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# NPQ

NONPROFIT QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

# CLIMATE JUSTICE

*A Movement for Life*

**The Movements Leading the Work**

+

**Designing for Climate Justice**

**Rebuilding Indigenous Economies of Care**

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"Long Live Our 4 Billion Year-Old Mother" (detail) by Jess X. Snow/www.jessxsnow.com

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# "THE THING THAT STICKS OUT TO ME MOST: THEY CARE ABOUT WHO WE ARE. THAT'S PRICELESS."

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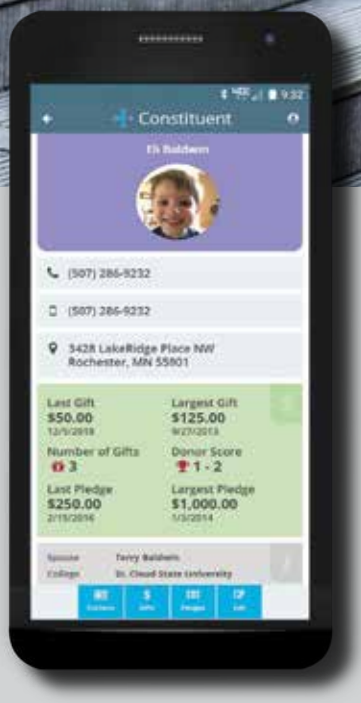


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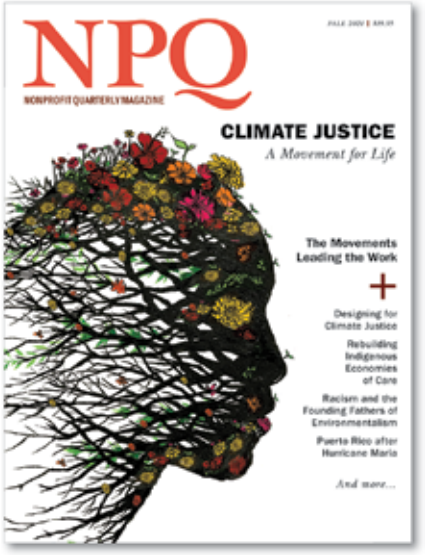


Dear Readers,

**Movements around the world are working to wake everyone up to the macro and micro realities of a planet and its inhabitants on the brink of collapse—a collapse that *does not have to happen.***

This issue of the magazine begins by looking at the Sunrise Movement's Green New Deal, Movement for Black Lives' Red Black and Green New Deal, and The Red Nation's Red Deal—the three leading climate justice movements in the United States. It also uncovers the injustices and brutalities that are at the roots of climate change as well as environmentalism and environmental organizations. We end with a frontline example of where we are now in Puerto Rico, post–Hurricane Maria.

In between, we dig into ways policy could be brought to bear to help get us where we need to be; revisit the ongoing Indigenous erasure and racist underpinnings of traditional environmentalism; and recognize all who are and have been for decades, if not generations, on the front lines of extreme environmental damage.

We also bring forward Indigenous economies of care, recognizing those who have always done their utmost to be wise stewards: Indigenous communities and movements. They describe the current status quo in stark terms, but they also offer hope.

We invite you to join us on this journey.

*Cyndi Suarez*
*President and Editor in Chief*
NPQ

# Climate Justice
## A Global Movement for Life

*by Cyndi Suarez*

Human evolution has been about getting more out of life, or increasing life—span, health, and joy.[1] But, we have reached a point of unsustainability, when there is more life being taken out of systems than is being put in, and so many are in collapse, and anxiety is the norm.[2] In order to reverse this trend and continue to have life, we must mount the biggest, deepest social justice movement ever—a global climate justice movement.

Social movements tend to develop the collective vision for the work, so a good place to start this exploration is to look at what climate justice movement leaders are saying is necessary, and if that gets us closer to the life-giving systems and practices we need now.

### THE GREEN NEW DEAL

House Resolution 109, or the Green New Deal, is a U.S. congressional resolution to "mobilize every aspect of American society to 100% clean and renewable energy, guarantee living-wage jobs for anyone who needs one, and a just transition for both workers and frontline communities—all in the next 10 years."[3]

"OUR COLLECTIVE VISIONS OF LIBERATION" (DETAIL) BY JESS X. SNOW/WWW.JESSXSNOW.COM (ASSISTED BY WO CHAN, ZORAIDA INGLES, SONJA JOHN, AND DIANA DIAZ, AND WITH TEXT BY SOOAH KWAK)


Climate justice has the potential to unify all other calls for justice, but only if we recognize this and mobilize around it.

**"We should be able to add our voice to the problems and solutions that impact our family and our community's well being. We should be able to build a future around the things that are important to us."**—Movement for Black Lives

The idea of a Green New Deal emerged during the 2007–2008 financial crisis in both the United States and United Kingdom. The United Kingdom–based Green New Deal Group published the first report laying out its key elements: "reining in the power of big finance and transforming the way that government manages the economy with a plan to transform the economy and society to meet the challenges of climate change."[4]

The idea was reintroduced in 2018 by U.S. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the Sunrise Movement, "a movement of young people to stop climate change and create millions of jobs in the process."[5] Director of Climate Policy at the Roosevelt Institute Rhiana Gunn-Wright, one of the primary authors, a young Black woman, told *Teen Vogue* that when she started working on the Green New Deal, she "had no idea it was going to turn into what it did"—something that gave young people hope.[6]

Gunn-Wright elucidates intersectionality when she describes how COVID put a fine point on how the movement sees the problem:

> I remember looking at the map of COVID hot spots in that first wave and being like, all those are environmental justice hot spots. Those are places with disproportionate levels of air pollution and, honestly, all types of pollution in Black and brown and Indigenous communities. Then when something like a pandemic happens, the people that you need to be essential workers to keep the economy going are the same people that you have made incredibly vulnerable to all sorts of health challenges because of environmental injustice.[7]

Representative Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Edward Markey published the Green New Deal bill in February 2019. However, while the Green New Deal acknowledges that environmental destruction "exacerbated systemic racial, regional, social, environmental, and economic injustices" and calls on the government to "promote justice and equity,"[8] it is largely an economic document focused on decarbonization.

In August 2020, Representative Ocasio-Cortez, alongside then-Senator Kamala Harris, introduced the Climate Equity Act to ensure that climate policy addresses the specific needs of "communities that have experienced environmental injustice or are vulnerable to climate injustice."[9] The bill established a Climate and Environmental Equity Office within the Congressional Budget Office, which is charged with preparing an analysis for each bill or resolution addressing environmental or climate change that includes the bill's impacts on frontline communities.

The bill also established an Office of Climate and Environmental Justice Accountability within the Office of Management and Budget to: (1) "measure the direct and indirect costs of environmental and climate regulations on frontline communities," (2) review agencies' investments to determine if they "have an environmental or climate change nexus" and ensure that "frontline communities benefit from the investment," and (3) "represent the views of frontline communities in rulemaking."[10]

## THE RED BLACK AND GREEN NEW DEAL

Meanwhile, the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) has been highlighting how many of the issues facing Black people and communities are climate justice issues—that is, issues at the intersection of the climate crisis and growing systemic racial inequities. This year, it launched the Red Black and Green New Deal (RBG New Deal)[11]—a multiyear, multi-issue initiative to organize Black people to take action on mitigating the impact of the climate on Black lives.

Its national mandate reads like a Black manifesto:

> At The Movement for Black Lives, we believe all Black people have the right to determine our own futures; where we can earn a decent living, purchase a home, raise a family and live in a safe community with access to reliable, clean and affordable services. We should be able to add our voice to the problems and solutions that impact our family and our community's well being. We should be able to build a future around the things that are important to us, leaving a legacy of generational and cultural value for those that come after us.[12]

**"While making up only 5 percent of the world's population, Indigenous peoples also protect 80 percent of the planet's biodiversity."**
—Nick Estes, The Red Nation

Its Vision for Black Lives—"a comprehensive and visionary policy agenda for the post-Ferguson Black liberation movement"—is endorsed "by over 50 Black-led organizations in the M4BL ecosystem and hundreds of allied organizations and individuals."[13] Its goals are achieved by the various campaigns it inspires across the country.

Its various policies align around six planks:

1. End the war on Black people
2. Political power
3. Community control
4. Economic justice
5. Divest/Invest
6. Reparations

Each plank has its own set of policies that focus on the needs of those most impacted. For example, the plank "End the war on Black people" includes policies focusing on youth; women; trans, queer, gender nonconforming, and intersex people; disabled people; and migrants.[14]

The RBG New Deal Agenda "puts Black liberation at the center of the global climate struggle, and addresses the impacts of climate change and environmental racism on Black communities."[15]

## THE RED DEAL

Many young activists were inspired to fight for climate justice by their experiences at the Standing Rock resistance camp in 2016, including Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.[16] Writing for the *Guardian*, Rebecca Solnit notes that young climate activists reported "encountering young Native people whose experiences at the protest site had encouraged them to dream of new possibilities and take actions that might otherwise have seemed out of reach."[17]

The Indigenous movement that has grown out of these frontline battles has coalesced into The Red Nation, an organization "dedicated to the liberation of Native peoples from capitalism and colonialism," who have authored the Red Deal.[18]

The Red Deal adds something very critical to the climate justice agenda—it moves decolonization from the margins to the center.

It focuses on, as Nick Estes, one of the cofounders of The Red Nation, writes, "creating just relations between human and nonhuman worlds on a planet thoroughly devastated by capitalism." It seeks nothing less than "the radical transformation of all social relations between humans and earth."[19]

The Red Deal also centers the justice owed to Indigenous peoples by focusing on Indigenous treaty rights, land restoration, sovereignty, self-determination, decolonization, and liberation. Its demand for a moratorium on *all* new fossil fuel extraction is central to both climate justice and Indigenous peoples' justice.

And, importantly, the Red Deal centers Indigenous peoples as leaders of climate justice. "While making up only 5 percent of the world's population, Indigenous peoples also protect 80 percent of the planet's biodiversity."[20] And they have been criminalized in the process, which is why decriminalization of Indigenous caretakers is seen as a fundamental priority in the battle to save the planet.

Understanding firsthand the violence that follows any challenge to the fossil fuel industry, the Red Deal calls for an immediate and long-term mass social revolution that moves beyond the economic sphere to the cultural.

Further, this mass movement needs to understand and prepare for the potential violation of any new deals. Native peoples know firsthand our government's history of violating deals, or treaties.

This deep, long-term mass movement requires "a revolution of values that re-centers relationships to one another and earth over profits."[21] For Indigenous peoples, a new, green economy is a caretaking economy.

Climate justice has the potential to unify all other calls for justice, but only if we recognize this and mobilize around it. Prioritizing projects that enact these visions may be helped by understanding where we are in the cycle of social change. In *Assembly*, social change theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri write:

> The political division of labor within revolutionary and liberation movements between leaders and followers, strategy and tactics, rests on an appraisal of the capacities of the different actors. Only the few, the thinking goes, have the intelligence, knowledge, and vision needed for strategic planning and therefore vertical, centralized decision-making structures are required. What if we were able to verify, instead, that capacities for strategy today are becoming more generalized? What if democratic, horizontal social movements were developing the ability to grasp the entire social field and craft lasting political projects? . . . [R]ecognizing today's changing social capacities allows us to reverse the polarity of the dynamic, and that shift could have extraordinary effects. Our first call is thus to invert the roles: *strategy to the movements and tactics to leadership*.[22]

These movements are indeed taking the lead on strategy, and offering visions of a living world based on relationships of care.

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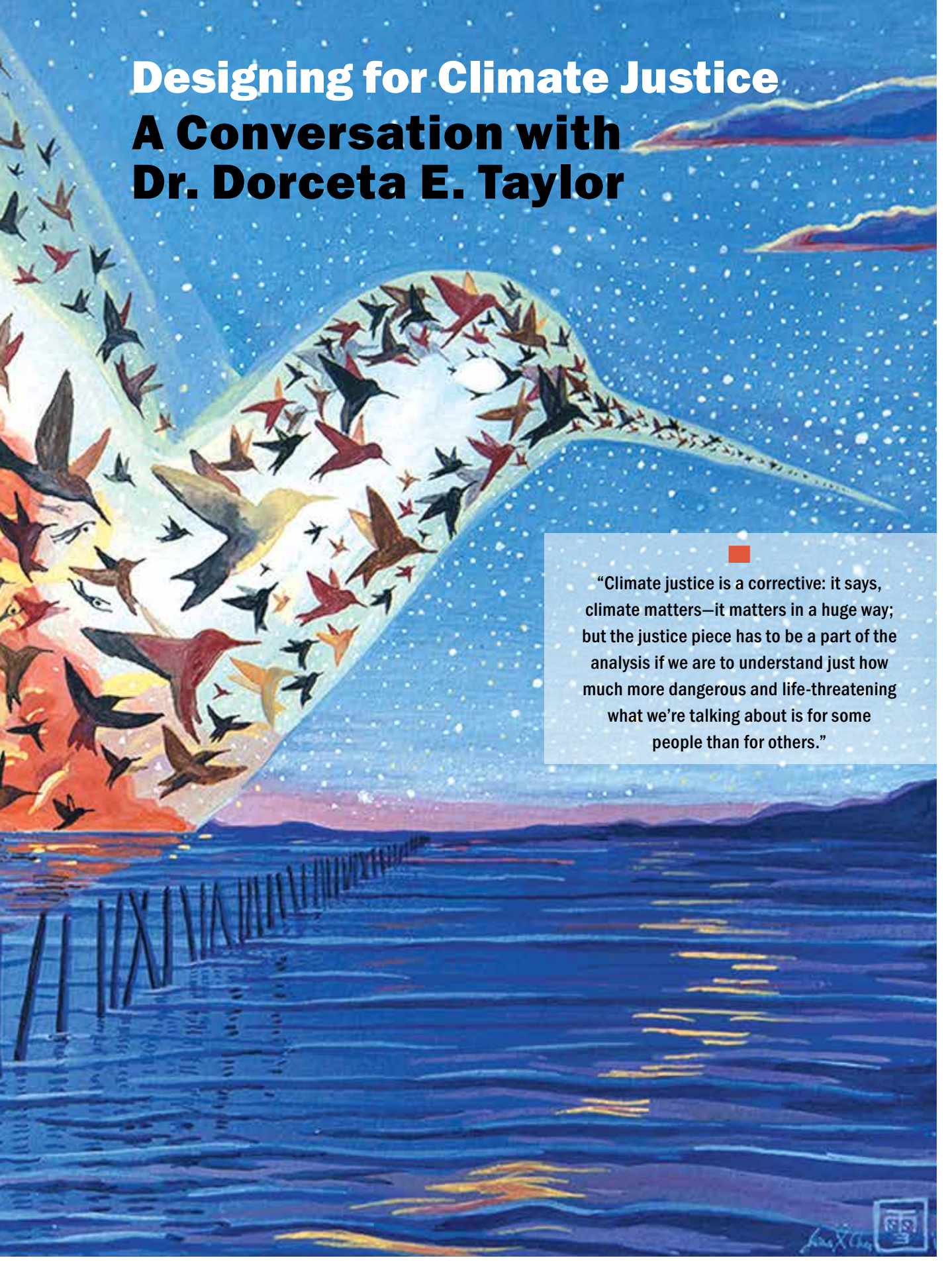
# Designing for Climate Justice

# A Conversation with Dr. Dorceta E. Taylor



"Climate justice is a corrective: it says, climate matters—it matters in a huge way; but the justice piece has to be a part of the analysis if we are to understand just how much more dangerous and life-threatening what we're talking about is for some people than for others."

*In this conversation,* Nonprofit Quarterly*'s president and editor in chief, Cyndi Suarez, and preeminent environmental justice scholar Dorceta E. Taylor discuss the distinction between the climate change and climate justice narratives, why the distinction is critical, and what's needed in order to address the climate crisis in ways that are equitable, effective, and transformative on a global scale.*

*Dr. Taylor is senior associate dean of diversity, equity, and inclusion and a professor at the Yale School of the Environment. In 2014, Dr. Taylor authored the landmark national report* The State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations: Mainstream NGOs, Foundations, Government Agencies*, which looked at close to two hundred environmental organizations in the United States and brought into focus the staggering injustices for people of color vis-à-vis these organizations. Dr. Taylor has published such influential books as, most recently,* The Rise of the American Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege, and Environmental Protection *(Duke University Press, 2016), which examines how conservation ideas and politics are tied to social dynamics such as racism, classism, and gender discrimination.*

*Cyndi Suarez is* NPQ*'s president and editor in chief. She is author of* The Power Manual: How to Master Complex Power Dynamics*, in which she outlines a new theory and practice of power. She has worked as a strategy and innovation consultant with a focus on networks and platforms for social movements. Her studies were in feminist theory and organizational development for social change.*

**Cyndi Suarez:** **Welcome, Dr. Taylor.**

**Dorceta Taylor:** Thank you very much for having me.

**CS: I'd like to begin with distinguishing between climate change and climate justice, as I know you make this distinction in your research. Why do you make this distinction? How do we define these terms?**

**DT:** Great question. When we think of climate change—or the way climate change has historically been framed—it looks at the science, and it looks at how changing climate and the conditions related to that might impact us as a global species, and impact trees, forests, wildlife, et cetera. What that framing doesn't do very well, or at all, is take into consideration disproportionality. Changing climate is affecting humanity, but it affects people differently. Take the U.S, for instance. There are disproportionate impacts on Native communities in Alaska, along the Pacific Northwest coast, and in California. If you go to the Florida Gulf Coast or up along the South Atlantic, you see disproportionate impacts there, too—the effects of rising seawater, bigger storms, more frequent storms. You see those events disproportionately along the East Coast and the Gulf Coast, and you see them affecting Black people in those communities in very negative ways, disproportionately with respect to how they affect higher-income whites, for instance.

The discourse around climate change points out the challenges that we're facing and the imminency of the problem and the dangers—but it completely misses the intersectional analysis of how poverty, race, and class are going to make some people more vulnerable.



DETAIL OF "UNTIL WE ALL ARE FREE" BY JESS X. SNOW/WWW.JESSXSNOW.COM

Internationally, we see some of the same events. There is sea-level rise in Europe, too. But if we look at what's happening in Africa, in Southeast Asia, in island nations, we're seeing much more significant impact being meted out in Brown communities, Black communities, and poor and low-income communities than in some of the upper-income communities, where people can afford to leave, to beat the storm. They can fly out in their jets; they can get on their yachts. *They can leave spaces. They can migrate to other countries.* So, climate justice is a corrective: it says, climate matters—it matters in a huge way; but the justice piece has to be a part of the analysis if we are to understand just how much more dangerous and life-threatening what we're talking about is for some people than for others.

**CS: You've also looked at the organizations, and the funding, and seen that disconnect replicated there, right? Can you talk a bit about what you found?**

**DT:** Our preliminary analysis shows a huge disparity in the amount of grant dollars going to low-income communities of color, and disparities related to the race of the person who runs the organization. If you are white and you run an environmental organization, your average grant dollars are a lot higher than if you're a person of color running an environmental organization. We're also seeing these disparities according to race and topic.

Take, for instance, three organizations—two led by people of color and a third headed by a white leader. If one of these, the first, works on climate justice or environmental justice, their average grant dollars are lower than those of the second organization, which works on issues unrelated to equity and justice. And we see quite clearly that if we take organizations that work solely on equity and justice—so, environmental justice, climate justice, et cetera—but the head of that organization is white, like the third, they get more grant dollars than if they are people of color. So, we're seeing these disparities that no one's really thought to look for in the bigger picture. We also see a difference if the organization focuses most of its effort on people of color. Regardless of whether it's led by whites or not, it gets lower grant dollars than if it doesn't focus on people of color as the main target group.

We're going to be doing much more detailed analysis later this year, and on a much larger scale. We will examine about thirty thousand grants made by several hundred grantmakers, over a five-year period. But those are the dynamics showing up—dynamics that, for instance, a recently formed group called Donors of Color Network has picked up on and started to question why it's happening,[1] and is asking: How can we expect to mitigate climate change, mitigate some of the dangers of environmental injustice, if we're not funding the frontline communities that need more help and are also doing significant work in this area? Why isn't the funding there? The Donors of Color Network has put out an ask to environmental foundations to dedicate at least 30 percent of their funding dollars to low-income communities, communities of color, communities/organizations led by people of color.[2]

**CS: I'm wondering what you see as the inversion that's needed—and where it's needed the most—where there are the least resources. What do you see being the trajectory if we keep going this way?**

**DT:** If we keep going this way, we're going to hell in a handbasket. And we probably won't even have a basket to go to hell in. We are in big trouble. Because, as we started the conversation, these communities were being hardest hit by some of the mega events that we've been seeing—events like Katrina. We saw Maria, how devastating it was to Puerto Rico, to the Virgin Islands, to other parts of the Caribbean. We see these mega tornadoes, tsunamis that are incredibly dangerous and

**"How can we expect to mitigate climate change, mitigate some of the dangers of environmental injustice, if we're not funding the frontline communities that need more help and are also doing significant work in this area?"**

**“If people are forced to leave these communities every time they get devastated, you’re also just wiping out your human infrastructure, your organizational infrastructure. It makes very little sense.”**

that do extensive damage in communities. So, if these are the same communities that are getting very little funding, they simply will not be able to recover; they won’t be able to have that resilience to bounce back, and bounce back either to the same level or better. The capacity is wiped out. If people are forced to leave these communities every time they get devastated, you’re also just wiping out your human infrastructure, your organizational infrastructure. It makes very little sense.

The other thing that we see happening when we look at funding is what people of color are asked to do with the amount of funding they get. If you give an organization $100,000, for instance, and you’re asking them to do youth engagement, work around disparities in health exposures, work around food justice, you’re asking them to do eight or nine things with $100,000 (all of which require a lot more than $100,000 to do), then you’re really reducing the effectiveness of those activists and those communities. The funding is too little and the ask is too big. If you look at Big Green organizations—your top ten/top twenty environmental organizations—they will usually get $2 or $3 million. And they’re asked to put that money to one or two issues. So their asks are very targeted, they get money for very targeted actions—whereas people-of-color organizations, organizations in low-income communities, are getting a tenth of the money and being asked to do maybe three or four times more work.

**CS: I was in Puerto Rico last year, and in the five days that I was there I saw the whole electricity system shut down on the island. It was during the earthquakes. And I was talking to a colleague of mine earlier this week who does environmental work in Puerto Rico, and I asked him what it’s been like since Hurricane Maria, especially after COVID. And he told me that he and his wife went away for a vacation, and that when they came back, it hit them, what they had gotten used to living with. And that it is now something that people are used to living with. Electrical poles that are leaning and could fall on people and kill them. Electricity going out twice a week, which apparently is the average there now. Water that is not really safe to drink. Streets filled with holes. Because there’s not much government infrastructure anymore.**

**When I went there, it was very stressful, I have to say. It’s like being in a place that has just had a huge event—except it’s years later. And my colleague said that people have gotten used to it. It’s a very politically engaged community, but apparently there are few civic engagement or leadership development groups, and no one’s really funding for organizing.**

**DT:** Foundations, philanthropy, are very uncomfortable with putting money into communities of color as general support grants. Something like organizing would come under “general support,” which you can use for staffing, for mobilizing the community, for paying community members—you can do a variety of things with it. Frankly, philanthropy does not trust Brown and Black people enough with the funds to put those kinds of dollars in. They will always trust Big Green organizations, big nonprofits that are loaded down with staff. They trust those organizations enough to give them a million, two million, three million, five million, but they will not put that kind of money in communities of color, in organizations within communities of color. We’re perfectly capable of managing that money, managing it appropriately, and getting bigger impact. Because those are the communities that know how to really get people to the table, get the work done, who know what the problems are.

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**CS: So, let's imagine we had that. I know you have a lot of great ideas and recommendations for what can be done if we invest in these communities. You've talked about how one of the reasons climate work is so racialized is because of where people of color live and the unequal policies. Can you talk about what you're seeing and what could actually change if we did invest in these communities?**

**DT:** There are some innovative things going on around the country, even with such limited funding and trust from foundations. Communities of color are not waiting to die by the ocean or be drowned out of their communities, like what we saw during Katrina, and Maria, and in Houston—people are not waiting anymore. So, if you look across the country, you will see communities of color working on solar energy projects to lower energy bills in low-income homes, et cetera. You will see the organizing that's going on in Flint since the water crisis. You will see that communities are developing what they're calling *regenerative programs*, to consider the whole community and how you lift it *all* up. You see this happening on Native reservations, where they're not just looking at one program and saying, let's work on one program and get that fixed. They're looking at the whole community—jobs, infrastructure building. They're looking at ways to be resilient when that next storm, that next flood, comes in.

We're seeing this in Detroit, in Flint, in New York—if you look at work that's being done by people in organizations like UPROSE and WE ACT. Really cutting edge. And it goes from the basis of community organizing—that's at the base of it—all the way through to, let's figure out how to put solar panels on a home; let's train youth how to do this; wind energy; let's put electric cars in low-income neighborhoods. Things that I'm sure Tesla folks are not thinking about when they're building their cars, because they're thinking about the upper-middle-class white client who can afford that second or third car that you plug in and take to Whole Foods and look very cool doing it. What people in low-income communities are thinking about are things like what if the taxi drivers in their neighborhoods had electric vehicles? It could cut down on their costs. It could help. What if the neighborhoods had more hybrid cars and electric vehicles? What would that mean for the carbon footprint of those neighborhoods? And can they get solar and wind into the communities so you're cutting down on people's energy bills, you're owning it cooperatively, you're feeding back into the grid, you're making money? If you look at California—Oakland—you see these kinds of programs at Green For All and GRID Alternatives. These are the innovative ideas coming out of low-income communities.

What is *not* there is funding to, for instance, put solar panels on every rooftop in the South Bronx, in Detroit. What would that mean for energy generation but also income and being able to survive in those communities? In places like Puerto Rico, they're portable—portable solar packs—so that when the electricity goes off on the main grid, you can generate yours. And they're almost like generators—you can generate your own energy. Why doesn't everybody in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands have one of those things? So that your medicine doesn't go bad, so that you aren't suffering from heat stroke because your home is too hot in the summer. Some of these solutions are actually relatively easy to implement. What's happening is the government is overlooking these communities, and foundations are reticent to put their dollars in to get those things directly to the people and to start seeing some impacts. We're just seeing folds, cracks, as we look at all the spaces where we need these inputs of dollars to get these communities to be more resilient. And again, in the era of COVID, you know, when you look at food security, for example—all of those things have huge impacts on communities of color on top of the impacts of the pandemic.

**“Communities of color are not waiting to die by the ocean or be drowned out of their communities, like what we saw during Katrina, and Maria, and in Houston—people are not waiting anymore.”**

> We have a political system here that treats the word *infrastructure* as a radical or weird or too-far-left idea: 'Don't do anything about infrastructure!'"

**CS: You've also talked about larger policy that could be really helpful if we were to invest in these communities. You've talked about how we actually have the technology in place along the coast that's effective already, that other countries have been using. Can you say more about that?**

**DT:** If you go to parts of Europe, for instance, good portions of those countries are below sea level, and they build very substantial water control systems. They don't just have a little dirt levee—they don't just say, you know, "We're going to put up a levee. Good luck, folks, if that is breached." If you look at a place like New Orleans, there are so many cities in Europe that are just as low or lower, with the same kind of geographic setup, where you have water coming from the north into a city that's very low lying, and that water has to go out to the ocean. You see this all the time in European cities, but, recent unexpectedly catastrophic flooding in Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands notwithstanding, they have good drainage, they have control over that water flow, and they can release and remove that water without having entire cities go underwater the way we saw New Orleans go.

And they have plans for egress. We saw what happened in New Orleans during Katrina. Folks who tried to get out and tried too late wound up stuck on bridges or stuck in the city, because it wasn't possible to get out quickly. Even cities like New York. If we had a massive catastrophe in New York City, how would we move people to safer outlying areas? How many millions of people can we move? How long would it take to do that? Do we have the infrastructure? Do we have the underground train infrastructure? Do we have the above-ground highways? Are we going to try to move all of New York City out on its bridges? From a logistical point of view, it's just not making sense that we're not investing, and the people who will invariably be left behind are old people, people of color, people with disabilities, poor people— who cannot exit in that first wave or don't have transportation to exit. Storm events like Sandy and Henri exposed the vulnerabilities of the New York metropolitan area. The extensive flooding that accompanied these storms crippled big swaths of the metro area. The storms also revealed that the infrastructure could not cope with the demands put on it. And of course, with quickening pace and more catastrophic climate change events, even those countries with superior disaster readiness will need to do much better.

In Beijing, they move millions of people underground traveling at high speed day and night. I remember being stunned when I was there. I've never been on a train with that many people in my life as I was on a Sunday at about 7:30 a.m. in Beijing. And they do this in part to deal with the horrendous traffic jams and air pollution that they have. And they're ahead of the U.S., in that they plan to go below their first underground layer and create another that mimics what they have at that first subterranean level, so as to be able to move ten to thirteen million people if necessary quite rapidly.

We have a political system here that treats the word *infrastructure* as a radical or weird or too-far-left idea: "Don't do anything about infrastructure!" So, we're basically setting ourselves up for some very major problems as we move forward.

**CS: What I hear you saying is that we really need to think about what infrastructure is now. And we need to think collectively about some of these things that currently are privatized or left to the individual to figure out. And maybe that everything has to be thought of that way—almost like designing for crises, right, because of the times we live in? Is that what you're saying?**

**DT:** I'm saying we have gotten away so far for a very long time as global populations, as human

beings, without asking the "What if?" questions enough. It's like during the seventies and eighties, when we built a large number of nuclear facilities throughout the world but didn't ask the basic questions, "What happens to the waste?," and, "Can we handle the waste safely?" "What happens if we have multiple kinds of catastrophic breakdowns in these kinds of facilities? Do we have the capability of dealing with them?" We've seen Fukushima, we've seen Three Mile Island, we've seen Chernobyl. And these are like poster children. If you look at all of those, it sometimes comes down to very simple issues that no one stopped to consider and ask: "Such and such could happen; how do we deal with this eventuality?"

So, it's the same thing with infrastructure. We've built the bridges, the roads, the tall buildings. But—and—we haven't asked the question enough: "Are we capable of handling what comes from it?" Some of our infrastructure is very old. We build the structures and sometimes we just leave them there. We're at the point where some of them will not be able to last much longer without either a complete redo, or rethinking or redesigning how we do it. And if we're unwilling as a country, now, to put that next wave of funding into really looking at our infrastructure, at how we can build in better ways and more efficiently . . . Well, it takes such big fights just to get the basic infrastructure pieces into perspective. Are we ever going to be able to get to that point—and really, it's not a luxury—where we're looking at the bigger picture of infrastructure?

When we think of infrastructure, we tend to think of roads, bridges, et cetera. But it's also our housing. It's the roads in the cities. We just came back from Michigan, and all the roads in the rural areas are being resurfaced. There are no potholes, but they're being resurfaced, they're being dug up, they're being rebuilt. If you go to Detroit and Flint, there are potholes there; those roads are in such bad shape. But the money is not going into those communities. It's

going into the rural communities, the sparsely populated parts of the state, the northern part of the state that gets much less traffic than the southern part. So the question becomes, Who's distributing these infrastructure dollars? And why are they bypassing the areas that in many ways need them the most to areas that could probably wait another few months or a year before perfectly good roads are dug up to be resurfaced?

**CS: I was interviewing Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley the other day, and we talked about infrastructure, because that's something that she's really trying to move forward. And we talked about how it's all about the infrastructure and the budget right now, because it's in communities of color and in poor communities where it would have the highest level of impact. I heard an episode on NPR recently about the roads in the U.S., how the building of a subway cost something like ten times what it costs in a comparable city anywhere else, because of environmental policy.[3] And I don't remember what the outcome was, but there was this tension between the cost and the environment. And the fact that we have laws, and the way that the laws are implemented, actually cause more cost. So even that has to be redesigned so that it works in a way that doesn't drive up costs. And that's why we don't build these things. So it seems like there are a lot of things to figure out about the system.**

**DT:** Yes, it makes sense to look at environmental policies to see where they could be tweaked to be more effective. Some of those policies are put in place for very good reasons, so the cost can be factored in right away. The challenge is probably not usually the environmental

**"If you go to Detroit and Flint, there are potholes there; those roads are in such bad shape. But the money is not going into those communities. It's going into the rural communities."**

DETAIL OF "UNTIL WE ALL ARE FREE" BY JESS X. SNOW/WWW.JESSXSNOW.COM

> **We place the Fellows all over the country . . . in environmental grantmaking organizations, because one of the things I think can be a solution to not seeing funding come into communities of color is to have more grantmakers, more program officers, who are people of color."**

legislation that prevents the road construction; it's more the politics of it, and who the politicians are who have the power and the clout to get the money into their communities.

**CS: Yes, what they were saying in that episode was that a lot of it was left to people to fight on their own, as individuals. And that was where a lot of the cost was, because it was used in different ways. Can you talk a bit about the environmental justice fellowship that you started, and where that is now?**

**DT:** I have two diversity fellowships. One, for undergraduates, is called the Doris Duke Conservation Scholars Program. As of October 2021, this fellowship will be renamed the Yale Conservation Scholars—Early Leadership Initiative. I've been able to fund about forty undergraduates every year. They get two years of funding, and they go and work in an environmental nonprofit, in government, or with a professor, researching. And what that does for the undergraduates is give them that research experience, that work experience, and if they want to go to graduate school, it helps them to get there. Or if they want to go into the workforce, they can take that leg up—they don't have to start at the very bottom rung of an organization. We do a lot of career development, a lot of programming. I'm wrapping that up this year, and I'm going to start a new one.

Then, for graduate students, I have another internship opportunity, called the Environmental Fellows Program. This year, we had thirty-three graduate students, our largest cohort ever. Thirteen of them are PhD students; twenty are master's students. They have to complete at least a year in graduate school to be eligible. We place the Fellows all over the country—again, in environmental grantmaking organizations, because one of the things I think can be a solution to not seeing funding come into communities of color is to have more grantmakers, more program officers, who are people of color, who understand these communities, and who can have that trust to put the money in. So, some of our fellows from the Environmental Fellows Program were in environmental grantmaking organizations. Some were in community groups. It's another way for me to put resources directly into the organizations that need them. It's to say, "Here's a free intern; you pay nothing." We cover the cost of the Fellows, because I go and get the grants for that cost. We placed interns at We the People of Detroit, at UPROSE, at WE ACT—all over the place.

**CS: WE ACT?**

**DT:** WE ACT is short for We Act for Environmental Justice, and it's in Harlem. It's Peggy Shepard's group, and they work on everything from climate justice, air pollution, and health disparities to voter registration. That's one of the big things we're seeing in a lot of environmentally based communities of color organizations—massive voter registration. You look at the flipping of Georgia—and it wouldn't have happened without all those environmental justice groups on the ground helping to organize those communities. When you listen to how groups like Race Forward—and we put a fellow in Race Forward this year—organized community, they were using an environmental justice lens to get people excited, to get them interested, to get them to the polls, and to get them standing at those polls *twice*, for a whole day or so, to vote. So, we're connecting all those dots the same way environmental justice groups are doing.

**CS: Can I ask a question about the voter engagement in these organizations? Can you say a little bit more about what's driving that as a strategy now? What are they trying to move?**

**DT:** That's always been a part of environmental justice and climate justice, but after 2016,

DETAIL OF "UNTIL WE ALL ARE FREE" BY JESS X. SNOW/WWW.JESSXSNOW.COM

when people saw what happened in states like Michigan. . . . It's unclear if all the Black votes were ever counted in places like Detroit. And just looking at how the maps of some of these states lay out, it becomes clear that massive mobilization of communities of color was needed to get those states to flip Democratic. So, this happened all over the country—it wasn't just We the People of Detroit. It was an on-the-ground door to door: go in and talk to people, make sure they are registered, take them to the polls. All of that stuff is being done across the country. We saw it in Chicago, in Georgia, in Alabama—all of these states that at first look like they don't have that many votes to flip, or where it might look like people are not going to go to the polls. That on-the-ground organizing was unbelievable. And people make the connection between their electric bills and who's in office. When your energy bills are higher than anyplace else in the country, you begin to take notice. Flint pays one of the highest water rates in the country for water that they still cannot drink—five or six years after the crisis. Next, Detroit has very high water rates, as well as a high number of water shutoffs. There are high electric and gas bills as well as high rates of utility shutoffs in these and similar cities. However, corporations that are behind on their utility bills do not experience utility shutoffs. It is the low- income people, people of color, whose water and energy are shut off. So, communities of color are starting to connect these dots.

Between that and your kids having no playgrounds to play in, your trash not getting picked up, that facility down the road polluting your air, your water, your land, no grocery stores to shop in. . . . And if you look at the community organizing of Race Forward and similar organizations, they connect all of those pieces and then say, "You've got to go out to vote, because either you put people in office who will help you to change conditions in your community or you're going to live with the problems, and it's going to get worse."

**CS: So, same thing they're finding in Puerto Rico.**

**DT:** Yes. Right. You know, Alabama is Puerto Rico is Atlanta. . . . People are looking at Alabama and saying, "If we could flip Georgia. . . ." You can use a similar kind of logic in the Black Belt: get every conservative, churchgoing farmer to understand how his or her livelihood on the farm is connected to these bigger pieces—and get them to vote along with your suburban ring, your white allies, and the new immigrants. Because a lot of people didn't realize that suburban areas around cities like Atlanta now have an influx of Latinx and Asian and Arab populations—and that if you organize and flip those groups or get them to vote with you that first time, you've changed the dynamics. Michigan is like that, you know—Detroit and some of the suburbs, Flint, Ann Arbor, Lansing/East Lansing, Grand Rapids, Ypsilanti. If all of those go democratic, you win the state.

**CS: It was like the climate report that came out this week[4]—you know, pointing out that in order to make any change on climate, we need to be able to move policy. And it's been a big thing to do as organizers: to make policy pass.**

**DT:** Right.

**CS: Thank you so much, Dr. Taylor. We've covered a lot. I have one last question. When we spoke earlier, you said you notice that the number of Black journalists covering climate justice has increased since last year. Can you speak about that?**

**DT:** You're welcome, Cyndi—and thank you for having me. So, regarding the influx of Black journalists, it's something that I think has been happening quietly but quickly since the George Floyd massacre. And you know, prior to last year, if I got requests to do radio interviews, TV, et cetera—if I got contacted by, say, thirty journalists, maybe one or two (if I were lucky) in every two or three years would be Black. It's completely split since last year. BNC, Black News Channel, has been in touch

**"People make the connection between their electric bills and who's in office. When your energy bills are higher than anyplace else in the country, you begin to take notice."**

**“The NPR stations, which are notoriously primarily white, now have young—*young*—Black journalists who are not just contacting me for news stories but for their own segments.”**

with me two or three times just since last fall. The NPR stations, which are notoriously primarily white, now have young—*young*—Black journalists who are not just contacting me for news stories but for their own segments. They're doing a lot of podcasts. In St. Louis . . . and all over New England I've been contacted by all these young African-American NPR-style journalists. I just did a segment with 1A, which I listen to in my car religiously, and both of the journalists were African American. In addition to that, I'm noticing a lot more print journalists who are also African America— and Latinx—contacting me. So, everything from *Bloomberg News* to *Gizmodo* to the *Wire*—all these news sources now have sourced people-of-color journalists. And then you have the independent ones—Hip Hop Caucus, for example, which runs its own podcast—reaching out to people like me to do interviews with them. So it has created a space for, especially, Black journalism, that I've never seen before. And then, of course, you have the traditional news outlets, like the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, the *Globe*, *San Francisco Chronicle*. They also now have more people-of-color journalists. But the big stories, the big scoops, are now coming from this new breed of journalists, who can get people like me to talk to them. And, you know, they're getting really incredible stories now that are certainly getting the word out. And they're on it at every turn. They seem to be more flexible than, like, a *New York Times*, which is still asking traditional questions. And by the time the old outlets get around to figuring out that environmental organizations are predominantly white, these younger journalists are scooping that story. And the story around funding and environmental organizations. A lot of journalists of color have picked up on that and are putting out the stories now.

## NOTES

1. See”Climate Funders Justice Pledge,” Donors of Color Network, accessed September 26, 2021, climate.donorsofcolor.org/.
2. Ibid.
3. Jerusalem Demsas, “Why does it cost so much to build things in America?,” *Vox*, June 28, 2021, www.vox.com/22534714/rail-roads-infrastructure-costs-america.
4. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, August 7, 2021), www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_SPM.pdf.

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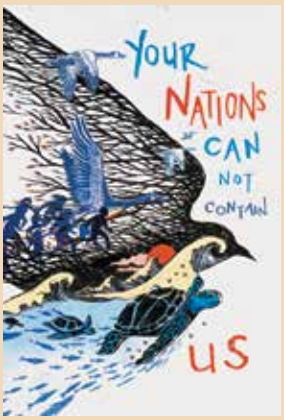
## About the Artist: Jess X. Snow

Jess X. Snow is a nonbinary film director, artist, poet, and community arts educator who creates queer Asian immigrant stories that transcend borders, binaries, and time. Based in Lenapehoking (Brooklyn, NY), they are currently an Ang Lee Scholar working on their MFA in NYU's Graduate Film program. Through narrative film, large-scale murals, virtual and augmented reality, and community art education, they are working toward a future where migrant and BIPOC folks may witness themselves heroically on the big screen and city walls, and discover in their own bodies a sanctuary for safety. They bring their background in social movement art, poetry, and trauma-informed healing into their film work, which has been supported with grants and fellowships from the Tribeca Film Institute, HBO APA Visionaries, BAFTA, Canada Council of the Arts, the Smithsonian, and the National Film Board of Canada. Their bilingual short films explore memory, intergenerational trauma, and migration, spanning genres of fantasy, romance, coming-of-age drama, musical, and science fiction. Their short films "Afterearth" and "Safe Among Stars" have screened internationally at over thirty film festivals. Their narrative short "Little Sky" premiered at Frameline 45 and Outfest 2021. Their murals can be found on walls across the country, and have been featured on "PBS Newshour" and in the *New York Times Magazine*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*.



# Health and Wealth
# An Integrated Approach to Climate Justice

*by Deeohn Ferris*

Adopting an integrated approach to climate justice is difficult work—it requires a seismic shift in how we think about some of the most persistent and potent challenges facing our planet and all who inhabit it.

When I was a child, my mother would often tell me stories about her experiences growing up in Sioux City, Iowa. She described playing childhood games around the city dump, which had been parked in her neighborhood. The community's trash had to go somewhere, and the powers that be chose to send it to the part of town that was predominantly home to people of color. There were people of means and people of limited means in the community; because of segregation and discrimination, both lacked political clout.

It is said that the sense of smell is harbored within our most vivid memories, which may explain why that dump found its way into the stories my mother shared with me.

In 1979, when I took my first job out of college, at the Environmental Protection Agency, I saw up close how my mother's experience was far from happenstance. In neighborhood after neighborhood, I witnessed people who looked like me living in disinvested and redlined neighborhoods standing in the shadows of chemical plants, refineries, and toxic waste sites. I saw air, land, and water pollution resulting from mining activities. And I was routinely assaulted by the same pungent odors that would have been constant in my mother's childhood and that poisoned generations of Black and Brown children.

Not unexpectedly, these communities faced a host of other challenges linked to environmental hazards that were part of their daily lives. They dealt with chronic health problems and disparities regarding healthcare access and treatment. They dealt with failing schools and economic dislocation. They had little or no opportunity to influence or reverse the decisions that had led to these conditions.



"WE CARRY THE DISTANCE MIGRATED BY OUR MOTHERS" (DETAIL) BY JESS X. SNOW/WWW.JESSXSNOW.COM

**People of color are the global majority. They are the hardest hit by the issues, and the most affected by centuries of decisions made by those who do not share their interests.**

Those early experiences have stayed with me throughout my career and have shaped my environmental justice journey, which now spans five continents and more than four decades. Along the way, they've fueled an ever-growing sense of urgency as I witness the burgeoning threat of climate change inflict increasingly disproportionate damage on already marginalized communities around the globe.

## CLIMATE JUSTICE: NOT A STAND-ALONE ISSUE

Over the past eighteen months, Black Lives Matter and the COVID-19 pandemic have shone a spotlight on systemic racism here in the United States and across the globe—and put an even finer point on the idea that we must act differently if we want to achieve change. Never has it been more apparent that environmental justice cannot occur in a vacuum. Around the world, there is a growing understanding that we cannot even begin to address the disproportionate impacts of environmental and climate change on people of color, women, and the poor without also addressing the overlapping and intersecting factors of economic, racial, and social justice.

For too long, government and philanthropy have approached climate change and climate justice as stand-alone issues. Climate injustice is a root cause of health inequities, and influences how children learn and grow. Environmental injustice amplifies—and is amplified by—economic, gender, and racial injustice across the globe. These are integrated problems that require integrated solutions—solutions that tap into the skills and knowledge of people and communities that have been experiencing these issues for generations. As we come to grips with the overlapping and urgent threats of climate change, racial injustice, and a worldwide pandemic, it's time to take a comprehensive, coordinated approach.

Adopting an integrated approach to climate justice is difficult work—it requires a seismic shift in how we think about some of the most persistent and potent challenges facing our planet and all who inhabit it. It also requires a fundamental rethinking of the systems we use.

People of color are the global majority. They are the hardest hit by the issues, and the most affected by centuries of decisions made by those who do not share their interests. Those who have access to the power and money needed to make change must be willing to upend traditional, top-down approaches so we can design equitable, community-led solutions. Failure to do so will only continue to reinforce our historic inequities.

Ceding power might sound intimidating to those working in and under philanthropy's existing structures, but there are a growing number of examples that offer a road map for how to create community-based approaches to climate justice that are embedded with racial, social, and economic justice. I offer three, here.

## PUERTO RICO

After Hurricane Maria, the Fundación Comunitaria de PuertoRico (Community Foundation of Puerto Rico)—working in partnership with philanthropy and government agencies—began an ambitious effort to help isolated, low-income communities create community-owned, solar-powered electricity systems designed to help them weather future catastrophic storms and create a path forward for scalable economic growth.[1]

Through the Puerto Rico Community Green Energy Corridor project, these communities not only get access to the tools to create their own electricity but also work closely with experts who help them organize, manage, and maintain these systems. Over time, these systems will help create new businesses and job-creation opportunities in long-overlooked rural communities that face high unemployment and poverty.[2]

This model is transforming lives in tiny barrios like Toro Negro, a rural community in the municipality of Ciales with a population of about one thousand people. Toro Negro went live with its power grid in the summer of 2018, after residents actively participated in its design and construction. The community now manage their own nonprofit, which owns the microgrid and is responsible for its future maintenance.[3] The community make key decisions about the rate they are going to charge themselves, and identify other funding mechanisms to ensure self-sustainability for the long term. With a strong, locally managed electricity system, they are able to spin off

new, locally owned businesses and create family-sustaining jobs while being able to weather future storms.

Toro Negro might be small—and the Puerto Rico Community Green Energy Corridor might be largely unknown in the mainstream United States—but imagine if philanthropy and donors began exploring how they could invest in replicating its model across the Caribbean. Scores of rural communities, most of which are poor, would become more economically viable. At the same time, it would mean investing in tangible projects that address the impacts of climate change, establish sources of green energy, and improve health outcomes. It would also help make these communities more resilient in the face of future storms—saving countless lives and billions of dollars in the process.

## INDIA

In Yavatmal and Dhar, cotton has historically been the most profitable crop, but livelihoods are now being threatened by climate change. Cotton happens to be one of the most water-intensive crops to grow, and changes to the environment have made water an increasingly precious commodity in these regions.[4]

The most obvious solution to this challenge centers on helping farmers develop agricultural practices that optimize water use. Yet when the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) began working with locals there to address this challenge, the water shortage turned out to be a canary in a coal mine of sorts: it exposed a series of other, interrelated challenges that had long vexed the region—in particular, issues involving gender equity.

ISC launched a project to enhance the role of women and address the region's water shortage by designing and implementing regenerative agriculture, soil, water, and pest-management models through cotton cultivation training and demonstration programs; improving understanding of local water balance by involving farmers and village-level institutions in water budgeting and developing village water

**"When we look at the first 15 years of the 21st century, the most defining moment in [B]lack America's relationship to its country isn't Election Day 2008; it's Hurricane Katrina."** —Jamelle Bouie, *Slate*

management plans; and strengthening women and advancing equity through gender learning groups and training women farmers and entrepreneurs.[5]

Still in its early stages, the project already shows what's possible for communities when they take steps to embed gender equity in efforts to improve local economies and tackle problems created by climate change. For instance, focusing on promoting environmentally sound entrepreneurial opportunities for women (such as the production of compost and biopesticides) has created an open lane to encourage environmentally friendly cotton production, providing tangible examples of the vital role women can play in improving quality of life and economic conditions in their villages. Further, ISC's expert gender learning groups augment understanding of the role gender plays in cotton cultivation and water management. Those learnings could have wide-ranging implications across India and elsewhere in agricultural regions that face the dual challenge of climate change impacts and a severe imbalance of opportunity and influence based on gender.

## THE UNITED STATES

In the United States, Hurricane Katrina demonstrated the irrefutable link between climate and racial justice more than nearly any other environmental catastrophe. For it is out of that August 2005 tragedy that one of the most consequential movements for racial and social justice was born: Black Lives Matter.

On the tenth anniversary of Katrina, *Slate* magazine published a piece titled "Where Black Lives Matter Began." In it, author Jamelle Bouie traces the roots of the Black Lives Matter movement to the stark inequities that those category 5 winds and relentless rain laid bare for all the world to see. People desperately huddled on roofs and crammed the damaged Superdome. Bodies floated through flooded streets. Entire neighborhoods were left in ruin. The faces of suffering the world saw were disproportionately, predominantly Black and Brown—people whose limited means and historic disenfranchisement had destined them to live in the most vulnerable sections of New Orleans.

"When we look at the first 15 years of the 21st century, the most defining moment in [B]lack America's relationship to its country isn't Election Day 2008; it's Hurricane Katrina," Bouie wrote. "Black collective memory of Hurricane Katrina, as much as anything else, informs the present movement against police violence, 'Black Lives Matter.'"[6]

Katrina offers an accessible and familiar touchstone to make the clear connection between climate justice and racial, economic, and social justice. In post-Katrina New Orleans, the interconnectivity between the health of the planet and the health and well-being of its most divested and exposed citizens is undeniable. The scope of the catastrophe, and the wall-to-wall media coverage it attracted, laid bare the depths of Katrina's impacts. Without both, what happened to mostly Black and Brown people might not have been so clear.

■

Enormous opportunities for transformative change exist at the intersections of climate stabilization, racial and economic justice, gender equity, health, access to safe and affordable housing, transportation, and social mobility. To effectively meet the present moment and lay the groundwork for a more just future for all requires that we embrace fully the connectivity of our challenges, in ways that encourage and energize community-based solutions that reach beyond a singular focus.

Our most pressing challenge lies in the fact that countless catastrophes of significant scope inflict damage in far more covert and sinister ways around the globe. Factory emissions vanish into the sky; toxins silently permeate soils and groundwater; pervasive ozone gases are unseen, and to most, abstract. I suspect that in my mother's childhood home of Sioux City, ways may have been devised to mask the stench of that landfill. But that does not answer the question as to what remains beneath the ground or in the air around the dump—and how it continues to affect those who live nearby.

## NOTES

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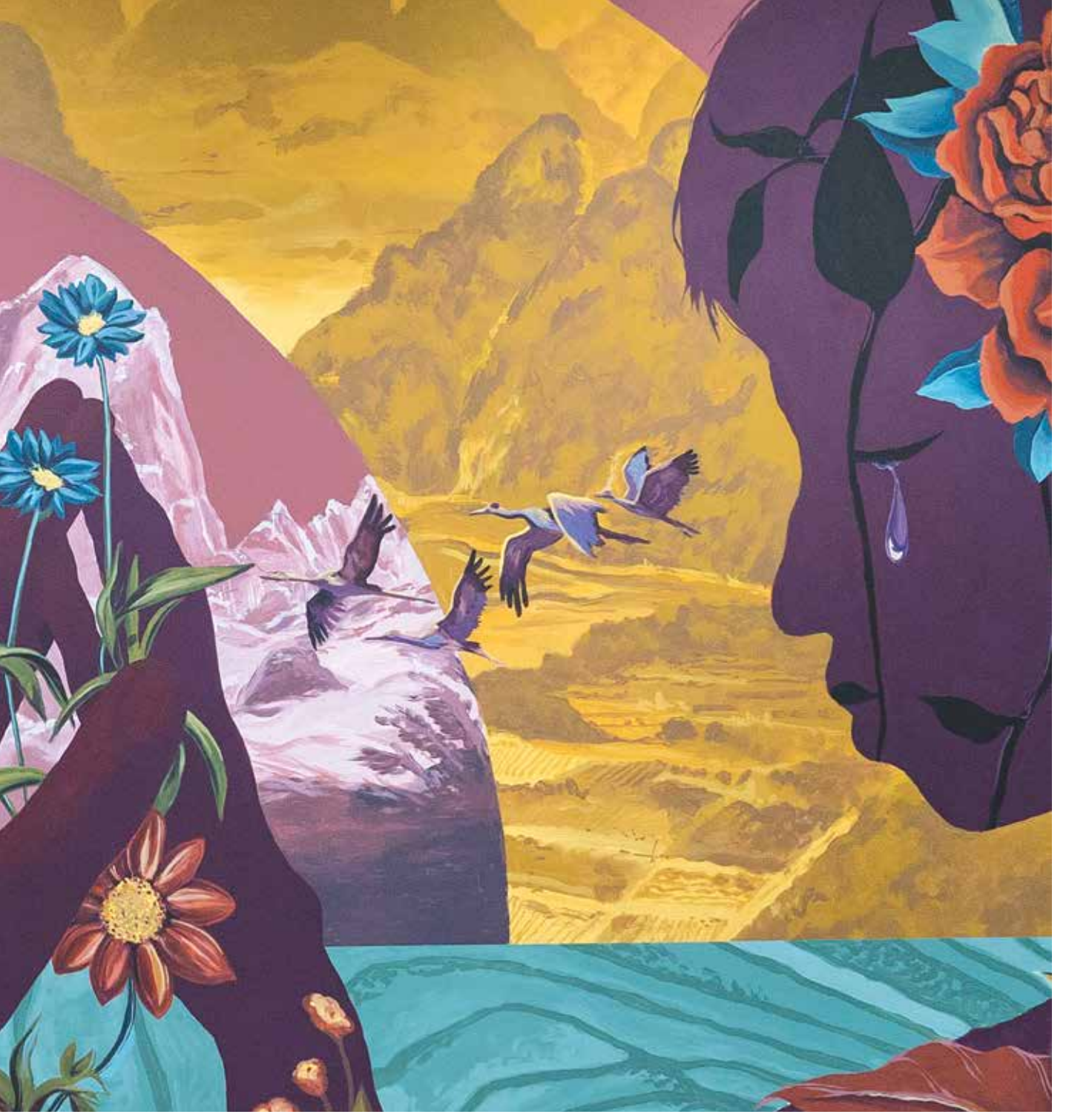
# Power to the People
## Why We Need Energy Justice

*by Al Weinrub*



"WE CARRY THE DISTANCE MIGRATED BY OUR MOTHERS" (DETAIL) BY JESS X. SNOW/WWW.JESSXSNOW.COM



We need more than a shift from fossil fuels.
We need a justice-centered movement for clean energy, with energy produced and owned by the communities who use it.

On November 29, 2018, a large crowd of protestors disrupted a meeting of the California Public Utilities Commission. They demanded that the agency hold Pacific Gas & Electric Company (PG&E) accountable for causing a rash of wildfires that were jeopardizing life in Northern California. The commissioners called in the state police to clear the vocal protestors from the normally staid proceedings; Shortly thereafter, the commissioners advanced a $6.1 billion credit rescue of one of the most powerful monopoly utilities in the nation.[1]

Just weeks before, smoke and ash blanketed Northern California, turning it into a gray toxic soup. On November 8, faulty PG&E transmission lines sparked what became at that time the largest wildfire in California history: Over seventeen days, the utility-caused Camp Fire killed eighty-five people, consumed more than one hundred and fifty thousand acres, and incinerated eighteen thousand buildings. The town of Paradise was turned into a living hell.[2]

A year-and-a-half later, on June 16, 2020, PG&E pleaded guilty to eighty-four counts of involuntary manslaughter.[3]

The Camp Fire was just one of seventeen wildfires in 2017 and 2018 for which PG&E was found responsible, amounting to an estimated $30 billion in damage.[4] All the while, the utility paid out executive bonuses and $4.5 billion in dividends to shareholders.[5] Two months after the disruption of the Commission meeting, PG&E filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, leaving wildfire survivors and ratepayers picking up the $30 billion tab.[6]

PG&E represents just one example of a legacy energy model that has long dominated electric power distribution in the United States. After a rash of climate-induced disasters that have exposed this system's vulnerabilities and inequities, a grassroots movement is growing to radically transform it—one that sees a transition to renewable energy technology as part of a broader restructuring and transformation of the energy system.

 DETAIL OF "WE CARRY THE DISTANCE MIGRATED BY OUR MOTHERS" BY JESS X. SNOW/WWW.JESSXSNOW.COM

ENERGY—THAT ESSENTIAL RESOURCE DRIVING ALL HUMAN ACTIVITY, FROM PRODUCING THE ESSENTIALS OF LIFE TO TRANSPORTATION, COMMUNICATIONS, CREATIVE ARTS, AND BEYOND—IS CURRENTLY AT THE CORE OF THE MOST CRITICAL ISSUES WE FACE TODAY.

## ENERGY

Energy—that essential resource driving all human activity, from producing the essentials of life to transportation, communications, creative arts, and beyond—is currently at the core of the most critical issues we face today: economic inequality, racial injustice, ever-declining health, ecosystem destruction, and, of course, the climate crisis.

We face a climate crisis largely because energy in our economy functions as a commodity instead of a life-giving resource. The climate crisis is an inconvenient truth for capitalism—predicated on the notion that the planet is an infinite reserve, here for our use, to be plundered, poisoned, and degraded, and where anything not deemed fit for the commodity market can be destroyed as "collateral damage."

Against this existential threat, people are fighting back, as they *always* have. Most prevalently, Indigenous peoples around the world have done their utmost for centuries to be good stewards of the Earth, its species, and resources, and to prevent the ecocide currently being perpetrated globally in the name of "development." The recent Green New Deal and Red Black and Green New Deal go a good way in this direction; and the Red Deal, authored by The Red Nation, explicitly centers the frontline climate justice work as advancing "the radical transformation of all social relations between humans and Earth."[7]

## MOVING BEYOND FOSSIL FUELS

Thanks in large part to the sustained efforts of grassroots climate advocacy groups, significant parts of the U.S. political and corporate establishment are beginning to recognize the need—in words if not always in actions—to transition our energy system away from fossil fuels.

Shareholders are challenging their peers at oil corporation annual meetings. Parts of the Democratic Party appear to no longer be coddling the Washington oil lobby. Wall Street is trying to figure out how it will dispose of stranded fossil fuel assets as investors are beginning to jump ship. The Biden administration is taking positions on climate that, limited as they are, no other administration has taken before, such as with Executive Order 14008, Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad.[8]

At the same time, many grassroots climate activists are asking questions about how their efforts can and must move beyond the basic goal of a technical transition to clean energy. They are asking, "Who will determine what the transition to renewable energy looks like?" "Who will control it?" "Who will benefit, or be hurt?"

A transition to renewable energy really means a transition to electricity—electricity generated from renewable energy sources. For the most part, that means relying on the legacy system of electric utilities and the set of institutions that underwrite and support them.

And that's a huge problem.

## A DECAYING, OUTMODED, CENTRALIZED ENERGY MODEL

For the electric utilities and their financial backers, a transition to renewable energy is mainly an opportunity to extend the legacy fossil fuel energy model to renewable sources of electricity. For them, a transition to renewable energy sources means a switch to big solar plantations and large wind farms, generally remote from electricity customers and dependent on existing and new long-distance transmission infrastructure.

President Joe Biden has virtually codified this approach in his signature infrastructure package. The bill sets aside $73 billion of investments in thousands of miles of power lines that would carry electricity from remote wind turbines and solar farms to faraway electricity users.[9]

Ownership of that grid infrastructure and energy decision making would remain centralized in powerful financial interests. In most cases, this means Wall Street financing with political support from state regulatory agencies.

We've seen just how harmful the impacts of this legacy system can be. Across the United States, hundreds of thousands of people—sometimes millions—have been left without power for days or weeks as unprecedented storms bring down transmission lines. In 2012, Hurricane Sandy

**A TRANSITION TO RENEWABLE ENERGY THROUGH THIS CORPORATE, CENTRALIZED UTILITY SYSTEM DOES NOT QUALIFY AS A "SOLUTION" TO THE CLIMATE CRISIS. A DIFFERENT TRANSITION TO RENEWABLE ENERGY IS NEEDED.**

left many New Yorkers without power for two weeks.[10] Texas residents suffered prolonged outages this past February that left 4.5 million homes and businesses without power, caused over 210 deaths, and resulted in unprecedented spikes in the cost of electricity—all due to failure of the utility system to prepare for a cold snap that was predicted decades ago.[11]

In Puerto Rico, in 2017, Hurricane Maria resulted in nearly three thousand deaths, according to a study commissioned by the Puerto Rican government, with many of those deaths the direct result of a lack of electricity that left residents without power for medical equipment, food, water, and shelter for months after the hurricane.[12]

"The storm laid bare the vulnerabilities of our transmission and distribution system and an electricity model that left our communities exposed to power failures," explains Ruth Santiago, an environmental and community lawyer who works with numerous groups such as Comité Diálogo Ambiental. "The U.S. colonial relation to Puerto Rico—Black and Brown people—has created conditions of dependence on centralized, fossil-fired generation that dramatically amplified the impact of the storm and resulted in the death of so many Puerto Ricans."[13]

These impacts illustrate two key truths.

The first is that increasing reliance on remote sources of electricity and long-distance transmission infrastructure, which put millions of people at risk, is exactly the wrong strategy for mitigating the impacts of climate change—it amplifies these impacts.

The second is that low-income communities and communities of color—those with the least resources and most at risk from electricity shutoffs—bear the brunt of the failures of centralized energy systems, intensifying the racialized impacts of these failures.

In short, a transition to renewable energy through this corporate, centralized utility system does not qualify as a "solution" to the climate crisis. A different transition to renewable energy is needed.

## AN ALTERNATIVE VISION: ENERGY DEMOCRACY

Energy democracy is a worldwide movement of working people, low-income communities, and communities of color working to take control of energy resources from the corporate energy establishment and use those resources to empower their communities. It is a movement focused on energy justice.

As Crystal Huang, coordinator of the Energy Democracy Project, a collaboration of close to forty affiliated energy democracy organizations, explains, "Energy democracy is about local communities taking in their own hands the responsibility of building a cleaner and more equitable future. Our communities seek solutions that address the economic and racial inequalities that an otherwise decarbonized economic system would continue to perpetuate."[14]

Energy democracy implies a profound shift in our relationship to energy: how energy use impacts the ecosystem, how it impacts economic development, and how it impacts racial disparities. "The question is whether we will build [the new energy] system on a foundation of justice and equity or whether we will build that system using the very same tools that landed us in this disaster in the first place," writes Shalanda Baker, deputy director for energy justice and secretarial advisor on equity at the U.S. Department of Energy, and author of *Revolutionary Power: An Activist's Guide to Energy Transition*.[15]

Baker and other energy democracy advocates identify with a growing climate justice movement: activists who see opposition to fossil-fuel capitalism as key to transforming our economic system more deeply. That movement is an outgrowth of the environmental justice movement, which for thirty years has sought to combat the disproportionate harmful impact of energy development on low-income communities of color.[16] Climate justice and energy justice stand *for* community health, community resilience, community control over resources, and community empowerment. Energy democracy is part of the broader struggle for social and economic justice.

**IN RECENT YEARS, A CONSCIOUS ENERGY DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT HAS EMERGED THAT SEES THE DECENTRALIZED ENERGY MODEL AS THE WAY TO PUT ENVIRONMENTAL, RACIAL, AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE TRANSITION TO RENEWABLE ENERGY.**

## A NEW, DECENTRALIZED ENERGY MODEL

To realize the broad benefits that renewable energy makes possible, we need to shift from the old, centralized energy model to a new, decentralized energy model.

Decentralized control of renewable energy resources is made possible by the fact that renewable energy resources, by their very nature, are distributed. Solar energy, wind, geothermal energy, energy conservation, energy efficiency, energy storage, microgrids, and demand response systems are energy resources that can be found and developed in all communities.

The decentralized energy model emphasizes the deployment of distributed energy resources and investment in our communities: local economic development, local jobs, business opportunities, local workforce development, and local wealth building. This model is the polar opposite of the centralized energy model in operation today. It calls for control, ownership, and decision making regarding renewable energy resources to reside in the community rather than in remote corporate boardrooms. It is the basis for a democratized energy system centered on justice.

## A GROWING MOVEMENT

In recent years, a conscious energy democracy movement has emerged that sees the decentralized energy model as the way to put environmental, racial, and economic justice at the forefront of the transition to renewable energy. The base of this movement is mainly local initiatives led mostly by women in communities of color across the United States. Many of these are affiliated with the Energy Democracy Project, a collaboration that grew out of a 2019 national Strategic Convening on Energy Democracy.

The movement's initiatives take many forms, such as:

- organizing for installation of solar panels on residential properties in low-income communities across the United States
- promoting the development of a new generation of consumer energy cooperatives in low-income and BIPOC communities nationally
- advocating for best operational practices to promote community benefits and equity among California's twenty-three local public Community Choice energy agencies
- taking on major private utilities to democratize energy and build community energy resilience
- working to return the nation's rural electric cooperatives, predominantly in poor regions of the United States, to democratic governance

This emerging movement has even spawned a congressional resolution, House Resolution 457, introduced by Representatives Cori Bush (D-MO) and Jamaal Bowman (D-NY). Their resolution to promote public electric utilities also aims to "facilitate the development of community owned and controlled clean energy resources" and to "create transparent and equitable systems for public participation and cultivate processes for community governance over energy production, distribution, and procurement decisions."[17]

## PRIVATE UTILITIES STAND IN THE WAY

But private investor-owned electric utilities (IOUs), responsible for about two-thirds of all national electricity sales, have for years waged a relentless campaign to undermine the decentralized, justice-centered approach to energy generation and distribution.

Take on-site solar generation. Often called rooftop solar, it refers to property owners installing solar panels—local clean energy—to provide the electricity needed on their property. Many states have established programs to encourage on-site solar under policies known as net energy metering, which establishes compensation rates for solar customers when they export excess electricity produced by their solar panels to the grid.

The IOUs have banded together to oppose these policies, regarding on-site solar generation as a threat to their centralized energy model—a "utility death spiral," as they have called it, that would put the utilities out of business.[18] The IOUs linked up with the right-wing lobby, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), to introduce more than seventy bills in thirty-seven states to weaken solar net metering policies.[19]

**UNLESS WE ADDRESS INSTITUTIONALIZED RACISM WITHIN THE ENERGY SECTOR . . . WE WILL NOT BE SUCCESSFUL IN FIXING THE CLIMATE CRISIS.**

The IOUs and ALEC have falsely argued that on-site solar users increase the cost of electricity for non-solar customers. They have framed this purported "cost shift" as hurting low-income households: effectively invoking a racial wedge to pit solar adopters and non-solar customers against each other, an effort to undermine the growth of on-site solar.[20]

In response, supporters of decentralized energy have recently scored at least one significant victory. On June 3, 2021, a broad statewide coalition of activists defeated an IOU attempt to bring on-site solar to a screeching halt in California. The state's IOUs called for passage of AB-1139—an effort right out of the IOU/ALEC playbook, to address what the utilities claim to be "inequities" by making it uneconomical for customers to invest in on-site solar.[21]

But a massive mobilization of activists, led by the Solar Rights Alliance, was not fooled by the phony IOU "cost-shift" narrative, nor by the hypocritical "equity" ploy. Ultimately, despite a full-court press by the IOUs, the bill was blocked by activists in the state Assembly.[22]

The struggle over on-site solar policy rages on at the California Public Utilities Commission. But energy activists took on and confronted the IOUs' effort to undermine the decentralized energy model in California, and won an important round.

Many passionate, dedicated climate activists are advocating for a transition to 100 percent renewable energy without specifying who will develop and control that renewable energy, to what end, to whose benefit, and at whose expense. The impetus is simply to decarbonize the economy with renewable energy but otherwise leave the basic extractive and unjust economic and social system intact.

This approach leaves us at the mercy of the corporate utility establishment. "It ignores the specific needs of people of color. It promotes programs that force low-income people to pay unfairly for carbon reduction. It exposes our communities to increased risks, and it sacrifices justice in the urgent rush to reduce carbon," says Jessica Tovar of the Local Clean Energy Alliance. "Time and again, it ends up throwing people of color under the bus."[23]

Unless we address institutionalized racism within the energy sector—and that requires democratizing energy within an energy justice frame—we will not be successful in fixing the climate crisis. "I think energy, the energy transition, lends itself to the possibility of justice—because you can put solar on rooftops, because people can come together to own a project that will power their community," says Baker. "It's not inevitable that this will be unjust. We can change it. I think this is a remarkable opportunity to really take back the energy system in service of those who've been on the bottom."[24]

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# Relatives, Not Resources

## Applying an Alaska Native Lens to Climate Sovereignty, Economic Justice, and Healing

*by Ruth Miller, Meda DeWitt, and Margi Dashevsky*

To re-form Indigenous economies and economies of care does not mean creating anew. . . . What is required is an understanding on a global level of the urgency to *bring forward from the past and into the future.*

Indigenous communities, particularly those of the Arctic, not only are on the front lines of the climate crisis but also are the engineers and economists of sustainability, and offer spiritual teachings of gratitude and deep relationship. Generating collective health and well-being requires spiritually and materially reconnecting our severed relationships to the land and each other.

All three of us live in Alaska. We descend from both settler and Native communities. For all of us, Alaska Native frameworks of reciprocity and intentional interdependence inform how we answer pivotal questions of our time—one being, What do reparations to the land look like after destructive mining, leaching of toxic pollutants, and irresponsible oil extraction?

We seek healing for the land itself. To engage in true climate justice work, we must be brave enough to consider reconciliation with places that have been harmed. We must all take accountability and turn to Indigenous leadership to help us remember how to live in and practice economies of care and compassion.



"MOTHER EARTHS HER CHILD" (DETAIL) BY JESS X. SNOW/WWW.JESSXSNOW.COM

## HOW WE ARRIVED HERE

When we ask our Elders about the changes they have witnessed on our Arctic lands, they tell us stories of growing up in Alaska without cars, televisions, cell towers—and with no English. Instead, they had rivers filled with fish, tundra filled with caribou, families joining together to hunt across the ice or line the smokehouse with summer salmon. They recount histories of this place with anthropological detail and serene reverence. But soon, conversations turn to the days those riches began to be taken away through compulsory boarding schools and proselytizing churches. The way their languages curved on their tongues was slowly lost, and the graceful curves of familiar rivers were similarly interrupted—blocked by dams, poisoned by mines, and now heating to record temperatures, deadly to fish and other creatures.

Erasure of Indigenous connection to place was crucial for the colonial settlement of the lands that became America. Political leaders, the army, and the church worked hard to break this connection. When settlers arrived and colonization began, our economic systems were targeted for disruption and destruction: Indigenous nations were dissolved, removed, subjected to genocide, or assimilated across this continent to make way for private land ownership, profiteering from finite resource extraction, and imposing of Christian norms of patriarchy and cisnormativity.

As PennElys Droz of the NDN Collective explains, "Removing a peoples' means of providing for themselves is a cunning way to suppress and control them. . . . A state of dependency was intentionally created, with the Nations having to look to their colonizers for survival assistance."[1]

This was the birth of our modern extractive economy, which sequesters wealth for the elite few (largely white, landholding, straight, cisgendered men). It was achieved by commodifying relationships through the transformation of land into money, and enslaving people into zero-cost labor.

When we converse with our Elders, the stories they tell are old ones—stories of bounty and abundance, balance and reciprocity.[2] The climate crisis is not only a product of greenhouse gas emissions (which impact the Arctic landscape at twice the rate as the rest of the globe),[3] but also of an ideological shift that was imposed by colonization and capitalism to justify violation of sacred land-, water-, and airways—domination that taught Americans to speak of "resources" instead of "relatives."

**This was the birth of our modern extractive economy, which sequesters wealth for the elite few. . . . It was achieved by commodifying relationships through the transformation of land into money, and enslaving people into zero-cost labor.**

## JUST TRANSITION IN ALASKA

This language shift is important to understand as we envision opportunities for growth and healing ahead of us. Today, the pain and trauma of separation from our Indigenous worldviews, evidenced by the imposed language, is being healed and integrated into our vision for the future. The Just Transition Framework[4] only began gaining widespread distribution in Alaska, in 2018, through collaboration with climate and justice advocacy organizations across the state. This framework, with roots in the labor movement of the 1960s, articulates the necessary shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative one. It realigns the purpose of the economy with the healing powers of our Earth, through ecological restoration, community resilience, and social equity. ***To achieve this, resources must be acquired through regenerative practices, labor must be organized through voluntary cooperation and decolonial mindsets, culture must be based on caring and sacred relationships, and governance must reflect deep democracy and relocalization.***

However, when this language first began circulating in Alaska, our communities realized that there were both familiar qualities and foreign terms preventing us from reaching deep resonance with the growing movement. We needed to see ourselves in the work. When we asked our elders how they would describe this new vision, they told us in the Behnti Kenaga language, "*Kohtr'elneyh*" (We remember forward).

This process soon led to the *Kohtr'elneyh* Just Transition Summit, where, in January 2020, over two hundred community members from all regions of Alaska and many different

"MOTHER EARTHS HER CHILD" (DETAIL) BY JESS X. SNOW/WWW.JESSXSNOW.COM

**A core tenet of Indigenous economic structures is to increase abundance for all economic partners.**

industry sectors and background gathered.[5] For days, we heard from community leaders and movement artists about renewable energy projects, food sovereignty, and cold climate agriculture. This was the last time many of us gathered in person. As the COVID-19 pandemic sweeps across the world, the Alaska Just Transition Collective has coalesced online to articulate what a transitional economy for Alaska must look like. Now, we are pushing state and national recovery conversations to incorporate Indigenous sovereignty and stories from the land.

## BRINGING *KOHTR'ELNEYH* INTO NATIONAL POLICY

These acts of translating and centering Indigenous ways of knowing have similarly guided the Just Transition Collective's statewide work in support of the Green New Deal and the THRIVE Agenda,[6] championed by over one hundred members of Congress. The THRIVE Agenda is considered the most ambitious and holistic investment structure yet proposed, ensuring that climate, jobs, and care (health and well-being), will be made at the scale, scope, and with the justice standards this time of transition demands. In partnership with communities across the state, we have published conversations and creative zines and toolkits,[7] elevating what Indigenous regenerative economy and climate justice must look like for Alaska.

In Alaska, we are actively engaged in building the solidarity economy ecosystem that is required to finance a just transition beyond fossil fuels. We are meeting a need for Alaskan financial infrastructure that is by us and for us, is aligned with our values, and enables community stewardship of capital. We are cultivating grassroots processes to seed the regenerative financial infrastructure Alaskans need, so that funds are grown, invested, and distributed by and for our collective well-being.

As we shift to new paradigms of land, resource, and financial management, we must remember that this meaningful participation is an exercise of sovereign Native nations' right to self-determination: *Tł'eeyagga Hūt'aan Kkaa Nin' Dohoodeetunh* (*Native people hold the land with words*; Koyukon translation by Eliza Jones). The goal must be to return to balance in all investments, industries, and sectors—infusing justice and restoration throughout a new economy.

## REMEMBERING INDIGENOUS ECONOMIES OF CARE

Indigenous economic frameworks for augmenting and redistributing abundance are key to informing how to approach economic recovery, and are needed now more than ever. Indigenous economies can counteract greed, the costs of which are increasingly apparent. For example, an important rite of passage in many Indigenous communities is sharing one's first catch and harvest with Elders. Hunters will give away the first of each animal they kill, weavers will give away the first baskets they make, harvesters will distribute the first berries picked—based on familial responsibility and obligations to grandparents, aunties, teachers, and so on. This exchange is an act of reciprocity.

Traditional Indigenous economic frameworks center around ensuring the health and well-being of a community. The role of traditional leaders is to oversee the foundational functions to meet the community's base needs for water, food, shelter, warmth, safety, and medicine. An economy is the exchange of time, talent, and treasure, and its purpose is to create stability. People generally want the same things but need to have shared understandings and expectations to reduce conflict and meet each other's expectations. The growth of an economy also relies on creating trade or economic partners. In an Indigenous framework, economic partners are not only humans but also are plants, animals, fish, and other species. They are referred to as relatives or nations. This framing elevates these groups to being equals in the systems of exchange, and requiring respect. *A core tenet of Indigenous economic structures is to increase abundance for all economic partners.*

*Reciprocity* is another core tenet of Indigenous economic structures. When something is taken, something must be given, and even this is backward. Traditionally, it is understood that you give first—of your time, efforts, skills, prayers, and abundance—without expectation of return but rather out

of pure generosity, caring, and duty. The exchange is thoughtful and intentional, benefiting all economic partners. It is also understood that taking without reciprocity can and generally will lead to suffering. For instance, if all the fish are harvested and not any are left to spawn, then starvation will be the reciprocal experience.

The modern fossil fuel economy is based in extraction and pollution for maximum profit and individual gain from a finite resource in a closed system (Mother Earth's biosphere). These activities have not had a balanced exchange of benefits with our natural economic partners, and have created what can be described as a debt to our relations and a grievous desecration against our Mother Earth. *The fossil fuel economy has overextracted, and humans are in debt to our relations.*

To re-form Indigenous economies and economies of care does not mean creating anew. Traditional ecological knowledge, collective experiences, genetic memory, and oral histories can guide action. What is required is an understanding on a global level of the urgency to *bring forward from the past and into the future*—as at other times of great transformation, the teachings of which cycle back to today. Taking these lessons and applying them to inform climate action, addressing the past harms of colonization, paying due reparations, and ceding land back integrate just land-management practices and infuse healthy human and more-than-human relationships, while continuing Indigenous ways of knowing and traditional practices. Traditional Indigenous economies will guide this time of global transformation, rooted in generational knowledge from living in eco-regions that require continual innovation and extreme resilience. As Elder Wilson Justin (Althsetnay, of the Headwaters People) shared with us regarding well-being:

> Well-being is vital to good decision making present past and future . . . . Economy [in the Western extractive context] didn't exist in the world I came out of. When I grew up that term had no meaning or sense. The economy in [an] Indigenous worldview is health and well-being. . . . In its most basic component [well-being] is the ability to survive unexpected trauma, warfare, all kinds of things. In a future sense be ready at all times for the unexpected. Well-being means well protected.[8]

**Indigenous economies are often described as gift economies, where resources and belongings—that is, wealth—are shared and given and received in return.**

Indigenous economies are often described as gift economies, where resources and belongings—that is, wealth—are shared and given and received in return. The entire economic system is oriented to promote the interests of the community, not individual accumulation.

For example, potlatch ceremonies are held across Alaska to mark births, marriages, deaths, and important rites of passage. They are called *k̲u.éex'* in Lingít, and have very specific protocols for economic redistribution.[9] Potlatches formalize allegiances and loyalty through reciprocity. Those who have access to great abundance are expected to share; and if they encounter hard times, sharing is extended back to them. Sharing and redistributions help smooth out the ebb and flow of resource abundance and stave against not having enough, including starvation. Families save up for a very long time in preparation to host potlatches to this day. In the past, when chiefs would host a potlatch, they would give away everything they owned that they were able to give away. Generosity and responsibility are highly respected, and the most generous and thoughtful leaders were the most respected, creating extensive allyship among the community and across neighboring territories.

Lingít frameworks identify economic partners as other nations, which in the Lingít framework are the Plant Nation, the Animal Nation, the Fish Nation, and the Insect Nation. Lingít responsibilities and social expectations of behavior and roles are circular, overlapping, and follow specific protocols for caring for the community. Additionally, the Lingít headman, or *K̲áa Tlein*, is responsible for the health and well-being of everyone in the community, ensuring access to food, water, medicine, clothing, safety, spiritual health, and wellness. The headwoman, or *Naa Tláa*, is responsible for the organization, care, and understanding of the needs of the house group, family group, clan group, and extended community. These are just a small glimpse of traditional economic and social roles.

**To achieve effective climate solutions, restoration of balance and deep justice must flow through all policy and transformation.**

Lingít clans care for and augment production within the territories for which they are responsible. They increase food abundance in specific land- and waterways, through very meaningful practices—in addition to layered protocols for harvesting plants, animals, and fish. Not taking the largest animals and fish is an example of how people care for the stability and ultimate survival of the population; tending wild roots and berry patches is an example of how people assist wild plants to flourish.

These *expectations of care* are also built into treaties or agreements between neighboring Indigenous groups. Invested energy and efforts put forth by the Lingít people into the environment increase production and achieve reciprocal benefit for the community and all economic partners.

These concepts include the exchange of spiritual energy, as well. Energetic expansion is achieved by purposefully giving to someone else. These living economies ensure that people can do well, support the community and the environment, and have a sense of purpose—*and they ensure well-being in perpetuity*. These *practices of stewardship* are an economic exchange that reinvests in the land by giving back to it, and are symbiotically beneficial.

## OUR VALUES MUST GUIDE AMBITIOUS SOLUTIONS

To achieve effective climate solutions, restoration of balance and deep justice must flow through all policy and transformation. Policy must remember forward and be ambitious in its mission to restore ecosystems, food systems, and practices of reciprocity. Toward this goal, the Alaska Climate Alliance, a statewide network of climate advocates and conservation organizations, has gathered throughout the past year to align across the broad spectrum of environmental advocacy, encouraging historically white-led and well-resourced organizations to implement decolonization processes and operate in accordance with just transition principles.[10] In this model, conservation organizations are given opportunities to learn from and grow with Tribal governments and Indigenous-led organizations, as well as learn from other non-Native groups who are following Indigenous stewardship principles and adopting actively antiracist policies into their work. Collectively, this leads to better coordination, healthier communication, and more unified communities.

Similarly, through Native Movement's Untangling Colonialism, Decolonizing Advocacy training, the organization provides an interactive audience with the opportunity to question the mores of traditional conservation and uncover the white supremacist roots of the conservation movement: the three Ws—*white, Western, wilderness*. The modern environmental movement placed great emphasis on their idea of the preservation of nature, of keeping an untouched wilderness safe from the destructive tendencies of humans, and of venerating certain places as examples of the sublime, where one could "glimpse the face of God."[11] As A-dae Romero-Briones notes, "These coveted lands only became 'available' when they were no longer occupied by the Indigenous people," who were brutally eradicated from their homelands. "Many of the Indigenous stewardship practices have weakened because of inaccessible landscapes that have been 'preserved' for future generations," writes Romero-Briones. "Given this country's historical and current policies and practices, one has to question whether Indigenous people are included in this idea of future generations."[12]

Many champions of wilderness conservation espoused racist thought and promoted eugenics as a necessary policy to accompany expanding land seizures, including John Muir,[13] Gifford Pinchot,[14] and Theodore Roosevelt.[15] Modern land policy was developed through this settler colonizer framework—meaning, in conservation terms, a disruption of relationship among beings. These policies transition the land, rich with dynamic and interlocking relationships, into habitat—removing human relationship and denigrating Indigenous peoples as an unfortunate obstacle for nature conservation to overcome.

By acknowledging the ways in which colonialism and extractive capitalism have incurred climate chaos and deep social inequality, it becomes possible to enact real solutions that question these systems and break from them. False solutions maintain the status quo and will heal neither society nor the environment. Many net-zero carbon emission

schemes do not lead to quantifiable emission reduction,[16] and often reinscribe social inequalities, banking on the last reserves of Indigenous territory and natural spaces to pay for continuing industry emissions.[17] Many of these proposed false solutions ask for collaboration with the perpetrators of harm. As Chris Peters (Pohlik-lah and Karuk), president of the Seventh Generation Fund, observes: "It is a breach of the ethical foundation of Earth-based spiritual understanding to sell the air and to continue unabatedly polluting for personal and corporate profit."[18] Only a values-based framework that changes behavior will lead to system change.

## YOUTH ARE LEADING US FORWARD

Indigenous cultures know that future prosperity requires investing in youth leadership. Native youth are not just the voices of the future—they must be the leaders of today. Key to this is infusing traditional ecological knowledge, technologies, and lifeways with modern calls to action. Today, "culture camps," annual events held by local communities and Tribes, are immersive experiences to teach and pass on traditional knowledge and subsistence practices (*qaqamiigux*). As Unangaan artist and youth leader Dustin Newman shared,

> When it comes time for culture camps, we often forget how our traditions and culture are tied into the climate crisis. Our camps tend to focus on the importance of our *qaqamiigux*. We teach our youth how to pull the seine net or how to butcher the seal, but we don't tell them the reasons behind a low salmon return or why the seals are skinnier this year.[19]

The climate crisis is additionally a catalyzing opportunity to bring the voices of Indigenous youth from the lands into all levels of decision making.

In Alaska, on the front lines of the climate crisis, the environmental community is beginning to unpack its colonial roots and defer to Indigenous stewardship. The next phase of climate justice advocacy in Alaska must continue to invest in youth leadership. In Wilson Justin's words, we are "responsible for the next generation [and have a] sense of duty and responsibility to someone [we've] never met, and never seen, and never will."[20] How we live today is guided by the needs of future generations. We pay back the lands and waters, not only in reparations for losses and damages but also in gratitude for the life that the lands have always gifted us.

*In this time of great struggle, it often feels like we are lost at sea. Our canoes are strong but weathered, and we are struggling to paddle as one. Many of us are tired. The swells of waves are relentless and steadfast, and we can no longer see the horizon we move toward as we struggle to trace the path that has carried us here. This is when we remember our paddling songs, synchronize our strokes, and trust one another to carry us forward. When we cannot see the horizon, we are reminded to look to the stars. There in the sky, our ancestors navigate us home. We remember forward.*

*The authors acknowledge that we live and write from the unceded lands of the Indigenous peoples of Alaska. We further acknowledge that, in the spirit of adrienne maree brown, we come as people raised in, interacting with, and intentionally dismantling white supremacy. We strive to additionally acknowledge the thought genealogies, community participatory work, and elders' guidance that contribute to this article and the work it represents. The coauthors are particularly grateful to our culture and language bearers, our Indigenous youth, and Elders, who continue to shine the light forward and remind us of our roots.*

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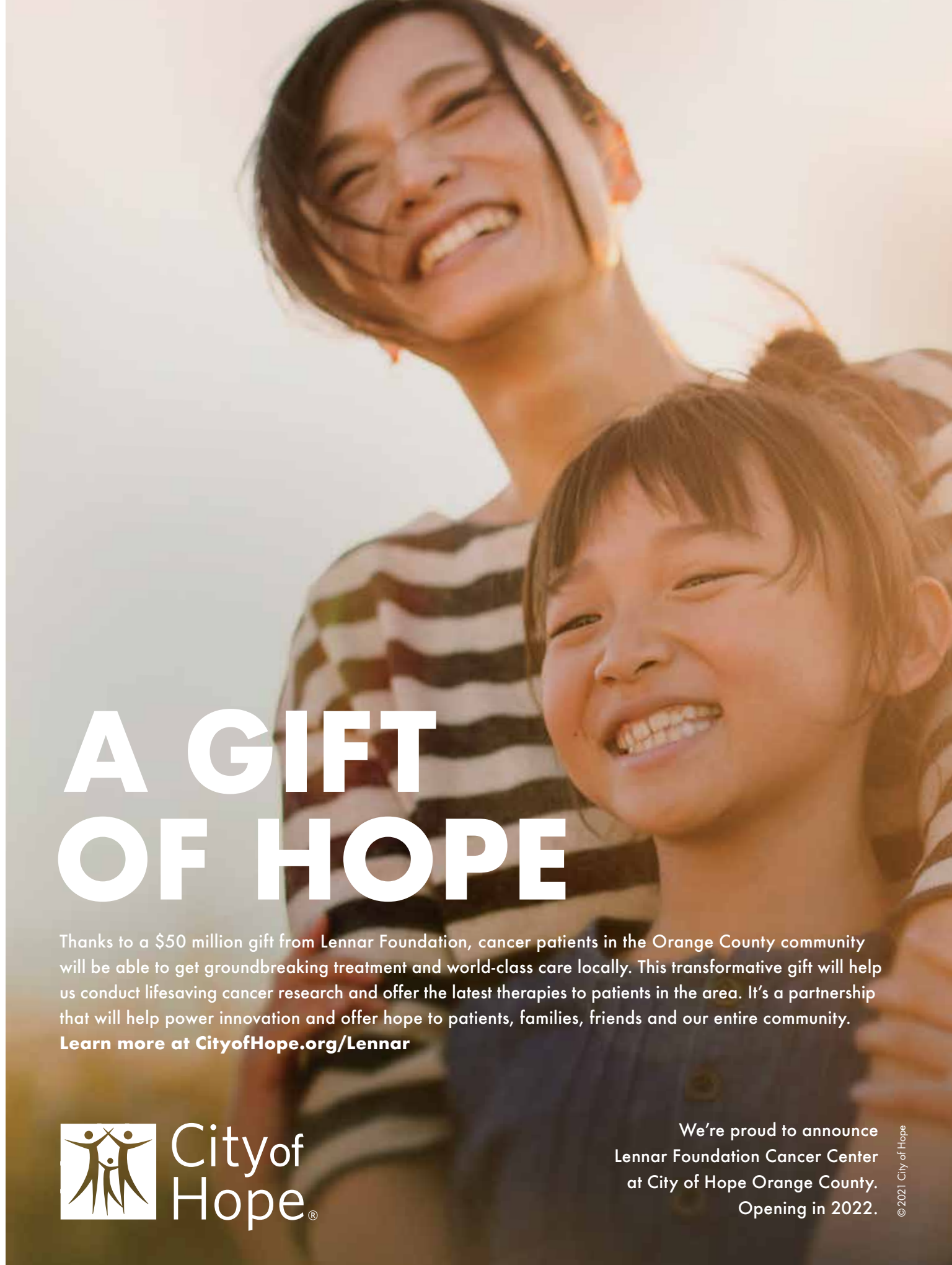

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# Regeneration—from the Beginning

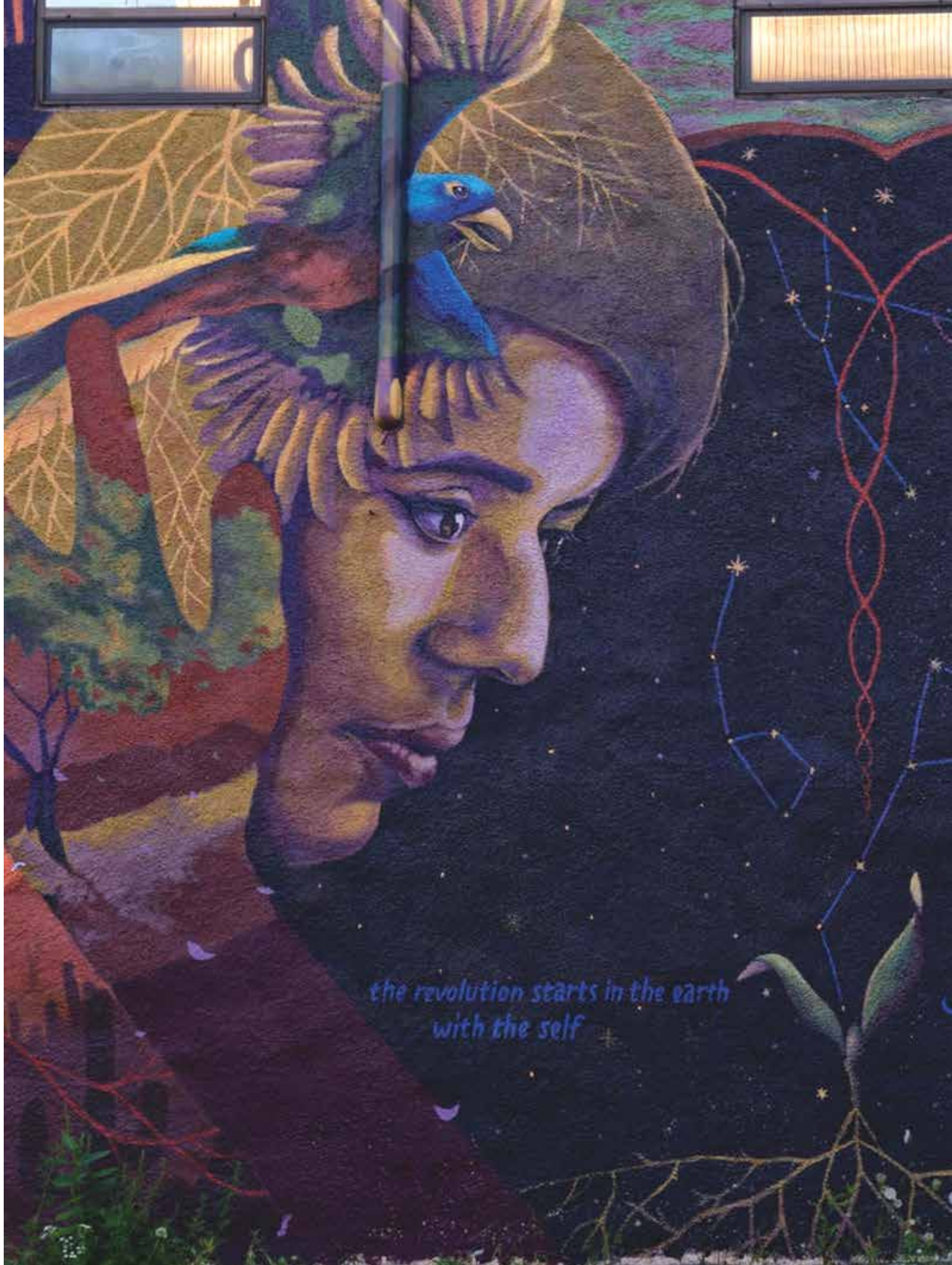
*by A-dae Romero-Briones*

**How we organize our food is gaining ever more recognition as an important part of the climate justice picture as we experience the effects of climate change on our food sources. Alternatives to the extractive agricultural systems that replaced Indigenous relationships with the environment "find ways to work around the colonial framework or minimize the producer to focus on the natural processes of the environment; but few, if any, challenge the historical injustice and violent removal of Indigenous peoples from their lands and corresponding stewardship of those lands. Regenerative agriculture can and should challenge those harms. It can restore the balance of relationship between people and land, environment and production, history and future."**

**Editors' Note:** *This article was first published in* NPQ*'s fall 2020 edition.*

Indigenous people have been growing food, creating complex systems of agriculture, gathering, and practicing land stewardship since long before the formation of any discipline, area of study, or social movement describing the relationships between environments and humans. Violent colonization and willful ignorance of these Indigenous land stewardship systems have led to the destructive replacement of the Indigenous relationships with our environment with parasitic, extractive systems, which now urgently need to be corrected.

 "THE REVOLUTION STARTS IN THE EARTH, WITH THE SELF" (DETAIL) BY JESS X. SNOW/WWW.JESSXSNOW.COM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**We have an opportunity now to create longevity that begins with Indigenous inclusion, which has much to teach through historical examples of where other fields of study and production have gone wrong.**

Ironically, many of the movements (including current ones) that call for better understandings of and relationships with our environments have not included participation of Indigenous people. From its beginnings, the environmental movement broadly has excluded Indigenous peoples, ideologies, and practices worldwide; in many ways has justified the inhumane treatment of Indigenous peoples—removal, forced assimilation, continued aberrations of cultural practice in our own homelands; and has often been the strongest advocate for extinguishing Indigenous land rights.[1] As hard as it may be to acknowledge and accept the truth of this reality, it is necessary in order to create better options and strategies that include Indigenous people and communities—for the balance of the environment and social health of society.

Regenerative agriculture holds great promise for the formation and direction of Indigenous inclusivity. Traditional agriculture and the environmental movement are rooted in the same Western anthropocentrism, in that they both start with timelines and definitions that often do not include Indigenous peoples, practices, and worldviews—and, further, are fiercely opposed to their inclusion. But regenerative agriculture, still in its infancy, has the power to be more than another oppressive movement. We have an opportunity now to create longevity that begins with Indigenous inclusion, which has much to teach through historical examples of where other fields of study and production have gone wrong. In this way, regenerative agriculture can actually generate change and socio-environmental balance.

## THE VIOLENT BIRTH OF THE U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

The environmental movement in the United States has roots in the Sierra Nevada mountains of California, the birthplace of the Sierra Club. In the mid- to late 1800s, California attracted men like Alexander von Humboldt, Josiah Dwight Whitney, and John Muir and Joseph Le Conte (cofounders of the Sierra Club)—"explorers"/scientists who studied, wrote about, and dedicated their lives to the protection of nature's sublimity, in a time of growing national industrialization that required extractive industries to fuel its progress. They would become the foundation of the new discipline of environmental conservation and, generally, environmental science.[2]

When California became a state, in 1850, these men were in a frenzy to protect California's natural landscapes, threatened largely by the discovery of gold, but even before that, by the extractive industries of California's other rich resources—from plants and trees to oil and silver. They wrote incessantly about California's natural beauty, consistently omitting California's Indigenous people from their writings. This created the protocol for Indigenous omission thereafter—not only in the environmental movement conversation and land conservation policy development, but also in science: many of these early writers became founders of important scientific institutions, such as the California Academy of Sciences and, eventually, the University of California. Indeed, as Zachary Warma writes in "The Golden State's Scientific White Supremacist," Le Conte "spent the entirety of his life advocating and advancing the cause of white supremacy"[3]—and Muir was a proponent of eugenics.[4]

As Muir, Clarence King, Whitney, Le Conte, and others were writing about the natural beauty of what is today called California, they never mentioned the ongoing campaign to violently eradicate Indigenous peoples from their land. Even before the California Gold Rush, the Spanish had created a mission system across California to indoctrinate and forcibly convert Indigenous people to Catholicism. They also introduced systems of indentured labor that dispossessed many Indigenous peoples of their land, which was then granted to Spanish settlers. This essentially created massive homelessness among Indigenous nations, whose people then returned to the missions.

This cycle of forced Indigenous labor lasted until around 1835, and the traditional lands became permanent land holdings in the American transfer from Mexico. After the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848, which officially put an end to the Mexican-American War, American occupation of California began with the ceding of Spanish land holdings to the Americans.

**The very lands that mesmerized both the environmental scientists and extractive prospectors alike (and who were often one and the same) were the homelands of Indigenous people who were fighting to remain alive and on their lands during one of the darkest periods of Indigenous history.**

Between 1846 and 1873, while the U.S. government upheld grandiose ideas of freedom and liberty, California Indigenous people suffered unprecedented loss of life and land. This was often justified by Western science, including the popular eugenics movement and the newly formed environmental science movement, which regularly sought to create national parks in locales populated by Indigenous villages (sometimes directly on top of villages, as in Yosemite), gathering areas, and homelands. Some of the most prominent national parks—from Yosemite to the Redwood Forest National Park and the Sequoia National Park—were Indigenous homelands, cared for and stewarded over thousands of years. These places were—and are—spectacular because of Indigenous stewardship.

These coveted lands only became "available" when they were no longer occupied by the Indigenous people. Government-sponsored militias, who were paid as little as $1 per head, and U.S. military regiments sent under the guise of "surveying" would ultimately eradicate entire communities, sometimes at one time. While government-sponsored bounties on Indian body parts were alive and well, many Indigenous people continued to return to their homes, fight for their lands, and seek out allies to help them secure their lands. Eighteen different treaties were negotiated in California between numerous Indigenous nations and the U.S. government, but those same treaties were never ratified and then were bound to secrecy by a directive of the U.S. Senate to be "printed in confidence."[5]

The very lands that mesmerized both the environmental scientists and extractive prospectors alike (and who were often one and the same) were the homelands of Indigenous people who were fighting to remain alive and on their lands during one of the darkest periods of Indigenous history—the very same period in which we see the birth of the environmental conservation movement.

This juxtaposition of death and birth remains a recurring theme in present-day environmentalism. Until recently, conservation largely meant an absence of human presence. Visit any national, state, and county park, and you will see these rules upon entry: "Stay on the trail. No picking plants. No disturbing the animals. Carry out what you bring in." This is quite literally the opposite of Indigenous stewardship practices, which center on constant interaction with the landscape, an interdependence that can only be cultivated through continuous access. Many of the Indigenous stewardship practices have weakened because of inaccessible landscapes that have been "preserved" for future generations. Given this country's historical and current policies and practices, one has to question whether Indigenous people are included in this idea of future generations. Recently, Muir's affiliation with racist ideologies such as the eugenics movement made headlines when the Sierra Club officially cut ties with him.[6] But he was but one player in a larger systematic institutional erasure of Indigenous people from both the study and the land. The pillars of those institutions still stand today, even without men like John Muir.

## REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

Regenerative agriculture, a current area of interest for many in the agricultural community, holds promise. But as many within and around the field watch regenerative agriculture unfold and grow, it is important to remember the beginnings of previous movements. And the unanswered question is: How can Indigenous people be justly included at the inception?

The idea of regenerative agriculture has been circulating since at least the early 1980s, but it wasn't widely adopted until around 2014. It started out in much the same way as the environmental movement and traditional agriculture, in that it was a response to destructive systems of land stewardship. In the 1980s, Rodale Institute's formulation of "regenerative organic" agriculture was a holistic approach to farming that encouraged continuous improvement of environmental, social, and economic measures.[7] This was later refined in 2018 by Ethan Roland Soloviev and Gregory Landua, who identified four levels of regenerative agriculture, organized as successive stages in a progressive framework of principles and practices: (1) a "functional" level, focused on best practices that regenerate soil health and sequester carbon; (2) an "integrative" level, focused on more holistically designing farms to improve the health and vitality of the

**But this story also contains narratives of strength, love, painstaking survival, fortitude, endurance, and adaptability that even the most powerful of institutions could not erase, despite their attempts.**

wider ecosystems, not just soil; (3) a "systemic" level, which views the farm within wider ecosystems of enterprises building multiple forms of capital; and (4) an "evolutionary" level, involving "pattern understanding of the place and context" over generations within which agriculture takes place.[8] More important, regenerative agriculture seeks to replace the harmful practices of past production systems.

If regenerative agriculture is a means of addressing harmful production systems of the past, the essential question is, what harms should we be addressing? While many regenerative agriculturalists focus on soil and carbon depletion, these are outputs—the end of the story. The beginning and plot of the story are the "how and why" of the adoption of agriculture and its current state. This beginning and plot, too, must be understood and addressed. The study of American agriculture and its promotion was largely a creation of Euro-American forefathers, who used agriculture as a distinguishing trait to differentiate the "yeoman farmer worker/settler" from "the wild, untamed Indian"—as if Indigenous people did not practice agriculture. This historical narrative allowed for the removal of entire nations of Indigenous people to reservations to make way for "progress" that began with the plow—but in reality, the underlying message was that progress began with removal of the Indian. Similarly, the environmental conservation movement itself began when Indigenous people were violently removed from their homelands. The recurring theme in both approaches has been to remove the Indians; regenerative agriculture must not follow suit.

We should answer the question "What harms are we addressing?" by starting at the beginning of the story. Environmental conservation and agriculture are examples of colonial erasure and extraction because they erase Indigenous history, negate past and present contributions, and make it that much harder to participate in future directives in either field. This parasitic framework is damaging to all of society; however, many producers, organizations, and communities have developed their own responses to it: Sustainable agriculture, organic agriculture, permaculture, agroecology—to name a few major movements and communities—are proposed solutions to an anthropocentric agricultural system that dominates America. (Arguably, we have entered a new era of technological agriculture that minimizes humans altogether.) Many of these responses find ways to work around the colonial framework or minimize the producer to focus on the natural processes of the environment; but few, if any, challenge the historical injustice and violent removal of Indigenous peoples from their lands and corresponding stewardship of those lands. Regenerative agriculture can and should challenge those harms. It can restore the balance of relationship between people and land, environment and production, history and future.

■

If there is a lesson to be learned from the not-too-distant timelines of the environmental conservation movement and the study of agriculture, it is that the stories are largely controlled by the founders, who chose to mythologize or even omit altogether Indigenous peoples. Regenerative agriculture is at its very early stages and could incorporate Indigenous founders, practitioners, and communities into its understanding, ethos, and practices. In its attempts to regenerate diminished, exhausted, and exploited lands as a result of anthropocentric agricultural systems, regenerative agriculture shouldn't just focus on the soil itself. The narrative of our soils, our lands, and the Indigenous people who carry those stories—those harms and the history—have always been the beginning of the story, whether told or not. In those stories are not just the tale of food production and resource management but also the tale of exploitative institutions that damage our entire society.

But this story also contains narratives of strength, love, painstaking survival, fortitude, endurance, and adaptability that even the most powerful of institutions could not erase, despite their attempts. After all, when it comes to the revitalization of a damaged system, Indigenous people have quite literally lived, and continue to live, through all the phases, from creation to destruction to regeneration.

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# Toppling the Monument to Silence

## Racism and the Founding Fathers of Environmental Organizations

*by Dorceta E. Taylor*

Reckoning of the past and transparency moving forward is how we will identify and root out the systemic problems causing and perpetuating injustice.

The environmental field is no less steeped in white supremacy than any other field currently being held up for inspection—indeed, the very foundation of environmentalism is rooted in white supremacy, and the rampant racism and discrimination in the writing and actions of early environmental leaders are well documented.[1] Yet, acknowledgment of the troubled racial history of environmental organizations is slow coming. Most environmental organizations prefer to ignore inconvenient aspects of their history, disregard disturbing revelations, and respond with deafening silence.

But the summer of 2020 was a watershed moment. It changed how some major environmental nonprofits deal with racism and their past. Amid the Black Lives Matter protests over the killing of George Floyd and other Black men and women, the presidents and chief executive officers of some prominent environmental organizations sheepishly acknowledged the troubling racist past of their institutions.[2]

### RECKONING WITH THE PAST . . . AND THE PRESENT

Over summer and early fall of 2020, there was a sudden flurry of apologies from environmental organizations forced by internal battles—energized by the overall societal eruption—to step up and acknowledge their full history, and exercise transparency vis-à-vis their current practices.



"TO LOVE LOUDER THAN WE LISTEN" (DETAIL) BY JESS X. SNOW/WWW.JESSXSNOW.COM

**APOLOGISTS CLAIM THAT AUDUBON WAS "A MAN OF HIS TIME"—BUT, AS NOBLES POINTS OUT, NOT EVERYONE OWNED SLAVES OR FAVORED SLAVERY DURING AUDUBON'S LIFETIME; SOME OPPOSED SLAVERY VIGOROUSLY.**

On June 19 (Juneteenth), 2020, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and the Bronx Zoo apologized for and acknowledged their "bigoted actions and attitudes in the early 1900s toward non-whites—especially African Americans, Native Americans and immigrants," including such reprehensible treatment as displaying a young Central African man, Mbye Otabenga, in a Bronx Zoo exhibit in 1904.[3] WCS also apologized for their ties to eugenicists Madison Grant and Henry Fairfield Osborn, both of whom espoused "eugenics-based, pseudoscientific racism."[4] Cristián Samper, president and CEO of the Society, wrote in a letter to staff, "We deeply regret that many people and generations have been hurt by these actions."[5]

The Sierra Club followed suit, posting "Pulling Down Our Monuments" on its website on July 22.[6] In the article, Michael Brune—the organization's executive director—wrote, "As defenders of Black life pull down Confederate monuments across the country, we must also take this moment to reexamine our past and our substantial role in perpetuating white supremacy. It's time to take down some of our own monuments, starting with some truth-telling about the Sierra Club's early history."[7]

Brune acknowledged that "The most monumental figure in the Sierra Club's past is John Muir. . . . And Muir was not immune to the racism peddled by many in the early conservation movement. He made derogatory comments about Black people and Indigenous peoples that drew on deeply harmful racist stereotypes."[8] He noted that "Muir's words and actions carry an especially heavy weight. They continue to hurt and alienate Indigenous people and people of color who come into contact with the Sierra Club."[9] Brune also named other early members and leaders of the Sierra Club—Joseph LeConte and David Starr Jordan, for example, who "were vocal advocates for white supremacy and its pseudo-scientific arm, eugenics."[10] He discussed exclusionary practices that protected and maintained whiteness in the club: "Membership could only be granted through sponsorship from existing members, some of whom screened out any applicants of color."[11] And he admitted that, currently, some of the club's members want the organization to "stay in our lane" and "stop talking about issues of race, equity, and privilege."[12]

Later, A. Tianna Scozzaro, director of the Sierra Club's Gender Equity and Environment Program, also wrote an article. In it, she argued that the "history of eugenics has a deeply troubling relationship with the environmental movement. Race, population eugenics, and 'natural order' were highly problematic features and values of the movement's—and the Sierra Club's—beginning."[13]

On July 31, *Audubon Magazine* published "The Myth of John James Audubon," as part of an effort to "chart a course toward racial equity."[14] The author, Gregory Nobles, identified Audubon, from whom the National Audubon Society took its name, as a slaveholder.[15] He noted that many people are unaware of this fact but that those who *are* aware "tend to ignore and excuse" the icon.[16] Apologists claim that Audubon was "a man of his time"—but, as Nobles points out, not everyone owned slaves or favored slavery during Audubon's lifetime; some opposed slavery vigorously.[17] In a letter penned to his wife in 1834, a dismayed and frustrated Audubon complained that Britain had "acted imprudently" and "precipitously" in granting emancipation to West Indian slaves.[18]

On September 15, Save the Redwoods League (SRL), an organization with well-known eugenicists among its founders, also acknowledged its racist origins,[19] with Sam Hodder, the organization's president and chief outdoors enthusiast, publishing "Reckoning with the League Founders' Eugenics Past."[20] Hodder noted, "As we elevate diversity, equity, and inclusion at the League, we must acknowledge our full history."[21] He also stated, "Our founders were leaders in the discriminatory and oppressive pseudoscience of eugenics in the early 20th century—around the very same time they dedicated themselves to protecting the redwood forest."[22] Hodder also discussed the white supremacist and eugenicist ideas of Madison Grant, one of the League's cofounders.[23]

AS A RESULT OF THE FIELD'S ROOT CULTURE, ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCATES FOUNDED AND ORGANIZED INSTITUTIONS ON EXCLUSIONARY PRINCIPLES THAT RESULTED IN CLOISTERED, GENDERED, AND RACIALLY HOMOGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS FOR THE BETTER PART OF TWO CENTURIES.

(Other SRL founders, Charles Goethe, for one, were also prominent eugenicists. Goethe wrote prolifically about Blacks, Mexican-Americans, Japanese-Americans, and Jews in degrading terms.)[24]

Some organizations remain mum on the eugenics, white supremacy, racism, and discrimination in their history. The Boone and Crockett Club remains firmly tethered to its past, featuring, without acknowledgment or commentary, Theodore Roosevelt, Madison Grant, and Gifford Pinchot—influential political figures, white supremacists, and eugenicists—on its website.[25] (Other well-known eugenicists, such as Henry Fairfield Osborn, were also members of the Boone and Crockett Club.)[26] And the American Bison Society, which numbered eugenicists and white supremacists like Madison Grant and Theodore Roosevelt among its founders and members, has also remained silent.[27]

## CLOISTERED, GENDERED, AND RACIALLY HOMOGENOUS

The ethos of these founding clubs, leagues, and societies spilled over into early nineteenth century outdoor recreation and environmental organizations. As a result of the field's root culture, environmental advocates founded and organized institutions on exclusionary principles that resulted in cloistered, gendered, and racially homogenous organizations for the better part of two centuries.

Early on, only wealthy white males could join or participate in these institutions. At the end of the nineteenth century, rich white women pried open the doors to join the membership and leadership of environmental nonprofits. However, the participation of elite white women in environmental nonprofits did little or nothing to stem the flow of sexist, classist, racist, and eugenicist ideas that shaped the founding of some of the early environmental organizations.[28]

The white working class, who often worked as servants, guides, and porters, were barred from membership. By the early twentieth century, "working-class whites objected to their lack of input into environmental affairs and the inequitable policies . . . [and] created their own outdoor organizations."[29] These "outdoor enthusiasts and environmentalists owned slaves and hired free people of color . . . [as] servants, guides, porters, cooks, and launderers."[30] Though men and women of color began joining segregated outdoor clubs in the early 1900s, they "were not allowed to participate fully in many environmental organizations until the latter part of the twentieth century."[31]

In 1981, historian Stephen Fox noted, "Few questioned the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the environmental sector until the 1960s, when academics and activists pointed to the overwhelming whiteness of the environmental movement and its workforce."[32] In the face of this criticism, environmental leaders argued that increasing the racial diversity of their staff, boards, and/or membership was incompatible with their environmental mission.

The idea of enhancing racial diversity also caused conflict within some organizations. For example, although David Brower, the Sierra Club's first executive director, declared in 1959 that membership was open to people of "the four recognized colors," the matter was far from settled for some time after.[33] Some Sierra Club members viewed Black members with skepticism, describing them as "trying to push themselves into the club" and not having any "interest in the conservation goals of the club," and even that Blacks were trying to infiltrate.[34] The question of their participation in the organization resulted in many complaints, screaming matches, reports of intimidation, and a proposal for a "loyalty oath" to the "American Way of Life."[35]

The result? Japanese American George Shinno and his son Jon were admitted to the Angeles Chapter of the Sierra Club in the 1950s.[36] And, although members who feared Blacks strategized to keep them out of the chapter in 1958, a Black schoolteacher, Elizabeth Porter, was admitted to the Angeles Chapter in 1959; the Angeles Chapter later admitted two other Black members, Mr. and Mrs. Kelsey, in 1959 or 1960.[37]

**THE IDEA THAT BLACKS ARE AVERSE TO CONSERVATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT IS A POPULAR AND ENDURING MISCONCEPTION AS WELL AS A CONVENIENT EXCUSE THAT IS USED TO JUSTIFY EXCLUSION.**

The debate over Black participation in the Sierra Club lasted into the 1970s.[38] An attorney and former director of the club, Bestor Robinson, summed up the struggle by saying "this is not an integration club; this is a conservation club."[39] Many club members shared Robinson's perspective that conservation was separate from social justice issues, that racial inclusion was a social justice or civil rights issue, and that it did not belong in the Sierra Club. Because club members did not see any connections between social justice and the environment, they did not believe that increasing racial diversity in the organization was an initiative the institution should undertake. Club members voted against resolutions to admit people of color into the organization's membership.[40] In 1971, as it struggled to make connections between race and environment, the Sierra Club polled its members and asked if the club should "concern itself with the conservation problems of such special groups as the urban poor and ethnic minorities." Forty percent of the members were opposed to the organization getting involved in such issues; only 15 percent were supportive of engaging in matters concerning people of color and economically disadvantaged people.[41]

Instead of building racially diverse organizations, environmental leaders, thinkers, and social critics searched for explanations to help justify the lack of diversity in environmental nonprofits. For example, Fox wrote in 1981 that "Blacks scorned conservation as an elitist diversion from the more pressing tasks at hand."[42] The idea that Blacks are averse to conservation and the environment is a popular and enduring misconception as well as a convenient excuse that is used to justify exclusion.

## LET THE CHIPS FALL WHERE THEY MAY

Given the above, it should come as no surprise that environmental nonprofits have had difficulty embracing and instituting diversity, equity, and inclusion in their mission and practices in the twenty-first century. Retention of people of color in senior and executive positions is proving to be a challenge in a number of environmental organizations. Attention to the racist roots and practices of environmentalism over the past few years, however, is finally shining a spotlight on organizational leadership.

In June 2019, women employed at The Nature Conservancy (TNC) alleged that sexual harassment and wage discrimination were commonplace at the nonprofit, prompting the resignation of TNC's CEO Mark Tercek.[43] Other diversity, equity, and inclusion issues were also a factor.[44] (Employees of Conservation International had filed similar complaints back in 2018, as had a staff member of the National Wildlife Federation [NWF], who sued her former supervisor and NWF in 2010.)[45]

In May 2019, women birders, members, and staff at the National Audubon Society had also reported sexual harassment while birding or on the job.[46] And, in November 2020, National Audubon Society staff claimed that organization leaders discriminated against employees and tried to intimidate them.[47]

In fall 2020, David Yarnold, then-CEO of the National Audubon Society, had published "Revealing the Past to Create the Future" in *Audubon Magazine*, in which he wrote, "Over the last few months, we've committed to making Audubon an antiracist institution."[48] Yarnold noted, "Audubon's founding stories center on the groups of women who came together to end the slaughter of birds for their feathers (mostly for fancy hats), but we have glossed over the actions of the American icon whose name we bear, as well as the racist aspects of our organization's history."[49]

Yarnold's statement was written shortly after the departure of a top diversity and inclusion staff member, six months after the departure of the organization's diversity and inclusion vice president, due to a toxic environment of intimidation and coercion.[50]

Yarnold resigned, suddenly, in April 2021, amid widespread staff dissatisfaction regarding the organization's efforts to address diversity-related complaints.[51] Both Tercek and

Yarnold had praised and vowed to support the Green 2.0 diversity and transparency campaign.[52]

■

These are clarion bells sounding the demise of white supremacy in environmentalism. We have entered a new era that goes beyond diversity, equity, and inclusion to justice and transformation. It is time to *act* to institute meaningful, deep-rooted change. Reckoning of the past and transparency moving forward is how we will identify and root out the systemic problems causing and perpetuating injustice.

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# Thoughts on Being in the Environment While Black

*by Dorceta E. Taylor*



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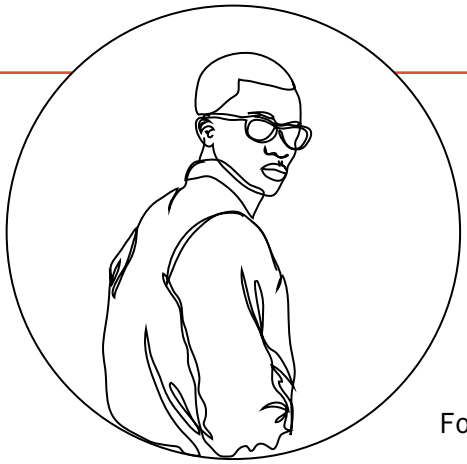

Since the emergence of environmental activism in the United States, white environmentalists have struggled to see how race is connected to the environment. For a long time, many environmentalists have ignored the connections, but in recent years, concepts like justice and equity have seeped into the environmental discourse as grassroots, people-of-color-led groups have stressed those interconnections. Recent events should erase all doubts that race—blackness in particular—is inextricably connected with racism, violence, and gross inequalities in the home, on the street, in the park, and elsewhere in the outdoors. The events, a few of which I will highlight below, make it impossible for environmentalists to concern themselves only with the trees, flowers, wildlife, fresh air—and not the people and their experiences in the natural and built environment.

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Environmentalists urge citizens to take a walk or a jog

without contemplating for one second the fate of:

Ahmaud Arbery

went for a jog.

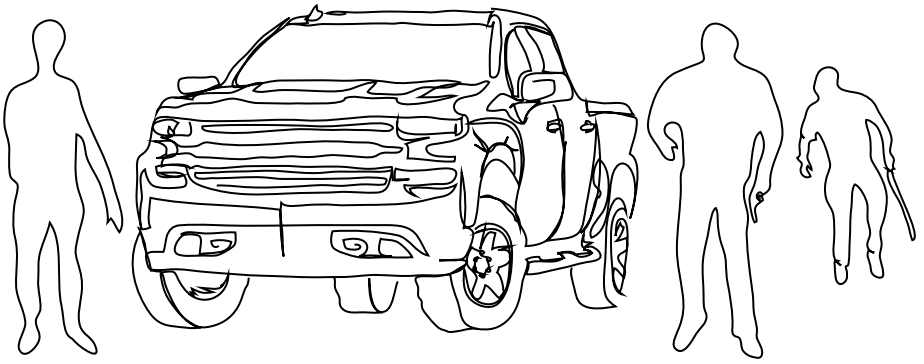
He was spotted by white supremacists and segregationists,

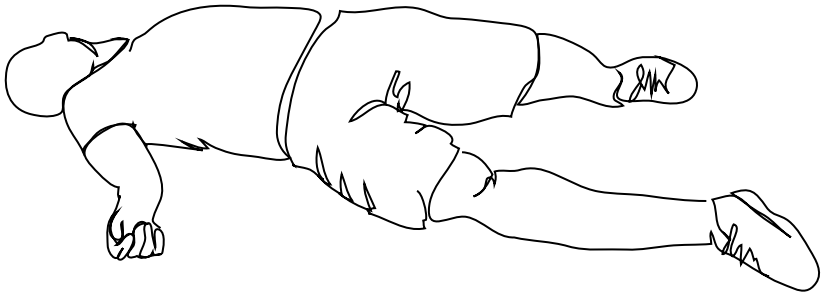
chased down in a vehicle,

cornered by three armed men.

Shot.

Dead.







ART BY DEVYN H. TAYLOR/DEVYNHTAYLOR.COM

In the confines of the Ramble in Central Park, Harvard graduate and member of the Board of Directors of the New York Audubon Society, Christian Cooper, is doing something he enjoys:

Birdwatching.

Frederick Law Olmsted designed the park with this activity in mind.

For Chris: right activity, wrong skin color.

Amy Cooper: right skin color.

Olmsted wanted (white) females to get fresh air and exercise and take contemplative walks in the park.

Amy's dog capers, unleashed in the park.

Olmsted would have a conniption over this—wrong activity for the park.

A police station and police patrols were installed in the park during the nineteenth century to prevent activities like the one Amy was engaging in.

Amy has the skin color combined with the power and privilege to ignore park rules.

Chris asks Amy to put her dog on a leash.

Amy, incensed by the hubris of a black man to make such a request,

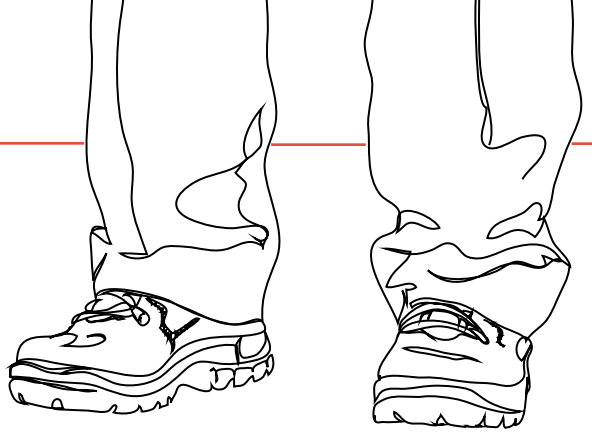
asserts her white power and privilege,

draws on stereotypical and racist tropes,

demonizes Chris,

with fear and trembling in her voice, calls the police to report that

an African American male is threatening her.



George Floyd could not have imagined dying in front of the store he walked out of and sat in a car with a friend. In the last minutes of his life:

George felt his face being pressed into the asphalt.

Black asphalt.

Black shoes, shiny shoes visible all around.

Earth.

Pushed into the earth.

Forcibly.

“Mother,” he calls out.

Mother. Earth. Earth. Mother.

Above him.

Whiteness.

The unspeakable violence of a white knee.

Pressed into his throat.

Unrelenting force.

Forced into the earth.

Air.

Air everywhere.

“I can’t breathe,” he says.

“Let him breathe,” cry the bystanders.

The white knee remains.

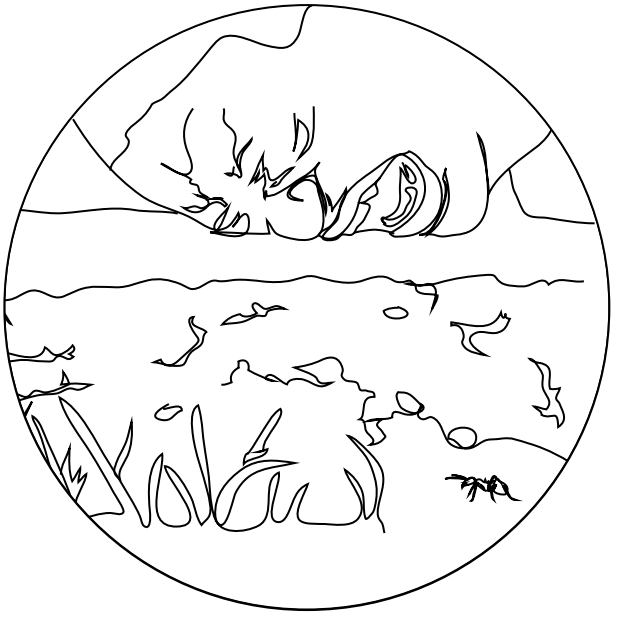
It does not let up.

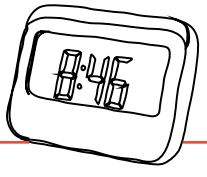
Air is forced from him.

Eight minutes and forty-six seconds.

No more air in George.

Dead.





These cases, as well as the case of Breonna Taylor who died in a hail of bullets while asleep in her bed and countless others, highlight the violence that blacks encounter in America every day. Environmentalists can no longer turn a blind eye to the structural factors that give rise to and perpetuate these inequalities. Environmentalists have to embrace diversity and incorporate activities aimed at reducing and eliminating racism, classism, sexism, homophobia into their everyday activities.

**DORCETA E. TAYLOR** is a professor at the Yale School of the Environment. Prior to that she was a professor of environmental sociology at the University of Michigan's School for Environment and Sustainability (SEAS) for twenty-seven years, where she was the James E. Crowfoot Collegiate Chair and the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Dr. Taylor received PhD and master's degrees from the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and the Department of Sociology at Yale University, and has published widely. Her most recent book is *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege, and Environmental Protection* (Duke University Press, 2016).

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*To view an illustrated video of* The Challenge of Diversity in the Environmental Movement, use this QR code.

ART BY DEVYN H. TAYLOR/DEVYNHTAYLOR.COM

# "The Puerto Rican Love" Life on the Island after Maria

"This constant love that we get from one another allows us to really be able to feel that hope, regardless of the situation. Feel that you're in a circle: that regardless of whether or not there are times when maybe the situation could make someone else feel alone, you don't, because you feel part of a community."

*In this conversation about Puerto Rico, climate crisis, leadership, and the all-too-often unrecognized and unsupported knowledge of communities of color,* Nonprofit Quarterly's *president and editor in chief, Cyndi Suarez, talks with a highly respected and beloved environmental leader in Puerto Rico who, because of the communications policy of the foundation he works for, cannot speak on the record.*

**Cyndi Suarez:** **It's wonderful to connect with you! At *NPQ*, we are prioritizing four areas: racial justice, economic justice, climate justice, and health justice—because these are the major movements. This issue of the magazine is on climate justice—and because I'm Puerto Rican, and because Puerto Rico has played such a big role in this area, I wanted to circle back and see what's going on there, and what the take on climate justice is right now. I remember that when I spoke to you back in 2017, you were saying that in Puerto Rico, people didn't really believe in climate change. And I'm wondering what it's like now. I know that so much has happened since COVID, and after Maria. A lot of movements were happening when I last spoke with you, and I would love some stories about what's going on now with that.**

**Anonymous:** I could connect you with some good community folks that could speak on the issue and really tell you, from the perspective of the communities, how they're seeing it, how it's affecting them. I'm sure you've seen that the Texas company Luma has taken over the electric grid. The Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (PREPA) no longer controls it.

**CS:** **Since when?**

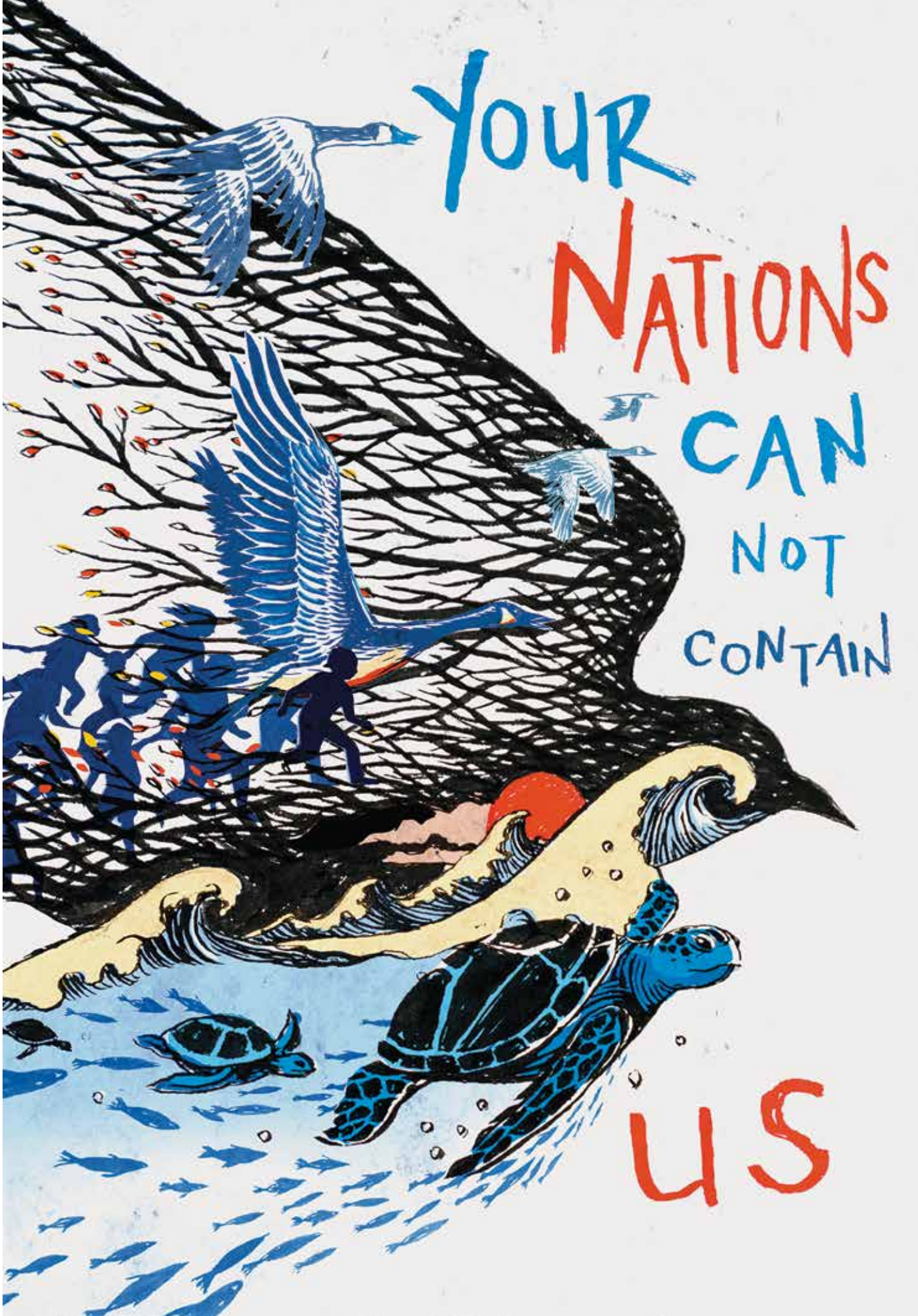
**Anon:** It started about mid-last year. And then they pushed out the union. It's been a big mess. Yet you still drive down the road and see electric pole after electric pole after electric pole that's literally bent over and about to fall. You know, if this was in the U.S., we would be raising flags, because we wouldn't be driving under those electric poles, because we'd be fearing that they would fall on us.

**CS:** **It was like that when I went there. I thought to myself, "Isn't that dangerous?"**

**Anon:** Yeah! And, you know, we have a hurricane that's coming. It's currently a thunderstorm—it could become a hurricane. Maybe level one, maybe level two. It could be coming by as early as tomorrow night. And things like that mean that the country is still fragile? Economically, we know we're fragile. And then, given the state of



"YOUR NATIONS CAN NOT CONTAIN US" BY JESS X. SNOW/WWW.JESSXSNOW.COM


YOUR
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> **The reason why we created the climate network was because all these climate change and environmental conferences that were taking place in Puerto Rico were taking place within four walls."**

COVID . . . a lot of people have lost their jobs, a lot of people are still trying to get back on their feet. A lot of people still don't have their homes in the best of shape, post-Maria. And so there's still a lot of blue tarps on roofs. And you think about all of that, and you think about the fact that something like a hurricane one, or a hurricane two, could do a lot more damage than that hurricane five did when we were much stronger. We were in an economic crisis, but we hadn't gone through COVID-19 and lived all the economic difficulties that it has caused, including the many people who died, the many households that were shrunk, right? Both here and in the U.S. But there are great folks that I can connect you with to get the full picture.

**CS: I've been wanting to catch up and figure out what Puerto Rico is learning. Because, you know, that report came out today—the United Nations report.[1]**

**Anon:** I saw that. Alarming.

**CS: There's just a lot to really put into perspective—because when I came into this position, what I learned from my time before, talking to people in the field, is that people don't always have all the information of the ecosystem that they're a part of. So, I'm hiring editors and bringing in art and bringing in all these different aspects and voices of the people that are doing this work.**

**Anon:** Right. And that's important.

**CS: Most of the knowledge in our sector—99 percent of it, 98 percent of it—is aimed at funders. It's not aimed at the people. The funders spend money to talk to other funders, because they think that's the most important thing to do. So, you don't hear from people like you. There's so much happening that I hear about from people who call me, and I'm thinking, "There are so many solutions! There are so many things that no one's covering!" So, I'm growing this journal as a multimedia platform. We have podcasts, we have webinars, we have fellowships, and we've been developing a program called the Voice Lab, which is for leaders of color to come in and be supported for a year to develop a portfolio of thought pieces, as a group. We've been doing a lot to highlight those voices, because honestly, what people like you guys know is very different from what is recorded as knowledge right now in the sector. My priority is to capture knowledge of people of color and support it and highlight it. And a lot of people want that.**

**Anon:** I think people are looking for that, Cyndi—and the more you do that, the more voice you give to these communities. You know, the reason why we created the climate network was because all these climate change and environmental conferences that were taking place in Puerto Rico were taking place within four walls, where the folks that were being invited were groups of scientists or professors or foundations—but communities weren't being involved. And they'd invite the executive director of an organization to come in, collect that knowledge, and bring it to the community. But the more access you give of that information to the community directly, instead of going through an organization, the more people understand why they're being asked to do things like reduce, like recycle and reuse, to conserve the environment—the more they can tie one thing to another. And in many cases, I heard over and over again scientists say in conferences, "And we've learned from the community that they already knew this stuff" and "We figured out that it was important to start working with the community." Well, see, you should have known from the start that it was important to be working with the community. We should have known that the community has a whole lot of this knowledge already. Let's connect it, you know? Let's really bring it together. And sometimes, you see that the community is afraid of scientists, because they say, "Well, they're going to spend a lot of money on analysis, and we're never going to get anything done." And you'll hear scientists say about the community, "Well, you know, they're gonna say they know stuff, but they don't."

And this is where empathy, understanding, and communication need to come into play. These are things we may think are so obvious, or we may think are so simple that it's a given that people understand. But it's those things that are going to enable these conversations to take place in an effective manner. You know, if scientists take half the empathy and understanding and wanting to hear and learn that I use when I talk to communities—man, we bridge the gap! And if communities do the same thing, vice versa, vis-à-vis scientists, and say, "Let me just listen to them—let me try and figure out what it is exactly that they're trying to communicate to me. And if they can't communicate it in a way that's effective, let me ask the questions to make sure that they communicate it in a way that I can understand." Boom! We have a connection. And I think that those gaps are important to fill.

**CS: Yes. So, what's your old organization doing now? Last time I was there, it was work around Hurricane Maria.**

**Anon:** Yes. They were doing work around energy. Giving out solar lanterns. We ended up giving out thousands of solar lanterns door to door.

**CS: I still have people thanking me for the lamps and telling me how much it meant to them. They still have the lamps.**

**Anon:** They clean them up and they shine them and they put them away. It's the funniest thing, you know? They give them the Puerto Rican love. Many said that the solar lanterns are an example of what the whole island can do by going 100 percent solar. I've gone back to houses where people still have the lanterns and still use them when the lights go out. I have seen on Facebook where people who were given lanterns post a picture of the lantern when the lights go out, and they write, "Thank God for giving me this gift that I can continue to use on days like this"—because the lights still go out. I mean, I know in my case, my lights go out twice a week for hours at a time.

**CS: When I was there last year for my dad's funeral, it was during the earthquakes. The day before I was leaving, the whole island shut down. I was so freaked out, because everything closed—the hotel, the supermarkets—and everybody was so casual about it. Everybody just brought out their generators. They were like, "It's just gonna be like this for a few days, so get some water." I was freaking out! Everybody was so matter of fact about it. It was like a party. Like it was normal. And it was so hot. It was just so hot. And I realized, "Oh, wow, this is normal."**

**Anon:** So there are two things to that, right? One is—and I think about this every single time I get off an airplane and come to Puerto Rico—that we've become so complacent with having the minimal. Having the minimal services—having poor public education, having minimal electricity service, having roads that are destroyed, driving under poles that could literally fall on us.

**CS: I mean, they could kill you, right?**

**Anon:** They could kill you. And then, we have really bad legislators, and we continue to reelect them. We've become so normalized about that, that we don't have higher expectations.

**CS: When did that happen? It wasn't always like that. I remember I would go there and everything was so *crisp*, and everybody voted.**

**Anon:** Yeah.

**CS: It seems like so long ago.**

**Anon:** Well, the voting still happens. But they are settling, and they know they're settling. And I don't even want to get into the whole issue of statehood versus independence versus, you know, commonwealth. Because I think that we're at a point where we're just okay with living the way we're living, you know? But on the flip side of that, because the electricity has gone out so much, because we are living so fragilely, because the economy is a mess, because we have really bad legislators, because of Hurricane Maria, we are better prepared for crises now.

**"Many said that the solar lanterns are an example of what the whole island can do by going 100 percent solar. I've gone back to houses where people still have the lanterns and still use them when the lights go out."**

> The minute you get back, you see the holes in the street, you see the infrastructure is a mess, you see all the buildings are a mess. You see the light poles hanging by a thread. And you just still see the results of Hurricane Maria."

**CS:** Say that again.

**Anon:** We're better prepared for a crisis.

**CS:** Because of what? Because of everything that's happened?

**Anon:** Because of Hurricane Maria, because of everything that's happened.

**CS:** So people just know how to deal with crisis.

**Anon:** So, when a crisis comes, people are relaxed and know what to do.

**CS:** Wow.

**Anon:** "I have this, this and this, and this in the house. All I have to do is do this, this, and this." So there's a flip side to it—there's a negative, which is we become complacent with, you know, everything. And then, on the other hand, we've become better prepared for crisis, which is: "A crisis comes, I'm gonna take it easy. I know what I have to do, and I'm going to do it." So, you have those two sides. But, you know, last time we left and returned, my wife said, "Oh, my God!"

**CS:** What is it like? Because of COVID? Is there lockdown in Puerto Rico?

**Anon:** It's been on and off lockdown. It's not a heavy lockdown right now. It's pretty open now.

**CS:** So, people aren't vaccinating?

**Anon:** People are vaccinated. I think 60 percent of the people are vaccinated.

**CS:** Oh! That's good!

**Anon:** Yeah, it's really good. What my wife was referring to was that the minute you get back, you see the holes in the street, you see the infrastructure is a mess, you see all the buildings are a mess. You see the light poles hanging by a thread. And you just still see the results of Hurricane Maria, and you say to yourself, "My God." And it's funny, because it hit my wife—it didn't hit me. But it didn't hit me because I knew that we have become accustomed to complacency. I knew that we have become accustomed to living in the situation that we are living in. So, the minute we got on the highway, she started looking around, and she saw the highway, she saw the buildings, and she said, "Oh, my God! It's really hitting me right now what we're living in." And I can't even walk on a decent sidewalk. You know what I mean?

**CS:** Yeah, I feel it when I go there. I feel it. And then I remember what it was like when I was a kid. And it almost feels like la-la land.

**Anon:** What happened, right?

**CS:** Yeah, it's very different. If you're not used to Puerto Rico, when you go there, living in a state of a crisis—you can't fully recover from it, it does something to your psyche. I was there for maybe five days, and it was very hard for me. And the earthquakes when I was there were very strong. I felt very unsafe. I felt like I was going to get swallowed up by the ocean. I was like, "How do people live here? This is so stressful." The lights went out. It was so hot. The fumes from the generators. Everybody was used to it. I had a headache from the fumes.

My brother lives in a gated community. And as we were leaving, as we were driving out, I noticed that the guy at the gate had a big automatic weapon. And I looked at my brother, who didn't flinch, and I said, "Why does the security guy have an automatic weapon?" Like, he's not in a war. And he said, "Oh, that guy, that's his own weapon. He's crazy. He just likes to bring his weapon to work." And I said, "And nobody does anything?" And he said, "Who's gonna do anything? There's no police, really. This is not what people are paying attention to." That was my vision on my way to the airport. It was almost like something out of a movie. It was pitch black, because there was no electricity. And I was just trying to get out. I felt like I was in a movie trying to catch the plane before everything collapses. And then you get to the airport, and everything is closed. There is just one place that opens at a certain time, and everybody stands outside to wait for that place to open to get food. It's like nothing works.

**Anon:** Right. You're 100 percent right.

**CS: It's very emotional for me when I go there. I don't like to go there, actually. My son wants to go, and I feel bad taking him, because this is the first time he's going to see it. But I feel like I missed those chances for him to see it. And this is what it is now. And he really wants to go. And my daughter, she had been wanting to move back to Puerto Rico. She really loved it there. She wanted to do creative work there.**

**So, we were there for that, and we were walking in San Juan, where we were staying, on the main street there with all the restaurants, Calle Loíza—and the street was broken up. And I remember I asked someone, "Why is this stuff in the street?" They said, "Oh, people cover the holes themselves, they just mix cement and cover the holes themselves."**

**Anon:** And that's the complacency I'm talking about.

**CS: But the amazingness of the people, though! People were creating all these microbusinesses, and there was all this healthy food that was delicious. And I think that's what struck her—the people. She would say, "The people here are just so unbelievable. Look at how it is, and look at how nice people are." Over here, you have a little thing in the street, and someone's ready to kill you. Over there, people are living this crazy existence, and they're sweet. You know, everyone's like, "How you doing?" People sit down at the table next to you and start talking to you. They recommend dishes. She had never experienced that, you know?**

**Anon:** Right. And those are the things that keep people in Puerto Rico, right?

**CS: I can imagine.**

**Anon:** Those are the things that, when we leave Puerto Rico, we miss. I have this sort of inside joke that I do when I'm in the U.S. Basically, I get into an elevator, and other people are there, and I'll just randomly say, "Good morning." Or I'll say, "Good afternoon." Or I'll say, "Good evening." Because I know, most of the time, people will not say it back. But if I do it in Puerto Rico, they will always 100 percent say good morning back, or good afternoon, or good evening. You know? And those are the things that remind me that the beauty of Puerto Rico is not only the nature, right? The environment of the island, the beaches, all of that. It's our people. So regardless of all the madness that we see, the people keep you there. And I think that's a powerful thing. It's a powerful statement. And I think that in times like these you need something that says to you that there is hope. And it's those reactions that you're getting from folks that let you know that, regardless of our current crisis, there's still hope. Because that love is being extended from one person to another on the island, no matter where you're from or who you are.

**CS: Is that part of the culture?**

**Anon:** Yeah.

**CS: I wonder what part of the culture contributes to that? That hope. . . .**

**Anon:** I think a large part of the culture contributes to that. It's island-wide. You could find that just as much in San Juan as you could find it in Cabo Rojo, or Humacao, or Loíza, or Ponce. I've seen it everywhere. I saw it equally in Vieques. And so this constant love that we get from one another allows us to really be able to feel that hope, regardless of the situation. Feel that you're in a circle: that regardless of whether or not there are times when maybe the situation could make someone else feel alone, you don't, because you feel part of a community.

**CS: People take care of each other.**

**Anon:** People take care of each other. And it's funny, because I have a friend who, when one of my staff, male, opened the door for her, said, "You guys don't need to open the door for me." Coming from her, it didn't surprise me, because that's something that's very American—you know, to show our ability to be independent and that we can do it ourselves. And I said, "I'm sorry that he did that. But this is what we do in Puerto

**The beauty of Puerto Rico is not only the nature, right? The environment of the island, the beaches, all of that. It's our people."**

> **This is what we do in Puerto Rico. We open the door for each other."**

Rico. We open the door for each other." I said, "I could tell you of countless times that I'll open the door for him, and I'll say 'after you' and he'll say 'no, no, after you,' and we get caught up in that whole 'after you' thing. But that's how Puerto Rico is in general."

I can give you a number of examples. Just yesterday alone—my family went to take my mother to dinner, and I remembered it because, as I opened the door for another family to come through, my family moved to the side, automatically. I didn't have to tell my family to move to the side—they moved to the side on their own. The other family came through, and then I was going to hold the door for the husband to come through. He says, "No, it's my turn." And then we all went through. And then he left. We still live in that sort of world that existed in the U.S. in the forties and fifties, where there were gentlemen and there were ladies, and chivalry was a good thing. All of that still exists here in Puerto Rico.

**CS: I think there's a name for that. Welcome culture? My ex-husband is from Sudan, and in Sudan it's the same thing. When we used to go visit Sudanese people when we lived in California, whenever you went to a Sudanese person's house there were sweets and the best food. Everything that was the best was saved. And you could only eat it when guests were there. So the kids would get all happy when there were guests. I've been to Sudanese people's homes where they insist that we sleep in the master bedroom, because it's the nicest bedroom. And I'm like, "I can sleep in another room, the kid's room." And it's this thing—they always say you give the best to the guests. I remember when I saw that I thought, "Oh, that's how Puerto Ricans are."**

**When I lived with my mom, people would just show up. A whole bunch of people would just show up on Saturday, and the whole day would be changed. Whatever we were doing, now we'd just be entertaining this family all day. And we would be doing it happily. And I remember when I lived in California, one time I stopped by a friend of mine who lived on the same block, and just knocked to see if she was there, because she had a kid that was friends with mine. And she was upset that I didn't call first. And I thought, "Oh, so I have to always remember that there are these different cultures." So, there's a name for it. It's not "welcome culture." But you give the best to the guests. Or to other people, you know? There isn't a thing about, you know, hiding things when the guests come, you know what I mean? I've seen people that do that. And it's just like, what?**

**Anon:** What is that? We put out the best glasses when the guests come, you know? Once when we had guests, I accidentally grabbed these metal cups that I get a kick out of drinking from, because they stay cool. And my wife goes, "No, what are you doing? Put out the best glasses."

**CS: You're like, "These are the best!"**

**Anon:** Yeah, I'm thinking in my mind, "These are the best."

**CS: So what are you doing now? When did you leave your previous job?**

**Anon:** I left some time ago. It was one of the hardest decisions I've ever had to make. Currently, I'm working with a foundation and continuing my work.

**CS: There are so many different people that I've talked to about this, but you have such a different take, because you're in the middle of all these different systems: the community. . . and you get this nonprofit sector, the people, the funders.**

**Anon:** I think it's really good work, the work I'm doing now. And it's given me a lot of peace in terms of economically stabilizing my family. I gave 120 percent of me, you know?

**CS: That's all? I think you gave more than that. At least 150.**

**Anon:** Yeah. And that means I put my family in a certain difficult place economically. But I believed, and still do, in everything we were doing—with a passion that I still feel today.

**CS: You miss it?**

**Anon:** I miss it hard.

**CS: What do you miss about it?**

**Anon:** I miss being with all the members in the community. I miss having them telling me what to do all the time. I enjoyed that. You know, leaders don't generally want people telling them what to do. I wanted it. I welcomed it. I'm glad you got to see it.

**CS: I'm glad I got to see it, too! I want my son to experience Puerto Rico. He's never been there. I have this thing about the different parts of Puerto Rico, you know, the different towns, and how they're all like their own world. I never do itineraries, but I kind of want to now, because I want to make sure that I do things that really show him Puerto Rico. So, I don't know, how do you cover Puerto Rico? You kind of can't, right? You have to like, pick a few places.**

**Anon:** Yeah, you can pick a few that will give him a good cultural perspective, where he can feel like he has connected.

**CS: Do you know what those would be?**

**Anon:** Yeah, for example, I would definitely take him to Isla Verde and see the beaches there, and maybe make some stops to see some of the environmental groups that are out there, and watch what they're doing. There are environmental groups on Isla Verde and in Santurce that are doing really great work reestablishing dunes in the area, which is so important because of climate change. So, they plant vegetation in the area. There are groups that take care of the leatherback turtle. And when the leatherback turtle comes in and nests, they take care of the eggs, and then form this pathway for the hatchlings to come out into the ocean. And then that becomes this whole spiritual moment with the community. In some cases, they're just quiet, and just sharing energy with the hatchlings as they catch the waves. It's the coolest thing. I remember I took my daughter to one. She would scream every time a turtle hit a wave. She's like, "Aah!" And I remember the folks there started saying, "Shhh." It's very spiritual, very awesome. And I think you and he would love that. It's a very powerful spiritual moment, seeing these hatchlings going out and experiencing life for the first time. And slowly trying to get to the ocean to start living its life. It's amazing.

Another awesome place—it is a heck of a drive, though—is Casa Pueblo, a nonprofit community group in Adjuntas. Along with the social justice work they do there, they also have all sorts of gardens, a butterfly habitat where they raise monarchs and grow their own coffee. You can buy a packet of coffee there, which is great.

I would take him to Loíza, and if there's a *bomba* group playing out there that night, I would take him there, and tell him the story of how Loíza was created, and how the people live. I would take him to Old San Juan, definitely. And take him to El Morro and tell him the story of El Morro and the story of Old San Juan.

What else? I would even take him—and this sounds lousy, but there's a reason for this—I would take him to the malls. Because I think sometimes people think that Puerto Rico is this "third world" country where we're still wearing, you know, leaves for pants and stuff. We also need to put things into perspective—you know, it's still just as fashionable as the U.S., and still just as "in" as the U.S. There are just things that are different about Puerto Rico, that's all. Culturally different?

And I would take him to Piñones—hardcore. Piñones is a must-stop.

**CS: Why?**

**Anon:** Because there's a culture there…it's part Puerto Rican, part Dominican. They make frituras. . . . When folks in the U.S. picture a restaurant that they want to go to on an island, it's something like Piñones.

**CS: When I was there one time I went through the mountains on the pig mile. And even though**

**There are environmental groups on Isla Verde and in Santurce that are doing really great work reestablishing dunes in the area, which is so important because of climate change."**

**I'm a vegetarian, it was so beautiful up there! And there were all the places to eat and dance. It was just so beautiful. I love the mountains.**

**Anon:** There are two more places that I would suggest happily. One would be El Yunque.

**CS: Is it open all the way now? I went there back in—oh my God, it was so beautiful.**

**Anon:** It's not completely open. If you go, you can call ahead of time and make reservations and buy your tickets.

**CS: What about Camuy?**

**Anon:** Cavernas de Camuy are really amazing. I would definitely put that up there. It's an awesome experience. It's him in the environment and really appreciating nature. I think that's a beautiful place to take him.

> **"If there's another place that I would definitely say to go to it's Cabo Rojo. The salt flats of Cabo Rojo. And the beach is called Playa Sucia. This is going back as far as the Tainos."**

And if there's another place that I would definitely say to go to it's Cabo Rojo. The salt flats of Cabo Rojo. And the beach is called Playa Sucia. This is going back as far as the Tainos, who were the first to access salt from the salt flats in Cabo Rojo. And since then, that was an industry that we had. Currently, there is no industry there in the salt flats—now it's a reserve. But it's dealing with some challenges due to climate change, and it'd be great if you could see that before it starts to disappear. And the spot that I would suggest is Playa Sucia, where the salt flats are, because it's an enclosed beach. It's the saltiest salt water you're ever going to swim in, but it's clean and clear. And then at the very top on the right-hand side, there's a reef with a cliff, but with a lighthouse on it that's closed. It's now owned by the municipality. And you can take pictures in front of the lighthouse, and then on the other side is just a cliff. And you can sit there, and you feel like you see the world, you know, and it's just ocean, all ocean. It's amazing. It's a place where you feel serenity, you feel peace. You feel connection with the environment that to some extent you feel with the beaches out here, but you *really* feel it there. It's my favorite place to go. So when my wife says, "Hey, what do you think if we go to Cabo Rojo?" I'm packing already, you know what I mean?

**CS: That's so cool. I think if I was in Puerto Rico, I would want to go to all the towns. I just find the whole thing so fascinating, that there are so many towns that have their own character and festivals. Thank you so much. This is great.**

**Anon:** You're welcome.

**CS: It's so great to hear that you're doing well and that your family's doing well. I'm just really happy for you guys.**

**Anon:** Thank you. And Cyndi, you know, there's only one ask I will ever, ever, ever, in my lifetime, have of you. And that's that, whatever you do, keep blasting Puerto Rico.

**CS: I try, you know? My work has grown so much, and I feel like I've been trying to figure out how to do that. When I first started covering it, people were like, "What? Why is this [being covered] here?" And I would say, "Okay, first of all, not only is it part of the U.S., but it is at the forefront of almost every issue that we're dealing with."**

**Anon:** Right.

**CS: And so people got really interested in it. And then other work happened. So, I'm thinking, okay, how do I stay in touch with what's happening in Puerto Rico? I know people in different institutes and stuff, but that's not always the voice that I want. I need one or two people to cover what's going on, because so many things have happened and I can't track it all. After Maria, there were so many things happening democratically, so many movements that I wanted to cover. But I would have had to focus just on it. So much was going on. And I wasn't there. So it became hard.**

**Anon:** I can also share news I come across with you. If I could be a help that way, a resource . . . because the power that you have to highlight what's going on here is amazing.

**CS: I want it. And people want to hear that.**

**Anon:** Definitely.

**CS: I wonder what's going to happen, and what's the future of Puerto Rico. I mean, I hope it's good. I hope that there's good stuff in place. And that there's some kind of normality, whatever it becomes.**

**Anon:** It feels like it's maybe still a decade away.

**CS: What do you think has to happen? Is it about the politicians?**

**Anon:** Part of it is the politicians. I think we need to continue to build strong movement. But I also think that the foundations here need to start thinking differently about the types of programs that they fund.

**CS: How do you think they should be funding?**

**Anon:** I think sometimes they play it too safe and don't fund work that is movement based. They fund after-school programs, which are important. They'll fund other programs that are equally important, but when it comes to movements, organizing, and that sort of stuff. . . .

**CS: No one's funding that?**

**Anon:** It's rare to see foundations funding it out here. There are very few that fund it, and there are very few dollars for it. And that's why when you get opportunities from foundations in the U.S., that can find a way to have the structure to be able to support a program in Puerto Rico, you love it, because they're not going be shy about funding movements.

**CS: So, U.S. foundations will fund movement.**

**Anon:** U.S. foundations will fund movement.

**CS: But not the Puerto Rico ones.**

**Anon:** It's not always the case in Puerto Rico.

**CS: Interesting.**

**Anon:** And the dollars are a lot less here.

**CS: Do you know *any* funders in Puerto Rico that are funding movement?**

**Anon:** The Puerto Rico Community Foundation. They're one that will fund this kind of work. But other foundations just straight up won't.

**CS: And in U.S.?**

**Anon:** There are many that do. They're really good for that. So, thank God for foundations like those that are willing to fund programs like that. That's what they want. That's what they're looking for.

**CS: If you had that money, what would you create?**

**Anon:** I would create a social justice organization that's able to do several things. It would have to do some work on electoral reform. It would do some sort of work around public education, the quality of public education. It would do something around climate change and the environment. And I know, these are some key topics that I'm mentioning, but I think that there are topics that we don't have enough people working on in the ways that they need to.

**CS: How much money would you need to do that?**

**Anon:** I think something like that can be done in Puerto Rico with five to six hundred thousand dollars a year, easily. Whereas in the U.S., that would be in the millions, probably.

**CS: I would love to see this. You are so awesome. I appreciate you so much. Thank you so much.**

**Anon:** Thank you, Cyndi.

**I think we need to continue to build strong movement. But I also think that the foundations here need to start thinking differently about the types of programs that they fund."**

## NOTE

1. *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis* (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], August 2021), www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/.

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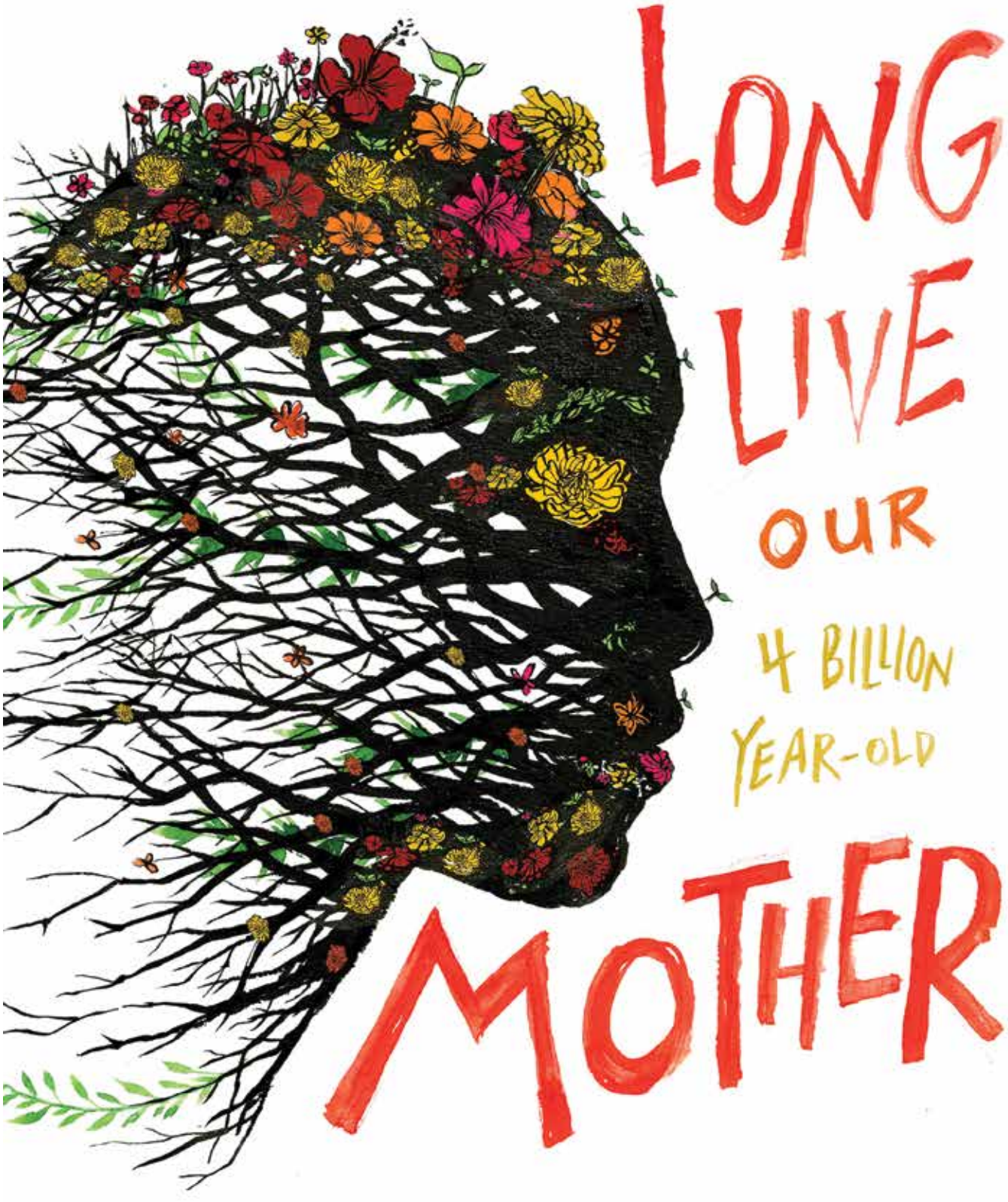




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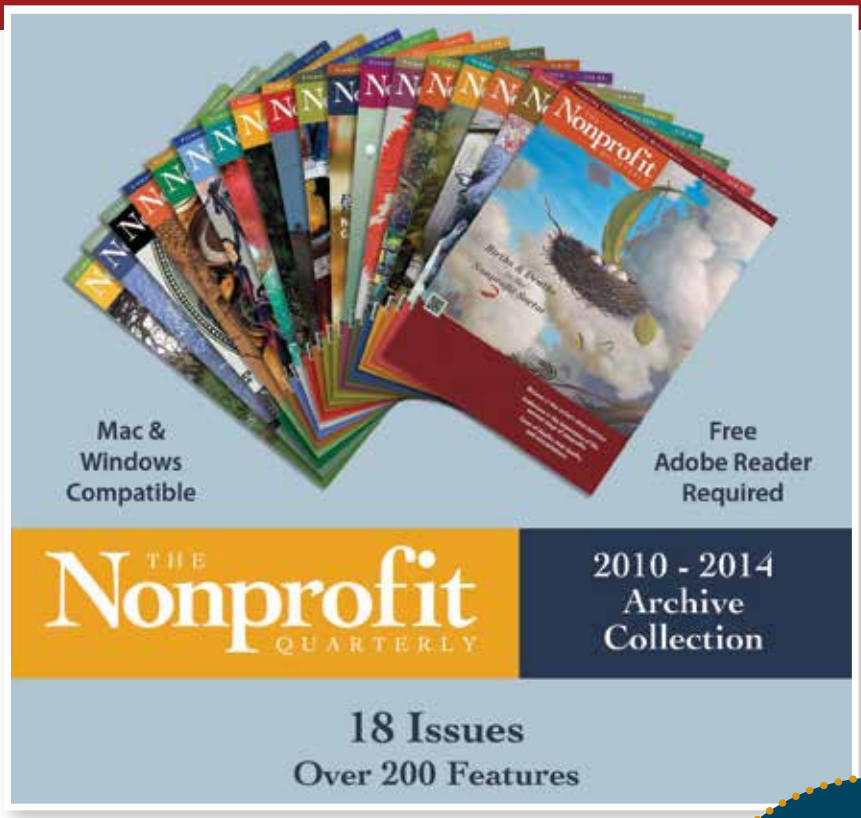


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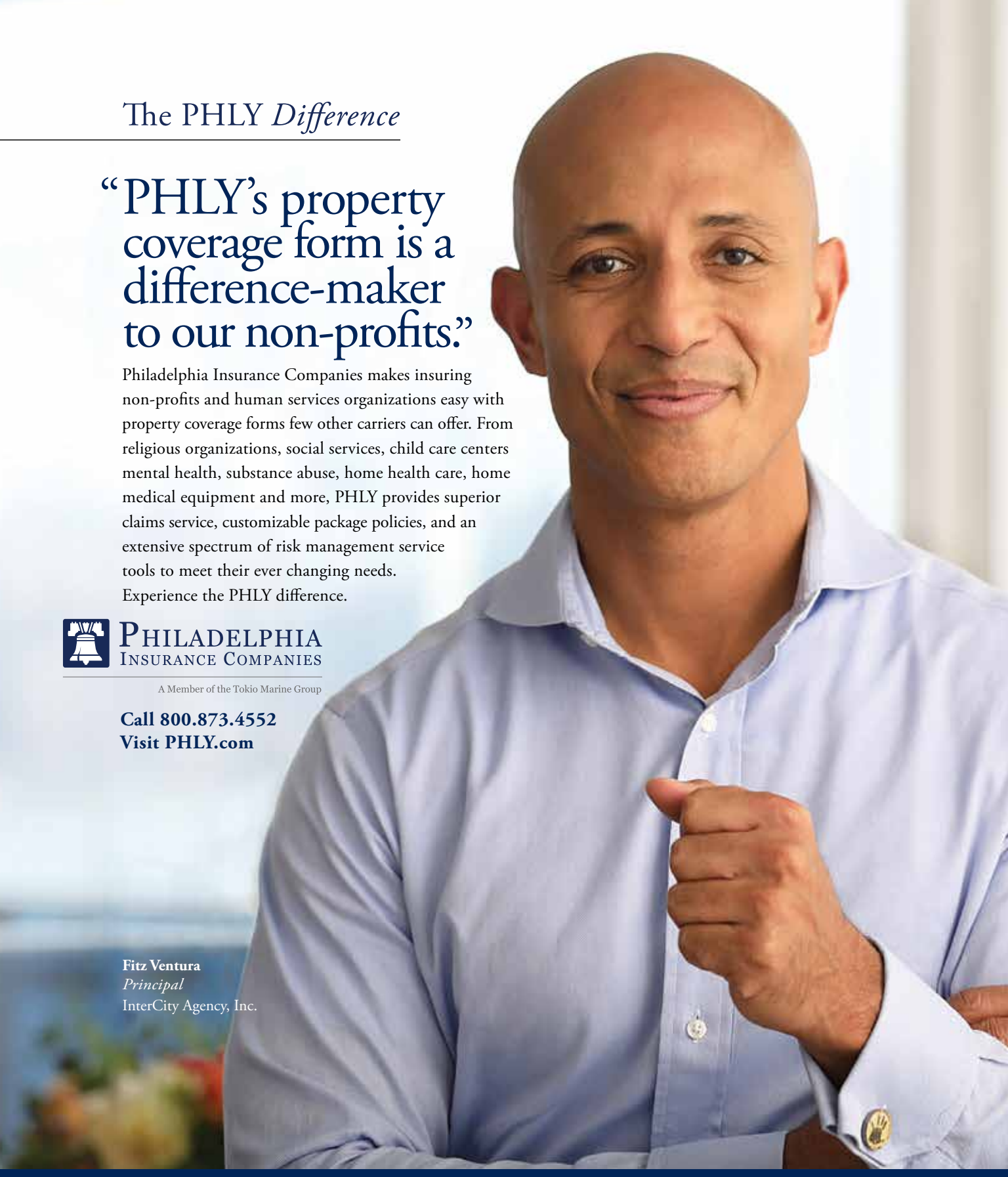

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