INTERSECTIONALITY
OF CLIMATE
CHANGE.

Environmental racism and its effects.

ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM & DIRECT
ACTIONS INFORMATION // A
GUIDEBOOK
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(Guidebook designed by Sana Fathima)
The acknowledgement that different aspects of our identities interact on multiple levels, and that because of these intersections we may be targets of discrimination or systemic injustices.

We consider the term intersectionality to be fairly new to popular vocabulary, after its addition to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2015. However, the term was originally coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a professor at Columbia Law School and the University of California Los Angeles. “Intersectionality” was born from Kimberlé Crenshaw’s extensive research on critical race theory as both a student and a professional.

Its existence as both a relatively obscure legal concept and a prominent notion in mainstream media both define intersectionality as the overlapping or intersecting of individual identities or characteristics, such as race, class, gender, ability, etc.
As conversations around intersectionality have begun to appear in mainstream culture in recent years, branches of the climate movement have adapted and centered their focuses on the importance of intersectionality in the fight against climate change.

Intersectionality explains why the climate movement cannot only be about creating a greener version of systems that are already in place through actions like divestment from fossil fuels, stopping deforestation, or transitioning to renewable energy. Every action that is taken in an attempt to mitigate or adapt in the climate movement has an impact. Just as the consequences of climate change have always disproportionately affected communities of color and low income communities, the consequences of climate solutions will first affect these communities.³

Climate justice refers to the idea that it is necessary to base the urgent action we must take on climate change in community-led solutions, as well as center the well-being of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) and low-income communities.⁴
Environmental/climate justice was born as a response to environmental racism. Often, government, institutional, and corporate policies and practices will target land with low value to use for factories, polluting the surrounding area and the people that live there.

Environmental laws and zoning are typically relaxed and unenforced, resulting in surrounding communities being exposed to hazardous and toxic waste.

Because of practices like redlining and gentrification, people of color have been historically pushed to areas that are taken advantage of by polluting industries.
DIRECT ACTIONS

FIGHT TODAY FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

(Markus Spiske, 2019)
Direct actions can be an effective form of demanding climate justice due to the outcry of individuals advocating for the implementation of environmental legislation. As crowds gather to show support, politicians are pressured through the media to enact change.

For example, from September 20-27 2019, approximately 6 million people joined global protests demanding climate justice and for world leaders to take action on the ongoing issue of climate change. Approximately 2 million people walked out of schools and workplaces. Disrupting the social norm creates disillusionment and the environment to systematic change.

Direct action also generates community worldwide. Over 1 million people took part in Italy along with 3.5% of New Zealand, Spain, and the Netherlands populations who joined in climate demonstrations. The UN Climate Summit, which took place on September 23, 2019, was the byproduct of demonstrations and pressure on political leadership in over 70 countries. This lead to the commitment to deliver more ambitious national climate plans in 2020 in line with net zero emissions by 2050 strategies.

Finally, 75 countries agreed to deliver 2050 net zero emissions strategies by 2020. World leaders were forced to commit to reducing their carbon emissions due to the massive demonstrations hence showing their significance.
Political action is a partisan form of systematic change. There has been a 20-fold increase in the number of global climate change laws since 1997, according to the most comprehensive database of relevant policy and legislation. The database, produced by the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment and the Sabin Center on Climate Change Law, includes more than 1,200 relevant policies across 164 countries, which account for 95% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

Political action can come in numerous forms. From letter writing, to campaign development, political actions are an effective way to persuade politicians and leaders to implement policies and regulations that protect our environment. For example, the 2017 update report is that current climate policies fall far short of what is needed to avoid warming of 2°C or more. Only seven countries have made commitments or efforts that would achieve the goal of the Paris accord.

In its latest 2017 update, the database now includes 253 climate court cases in 25 jurisdictions, spanning 1994-2016. In two-thirds of the 253 cases, rulings strengthened or preserved existing laws. The increase in global demonstrations from climate organizations has led to increase in bills over time. However, now is a time not to focus on quantity, but on quality meaning that stronger bills are passed holding the large polluters financially accountable for their actions.

(Andrea Piacquadio, 2020; Markus Spiske, 2018)
Movements are a collection of individuals who come together to address specific topics they deem are critical to sustaining an equitable lifestyle. There is no traditional structure of a movement. The leaders can be any gender, race, or age and come from all backgrounds allowing for diversity to thrive among movements. From hierarchical structures to leaderless movements, any group of passionate individuals can demand systematic change.

Although it is hard to measure the movement’s direct electoral impact, leaders in a whole range of countries hoping to win the youth vote have and will try to cash in on the “Greta effect.” (Thunberg doesn’t campaign for political parties.) Among Germans aged 25 and under, 34 percent voted for the Greens in the May European elections. The Christian Democrats came second at 12 percent. Movements can invigorate and excite communities to change the landscape of local and federal politicians. In the United States, the Green New Deal championed by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez failed miserably—but that’s hardly the last word from her. And in Germany, in mid-December, Berlin expanded its initial climate package to a much more ambitious one. The price per ton of CO2 more than doubled, to 25 euros ($28).
Youth led movements are a powerful force with a makeup of driven young people. School strikers are uprooting the traditional modes of political expression by not only turning away from political parties but also from the national causes (tax increases, the Iraq War) protests usually focus on.

Indeed, while national governments can lead by example, climate change is a global issue that can only be addressed on the international stage. That process, it appears, will be led by the young. Despite the failures of Madrid, thanks to Fridays For Future, expect to see more climate action in 2020, starting with the resurgent greens in the European Parliament.
Next year, Merkel’s Germany—where no fewer than 1.4 million people marched in further protests this past September—may offer more climate leadership and legislation. Under the leadership of 34-year-old Prime Minister Sanna Marin, a proponent of green policies, and prodded by Fridays for Future, Finland may likewise take on an even stronger global role on climate change. Millions of young people around the world took to the streets for the Global Climate Strike on Friday, September 20 to demand that governments take bolder action to address the climate crisis.

Thousands of students took time off from class to protest again last Friday, and organizers say they plan to continue striking in the weeks to come. But youth activists are not just skipping school to protest, they are also taking concrete steps to influence the policymaking process. Leading up to the latest strikes, youth leaders met with several members of Congress, including Green New Deal sponsors Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY 14) and Senator Ed Markey (D-MA). They also met with Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AL) and staff members for Senators and Democratic presidential candidates Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Bernie Sanders (D-VT).
GOVERNMENT ACTION

Despite an increasingly polarized democracy, global problems such as climate change are among the issues that unite citizens on both sides of the aisle. The majority of all voters—95% of Democrats and 71% of Republicans—support the transition to clean or renewable energy policies. Americans understand the threat and have become increasingly supportive of government action, with a recent survey showing that two-thirds of U.S. adults say protecting the environment should be a top priority for the president and Congress, while about half say the same about dealing with global climate change.

Citizen activism and public support are building the movement behind a sustainable future, so why hasn’t anything been done to implement it? One reason may be the fact that increasingly public opinion has little impact on policy, and most Americans believe they don’t play a role in policy outcomes because of the undue influence of wealthy special interests. The fossil fuel industry spends millions of dollars each year to drown out the voices of the people and prevent meaningful outcomes for clean energy. But as fossil fuel money hinders progress toward sustainable energy infrastructure, citizen leaders are making strides toward a solution.

The 28th Amendment to the Constitution offers an answer by getting to the heart of the problem: big money in politics. This constitutional amendment is aimed toward campaign finance reform so that citizens rule instead of wealthy special interests. An informed democracy is a powerful one, so continue reading to learn more about how the 28th Amendment can keep big money from bringing the heat—in both government and climate.
Donations from individuals are powerful when collective action is taken. Unfortunately, many donations aren't enough to fight against climate change with meaningful legislation because of massive spending, through lobbying, by the fossil fuel industry outspending environmental organizations 10 to 1. Philanthropy has an important role to play in helping make this happen.

But it requires a much bigger effort. Less than 2 percent of philanthropic dollars are currently spent in the fight against climate change, much too little given the threat we face. Nor is it enough just to increase spending. Funders also need to collaborate more and collaborate better. We must pool our resources, intellectual as well as financial, to find the right organizations to support and the right way to support them if we are to avert the worst harms of a warming planet.
Education is a critical agent in addressing the issue of climate change. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) assigns responsibility to Parties of the Convention to undertake educational and public awareness campaigns on climate change, and to ensure public participation in programmes and information access on the issue.

Education can encourage people to change their attitudes and behavior; it also helps them to make informed decisions. In the classroom, young people can be taught the impact of global warming and learn how to adapt to climate change. Education empowers all people, but especially motivates the young to take action. Knowing the facts helps eliminate the fear of an issue which is frequently colored by doom and gloom in the public arena. In this context, UNICEF has tapped into the minds and imaginations of children around the world to capture what it means to be a child growing up in the age of rapid climate change.

More than 80% of parents in the U.S. support the teaching of climate change. And that support crosses political divides, according to the results of an exclusive new NPR/Ipsos poll: Whether they have children or not, two-thirds of Republicans and 9 in 10 Democrats agree that the subject needs to be taught in school. A separate poll of teachers found that they are even more supportive, in theory — 86% agree that climate change should be taught. These polls are among the first to gauge public and teacher opinion on how climate change should be taught to the generation that in the coming years will face its intensifying consequences: children.

As more teachers and students push for climate education in the world's classrooms, it can be clearly seen that the next generation needs to learn about the climate crisis and ways to mitigate it because they are going to be facing this situation in their futures. The more knowledgeable the next generation is on climate change, the better they will be able to withstand its effects and ensure a green recovery in the future.
IMPORTANCE OF INTERSECTIONALITY

(EJAtlas, 2014)
Addressing environmental racism is crucial to the success of the climate movement as a whole. BIPOC have been, are, and will be most affected by the consequences of climate change, making them instrumental to the success of any solution. The climate movement cannot be successful if it does not also include and value environmental justice. We, as a society, must reconceptualize the principles of the climate movement.

Often we think only of the natural environment: the melting of ice caps, the dwindling populations of endangered species, or the destruction of land through deforestation. It is crucial we remember that humans are also part of our degrading ecosystems, and systemic oppression dictates that those people will, more often than not, be people of color. It is the responsibility of privileged activists and allies to uplift BIPOC voices and to step back so that the communities that are most heavily impacted by climate change may be the experts in the solutions.
The ultimate objectives of the climate movement, to reduce carbon emissions, restore ecosystems, and create a sustainable future for all living beings, simply cannot be reached if the processes by which to achieve those goals do not value or center intersectionality. In other words, climate justice is critical to the success of the climate movement. Intersectionality requires that we view ourselves and others as complex human beings, not defined by a single categorization, but many overlapping identities that shape the way each of us interacts with the world.

Valuing intersectionality individually, or as a movement, is for the benefit of all people, as its purpose is to give a voice to every individual. This is especially necessary in climate activist spaces, because the simple fact of the matter is that climate change will and is affecting certain groups of people before it will affect others, and these impacted groups are those most marginalized within society as a whole. Making space for marginalized communities to have influence and representation within the climate movement allows for solutions to climate change to be administered by front-line communities, making them accessible, inclusive, and truly beneficial for both the natural environment and the people that live in it.
EXTRA RESOURCES

For Middle Schoolers:

Click to Watch Here

For High Schoolers:

Click to Watch Here
SAYAN BANERJEE, 18
For about one and a half years, Sayan has been passionate about solving the climate crisis through environmental justice by joining various environmental groups in LA, California such as Fridays For Future, etc.

LODEN CROLL, 16
Loden has been passionate about environmental justice and the climate crisis for most of their life and has been a part of various Minnesota-based, national, and international climate organizations for around a year and a half.

DELANEY MICHAELSON, 18
Delaney began her activism efforts while she lived abroad in London, England in 2012 when she realized the intersectionality of the climate crisis.