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## Environmental Racism & Intersectionality

Written by the [Climate Justice 101 project](#) of Work on Climate - Climate Justice Learning Group.

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# What is it?

## Environmental Racism

[Environmental racism](#), first coined by Dr. Benjamin Chavis in 1982, is systemic racism manifesting as environmental hazards that [disproportionately](#) harm Black, Indigenous, Hispanic/Latine<sup>1</sup>, Asian, and other people of color<sup>2</sup>. Made to live in “[sacrifice zones](#)” and “[fenceline](#)” communities, they are often least responsible for these unsustainable environmental hazards while most harmed by them. Environmental racism adds to existing structural oppression.

Environmental racism [around the world](#) shows how systemic racism, colonialism, imperialism, and [racial capitalism](#) continue to perpetuate harmful and long-standing [inequities](#) around every aspect of liveability, such as food access, drinkable water, clean air, toxic waste, housing, income, location, disaster recovery, pollution, health and mortality rates.

Climate crises [compound](#) the disproportionate and [interconnected](#) harms (both environmental and social) already suffered by marginalized communities. “[The worst disasters are never colorblind](#)” because climate change [amplifies](#) existing racial inequities.

*“Climate change is a [multiplier of injustice](#)<sup>3</sup>...the way our society is constructed exacerbates [the effects of] climate change.”*

—[Jacqueline Patterson](#),

Director of NAACP’s [Environmental and Climate Justice](#) Program

→ Refer to the section on [Who is harmed and who is helped? \(distributive justice\)](#)

## Environmental Justice

[Environmental Justice](#) (EJ) counteracts environmental racism. First championed by [leaders](#) like [Dr. Robert Bullard](#) and [Hazel M. Johnson](#), environmental justice<sup>4</sup> is now a broad movement that [shows](#) how **social justice is inextricable from climate justice**. EJ advocates for

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<sup>1</sup> We choose to use “Latine” in this document to refer to people from Latin American countries or with Latin American ancestry when gender is unspecified over words like Latino, Latina, Latin@, or Latinx, because of recent support for “Latine” as being more natural to Spanish speakers, and objections to “Latinx” from people from predominantly Spanish-speaking countries. However, we acknowledge that this is not a perfect solution and that language in this area is evolving. See, e.g., James Lee, [Call Me Latine](#) (2020); Alfredo Gutierrez, [From Hispanic to Latine: Hispanic Heritage Month and the Terms That Bind Us](#) (2020); Terry Blas, [“Latinx” is growing in popularity. I made a comic to help you understand why.](#) (2019); Gilbert Guerra & Gilbert Orbea, [The argument against the use of the term “Latinx”](#) (2015).

<sup>2</sup> While EJ was initially a U.S.-based term, environmental racism is global because racism is global. However, socially constructed racial oppression around the world is specific to the culture and history of a place and carry specific terms to describe them, e.g. casteism in India, apartheid in South Africa, xenophobia and ethnic cleansing of minority groups in East Asia, and colorism in Latin America.

<sup>3</sup> The UN Security Council recognizes climate change as a “[threat multiplier](#)”.

<sup>4</sup> We are deliberate in talking about justice. It’s worth noting the contextual distinction between “justice” and “equity” here, as noted on a main [environmental justice](#) resources site.

community-led and [decolonial](#) climate solutions that center justice for those most harmed. (Read [The Principles of Environmental Justice](#) and other founding resources [here](#).)

As a [result](#) of environmental racism, Black, Hispanic/Latine, Indigenous, Asian, and other marginalized communities have been [fighting](#) on the frontlines for both racial justice and climate justice for decades. Thanks to EJ leaders like [Peggy Shepard](#), there is increasing evidence and recognition that social justice and climate change are [interconnected](#) around the [world](#). EJ has [grown internationally](#) to recognize the direct [links](#) between [social](#), environmental, economic, political, food, and health justice.

*“Climate change is the result of a legacy of extraction, of colonialism, of slavery. The communities that are most impacted by Covid, or by pollution, it’s not surprising that they’re the ones that are going to be most impacted by extreme weather events. And it’s not surprising that they’re the ones that are targeted for racial violence. **It’s all the same communities...and you can’t treat one part of the problem without the other, because it’s so systemic.**”*

—[Elizabeth Yeampierre](#)<sup>5</sup>,

[“Unequal Impact: The Deep Links Between Racism and Climate Change”](#)

## Intersectional Environmentalism

[Intersectionality](#) was first coined by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw to advocate for a more holistic understanding of the world:

*“We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What’s often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and **the experience is not just the sum of its parts** [...] Cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are **bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society.**”*

—Professor [Kimberlé Crenshaw](#)

Prof. Crenshaw showed how a Black woman’s lived experiences with racism and sexism are inextricable from each other (and how [misogynoir](#), coined by Dr. [Moya Bailey](#), cannot be reduced or understood by separating the two). Similarly, it can be reductive and distortive to try and separate social injustices and climate injustices. Intersectional environmentalism uses a more disaggregated view to understand how effects of climate change are different for different people.

*“[\[Intersectional Environmentalism\]](#) identifies the ways in which **injustices happening to marginalized communities and the earth are interconnected**. It brings injustices done to the most vulnerable communities, and the earth, to the forefront and does not minimize or silence social inequality. Intersectional Environmentalism advocates for **justice for people + the planet.**”*

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<sup>5</sup> Climate attorney and environmental/climate justice leader, Executive Director of [UPROSE](#), co-chair of the [Climate Justice Alliance](#), first Latina Chair of the U.S. EPA National Environmental Justice Advisory Council

—Leah Thomas,  
Founder of [Intersectional Environmentalist](#) and [@greengirlleah](#)

An intersectional lens on race and climate reveals environmental racism. Intersectional environmentalism goes beyond racial justice and recognizes how [climate justice includes all aspects of justice](#).

For example, intersectional [studies](#) on [gender and climate](#) reveals that [80% of all people displaced](#) by climate change are women and nonbinary people, mostly from the Global South. Looking at race, gender, and climate together, even more [urgent climate injustices](#) emerge. Frontline climate activists, farmers, and land protectors around the world—who tend to be [Indigenous women](#) like [Berta Cáceres](#) and other [women of color](#)—face [outsized violence](#) and [sexual assault](#), while [leading dangerous](#) fights against polluting industries and [innovating](#) for the planet. Disaggregating data by gender and other factors reveals patterns of harm and the [shared](#) roots of exploitation between social injustice and climate injustice.

This more holistic understanding builds solidarity for climate justice across race, gender, class, and more. It makes our climate movement more just and inclusive, and ensures our solutions work for everyone.

*“There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because **we do not live single-issue lives.**”*

—[Audre Lorde](#)<sup>6</sup>

## Why Does It Matter?

**Including frontline expertise from people’s lived experiences is imperative**

[Solving climate change](#) effectively will require learning from the [lived experiences](#), [long-standing expertise](#), and [frontlines](#) leadership of people that already experience the most social and climate injustices. Global heads of state, funders, policymakers, and executives are overwhelmingly wealthy white men far from the impacts, who often ignore or fail to understand the voices, warnings, and lived expertise of people from marginalized communities.

*“These same exploits that are causing climate change on a massive scale...are causing very immediate health problems in areas inhabited by Black and brown people. Climate change is the **most immediate threat** for the marginalized people of this country and of the world. **But that also means we are the most quick to act.**”*

—[Corina Newsome](#), ornithologist and climate activist,  
[“Climate change is also a racial justice problem”](#)

We should listen to [young](#), [disabled](#), [queer](#), [trans](#), [Asian](#), [Black](#), [Indigenous](#), [worker](#), [farmer](#), [feminist leadership](#) and others on the frontlines when creating climate solutions, because they

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<sup>6</sup> Originally in [Learning from the 60s](#), quoted in “[A feminist revolution demands climate justice](#)”, “[We can’t solve the climate crisis unless Black lives matter](#)”, [Mijente](#), [TransLoc](#), [OxFam](#), [350.org](#), and across many movements as a call for interconnected and holistic understandings of systemic problems and solutions

are already surviving climate catastrophe today. Intersectional environmentalism is [imperative](#) to the [fight against climate change](#) — those closest to the problems are closest to the solutions.

- There is growing evidence that Indigenous sovereignty could [save](#) the planet, yet Indigenous people face ongoing [violence](#) for protecting their biodiverse lands against polluting industries. Refer to the “[Indigenous Rights & Land Sovereignty](#)” section.
- Project Drawdown ranks [gender equity](#) as one of the most effective [climate solutions](#).
- [Principles of disability justice](#) offer a guide for real solutions, and grassroots leaders from Black, Indigenous, [South Asian](#), and other environmental justice communities, among many others, warn against extractive or unsustainable [false solutions](#).
- Workers and laborers created a [framework](#) for rebuilding a climate-resilient and sustainable society. Refer to the “[Labor & A Just Transition](#)” section for more.
- Many grassroots climate activists, like Black queer organizer [Phillip Brown](#) (from Florida, U.S. and Kingston, Jamaica), are systematically excluded from government climate negotiations (which are sometimes funded by the fossil fuel industry) that would disproportionately impact them first.
- Black women have long been [leaders](#) of environmental justice. It’s because of their decades of leadership that EJ is now recognized as an important federal [priority](#) in U.S. environmental and climate policy.

*“If we’re thinking about how to become more resilient to the impacts of climate change, we must focus on the people who are actually the most impacted. And we must understand that it is people from their own communities who are [best equipped to lead](#) them. [...] **The climate crisis requires that we build the biggest team possible. So wouldn’t it make sense to prioritize the people who already get it?**”*

—Dr. [Ayana Elizabeth Johnson](#)<sup>7</sup>

## Systemic racism and social injustice derail efforts to save the planet

Due to their experiences with environmental racism, many Black, Hispanic/Latine, Indigenous, Asian, and other marginalized people of color [disproportionately](#) experience the worst of climate change already. As a result, they [care more](#) about climate change and have been fighting climate change on the [frontlines](#) for decades—all while having to contend with systemic racism. As climate expert Dr. Johnson [shows](#), “**racism [derails](#) our efforts to save the planet**”.

- [Climate justice](#) also [means abolition](#): “When we call for climate action, we must call to end environmental racism. It’s state violence. Whether by pollution or by the hands of the police, the refrain, “I can’t breathe,” resonates.” [Sam Grant](#) and others explain the [climate case for abolition](#) (and here are some [talks](#) on how racial justice is climate justice). For a deeper analysis, refer to [Ki’Amber Thompson](#)’s thesis on “[Prisons, Policing, and Pollution: Towards an Abolitionist Framework within Environmental Justice](#)”.

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<sup>7</sup> Dr. [Johnson](#) is a marine biologist and climate expert, co-creator of the [How to Save a Planet](#) podcast, co-founder of [The All We Can Save Project](#), founder of [Urban Ocean Lab](#)

- Nobel and Pulitzer-winning Professor Toni Morrison says<sup>8</sup>, “The function, the very serious function of racism, is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being.”
- Psychologist Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum writes<sup>9</sup>, “Cultural racism...is like a smog in the air. Sometimes it is so thick it is visible, other times it is less apparent, but always, day in and day out, we are breathing it in.”
- [Black scientists](#), scholars, climate activists like [Vanessa Nakate](#), and more experience systemic and interpersonal racism daily<sup>10</sup>. From pollution to policing to other forms of racial trauma, systemic racism drains time, energy, and lives away from the work they set out to do.

## Solutions to climate injustice and social injustice are connected

*“The root causes of the problems our communities face—like climate change, racism, and economic inequality—are all deeply connected. **Since the problems are connected, so are the solutions.**”*

—NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program (ECJP),  
[Advancing Resistance and Resilience in Climate Change Adaptation: Action Toolkit](#)

Attempts to address climate change that ignore human impacts or social injustices may not be sustainable (or even be harmful), because these “[root causes are all deeply connected](#)”. Both systemic racism and climate change can be largely [attributed](#) to a long history of colonialism, imperialism, [racial capitalism](#), and other interwoven [systems](#) of [oppression](#) that continue today. Read more about how climate change and its impacts stem from exploitative systems of social inequity: [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#)

Understanding environmental racism and intersectionality shows how climate justice and [real](#) solutions to climate change need to be rooted in anti-racism, anti-oppression, and [new systems](#) of social justice. As [Basav Sen says](#), “Addressing climate change effectively inevitably also means challenging deep rooted [social](#) and economic inequalities.”

*“Without the presence, wisdom, and expertise of frontline communities, along with the acknowledgment and understanding of their history, culture, and issues, there can be neither an accurate nor functioning gage of effective solutions.”*

—[Gen-Green.org](#)

## What are the power dynamics?

### Who is harmed and who is helped? (distributive justice)

How are the impacts of environmental racism distributed for people in inequitable ways?

Marginalized and low income communities [disproportionately](#) experience the [effects](#) of climate and environmental racism first and [hardest](#), contribute the least to environmental harm, are

<sup>8</sup> Toni Morrison, Black Studies Center public dialogue. Pt. 2 (1975) (keynote address, full recording [here](#))

<sup>9</sup> From “Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?”, p. 86 (excerpt [here](#))

<sup>10</sup> Read their stories via hashtags like these: #BlackInClimate, [#BlackInNature](#), #BlackInTheIvory, #AskABlackBirder, #BlackInSTEM, #BlackInSciComm, #NoJusticeNoPride

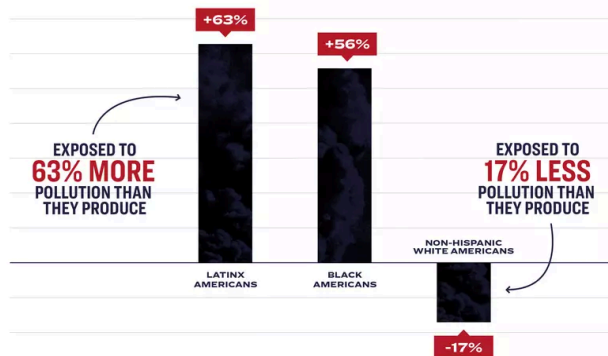


systematically under-resourced or overlooked in recovery or resilience, care the most about the climate, are often the [only](#) line of [defense protecting](#) land from harmful industries. Since this distributive injustice is a result of systemic harm, there is often a racial consequence even when there is no [racial intent](#) or active malice<sup>11</sup>.

**Race(-ism) is the most [significant](#) predictor of the liveability** of a community—more than poverty, land, or homeownership—and people of color are more likely to die, become disabled,

or experience a public health crisis from the [toxicity](#) of environmental racism. Here is more detailed evidence of environmental racism: [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[5\]](#) [\[6\]](#) [\[7\]](#) [\[8\]](#) [\[9\]](#) [\[10\]](#) [\[11\]](#) [\[12\]](#) [\[13\]](#)

**POLLUTION EXPOSURE BY POPULATION (2003–2015)**



Source: Christopher W. Tessum et al., "Inequity in consumption of goods and services adds to racial-ethnic disparities in air pollution exposure," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (March 2019).

A 2019 study from the National Academy of Sciences found that air pollution is "[disproportionately](#) caused by the consumption of goods and services by the non-Hispanic white majority, but disproportionately inhaled by Black and Hispanic minorities." (See graphic.)

[Redlining](#), a structurally racist housing policy from the 1930s that caused mortgage lenders to discriminate against Black neighborhoods in the U.S., systematically denied communities of color access to decades of credit and drove them to the [least](#) environmentally livable areas. Structural racism also [perpetuated](#) a racial wealth gap, making it more difficult for people to move, recover, or live well.

Nearly a century later, the [effects](#) on public health [persist](#), as redlining transformed into covenants and zoning laws that are now baked into city planning and real estate. [Across more than 100 cities](#), a recent *Climate* study [found](#), formerly redlined neighborhoods are 5 degrees hotter in summer today than areas once favored for housing loans, with some cities seeing differences as large as 12 degrees.

[Environmental racism](#) is a [public health emergency](#). Communities of color are disproportionately driven to live on land that suffers from [high floods](#), [poisoned water](#), [polluted air](#), [excessive pesticides](#), [sweltering heat](#), [toxic waste](#), and even [pandemics](#) (for example, see this 2021 report on [fossil fuel racism](#)).

Climate change also has a greater [effect](#) on women and nonbinary people due to existing gender inequities: they [disproportionately](#) live in poverty, experience malnutrition, depend on agriculture and natural resources, and face other socioeconomic barriers around the world (and particularly in the [Global South](#)). The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina revealed the unequal

<sup>11</sup> Paraphrased from *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* by Michael Eric Dyson (p. 20)

impacts of climate disaster at the intersections of factors like race, gender, class, geography, and more (see [case study](#) below).

[Environmental racism](#), intersectionality, and justice are [international](#) issues, both among countries (e.g. [toxicity](#) of recycled [e-waste dumping](#) from the global North, mainly the U.S. and Europe as the world's largest e-waste exporters, to the global South, mainly China, India, Nigeria, Ghana, in cities like Guiyu) and within them. From the notorious “[Chemical Valley](#)” in [Canada](#); to the 1984 [Bhopal gas leak](#) (still the world's deadliest industrial disaster) and more in places like [Delhi](#), [India](#); [Thailand and Mexico](#); [Scotland](#); [Mongolia](#), the [Gulf of Guinea](#); and more, we can see how a lack of distributive justice exacerbates climate issues and community resilience. There are thousands of [cases around the world](#) that show how environment injustice and social injustice deeply affect each other, given their shared roots in extractive systems.

### **Who has the power in the decision-making and who has been left out? (procedural justice)**

*“Those closest to the pain can speak toward the solutions that we need with the greatest clarity. It is absolutely essential that those folks have a place in our movements, otherwise we’re going to have major blind spots.”*

—Varshini Prakash,

Co-Founder of [Sunrise Movement](#),

[“Why the fight for climate justice is a fight for justice itself”](#)

Despite all the above, the current environmental movement, decision-makers, representatives, and voices in power are [disproportionately](#) white and cisgender. This [overrepresentation](#) due to structural inequity often results in the erasure or exclusion of individuals with critical experience and leadership for climate, particularly people from Asian, Black, Latine/Hispanic, Indigenous, queer, nonbinary, trans, disabled, low-income, and many other marginalized communities who tend to be on the frontlines of environmental and climate crises.

- “While racial minorities make up approximately 40 percent of the U.S. population, they compose [only](#) 12 to 16 percent of staff at environmental NGOs, foundations, and government agencies”.
- Activists of color, particularly Black and Indigenous people, were [early leaders](#) of environmental justice, climate urgency, and sustainable living before they came into broader social awareness, but have been largely erased from white-dominated spaces, media, and funding.

*“The reason the world hasn’t been fighting climate change as hard as it should is because powerful people don’t want to stop exploiting people of colour. The urgency of climate change is also an urgency for racial justice.”*

—[Eric Holthaus](#),

meteorologist and climate journalist



Policies decided without the direct participation of people who would be most affected are often harmful. More often than not, climate and environmental issues are a result of poor decision-making processes.

- Disability justice<sup>12</sup> calls for “nothing about us without us”. The plastic straw ban was one example of the environmental movement failing to include [disabled perspectives](#) in decision-making (for many disabled people, plastic straws are a [necessity](#)). While made with good intentions, the ban resulted in harmful impacts by not centering those who would be most affected by the decision.
- Jackson, Mississippi has a [water crisis](#), but it isn’t being addressed because the state legislature chooses to ignore the city’s Black leaders. The most [egregious](#) case of this kind of environmental racism and failure of procedural justice in the U.S. is Flint, Michigan. These water crises highlights how structural racism in politics and policy-making reinforces environmental racism through harmful neglect and exclusion.

## Whose needs are seen and whose aren’t? (recognition justice)

**Data reporting often overlooks intersectional experiences.** Studies often fail to disaggregate data across multiple demographic axes and miss patterns of harm that disappear when the data is averaged (which favors any overrepresented majority). That invisibility and lack of representation in the data can lead to an array of inequitable or unjust decisions when it comes to the environment, climate change, and day to day survival. The fight for recognition is a fight for human rights.

- In India: Climate migrants are “often [invisible](#) to the official state apparatus, or worse, are actively erased from cities through force or discriminatory development policies.”
- In France: “It is illegal in France to collect data on ethnic, racial or religious origin. Officialdom [neither counts nor recognises](#) racial minorities.” This refusal to recognize aspects of people’s identity erases any awareness of [inequities](#) in harm, and does not erase the harms themselves.
- In the U.S.: Given how race itself was socially constructed and counted over time, the national Census was a way to [deny access](#) to resources for Black communities, and increasingly other marginalized identities, [by not recognizing their existence to begin with](#).

In order to have a deeper understanding of social injustice to inform climate solutions, it’s important to recognize and measure environmental racism with an intersectional approach. Here are examples of how recognition justice and data equity (equity in data analysis) can reveal and address racial and social inequity:

- [Dr. Robert Bullard](#), considered the father of environmental justice, speaks on the impact of his recognition justice work.
- In a 2019 PNAS [paper](#), researchers employed a “pollution inequity” metric that revealed Black and Hispanic/Latine communities are exposed to way more pollution than they produce, and white communities are exposed to way less pollution than they produce.

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<sup>12</sup> While disability caused by environmental racism is a form of structural violence, disability can also be a form of [embodied knowledge and resistance](#). Disability justice advocates are [leaders](#) in advocating for procedural justice.

- In the 2017 [UN DESA](#) paper “[Climate Change and Social Inequality](#)”, researchers show a framework for analysis that can be used across climate issues and illustrate causal systems of inequity around the world.
- In a 2011 paper, the U.S. NIH recommends [ways to apply](#) intersectionality in environmental analysis
- W.E.B. Du Bois created pioneering [data storytelling](#) and [visual portraits](#) that demonstrated patterns of systemic racism at the 1900 World’s Fair. His work in recognition justice paved the way for [today’s visual activism](#).

[Equitable](#) data analysis informs and [enables](#) active countermeasures against inequity and injustice. Recognition justice in the context of environmental racism and intersectionality means not erasing marginalized experiences by ignoring racial harm or just averaging to favor a majority.

## What’s Being Done Today?

A growing number of [organizations](#) are doing innovative and intersectional environmental justice work. Here are a few different examples that center justice in their climate action. See the Indigenous Rights & Land Sovereignty section for more.

### Policy & Law

[WeACT](#) is one of the founding organizations of the environmental justice movement, started in Northern Manhattan, New York. WeACT organizes local community members; advocates for local, state, and national policy; researches environmental health, renewable energy transitions, and climate adaptation; conducts solar panel installation job-training for people of color; coordinates the [Environmental Justice Leadership Forum](#); [and more](#). See case studies of what’s being done today at the end of their 2020 [green jobs report](#).

[Sunrise Movement](#) is a youth-led political advocacy organization working to “make climate change an urgent priority across America, end the corrupting influence of fossil fuel executives on our politics, and elect leaders who stand up for the health and wellbeing of all people.” They organized in key battleground states to elect candidates for a Green New Deal and delivered a [climate mandate](#) to President Biden with policymakers that advocate for environmental justice without ties to fossil fuels or corporate lobbyists.

U.S. [climate policy plans](#) from the Biden administration highlight environmental justice and frontline communities as part of more [equitable plans](#) to address climate change. This was made possible by the [grassroots activists](#) in frontline communities who led the EJ movement.

[Earthrights International](#) leads legal campaigns and cases to hold powerful corporations, governments, and banks accountable for violating human and environmental rights.

[Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide](#) is a global alliance of attorneys, scientists and advocates that helps communities speak out for clean air, clean water, and a healthy plane, collaborating across borders to promote grassroots efforts.

## **Energy & Economy**

In the clean energy sector, companies like [BlocPower](#) and organizations like [GRID Alternatives](#) and [Emerald Cities Collaborative](#) work to provide green jobs and access to energy efficiency solutions to low-income communities and communities of color.

The [Greenlining Institute](#) (in counterpoint to redlining) advances economic empowerment for people of color through advocacy, community and coalition building, research, and leadership development.

## **Advocacy & Community-led Projects**

The [Equitable and Just National Climate Platform](#) is a nation-wide coalition with 300 EJ organization signatories, focused on aligning, advocating, and developing federal EJ policies in the U.S. informed by local EJ communities.

[Zero Hour](#) is a youth-led and intersectional climate activist organization working on educating, mobilizing, and training for climate justice according to these guiding [principles](#).

[UPROSE](#), founded in 1966, is the oldest Latine community-led EJ group in Brooklyn, New York. They organize the [Climate Justice Youth Summit](#), the largest annual gathering of young activists of color in the U.S.

[Asian Pacific Environmental Network](#) (APEN4EJ) [works](#) with working-class Asian immigrant and refugee communities to fight major polluters and build new models of resource allocation and land use. It's part of [California Environmental Justice Alliance](#), a state-wide EJ coalition that combines grassroots organizing with policy advocacy (e.g. for bills like [AB 1628](#) on procedural justice).

[Planting Justice](#) works towards food sovereignty, economic justice, and community healing, resulting in 500+ permaculture gardens and 40 green jobs in Oakland, California, while [partnering](#) with the [Sogorea Te' Land Trust](#) to transfer Ohlone land back to Indigenous stewardship.

## **International Coalitions & Leaders**

[Climate Justice Alliance](#) unites frontline communities and organizations against extractive systems of production and political oppression, and towards resilient, regenerative and equitable economies by building towards a [Just Transition](#).

[350](#) is an international coalition working to accelerate a world of community-led renewable energy for all, to stop new fossil fuel projects through community resistance, and to divest from existing fossil fuel companies.

[Cultural Survival](#) works with Indigenous communities around the world to inform Indigenous people of their rights, issues and threats affecting their communities.

[New Earth Disability](#) (NED) is a World Institute on Disability initiative to research and educate the connections between climate change and disability, and advocate for procedural climate justice.

[Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance](#) (PACJA) is a coalition of over 1000 members in over 45 countries in Africa mobilizing to influence policy, institutions, governments, and the public towards climate and environmental justice.

[Grist](#) is an independent media nonprofit that reports on climate solutions and the connections between social justice and climate change. Many of the [2021 Grist 50 leaders in climate justice](#) are building solutions for environmental justice and social equity.

The [Rise Up Movement](#) was founded by Ugandan climate activist Vanessa Nakate as a platform to amplify the voices and leadership of African climate activists in the global conversation. Their advocacy includes [#StopEACOP](#) to defend against a massive crude oil pipeline through East Africa.

## Case Study: Hurricane Katrina

[Hurricane Katrina](#) in the U.S Gulf Coast in 2005 is one [example](#) (among [many](#)) of the connections between environmental racism and climate injustice. This climate disaster in New Orleans, Louisiana was not only the [costliest](#) storm in U.S. history, it revealed [inequitable](#) impacts based on the intersections of social factors like race, [gender](#), class, and more.

Black homeowners were [more than 3x](#) as likely to have their houses flooded as white homeowners, because historical [redlining](#) in New Orleans meant white neighborhoods could [choose](#) to be on higher ground and [84% of those living in poverty](#) at the time were Black. Black homeowners also received [\\$8,000 less](#) per family in government aid due to structural inequities in housing values. As a result, over a third of the Black community [could not return home](#), while the white population returned to nearly the pre-storm total. Congressman Barney Frank described this as “[ethnic cleansing](#) through inaction.”

Similarly, queer, trans, nonbinary, and many LGBTQI+ individuals were left vulnerable to [sexual assault](#) and systematically [denied emergency aid](#), shelter, evacuation, and capital. Existing heteronormative and racist structures compounded [obstacles](#) to disaster recovery for the [Black gay](#) community of the Lower Ninth Ward. This included the denial of emergency services, the jailing of a transperson just for showering, and disproportionate internal displacement ([climate refugees](#) within one’s borders) in the aftermath of Katrina.

Low-income Black women were similarly [neglected](#) and [unprotected](#). Since many were also primary caretakers of the young and the old, they [experienced](#) disproportionate unemployment and psychological [stress](#). Just as important was what happened since Katrina: [more](#) Black women ran and won seats across government, eventually leading Louisiana's three largest cities and [paving political representation](#) for women in the state. LaToya [Cantrell](#) won a city council seat in 2012 after [revitalizing](#) the Broadmoor community from Katrina's devastation (and her work serves as a national [model](#) for post-disaster recovery today). She then [made history](#) as the first woman mayor in New Orleans's 300-year existence.

Explore [A Katrina Reader](#) for more.

## What Can I Do Next?

Collectively, we can take action at the individual, community, and [institutional](#) levels in order to counteract the extractive and oppressive systems that perpetuate environmental racism and climate change. The [How to Save a Planet](#) podcast, [350's Climate Resistance Handbook](#), and [Our Climate Voices](#) all share personal stories of individuals who decided to take action, along with how they got started and their journeys to today. Here are ideas, each with a few examples, for ways you can get started in systems change for social, environmental, and climate justice. You only have to show up in your own way—we're all in this together.

### Contribute to environmental justice

Fund [some EJ organizations](#), [reparations](#), [mutual aid networks](#), Indigenous land [rematriation](#), frontline or online climate justice activists, and other justice-focused groups to shift resources to grassroots and community-led coalitions. Get involved in a way that makes sense for you and your spheres of influence.

- **Local:** Find EJ groups related to your location (e.g. city/district, state/province, country) or communities, especially if they are led by people from the communities they serve. One strategy is to search for the word "justice" along with your location, community, or area(s) of environmental interest. For example, searching "environmental justice oakland" shows the volunteer group [No Coal in Oakland](#); "environmental justice ca asian" shows [APEN4EJ](#); "food justice oakland" shows [Planting Justice](#); "climate justice south asian" shows [Brown and Green](#). Get involved locally to protect neighborhoods or politically to influence policy (e.g. advocate with [NRDC](#) and sponsoring coalition [VISION](#) for the latest EJ bill [SB 467](#) in California #YesOnSB467). Share EJ news or work with your friends, neighbors, networks, and on social media.
- **Coalition:** Sign the [petition](#) to end "sacrifice zones" by [Hip Hop Caucus](#). Check out great EJ coalitions like [WeACT](#), [Climate Justice Alliance](#), and [350](#) in "[What's Being Done Today?](#)". If there's a group you're interested in, look up their "get involved" page, subscribe to their newsletter, make a (recurring) donation, join an event, attend a webinar or Q&A, find your local chapter, volunteer, sign a petition, email them, reach out

and get to know another volunteer or organizer, and/or share with friends and online. Here are just a few more to start: [GreenAction](#), [Green 2.0](#), [WECAN](#), [Intersectional Environmentalist](#), [Zero Hour](#).

- **Commit:** Participate in [Terra.do](#)'s online climate school. Take the [Climate Funders Justice Pledge](#) to fund BIPOC-led organizations by the [Donors of Color Network](#). Support the launch of the [Red Black Green New Deal](#). Get your companies, investors, advisors, and any other funders in your spheres to commit to justice-focused funding, or get them to match or double your own pledges and funding. Consider [performative philanthropy](#) and the cost of silence. Fund local and direct where you can—internships, scholarships, grassroots, and community-led [organizations](#).

## Connect with community

Build or join community and invest in resilient relationships for mutual support and shared accountability. Experience self-care as community care and vice versa to sustain your change-making. As Mariame Kaba says, "[Everything worthwhile is done with other people](#)."

- **Friends and networks:** Share this [Climate Justice 101 Guide](#) with your friends and family and choose to do one action together. Gather a handful of friends to make an [All We Can Save #ClimateSquads Circle](#) (like a remixed "book club" for climate justice). Share social or climate justice work in your favorite group chats, Discord servers, or start a #climate-justice Slack channel at work.
- **Climate:** Join an action-oriented climate or social justice community like [Climate In Colour](#) (climate justice community and courses), [Terra.do](#) (climate school), [Work On Climate](#) or [ClimateAction.tech](#) (action-oriented tech workers), [Just Seeds](#) (artist collective), [COMMUNITYx](#) (social good platform), [You Change Earth](#) (collection of climate communities).
- **Local:** [Organize](#) with a [mutual aid network](#) or community-based political advocacy group (e.g. [PIVOT](#), [Mijente](#)). Volunteer with an EJ organization in your neighborhood. Support rematriation for the Indigenous [land you're on](#). Join your local chapter of national or global coalitions like [Sunrise](#) or [350](#). Get to know local organizations, leaders, and neighbors.
- **Industry or interest:** Join [ClimateAction.Tech](#) or [Tech Equity Collaborative](#) if you're in tech. Join [Design Justice Network](#) (DJN) if you're in design. Sign up with [Data 4 Black Lives](#) (D4BL) or [Algorithmic Justice League](#) (AJL) if you're a data scientist. Join [Activist Teahouse](#) if you like tea. Join [Allied Media Projects](#) if you're in media. Join [Creative Resilience Collective](#) if you care about health justice. Join [Food First](#) if you're interested in food justice. Join [Free Radicals](#) if you're interested in science justice.

## Integrate justice and anti-oppression as an active daily practice

Begin with reflecting on your values, inclinations, and ways of knowing. Continue to diversify and reexamine your networks, information sources, and media. Find ways to make it an ongoing and sustainable practice for you. Shift beyond binary or reductive mindsets (e.g. narratives as victim/persecutor/rescuer, dominant/submissive, extractive/transactional, rules/order) and



approach it with more expansive mindsets (e.g. narratives as a student, creative, explorer, apprentice, community member). Start small, do it with a friend, and take time to rest, set boundaries, and nourish your own wellbeing along the way. Reflect on the wisdom from a civil rights elder on [exhaustion and rest, spiritual practice, and the necessity of loving community](#).

- **Form daily habits:** Subscribe, read, pay, and act with ongoing education paired with clear calls to action like [Bad Activist Collective](#), [Anti-Racism Daily](#), [One Anti-Racist Action A Day](#), and [Practical Decolonization: How to live it daily](#). Set up recurring funds to a BIPOC- or other community-led group, and/or sign up to give recurring financial support to individuals (e.g. via Patreon). Find something [sustainable](#) for you, and bring those you love along. Educate, train, and practice in proactively raising [anti-racist kids](#) before they start [internalizing racism](#) from a young age by default (and generally raising anti-oppressive kids early on *before they grow up*).
- **Follow guidance:** Listen to climate wisdom from these [podcasts](#). Take Rachel Rickett's [Spiritual Activism 101 course](#). Join Myisha T's [Check Your Privilege](#) community. Read Ijeoma Oluo's [So You Want To Talk About Race](#). Follow [So You Want To Talk About](#). Look to resources from cross-cultural or cross-movement solidarity organizations (e.g. [People's Collective for Justice and Liberation](#)). For understanding different perspectives: Pay and learn from a variety of anti-oppression, climate justice, and systems change leaders and educators like [these](#). For actions to take on current events: amplify and support activists, workers, land defenders, grassroots organizers, and other frontline folks on the ground in an area you care about.
- **Practice accountability:** Working for climate justice and social justice is complex, nuanced, and messy. Answer to what you've learned from harm with restorative action. At the same time, hold space for mistakes and multitudes of possibility in any work being done, both yours and others. Keeping yourself and your communities accountable to minimizing harm is an ongoing labor of care. To make this easier, [form a "pod" and do a pod mapping exercise](#) (a concept from [Mia Mingus' work](#) on [transformative justice](#) with [BATJC](#)). Recognize where you have privilege (in the form of unearned lack of barriers due to aspects of who you are), so you can use it in solidarity with those who don't. Move past fear of conflict with specific [practices](#). [Call in](#) and address internalized issues within your own families, friends, and coworkers, and communities (e.g. refer to general [talking points](#), or more specific practices like this actionable [toolkit](#) and [these talking points](#) on racial justice and anti-Blackness in Asian communities).
- **Diversify life:** Examine whose perspectives you're exposed to and counteract dominant or overrepresented sources. Read and make zines. This could look like independent climate journalism (e.g. [HEATED](#), [Floodlight](#)); global climate news (e.g. [Mongabay](#)), international publications (e.g. [China Dialogue](#), [Sixth Tone](#)), local news and publications (e.g. [The Leaflet](#) in Berkeley, CA); [#OwnVoices bookshelf](#) and media (e.g. [Them.us](#), [Disability Visibility](#), [Brown Girl Mag](#), [Truthout](#), [Rematriation](#), [Teen Vogue](#), etc), creators (e.g. [The Creative Independent](#), [hire](#) black women creatives), tech and society (e.g. [Logic Magazine](#)), and much more for any aspect of your life. Think about exploring or applying this to your work industry, friend circles, or personal interests, to [where](#) you live

(and [who](#) you live with), what you know (or assume to know), or how you experience living in society (and how you don't).

- **Move resources:** Consider holistic and ongoing [reparations](#) you can make. Where you see an opportunity and can do so, shift money, power, time, attention, land, and other resources from yourself to environmental justice communities (where environmental racism is disproportionately harmful), marginalized people, and community-led organizations to counteract dominant systems. There are many chances to act in a variety of ways every day. To not get overwhelmed, reflect on how you plan to protect and direct your energy and resources—sustained focus can be valuable over a period of time. Here is how to [move money](#) more responsibly.
- **Relearn:** Rebuild understanding of how we got here through non-Western, anti-colonial, and global perspectives. Relearn U.S. history through [non-U.S.](#) perspectives, and through Asian American perspectives of [land, labor, and empire](#), through Black perspectives with [Plain Talk History](#), through [An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States](#), [Afro Asia](#), etc. Understand [characteristics](#) of white supremacy culture and the [pervasiveness](#) of systemic racism.
- **Imagine and co-create:** Tap into your interests, skills, and creativity with community to imagine and build experiments for collective liberation. Be in conversation with others during this practice. Find inspiration in the works of expansive visionaries like these: [Mariame Kaba's We Do This Till We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice](#), [adrienne maree brown's Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds](#), [Grace Lee Boggs's Living for Change](#), [Sundus Abdul Hadi's Take Care of Your Self: The Art and Cultures of Care and Liberation](#), [Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower](#), and more.

## Challenge harmful power dynamics

Start with networks, workplaces, and other places where you have more influence and speak up where you see an opportunity to question, protect, or amplify. Ask questions around distributive, procedural, recognition, and other forms of injustice. Understand how harmful structures are showing up in where you live (and who gets to live there), where you work (and who is missing), and other defaults you may take for granted or are not forced to reckon with on a daily basis. Find opportunities to use your unearned privileges to protect, center, and amplify others.

- **Recognize context for how unjust structures manifest.** Think about power dynamics you're involved in and their historical roots. How does distributive injustice manifest around you? How are oppressive systems showing up around you, who are they designed to protect or neglect, and who stands to profit or face harm? How can you use your privilege to counteract this or minimize harm for others?
- **Think about who is excluded or missing in decision-making spaces.** When making decisions (in a group or otherwise), think about whose voices are not being heard, and more importantly, whose voices are not being represented at all. Who is trying to get in the room but can't, whose ideas won't be taken seriously by default, and whose presence is under a constant threat of erasure? Think about the unintentional but harmful side effects that may result, especially to those whose needs you may not

understand. Counteract this by involving community and centering those most harmed or invisibilized.

- As [John Lewis](#) says, "Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and **get in good trouble, necessary trouble.**"

## Learn more

This is not meant to be comprehensive, only a short starting point to learning more in addition to the resources, articles, organizations, and research hyperlinked above.

### Environmental racism

- [What is environmental racism?](#)
- [Environmental racism is the new Jim Crow](#)
- [Why every environmentalist should be anti-racist](#)
- [The link between climate change and racial justice](#)
- [Why the climate movement must unite behind the Black Lives Matter movement](#)
- [The environmental movement is very white. These leaders want to change that.](#)

### Environmental justice

- [What is environmental justice?](#)
- [Why the fight for climate justice is a fight for justice itself](#)
- [Why climate change is an environmental justice issue](#)
- [Environmental justice leadership is non-negotiable](#)
- First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, [Principles of Environmental Justice](#) (1991)

### Intersectional Environmentalism

- [Intersectional Environmentalism: A Crash Course](#)
- [How Intersectional is Your Climate Justice?](#)
- [Intersectionality and climate change: An emancipatory research agenda](#)
- [We need an anti-colonial, intersectional feminist climate justice movement](#)
- [Five ways to make the climate movement less white](#)
- [The Urgency of Intersectionality, by Dr. Crenshaw](#)
- [“Intersectionality isn’t just a win-win: it’s the only way out”, as climate activist Henia Belalia explains.](#)

### Other

- Articles
  - [New Earth Disability \(NED\)](#)
  - [The Unknown Ally in the Fight for Environmental Justice](#)
  - [People with Disabilities Needed in Fight Against Climate Change](#)
- Watch or read
  - [There’s Something In The Water](#)
  - [Hesapa - A Landback film](#)

- [Braiding Sweetgrass](#)
- [Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster](#)
- [Leah Pennimen - Farming While Black](#)
- [An action toolkit from the NAACP's Environmental & Climate Justice Program](#)
- [An Afro-Indigenous History of the United States](#)
- Podcasts
  - [How to Save a Planet](#)
  - [Brown Girl Green](#)
  - [Created Equal - A terrible thing to waste](#)
  - [Toward Climate Justice](#)
  - [Breaking Green Ceilings](#)
  - [Green Dreamer](#)
- Subscribe
  - <https://www.antiracismdaily.com/archives?tag=environment>
  - <https://atmos.earth/>
  - <https://rightsandresources.org/>
- Follow and support online
  - [Climate In Colour](#)
  - [Teju Adisa-Farrar](#)
  - [Ayana Elizabeth Johnson](#)
  - [Monica Marie White](#)
  - [Green Girl Leah](#)
  - [Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim](#)
  - [Diné Aesthetics](#)
  - [Black Girl Environmentalist](#)
  - [lilnativeboy](#)
  - [Atmos](#)
  - [Pattie Gonia](#)
  - [Mikaela Loach](#)
  - [Radical Family Farms](#)
  - [A Growing Culture](#)
  - [Vanessa Nakate](#)
  - [Aja Barber](#)
  - [Aditi Mayer](#)
  - [Disablednoutdoors](#)
  - [Sonya Renee Taylor](#)
  - [adrienne maree brown](#)
  - [Connie Wun](#)
  - [Alok Vaid-Menon](#)
  - [Mariame Kaba](#)
  - [Corinne Rice-Grey Cloud](#)
  - [The Decolonial Atlas](#)
  - [Seeding Sovereignty](#)
  - [Farmer Rishi](#)

- [natureboyniel](#)
- [disability\\_visibility](#)
- [Elwing Sương Gonzalez](#)
- [Decolonize Myself](#)
- [Bad Activist Collective](#)