systems.<sup>39</sup>

Grassroots environmental justice movements from marginalized communities offer models for how to transform social systems without requiring total collapse and widespread suffering!<sup>40</sup> Indigenous sovereignty movements globally illustrate ways of working beyond the parameters of the state and racial capitalism, and abolitionist frameworks center community care, rather than the exploitation of resources and human individuals.<sup>41</sup> They have proven, and continue to prove, that other worlds are possible—without widespread ecological collapse and human death.

## Let's Discuss

1. Does Thanos's ecofascism make him more or less sympathetic as a supervillain? Why or why not?
2. What are the core fallacies of ecofascism? How does ecofascism misconstrue ecology, economics, and social inequality?
3. Which of the ecofascist myths have you seen in media and pop culture?
4. Have you seen ecofascist myths outside of "environmental" discussions? Where?
5. What are some ways you could counteract ecofascist ideas in your own life?



## Against the Ecofascist Creep Tactics and Strategies

- **If You See It, Say It:** Debunk ecofascist myths when they "creep" into environmental rhetoric and movements.
- **Learn About Everyday Ways to Fight Fascism:** <https://spencersunshine.com/2020/08/27/fortyways/>
- **Support Landback:** Indigenous peoples comprise 5% of the population but protect 80% of the world's biodiversity.<sup>42</sup> LandBack is an efficient, ethical, and diverse strategy that has already seen private and public lands returned to Indigenous caretakers.<sup>43</sup>
- **Contribute to:** Movements that prioritize Indigenous sovereignty, the abolition of racist institutions, and visionary long-term socio-environmental planning. Indigenous land protectors have blocked or delayed projects equivalent to one quarter of the U.S. and Canada's annual carbon output.<sup>44</sup>
- **Think and Strategize at Multiple Scales:** Systemic change entails the local, regional, national, and global.
- **Challenge Borders:** Demilitarize, decriminalize, and abolish borders.
- **Support Anti-war Movements:** The U.S. military industrial complex is the #1 polluter and carbon emitter globally.
- **Organize Locally and Invest in Mutual Aid Initiatives:** Create and foster communities of care. Think and plan outside of state power. "What we practice on the small scale reverberates on the large scale" (adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy*.)
- **Let the Youth Lead the Way:** Join or support youth climate movements. Mentor and listen to young people!

## Further Reading

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- Peter Staudenmaier, *Ecology Contested: Environmental Politics from Left to Right* (AK Press, 2021)
- Kyle Whyte, "Indigenous Climate Change & Climate Justice: Teaching Materials and Advanced Bibliography," SEAS: School for Environment and Sustainability, University of Michigan, <https://kylewhyte.seas.umich.edu/climate-justice/>
- Carl A. Zimring, *Clean and White: A History of Environmental Racism in the United States* (New York University Press, (2015)

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Alexander Reid Ross, *Against the Fascist Creep*, (AK Press, 2017).

<sup>2</sup>Michael Shermer, "Why Malthus is Still Wrong," *Scientific American* (1 May 2016), <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-malthus-is-still-wrong>. See also Ian Angus and Simon Butler, *Too Many People?: Population, Immigration, and the Environmental Crisis* (Haymarket Books, 2011); Anne Hendrixson and Betsy Hartman, "Threats and Burdens: Challenging Scarcity-driven Narratives of 'Overpopulation,'" *Geoforum* (vol. 101, 2019, pp. 250–159); Jordan Dyett and Cassidy Thomas, "Overpopulation Discourse: Patriarchy, Racism, and the Spectre of Ecofascism," *Perspectives on Global Development* (vol. 18, 2019, pp. 205–224). For a summary of this research, see the special issue on Populationism in *Gender, Place, & Culture* (vol. 27, no. 3, 2020).

<sup>3</sup>Heather Alberro, "Debunking Overpopulation," *Ecologist* (16 April 2020), <https://theecologist.org/2020/apr/16/debunking-overpopulation>.

<sup>4</sup>Eric Holt-Giménez, et al., "We Already Grow Enough Food for 10 Billion People . . . and Still Can't End Hunger," *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture* (vol. 36, no. 6, 2012, pp. 595–598).

<sup>5</sup>Fred Pearce, "Consumption Dwarfs Population as Main Environmental Threat," *Yale Environment 360* (13 April 2009), [https://e360.yale.edu/features/consumption\\_dwarfs\\_population\\_as\\_main\\_environmental\\_threat](https://e360.yale.edu/features/consumption_dwarfs_population_as_main_environmental_threat).

<sup>6</sup>Hannes Bergthaller writes that limits "lie not so much in the availability of resources, but rather in the finite capacity of the Earth system to absorb our waste," in "Population, Ecology, and the Malthusian Imagination: An Introduction," *Ecozon@* (vol. 9, no. 1, 2018, p. 6).

<sup>7</sup>thecollective, "Ecofascism, 'Overpopulation,' and Total Transformation," *It's Going Down* (19 February 2021), <https://itsgoingdown.org/ecofascism-overpopulation-and-total-transformation>.

<sup>8</sup>Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* (vol. 162, no. 3859, 1968, pp. 1243–1248).

<sup>9</sup>Hardin, especially in his idea of a "naturally selfish" gene, uses the example of common grazing lands in medieval and post medieval England, which Hardin mischaracterizes as free-for-all grazing sites where people took as much as they could. Instead, they were well regulated by local associations, according to Rob Nixon. See "The

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<sup>10</sup>Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge University Press, 1999). See also Elinor Ostrom, et al., "Revisiting the Commons: Local Lessons, Global Challenges," *Science* (vol. 284, no. 5412, 1999, pp. 278–282); Rob Nixon, "Neoliberalism, Genre, and 'The Tragedy of the Commons,'" *PMLA* (vol. 127, no. 3, 2012, pp. 593–599); Robert Boyd, et al., "Tragedy Revisited," *Policy Forum, Science* (vol. 362, no. 6420, 2018), <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aaw0911>; Matto Mildenberger, "The Tragedy of the Tragedy of the Commons," *Scientific American* (23 April 2019), <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/voices/the-tragedy-of-the-tragedy-of-the-commons/>.

<sup>11</sup>Timothy Taylor, "Tragedy of the Commons: 50 Years Later," *BBN Times* (19 December 2018), <https://www.bbnimes.com/global-economy/tragedy-of-the-commons-50-years-later?fbclid=IwAR19b-9pl-esrQS98l73iGQlZ3qtKDukxE3H07Bmhox5xjezziphwqmEZ3JE>

<sup>12</sup>"Garrett Hardin," SPLC: Southern Poverty Law Center, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/garrett-hardin>

<sup>13</sup>Alex Amend, "First as Tragedy, Then as Fascism," *The Baffler* (19 September 2019), <https://thebaffler.com/latest/first-as-tragedy-then-as-fascism-amend>.

<sup>14</sup>Amend.

<sup>15</sup>Hardin.

<sup>16</sup>Mildenberger; Nixon, "The Less Selfish Gene."

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