



# Marilyn Williamson Endowed Distinguished Faculty Fellowship Lecture

Marsha Richmond, Professor, Department of History

Friday, January 25, 2019

McGregor Memorial Conference Center, Room B

2:00 PM - 4:30 PM

Moderator

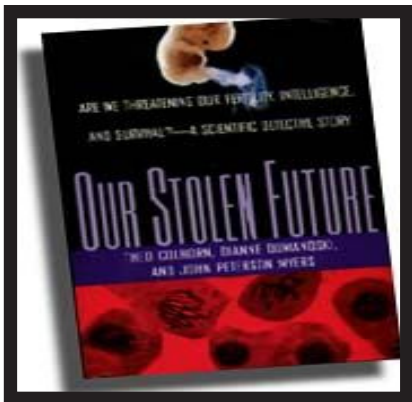
Nicholas Schroek, Director of Clinical Programs, University of Detroit  
Mercy School of Law



Marsha Richmond

## SENTINEL OF SCIENCE: THEO COLBORN AND THE DISCOVERY OF ENDOCRINE DISRUPTING CHEMICALS

In the late 1980s, Dr. Theo Colborn (1927-2014), a World Wildlife Fund (WWF) biologist studying Great Lakes fauna, identified a disturbing pattern that previously eluded scientists: perplexing cases of developmental abnormalities in wildlife that interfered with their viability. Alarmed by this apparently new environmental threat, Colborn, with the support of the WWF, convened a meeting of almost two dozen leading biologists and medical researchers in 1991. The outcome was the Wingspread Consensus Statement of 1992 announcing chemically induced endocrine disruption. This was the first realization that manmade industrial chemicals were entering the food chain and had the potential to alter developmental pathways by interfering with normal hormone expression. In 1996, Colborn and two co-authors published the popular book *Our Stolen Future: Are We Threatening Our Fertility, Intelligence, and Survival? A Scientific Detective Story*. Like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), *Our Stolen Future* warn the public about the danger of industrial chemicals, but ultimately did not have a comparable impact owing to the chemical industry's savvy strategies that undercut the federal government's regulatory process. Until her death in 2014, Colborn served as a tireless sentinel of science, working to advance scientific research on environmental disrupting chemicals (EDCs), restrict their release into the environment, and educate the public about their harm. This project is the first full-scale historical examination of Colborn's scientific career and the science of endocrine disruption, contributing both to scholarship on women in the life sciences and to environmental history.



For more information about the  
Humanities Center, call  
(313) 577-5471 or visit  
<http://research2.wayne.edu/hum/>