

Introduction to Environmental and Climate Justice



ENVIRONMENTAL
SOLUTIONS
INITIATIVE



"'Climate Justice Now' sign on a bike at a rally against climate change (51059099596)"
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What's in this module?

Activities

3 parts
2 videos
4 readings
4 activities
4 optional projects

Key Resources:

- [Environmental Justice \(Mohai et al., 2009\)](#)
- [Climate Inequality: Forgotten History. \(Martinez & Gupta, 2013\)](#)
- [A colonized COP: Indigenous exclusion and youth climate justice activism at the United Nations climate change negotiations \(Grosse & Mark, 2020\)](#)

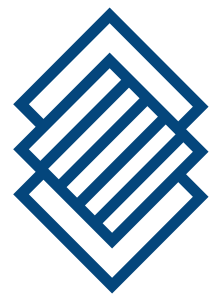
Contents

This module is broken into 4 parts. Part 1 & 2 introduce environmental and climate justice. Part 3 provides 5 case studies from the environmental/climate justice movements . Part 4 provides 4 different project or assignment options. This module could potentially be used an entire unit in a course. This module could be broken into 3-4 class sessions or used for an entire unit.

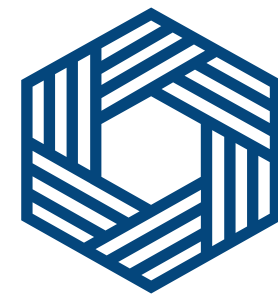
Agenda and Learning Objectives



Review origins of climate and environmental justice with readings, discussion and lecture



Brainstorm and **communicate** definitions of climate & environmental justice



Compare, contrast, and **critique** definitions from both academics and activists



Explore stories & voices from the climate & environmental justice movements

Warm up:

How do you define climate and/or environmental justice? What might be the difference between these terms?

Turn to a partner or small group and brainstorm your ideas...



"Google Street View - Pan-American Trek - Sugar factory" by kevin dooley is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Part 1

Introduction to Environmental Justice

FIGHT Re-Re-enclosures
think LAND Access Issues
Accountability (recall WaPo piece)
SP. in South & TRIBAL / 1st Nation
Concerns
GMOs - seeds / food justice
food security / sovereignty
House EPA on

Introduction

- The (modern) Environmental Justice (EJ) Movement began in the early 1980s as communities of color protested the inequitable distribution of toxins in their communities.
- **This led to two landmark reports:**
 - Siting of Hazardous Waste Landfills and Their Correlation with Racial and Economic Status of Surrounding Communities (General Accounting Office, 1983)
 - Toxic Waste in the United States (United Church of Christ, 1987) - this report coined the term "environmental racism"



Protestors block the delivery of toxic PCB waste to a landfill in Afton, North Carolina, 1982. Credit: Ricky Stille. Retrieved from <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/environmental-justice-movement>



These two reports led to the establishment of The Field of Environmental Justice and the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

For more see the EPA EJ Timeline

Early EJ Definitions

The EPA and Robert Bullard (a founder of EJ studies), originally defined EJ as the right to a safe and healthy environment for all:

Robert Bullard: “All people and communities are entitled to equal protection of environmental and public health laws and regulations.”



Robert Bullard at the "Michigan Environmental Justice Summit" by umseas is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

EPA: “The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Fair treatment means that no population, due to policy or economic disempowerment, is forced to bear a disproportionate share of the negative human health or environmental impacts of pollution or environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local and tribal programs and policies” Mohai et al., 2009

For much more on the history of the field of EJ, please see Mohai et al., 2009.

Activity 1:

Narratives of the EJ Movement: Academic and Activist

Read & Analyze:

Before reading:

- What are the origins of the EJ movement dating before the early 1980's?
- How are environmentalism and racism connected?



The future of environmental justice is true equality (Taylor, 2020) - Sierra Club Magazine

Dorceta E. Taylor is an American environmental sociologist known for her work on both environmental justice and racism in the environmental movement.



This environmental justice activist breaks down deep ties between racism and climate change (Interview with Yale - 360, Republished by PBS)

Elizabeth Yampierre is an internationally recognized Puerto Rican attorney and environmental and climate justice leader of African and Indigenous ancestry born and raised in New York City.

Post Reading Discussion Questions:

Learn more about Yeampierre's
work at Uprose

Learn more about Doreta Taylor's
work

- For Yeampierre and Taylor, what are the roots of the environmental justice movement?
 - What are some specific examples they give?
 - How are the roots intertwined with history of systemic racism and discrimination in the U.S.?
- How do their personal experiences connect to environmental justice issues?
- What are their arguments for the future of environmental justice both for environmental organizations and for future government policy?
- What other insight do these articles give you about the environmental justice movement, both from an academic and activist perspective?
- How do these activists and scholars define environmental justice?
- Which perspective stood out to you more? Why?

Reflection and Critique:

Do the EJ definitions we have seen or read miss anything or anyone?

- What critiques or questions do you have so far?
- How do these readings compare and contrast with your own knowledge of EJ?



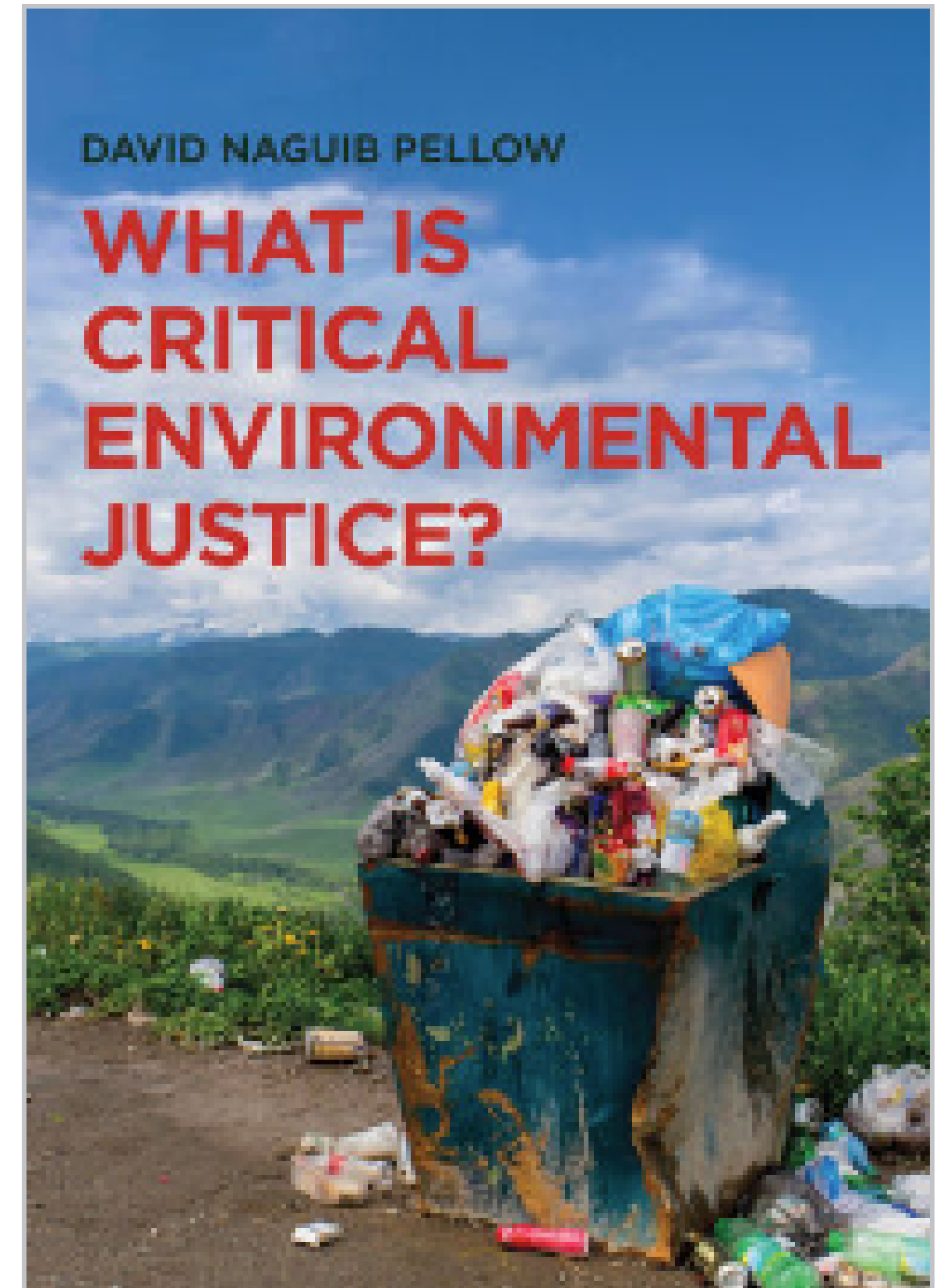
"Cloud Thinking" by Dejan Hudoletnjak is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Evolution of EJ Definitions

More recent definitions of EJ have evolved to take on a more critical stance:

For example, David Pellow (2017), in his book *What is Critical Environmental Justice* establishes four pillars four what he calls Critical Environmental Justice (CEJ):

(1) emphasis on the intersectionality of multiple inequalities and axes of oppression—including domination of nonhuman species—rather than on single categories of difference; (2) attention to multiple spatial and temporal scales of environmental justice problems and solutions; (3) a focus on state power as reinforcing and reproducing deeply embedded social inequalities; and (4) recognition of the indispensability of marginalized populations and species that are often treated as expendable.



Further Reading

Questions to consider after reading:

- What theoretical perspectives does Pellow rely on to conceptualize “critical” environmental justice? Why?
- How does EJ relate to the Black Lives Matter Movement?
- What is the difference between 1st generation EJ studies and 2nd generation?
- How does critical EJ studies take into account more “social categories of difference”? How does the concept of intersectionality help describe this?
- What are your reflections and analysis on the four pillars of critical EJ?

TOWARD A CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE STUDIES

Black Lives Matter as an Environmental Justice Challenge

Published online by Cambridge University Press: 15 August 2016

[David N. Pellow](#)

[Show author details](#) ▾

Article

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Abstract

In this paper I expand upon the recent use of the term “Critical Environmental Justice Studies.” This concept is meant to capture new developments in Environmental Justice (EJ) Studies that question assumptions and gaps in earlier work in the field. Because this direction in scholarship is still in its formative stages, I take this opportunity to offer some guidance on what Critical Environmental Justice (CEJ) Studies might look like and what it could mean for theorizing the relationship between race (along with multiple additional social categories) and the environment. I do so by (1) adopting a multi-disciplinary approach that draws on several bodies of literature, including critical race theory, political ecology, ecofeminist theory, and anarchist theory, and (2) focusing on the case of Black Lives Matter and the problem of state violence.

From Environmental Justice to Climate Justice

With definitions and examples of EJ in your mind, lets transition to explore climate justice ...



"File:Climate March 0619 (34210337012).jpg" by Edward Kimmel from Takoma Park, MD is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.



"Climate Justice - #climatestrike Melbourne IMG_3486" by John Englart (Takver) is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.

Part 2

Introduction to Climate Justice



"Rise Up 4 Climate Justice graffiti - Campo Santa Marina, Venezia, Veneto, Italia - 2022-02-07" by Mænsard vokser is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

A Coalescence of Movements

It is important to point out that the EJ Movement evolved with a coalescence of various movements happening simultaneously, both at the U.S. level and globally including different groups, perspectives and issues.



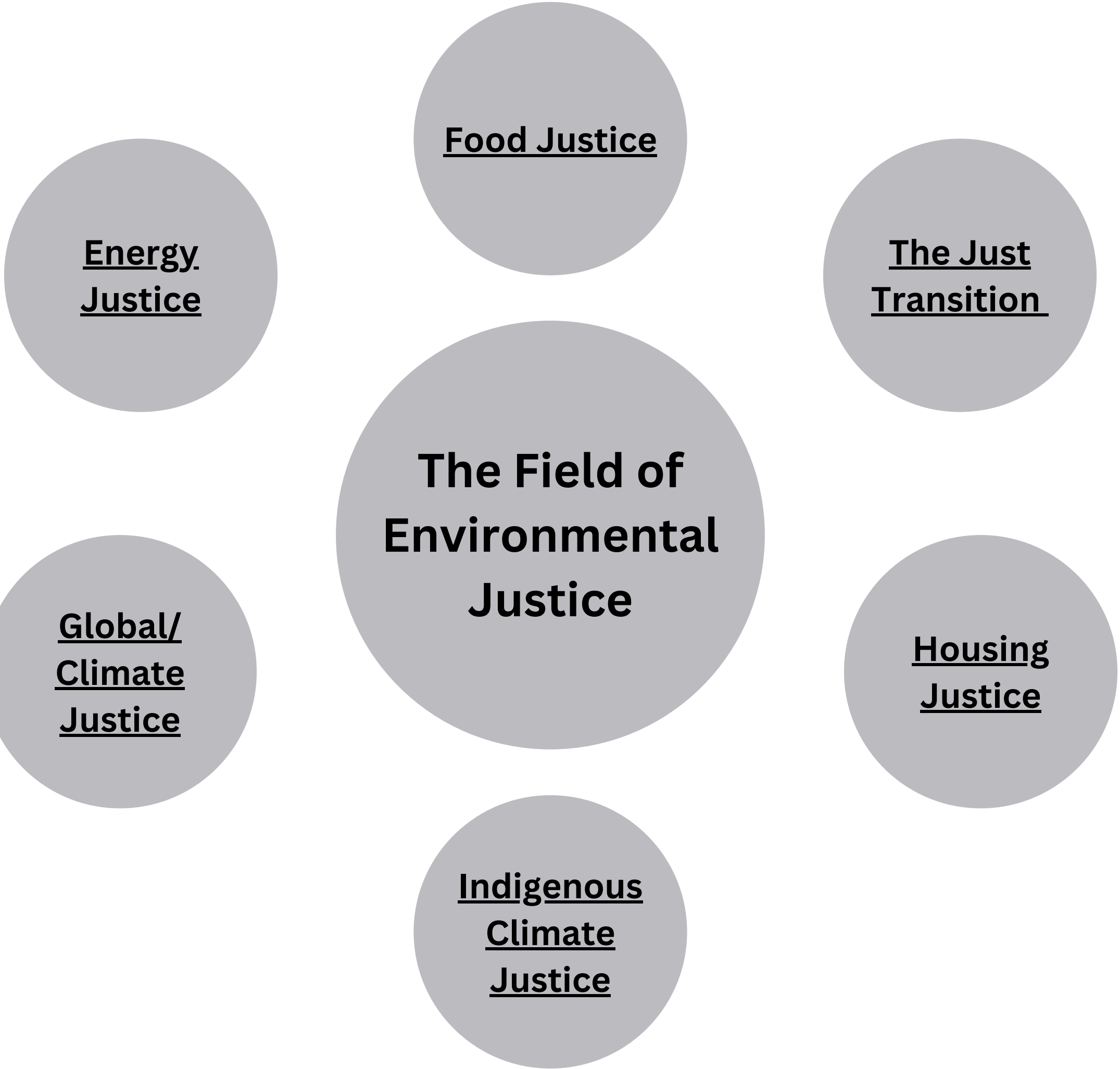
"coalesce in the darkness" by [cipher]
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A Coalescence of Movements

From this lens, the **Climate Justice Movement** was one of many, overlapping movements that sought to broadly understand the injustices of climate change on the world's most vulnerable populations at both local and global levels, which involved a wealth of topics including energy, human rights, food, indigenous rights, trade, technology and more.



These movements led to the field of EJ studies with various sub areas which continues to grow and expand in both depth and breadth.



Energy Justice

Food Justice

The Just Transition

The Field of Environmental Justice

Global/Climate Justice

Housing Justice

Indigenous Climate Justice

Activity 2

Read & Define

To build foundational knowledge, read this piece that describes the historical nature of climate change, which was rooted in inequality and injustice.

2013 CEED

Climate Inequality: Forgotten History



Even though you and I are in different boats, you in your boat and we in our canoe, we share the same River of Life. What befalls me, befalls you. And downstream, in this River of Life, our children will pay for our selfishness, for our greed, and for our lack of vision.

*Oren Lyons
United Nations, 1992*

Dr. Cecilia Martinez
Shalini Gupta
Reprint, 2013



Center for Earth, Energy and Democracy

Cecilia Martinez and Shalini Gupta, “Climate Inequality: Forgotten History”

How does this historical piece define climate justice?

What aspects of history are critical when defining or understanding climate justice?

Why?

2013 CEED

Climate Inequality: Forgotten History



Even though you and I are in different boats, you in your boat and we in our canoe, we share the same River of Life. What befalls me, befalls you. And downstream, in this River of Life, our children will pay for our selfishness, for our greed, and for our lack of vision.

*Oren Lyons
United Nations, 1992*

Dr. Cecilia Martinez
Shalini Gupta
Reprint, 2013



Center for Earth, Energy and Democracy

Want to see other definitions of climate justice? Optional Reading for more context.

Yale's Climate Connections Article



What is 'climate justice'? » Yale Climate Connections

It begins with the idea that the adverse impacts of a warming climate are not felt equitably among people.

 Yale Climate Connections / Nov 3, 2022

The Climate Justice Explainer on MIT's Climate Portal



Climate Justice

Climate justice is the principle that the benefits reaped from activities that cause climate change, and the burdens of climate change impacts, should be distributed fairly.

 MIT Climate Portal

More specific Definitions of Climate Justice

People of color, indigenous communities, and global South nations bear the brunt of climate disruption in terms of ecological, economic, and health burdens. In addition, climate change infers a naturally occurring process rather than a disruption created by specific human activity.

For these reasons, activists and scholars have developed the concept of climate justice, which recognizes that the struggle for racial and economic justice is inseparable from any effort to combat climate change.

Climate justice begins with an acknowledgement of climate injustice and views this problem not as an unfortunate byproduct of climate disruption, but as one of its core elements, and one that must be confronted if climate disruption is to be reversed.

Pellow, D.N., and L. Sun-Hee Park (2009), 'From Climate Change and Climate Disruption to Climate Justice: Analysis and Policy Considerations for African American Communities', Department of Sociology, University of Minnesota.



"Earth Waves at Cassini" by NASA Goddard Photo and Video is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

To learn more, refer to Climate Justice in the US (Dayaneni, 2008).

More specific Definitions of Climate Justice

Gross & Mark (2020). p. 2 define climate justice as:

The atmosphere is an ecological commons. Climate justice demands that this commons not be enclosed by a handful of polluters. Climate justice also demands that people be compensated for the impact of climate chaos caused by the actions of others. But above all, climate justice demands that every person, every community, every society have the freedom to create and defend economies that cause no harm to the climate or to other people.

For delve deeper, click on the article (at right).

A colonized COP: Indigenous exclusion and youth climate justice activism at the United Nations climate change negotiations

[Corrie Grosse, College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University](#)

Follow

[Brigid Mark, College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University](#)

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Document Type

Article

Publication Date

12-2020

Disciplines

Civic and Community Engagement | Climate | Community-Based Research | Environmental Sciences | Indigenous Studies | Inequality and Stratification | Place and Environment | Politics and Social Change | Race and Ethnicity

Abstract

Youth activists around the world are demanding urgent climate action from elected leaders. The annual United Nations climate change negotiations, known as COPs, are key sites of global organizing and hope for a comprehensive approach to climate policy. Drawing on participant observation and in-depth interviews at COP25 in 2019, this research examines youth climate activists' priorities, frustrations and hopes for creating just climate policy. Youth are disillusioned with the COP process and highlight a variety of ways through which the COP perpetuates colonial power structures that marginalize Indigenous peoples and others fighting for justice. This is intersectional exclusion - the character of exclusion experienced by people with multiple intersecting marginalized identities. We demonstrate that the space, policies and even the social movement organizing at COP25 are exclusive, necessitating new ways of negotiating, building relationships, and imagining climate solutions that center Indigenous communities, and protect and return to them the lands on which they depend. As the youth climate justice movement grows, attending to Indigenous priorities will help it transform, rather than reinforce, the systems at the root of climate crisis and to challenge existing policymaking structures.

Grosse & Mark (2020) p. 2-3 continued:

“The climate justice movement builds on grassroots traditions often led by black, Indigenous, and people of colour resisting legacies of colonialism and enslavement and focuses on climate debt as a key organizing arena. Climate debt is two-fold:

1. An ‘emissions debt’ – amassed by rich countries from their excessive consumption of the limited atmospheric space: they have left almost no space for developing countries to increase their greenhouse gas emissions if climate change is to be contained. [...]

2. An ‘adaptation debt’ – through their emissions, rich countries have disproportionately contributed to the impacts of climate change being felt by developing countries. In order to resolve this inequity, the Indigenous Environmental Network suggests that ‘industrialized society must redefine its relationship with the sacredness of Mother Earth’ by keeping fossil fuels in the ground, demanding real solutions, compelling industrialized-developed countries to take responsibility, and living in a ‘good way’ on mother earth.

These are central values and goals of the climate justice movement. Addressing this debt requires a restorative approach: ‘the environmental space of the developing countries must be returned, “decolonized.”’

Activity 3

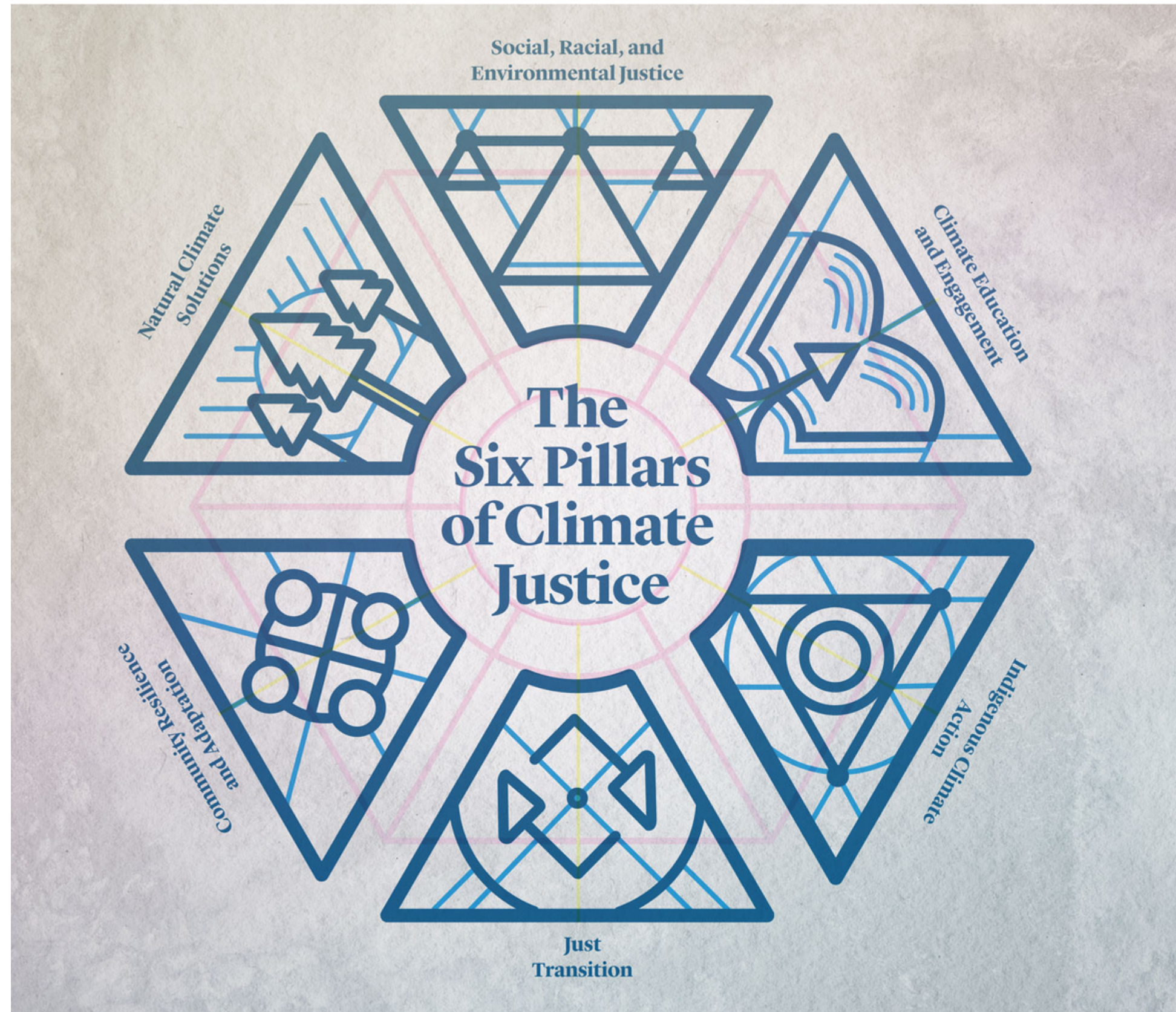
Brainstorm

What is an example of a climate justice issue in your city, country, or region? What are the causes of these issues? How do they intersect with social issues? Are you interested or involved in any of these issues?



Choose one of the six pillars of climate justice from the UCAL Center for Climate Justice, review the text and video individually, or in groups.

Activity 4: A Deep Dive on the 6 Pillars of Climate Justice



Present your climate justice pillar:

<https://centerclimatejustice.universityofcalifornia.edu/what-is-climate-justice/>

- 01 Just Transition
- 02 Social, Racial and Environmental Justice
- 03 Indigenous Climate Action
- 04 Community Resilience and Adaptation
- 05 Natural Climate Solutions
- 06 Climate Education and Engagement

1. How would you explain this pillar in a few sentences?
2. How does this pillar advance climate justice and for whom?
3. Can you provide 1-2 examples that are given in this pillar?
4. Do you see this pillar being sufficiently enacted where you live or where you are from?
5. What critique do you of this pillar if any? Why?

Further Reading

Before Reading: Why is Climate Change an Environmental Justice Issue?

1. How are climate change and environmental justice connected?
2. How are communities of color often more affected by climate change?
3. What are some other examples of environmental justice?
4. What are some steps needed to achieve Environmental Justice?
 - a. Which ones most resonate with you?
 - b. What examples of EJ have you experienced or learned more about through your communities?

Read the article below: Why Climate Change is an Environmental Justice Issue



Why Climate Change is an Environmental Justice Issue

Climate change is a threat to everyone, but some groups—socially and economically disadvantaged ones—face the greatest risks.

SP State of the Planet / Sep 22, 2020

After reviewing definitions and reading these articles, what are some tools and strategies for addressing climate justice issues?



Important principles for climate justice:

1. Equity in distributing the burdens and sharing the benefits of climate change in communities and among nations;
2. Social and political processes that recognize currently or previously marginalized groups as rightful participants in the governance and management of climate change;
3. Freedom of peoples to make choices that maximize their capabilities to survive now and in the future;
4. Rebuilding damaged historical relationships between parties, correcting past wrongs against humanity, and restoring the Earth.

(Harlan et al., 2015)

For more, see [Climate Justice and Inequality](#) (Harlan et al., 2015)



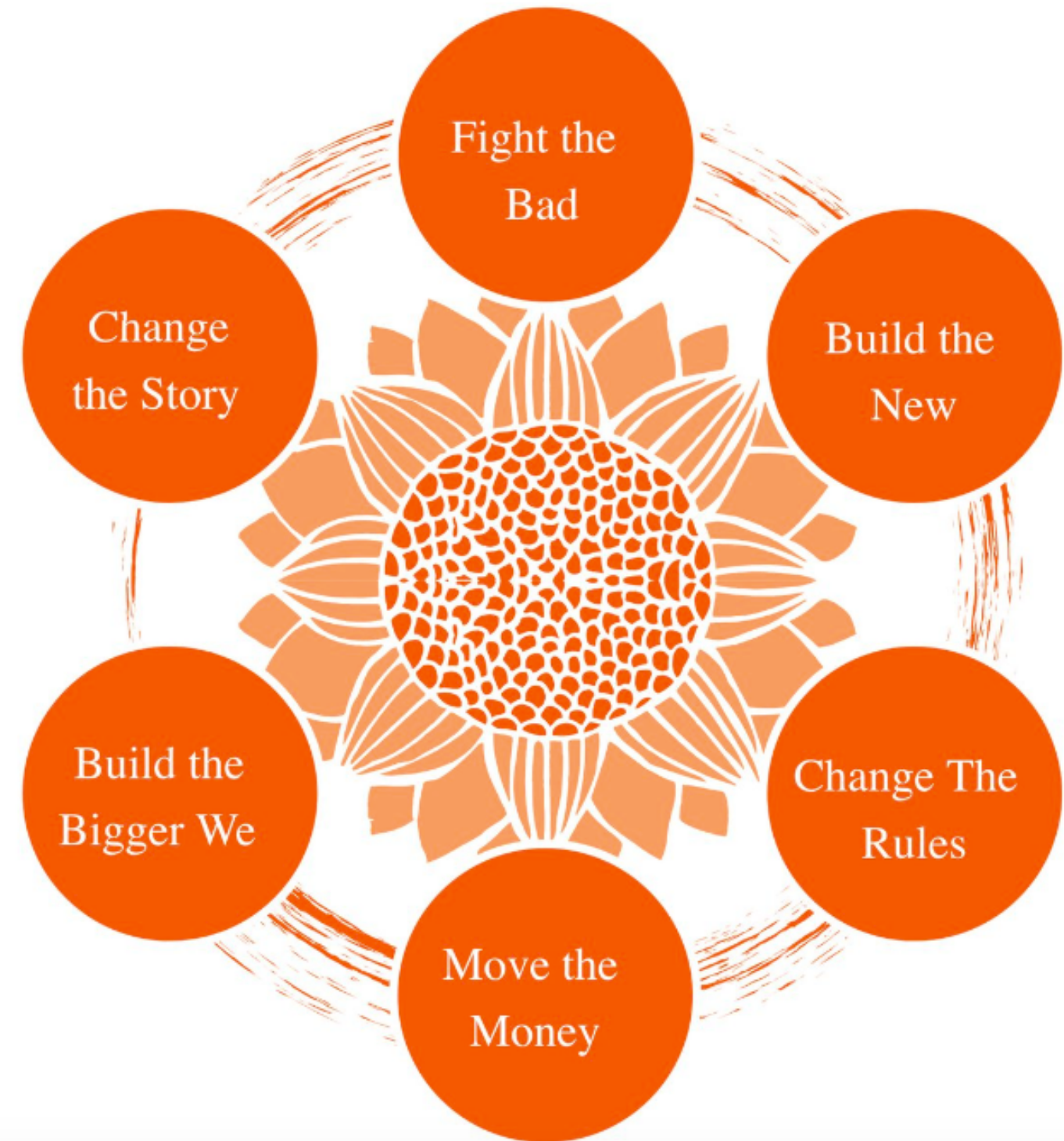
"Edinburgh Climate March COP27 November 2022"
by Friends of the Earth Scotland is licensed under
CC BY 2.0.

The Climate Justice Alliance

The Climate Justice Alliance website, has an entire page dedicated to explaining how they organize climate justice systemic change, depicted on the graphic on the right.

Questions: How does this framework for action compare to the previous slide? What's missing? What would be your role as a student or young professional? As you read more about climate justice activists, how do they implement some of these steps?

For more, go to the [Climate Justice Alliance webpage](#).



For even more, see the [Center for Global Climate Justice](#), located in Boston.

Part 3

Explore Stories from the Environmental and Climate Justice Movements

***Project Option:** Student break into groups and research one of these stories, or find their own to present to the class



"Protester holding a sign with 'Climate Justice Now' message at a Global Climate Strike (51058381908)" by Ivan Radic is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Story 1: Tara Houska and Indigenous Rights

Questions for Exploration:

1. What did you learn about Indigenous history that is important for the EJ movement?
2. What does Houska say about how Indigenous people's are impacted by climate change?
3. What are the costs of pipeline constructions?
4. According to Houska, why was Standing Rock important? What did she learn in her experiences there and at other pipelines?
5. What can we (you) do to help engage in this issue?

*Further Reading: [Kyle Powys Whyte, "The Dakota Access Pipeline, Environmental Injustice, and U.S. Colonialism"](#)



For more, see the module on
Indigenous Climate Action

More on the Standing Rock Resistance

Story 2: Two founders of the Sunrise Movement:

Read 2 short
articles:

Questions for Exploration:

1. What led them to their climate activism work?
2. What insights can be gained by the four lessons Prakash has learned from youth movements?
3. What role does “organizing” play in the climate justice movement according to Jaye?

Learn more about the
Sunrise Movement



Varshini Prakash on
Redefining What's
Possible



Dyanna Jaye: Bringing the
urgency of organizing to
climate policy.

For more on this topic, see the
modules on **Climate Policy** or
The Just Transition

Story 3: Youth Organizers for Climate Justice:The Climate Justice Alliance

Questions for Exploration:

1. How does youth organizing around the country alter your views on climate justice action?
2. What quotes from the different youth leaders stand out to you?
3. What is needed from policy or education to better support these youth leaders and their organizations?



Front Line Youth: Fighting for Climate Justice Climate Justice Alliance

Scroll down on this webpage, to see the bios of the youth leaders featured in this video. Scroll up, to review the Instagram Takeover that several Youth influencers led.

Story 4: Equitable & Just National Climate Platform: Stories from the Movement



For more information, please go to the Equitable & Just National Climate Platform

Explore 3 Stories:

1. A Community's Stand Against Pollution in Newark
2. A community's fight against environmental racism in Savannah
3. No Community Left Behind: Mossville, Louisiana

Questions for Exploration:

1. What are the specific strategies, or tools that these different communities use to take action and create change?
2. What are the similarities and differences between stories?
3. What insights can be taken from all of these stories about how communities can rise up and confront environmental/climate injustices?

Story 5: Mothers of the Movement

Questions for Exploration:

1. What are some common threads among these activist women and the issues they were involved in?
2. What issues did they help uncover?
3. What traits do they have - similar and different - that helped them lead successful climate and environmental action?

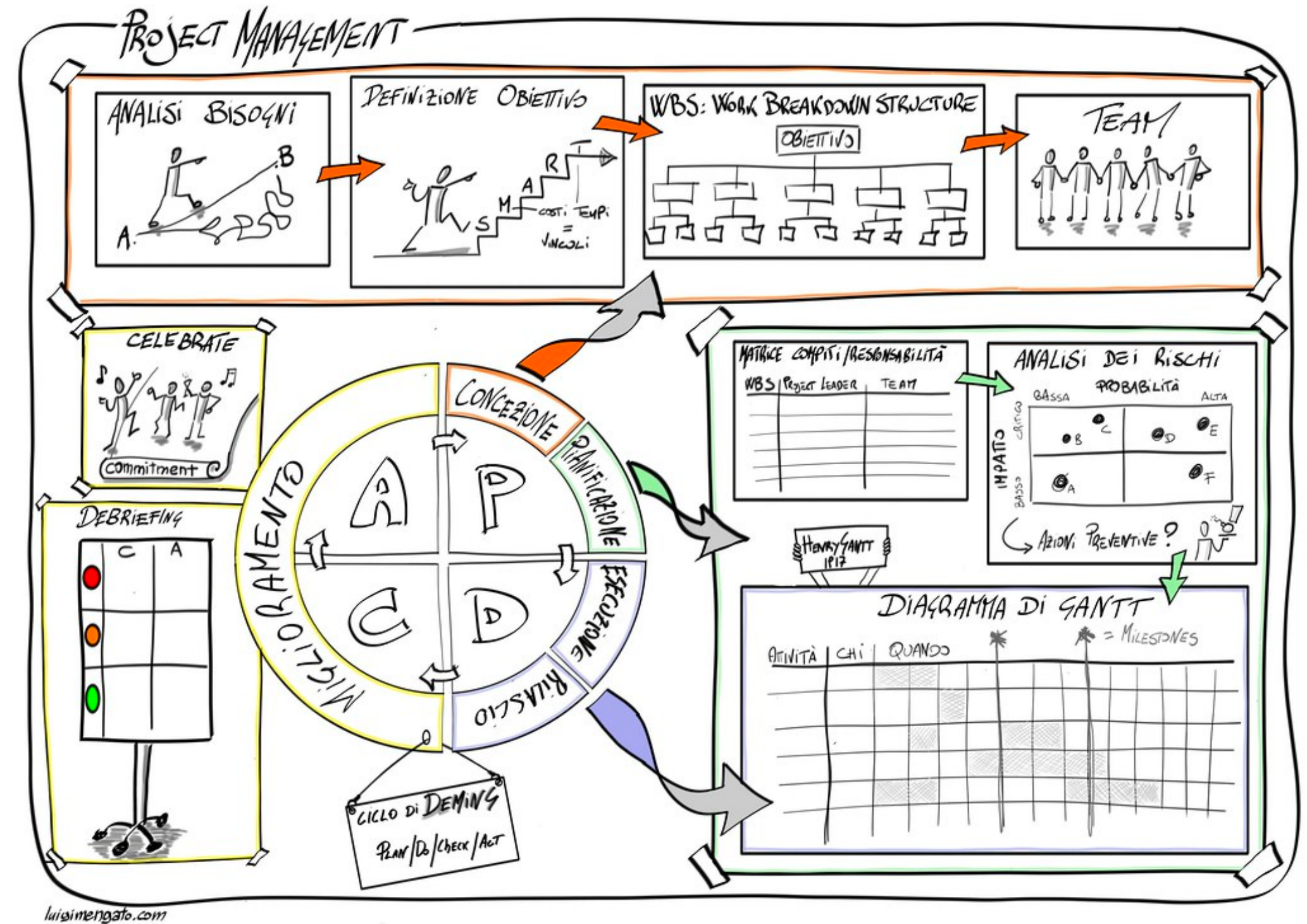


Mothers of the movement: Black environmental justice activists reflect on the women who have paved the way

Described as “the backbone of the environmental justice movement,” these women pioneered the work to protect communities.

 The 19th / Feb 17

Part 4 Beyond the Module: Longer-term Project Options



"sketchnote project management" by Luigi Mengato is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Note: During these projects, students can be encouraged to connect their major, coursework, or research focus to climate justice issues

Optional Project 1: Essay on Creating Climate/Environmental Justice Definitions

Prompt Suggestions:

- How do you define climate or environmental justice? How does your definition connect to your work or lived experiences?
 - What are the main differences/similarities between the definitions we have reviewed?
 - What is the difference between environmental and climate justice?
 - What is missing in these definitions? What would you like to add?
 - How have definitions evolved over time?



Optional Project 2: Climate Justice Youth Activist Profiles

Prompt Suggestion:

1. Choose a youth activist leader and research their work to present to the class. What aspects of their work make them successful? What could be learned to share or replicate in other contexts?



Meet Chioh Mwaafrika, who has been involved in media work with CJA member group **KHEPRW** in Indiana for the past 7 years! He took over our IG account recently which you can check out on our IG page!



Chamoru/Taotao Tāno youth climate activist, yoga instructor, entrepreneur, and indigenous land and water protector Franceska De Oro from the **Micronesia Climate Change Alliance** took over IG account recently which you can check out on our IG page!



Inkza Angeles Bautista, indigenous youth organizer, frontline land and life defender, and artist, who is part of the Youth organizing program of **PODER** in San Francisco. She took over IG account recently which you can check out on our IG page!

Additional Prompts:

1. Choose one of the above Youth Activists, and do research on the their Instagram Takeover. Present their work, and create your own instagram story regarding a personal or community environmental issue you are passionate about.
2. Research and choose an EJ or CJ activist that from anywhere around the world that speaks to you, and develop a presentation or paper related to their work.

Optional Project 3: Community Engagement

Prompt Suggestion: This project has several options, as long as students engage with community in working towards addressing a climate or environmental justice issue.

Option 1: Volunteer or engage in activities with a particular community organization. This may include attending meetings, or providing labor (whether physical, digital, scholarly etc).

Option 2: Students can launch their own community initiative. Examples of this would include a petition drive, a letter writing campaign, a social media project, or new campus student group that interacts with the local community.

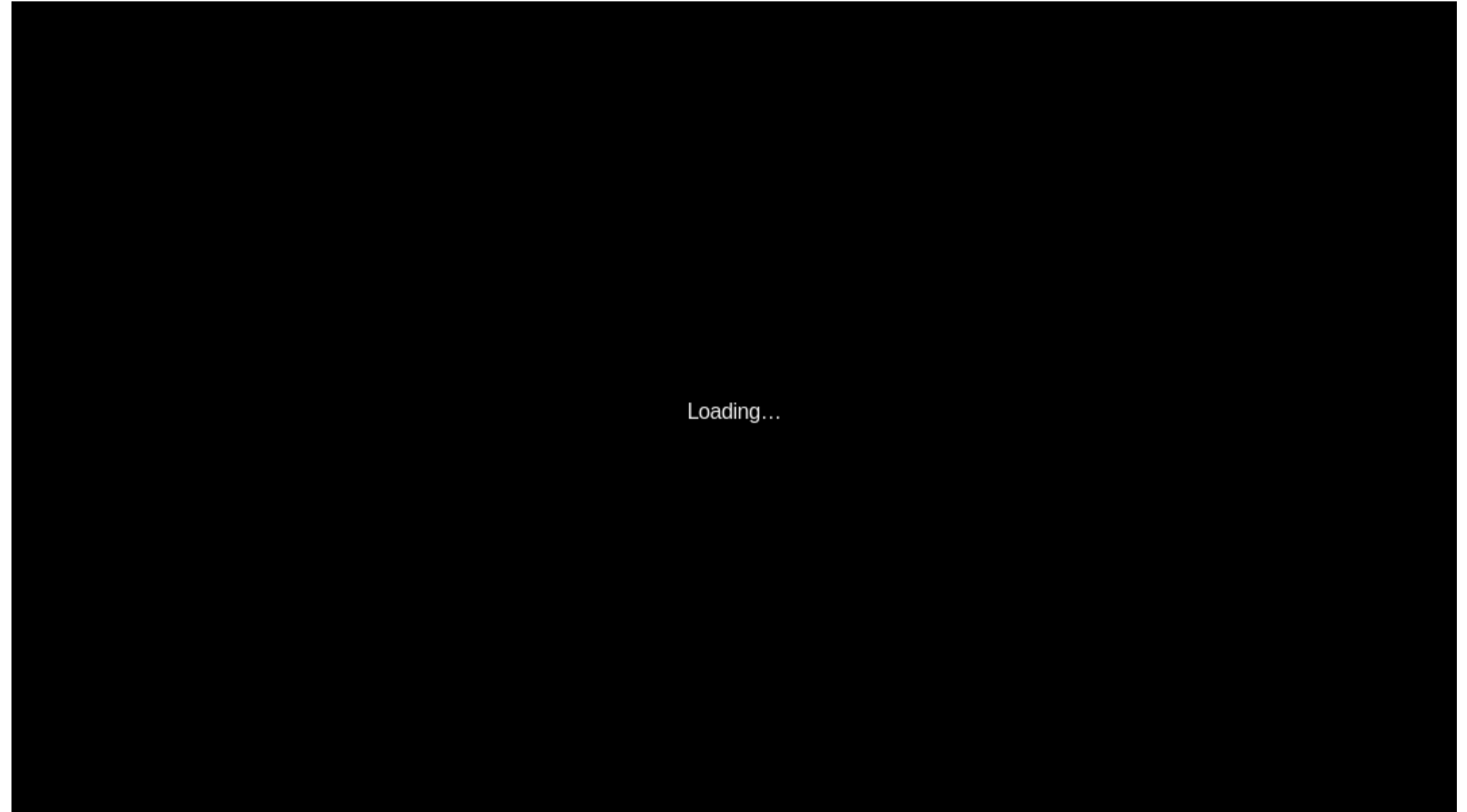
Guiding Questions: Students can share or reflect on this project either in writing or presentation form. Questions for reflection include:

1. What are the opportunities and limitations that community organizations face in response to EJ/CJ issues?
2. How can universities/educational institutions better listen to or support community orgs.?
3. How can this experience help you critique academic concepts or theories? Do they function in real-world contexts?

Project Option 4: Structured Reflection: Finding your role in climate action

Prompt Suggestion:

Option 1: Students can first watch the TED talk by Ayana Johnson, and fill out their own venn diagram. Then, based on their venn diagram they can work individually or in groups to write an essay, engage in a campus/community initiative, or create a presentation on how they can use their unique talents and strengths in the on-going movement for climate action. During this process, students can also reflect on the emotional, psychological and personal dimensions of the climate crisis.



For more on this topic, please see the module on [Climate Justice and Emotions](#)

Further Reading - Academic Articles

- Climate and the Personal Essay – A Reading List (Martines, 2020)
- Environmental Justice (Mohai et al., 2009)
- Trends and Directions in Environmental Justice: From Inequity to Everyday Life, Community, and Just Sustainabilities (Agyeman et al., 2016)
- Evolution of the environmental justice movement: activism, formalization and differentiation (Colsa Perez et al., 2015)
- From environmental to climate justice: climate change and the discourse of environmental justice (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014)
- “The Dakota Access Pipeline, Environmental Injustice, and U.S. Colonialism” (Kyle Powys Whyte, 2017)
- Schlosberg, D. (2013). Theorising environmental justice: the expanding sphere of a discourse. Environmental politics, 22(1), 37-55.
- Temper, L., & Del Bene, D. (2016). Transforming knowledge creation for environmental and epistemic justice. Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability, 20, 41-49.
- Dayaneni, G. (2009). Climate Justice in the US. What Next? Climate, Development and Equity, 80-85.

Further Reading

- Wealth inequality and carbon emissions in high-income countries (Knight et al., 2017)
- Global Landscapes Forum (2023, July, 7) Why we can't have climate justice without social justice. [https://www.globallandscapesforum.org/video/why-we-cant-have-climate-justice-without-social-justice/United States](https://www.globallandscapesforum.org/video/why-we-cant-have-climate-justice-without-social-justice/United%20States)
- Higher Education's Role in Advancing Climate Justice (2022). Second Nature. Retrieved from https://secondnature.org/wpcontent/uploads/HE_Climate_Justice.pdf

Further Reading - From the Climate Justice Movement

- [All We Can Save \(Johnson & Wilkinson, 2020\)](#)
- [Climate and the Personal Essay – A Reading List](#) (Martines, 2020)
- [To Free Ourselves, We Must Feed ourselves](#) (Leah Penniman, 2020)



For more resources on climate and environmental justice: **Please explore other modules in the Climate Justice Instructional Toolkit.**

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