



# MY STORY

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**Down To Earth Journaling Workbook**

# **DOWN TO EARTH**

## **Journal Workbook**

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**Additional articles/handout template/DVD of Down to Earth Films**

## Introduction to the Down to Earth Journal Workbook

Three years ago I was inspired by the growing climate justice movement that was connecting the dots to social and economic justice causes I had long embraced. I wanted to tell the stories of Maine activists I had met who were involved in efforts to restore the Earth to a just, compassionate and sustainable community. The passion and joy that I witnessed among individuals of all ages and identities as they worked together towards a common vision begged to be shared widely as a seed of inspiration for others who were not yet deeply engaged in the cause.

Stories I knew — yours and mine and our neighbors near and far — can change hearts and minds, as well as inspire action. So I set out to gather stories of a diverse group of Maine activists championing bold climate change actions and solutions. The result, after consulting with many friends and colleagues, has been to produce a series of films that explore the seeds of activism for several individuals and this journaling workbook as a companion to the films.

I have been clear from the beginning that what I wanted to create, using the films as a centerpiece, was a tool that could prompt others to deepen their commitment to and engagement in justice struggles. I did not want to create entertainment — I wanted to present stories that would allow listeners to enter the movement through different doorways but also to explore their own values and passions for justice as part of their life story.

This journal, I hope, will be a useful tool for you personally and perhaps with a group, to unearth your story and develop a plan of action that suits your style. There are different exercises, charts, and suggestions for art projects that can provide a variety of approaches for using the film as a catalyst for exploring and sharing your story.

I am eager for this resource to grow and change as it is used, and for journalers/workshop leaders to share ideas for innovative ways to share the film and workbook. To that end the Down to Earth website (**[downtoearthstories.org](http://downtoearthstories.org)**) is being designed to have interactive components so that this project can truly be a community effort.

I would like to thank the Lyman Fund and the Eleanor Humes Haney Fund, as well as the many contributors to the Indiegogo crowdfunding campaign, for their support in helping me launch this project. I could not have done this without such generosity.

May this journaling workbook provide you with new insights and energy for the journey ahead. I say — Onward together with hope and boldness to build the Community of Wholeness we collectively envision!

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## Getting Started...

Taking time to reflect on the **Down to Earth** storytellers' experiences and then sharing (group activity) or journaling (personal activity) from those reflections is one way to use this workbook. Below are some questions that can get you started, using the film's stories as prompts to begin to unearth your own values/activism journey. You could also organize a group to share each other's experiences around the questions. This workbook contains other opportunities/activities to explore some of these questions in greater depth. *A template for the questions and activities is provided, should you wish to make copies for a film screening/workshop.*

The questions and activities below could be part of a short workshop or fishbowl session that follows the film screening. It could be turned into a longer workshop series, taking the questions separately for personal journaling sessions and then returning to share each other's reflections in a group gathering. *(Fishbowl sharing: Sitting in a circle, each person has an opportunity to respond to a question or series of questions. No one speaks for a second time until everyone who wishes to speak has spoken once. You can organize this by passing an object around the circle (talking potato, talking stick, feather, your choice.) and someone not ready to speak may pass the object on to the next person. The object may be passed around multiple times to insure that everyone who wishes to share gets the opportunity. This can also be less structured without passing an object and individuals in the circle just speak as they feel moved. However it is structured, keeping to the rules — each person speaking only once, individuals not responding to one another but listening intently as someone speaks, and speaking from each person's own experience and not debating — is key.)*

## Watch the **Down to Earth** film (one hour) and Reflect...

### **Down to Earth Climate Justice Stories** *Questions for Reflection/Sharing/Journaling*

Which filmed stories/storytellers reflect your own story and/or inspire you?

- ❖ **Sylvia** wrestled with what she would need to do if she were to truly live her values and beliefs. **Iris** spoke of embracing activism as “just something inside of me.” What are the values you hold deepest and dearest? Where did those come from? How do you live those values daily?
- ❖ **Chloe** fell in love with Maine's wilderness. **Skip** felt profound concern for frontline communities experiencing painful social, economic, and environmental injustices. **Dawn** loved two horned owl friends and was always drawn to the Penobscot River. Love prompted them to act. **Rachel** and **Wendy** both shared their belief that love is at the heart of actions for justice. What/whom do you love that climate disruption/ injustices might impact? What bold new action(s) will you pledge to take to protect that which/whom you love?
- ❖ **Maria** recounts her Wabanaki peoples' prophecy, saying this is the time foretold when all people must come together to light the 8<sup>th</sup> fire. **Chloe** says that the beautiful, yet scary, thing about climate change is that it impacts all of us, though to different degrees. And that it is not going to be political leaders who solve the problem...it's you and I and our families and friends. Where do you see signs of a paradigm shift/of people coming together for justice?
- ❖ Each storyteller found his/her own path to be active in the movement towards a just and sustainable world. **Fred** and **Hadley** are “practivists” while **MJ** is a contemplative and puts prayer into action. **Hilary** found courage and her voice to share her Healing Walk and tar sands experience when she returned. **Becky** finds joy and hope in getting off the couch and into action. What is your role to play on this new Earth?

## Down To Earth Climate Justice Storytellers (in order of appearance)

**Mary-Jane (MJ) Ferrier:** A Sister in a Roman Catholic religious order — the Society of the Sacred Heart — and a Portland area psychologist, MJ identifies herself as a “contemplative in action.” MJ is one of the leaders of the Protect South Portland citizen-powered group that championed a grassroots education and public policy campaign to keep tar sands from coming into the community. Growing up in Ottawa, Canada, she spent summers by a lake in the Gatineau, and winters sledding, skating and skiing. While a student at McGill University and later, she’s had the opportunity to sail extensively, fly fish and hike the Rocky Mountains in both Canada and the US. She says: “My love of nature has only grown deeper as, with all my sisters, I have dedicated my life to “getting to the heart of things”, to working for “justice, peace and the integrity of Creation.”

**Hilary Clark:** Hilary lives in York, where she is a small homesteader. She is long-time environmentalist who has focused on population growth, biodiversity, conservation and climate change. She serves on the York Land Trust board and the York Energy Steering Committee. Hilary is the convener for Green Sanctuary at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Portsmouth, NH, and coordinator for 350 Maine York Region. In the summer 2014, she accompanied two other Mainers on a trip to Ft. McMurray, Alberta, Canada, for a First Nations-led Healing Walk at the site of tar sands mining activities and toxic pollution.

**Sylvia Stormwalker:** Sylvia has participated in nonviolent direct action in Texas frontline communities to stop tar sands and fracked oil pipeline development. She has been a workshop leader for Maine youth and multi-generational groups that are considering transgender and sexual orientation issues, deep ecology, and colonialism, racism, classism and oppression in our culture. Sylvia is a life-long learner, most recently traveling south to study the science of herbal remedies.

**Iris SanGiovanni:** Iris grew up in South Portland and now attends the University of Southern Maine where she has focused her studies on political science. She has been an active member of the Protect South Portland campaign on tar sands. Iris is a leader of the multi-Maine campus organization, Maine Students for Climate Justice, and has served as an intern on the 350 Maine Divestment Team, where she’s played a large role in persuading the University of Maine system to divest from coal. Iris has become an advocate for bicycle commuting.

**Rachel Mason Burger:** Looking back, Rachel describes herself as artist-builder-activist. Rachel says: “My art has mostly served my passions such as stopping the Vietnam War and ending violence against women and children. Since moving to this gorgeous part of the world I’ve naturally painted Maine landscapes. Now I find myself painting birds. My partner is a photographer and bird rescuer.” Rachel gathered friends and neighbors to stop tar sands from being piped to and exported from South Portland. She says: “The persistence and hard work of many resulted in the creation of the Clear Skies Ordinance, which accomplished our (Protect South Portland) goal. At our urging, the City Council is also writing an ordinance to stop the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Through hard work we have become a large dynamic group focused on concrete ways of working against global warming and for the healing of the earth.”

**Becky Halbrook:** Becky has retired from a career as a corporate attorney to Phippsburg, where she’s active with the land trust and the Sierra Club’s Climate Action Team. She was one of the 1251 people, who answered Bill McKibben’s invitation to do a nonviolent direct action sit-in in front of the White House to halt the Keystone XL pipeline, under consideration for tar sands transport through the breadbasket in the US Midwest. She is active on the ecumenical EarthCare Team in Brunswick and has served on several initiatives of 350 Maine and other environmental organizations.

**Fred & Hadley Horch:** Residents of Brunswick, Fred and Hadley have made a family commitment with their three children to live fossil-fuel free as much as possible. Fred is the former owner of a local green retail business, FW Horch, and Hadley is a professor at Bowdoin College. They power their home with the sun, get around on bicycles, walking or in their all-electric car, and are turning their yard into a permaculture paradise. Fred has been a Green Independent Party candidate for the legislature at the urging of his friends, neighbors, and customers. They are active in civic affairs and student concerns.

**Wendy Schlotterbeck:** A high school art teacher, Wendy grew up in Ohio and Maine as the daughter of two classical musicians. She has become an activist, inspired by the example of her four children, who are all activists themselves. She is the mother of Sylvia Stormwalker. Like Becky, Wendy answered a call to go to Washington, DC in August 2011 to do a sit-in at the White House to stop the KXL pipeline construction. She returned to apply her art skills to creating banners and t-shirts for climate justice campaigns. Wendy joined the 350 Divestment Team of Maine teachers who advocated at the Maine Education Association annual meeting for a resolution to divest their pensions from fossil fuel corporations. In 2015 the resolution didn't pass. She has been an ally to the Penobscots' land sovereignty campaign. She says: "Besides teaching, my passions include organic gardening and chicken raising, listening to classical and folk music and working with the youth at Durham Friends Meeting."

**Betsy (Skip) Caitlin:** Skip grew up in Brunswick, but went away to NYC to college where she began her activism. She has spent many months with frontline communities, impacted by climate change, pollution and social/economic injustices. Skip has been an organizer and ally, and engaged in nonviolent direct action in these communities. Skip and Sylvia were arrested at the TD Bank in January 2014 when they locked their necks together to the bank doors as a solidarity action with communities in Texas and Oklahoma where a tar sands pipeline was opened for business. Skip lives in community with other like-minded activists.

**Dawn Neptune Adams:** Dawn is an activist with the Dawnland Environmental Defense organization which is an "alliance of Native and non-Native peoples united in the protection of the 'Dawnland' with particular focus on the sacredness of Water." Dawn grew up in a foster home in Brewer and spent much of her early adulthood in California. She has returned to her roots and her culture to be active in preserving tribal lands and sacred traditions for her daughter and future generations.

**Chloe Maxmin:** Chloe is a graduate of the Harvard College ('15). She is currently a Fellow with *The Nation* as she writes a book about the climate movement and how it can become an effective political force. Chloe became a youth climate activist when she was 12, forming the Climate Action Club in high school and galvanizing a grassroots movement in her community. At Harvard, she co-founded **Divest Harvard**—a campaign calling on Harvard University to divest its endowment from fossil fuels. Chloe also founded First Here, Then Everywhere to empower youth climate activists. She has received national recognition for her activism. Learn more at [www.chloemaxmin.com](http://www.chloemaxmin.com) and @chloemaxmin. She is currently in Paris for COP21 climate negotiations.

**Maria Girouard:** Maria, of the Penobscot Nation, is a historian and an expert on the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act. She holds a master's degree in history. She is a community organizer and environmental activist, and she volunteers for her community, coordinating the People's Garden Food Sovereignty Project. Maria is a 2015 recipient of the prestigious Maryann Hartman Award for her advocacy work on the preservation of cultural heritage and rights of the Penobscot Nation. A founder of the Dawnland Environmental Defense organization, she has been the leading spokesperson at community meetings along the Penobscot River to inform elected officials and citizens about the lawsuit between the Penobscots and the State of Maine over water sovereignty and sustenance fishing rights. Maria is the health and wellness coordinator for the Wabanaki REACH program, a cross-cultural project to promote healing.

### **Story Line for the Film:**

- Background
- Early experiences and inspirations
- Intergenerational Nonviolent Direct Action focused on Tar Sands/Fracked Oil Pipelines: Youth (Sylvia & Skip); Older Generation (Becky & Wendy)
- Living what we believe (Chloe & Fred featured)
- Divestment as a tool for change
- More about inspiration and seeds of activism
- Environmental Justice concerns
  - Water (Penobscot River/land sovereignty and cultural preservation)
  - Healing Walk in Alberta, Canada (tar sands)
- Protect South Portland — speaking truth to power in local community (MJ, Rachel, Iris)
- Hope for the Future

# Unearthing Your Own Story/Writing a Memoir for Your Descendants

## INVITATION

If you are a dreamer, come in.  
If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar,  
A hope-er, a pray-er, a magic bean buyer ...  
If you're a pretender, come sit by my fire,  
For we have some flax golden tales to spin.  
Come in!  
Come in!

- Shel Silverstein

**STEP ONE:** Watch the film (one hour).

**STEP TWO:** Which filmed stories/storytellers reflect your own story and/or inspire you? Write about a memory or a feeling that one of the storyteller's experiences brought up for you. Describe your experience or feeling in as much detail as you can, so that another person could experience this from your sharing it. *(If you are working with another journaler or a group, plan to share these with one another at your next meeting/conversation.)*

**STEP THREE:** Cast back over your own life, using the Storytelling Timeline chart. See Step 4 for additional ideas to help unearth your stories.

- Who and what experiences have been seeds for your own values and concerns about social, economic and environmental/climate justice throughout decades of your life? What places may have provided inspiration? Who have been role models? Are there moments that transformed you/set you on a new path of justice activism?
- Has there been a moment or moments (Methodist founder John Wesley calls it a sanctification moment; Thomas Berry speaks of his "meadow moment") when you have felt called to some greater purpose or you have felt at one with all life/with the universe? *(Throughout his life, the late Thomas Berry, Passionist priest and Earth scholar, spoke and worked extensively on behalf of the planet. That work is rooted in what he calls his "meadow" experience at age 11 in Greensboro, N.C., where he had recently moved with his family. Berry was roaming the woods and fields near town. He describes the experience: "The field was covered with white lilies rising above the thick grass. A magic moment, this experience gave to me something that seems to explain my thinking at a more profound level than almost any other experience I can remember." More than the lilies "it was the singing of the crickets, and the woodlands in the distance and the clouds in the clear sky..." He goes on to say: "This early experience has remained with me ever since as the basic determinant of my sense of reality and values. Whatever fosters this meadow is good. What does harm to this meadow is not good...It was a wonder world that I have carried in my unconscious and that has evolved all my thinking.")* How did such an experience impact your life?

**STEP FOUR:** Here are some exercises/questions for reflection that can help you dig deeper into your past and find the storylines that help to define who you are and what you believe.

- Getting in touch with childhood memories: Close your eyes and imagine a room in your home or some place where you felt most "at home" as a child. What do you see, hear, smell, feel? Pay attention to details....favorite objects, colors, pictures,

placement of furniture...who comes into this space? What is special about that place? From this exercise, visit people who were important to you at that time/you looked up to? What did you learn from them in what they said or did? Were there any moments you can remember as a child when you felt it was important to stand up for a friend, to speak out about justice, to realize that something was unjust, to be compassionate. What was your relationship to the Earth as a child? Did you play/walk/recreate outside? Were there places that you loved and felt connected to? How have these affected your life?

- You can do this similar remembering exercise through various stages of your life presented on the Storytelling Timeline to unearth some of the seeds of your activist journey. You may be surprised at what comes bubbling up from your past!
- There are several books on creating your memoir and storytelling. In the section on resources, I have listed a few that I have read or skimmed for ideas. In a recent conversation with Susan MacKenzie, a spiritual director and environmental policy professor at Colby College, she shared an exercise she's found useful for retreats. It's from a book entitled **Remembering My Story** (see the Resource page for author and book information). Each person identifies the wellspring from which their life story has evolved and then follows that stream of water over the rocky places (challenges and how they were overcome) and divides, etc. She suggests that you draw this image of your life flowing like a stream. I can imagine using the timeline chart in this workbook to capture some of the details that you could then turn into the picture suggested above. A graphic might help to show where early parts of your story may circle back to feed later experiences, much more like a spiral than a straight time line.

## Food for Thought

Whenever I look around me, I wonder what old things are about to bear fruit, what seemingly solid institutions might soon rupture, and what seeds we might now be planting whose harvest will come at some unpredictable moment in the future. The most magnificent person I met in 2013 quoted a line from Michel Foucault to me: "People know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does." Someone saves a life or educates a person or tells her a story that upends everything she assumed. The transformation may be subtle or crucial or world changing, next year or in 100 years, or maybe in a millennium. You can't always trace it but everything, everyone has a genealogy. Rebecca Solnit Tom Dispatch:

In her forthcoming book [The Rise: Creativity, the Gift of Failure, and the Search for Mastery](#), Sarah Lewis tells how a white teenager in Austin, Texas, named Charles Black heard a black trumpet player in the 1930s who changed his thinking -- and so our lives. He was riveted and transformed by the beauty of New Orleans jazzman Louis Armstrong's music, so much so that he began to reconsider the segregated world he had grown up in. "It is impossible to overstate the significance of a 16-year-old Southern boy's seeing genius, for the first time, in a black," he [recalled](#) decades later. As a lawyer dedicated to racial equality and civil rights, he would in 1954 help overturn segregation nationwide, aiding the plaintiffs in [Brown v. Board of Education](#), the landmark Supreme Court case ending segregation (and overturning [Plessy v. Ferguson](#), the failed anti-segregation lawsuit launched in New Orleans 60 years earlier).



People, places, events inspiring my social/environmental justice concerns/actions	Age 1-5	Elementary Sch	Teens (Jr. Hi/HS	College/Post-HS	20's decade	30's decade	40's decade	50+
People								
Places								
Events								
Spiritual Transformation/ "sanctification moment"								

***For my Love of*** \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank)  
***I will*** \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank with an action)

Several Down to Earth storytellers share their belief that it is important to pay attention to what/whom each of us loves as the positive impetus for taking action. This is a theme in the worldwide circle of the Climate Justice Movement. Focusing on what we each personally treasure and what we are prepared to do to protect that treasure is part of creating our collective vision and actions for an Earth restored with justice and peace for all.

**ACTIVITY — JOURNALING:** Spend time reflecting on what you love and begin to fill in the blanks on MY LOVE CHART. This can be an ongoing meditation and exercise.

**ACTIVITY — ART PROJECTS** (*for individuals or group*):

- Map of Maine/US/Earth — Place a heart to mark the spot. Research how that place is already being affected by climate change and predictions for the future. (*If you wish, go to the website: [the climate coalition](http://theclimatecoalition.org) to see what some British people shared.*)
- Create a meme, poster, t-shirt, banner, mobile, refrigerator magnet, yard sign that represents something(s)/someone(s) some place(s) you love...It could be titled “For the love of...” and on the back of the shirt, on part of the poster/banner/mobile, add an action you plan to take to lower the threat to your loves’ future. This can be a great conversation starter with others.

These exercises not only put you in touch with what you hold most precious, most meaningful to you, but also allow you to understand the impacts climate change already may and likely will have on those treasures. Take time to feel the pain of loss, to lament those losses, and then move on to consider what actions you are prepared to take using the Envisioning a Just and Sustainable World exercises/chart.

POSTSCRIPT — An idea for sharing this exercise: One of my granddaughters really loves chocolate. She is also a child who gives much of her allowance to good causes she cares about. As a gift, her grandfather and I made a donation in her name to a project that is working with cacao farmers to produce chocolate sustainably and justly. Through the webpage for the farm, she learned about the climate threat to something she loves. She also received a chocolate bar from that farm!

## **WORDS OF INSPIRATION**

In the end we will conserve only what we love  
We will love only what we understand  
We will understand only what we are taught  
Baba Dioum, Senegalese poet

From caring comes courage. — Lao Tzu

“We don’t have to engage in grand, heroic actions to participate in the process of change. Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world.” Howard Zinn, **You Can’t Be Neutral on a Moving Train: A personal history of our times**, Beacon Press 1994/2002 p. 208

Video on Karmatube “I will be a Hummingbird”

## MY LOVE CHART

[illegible]

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# United States of America



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# North America



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# Europe Regional Map



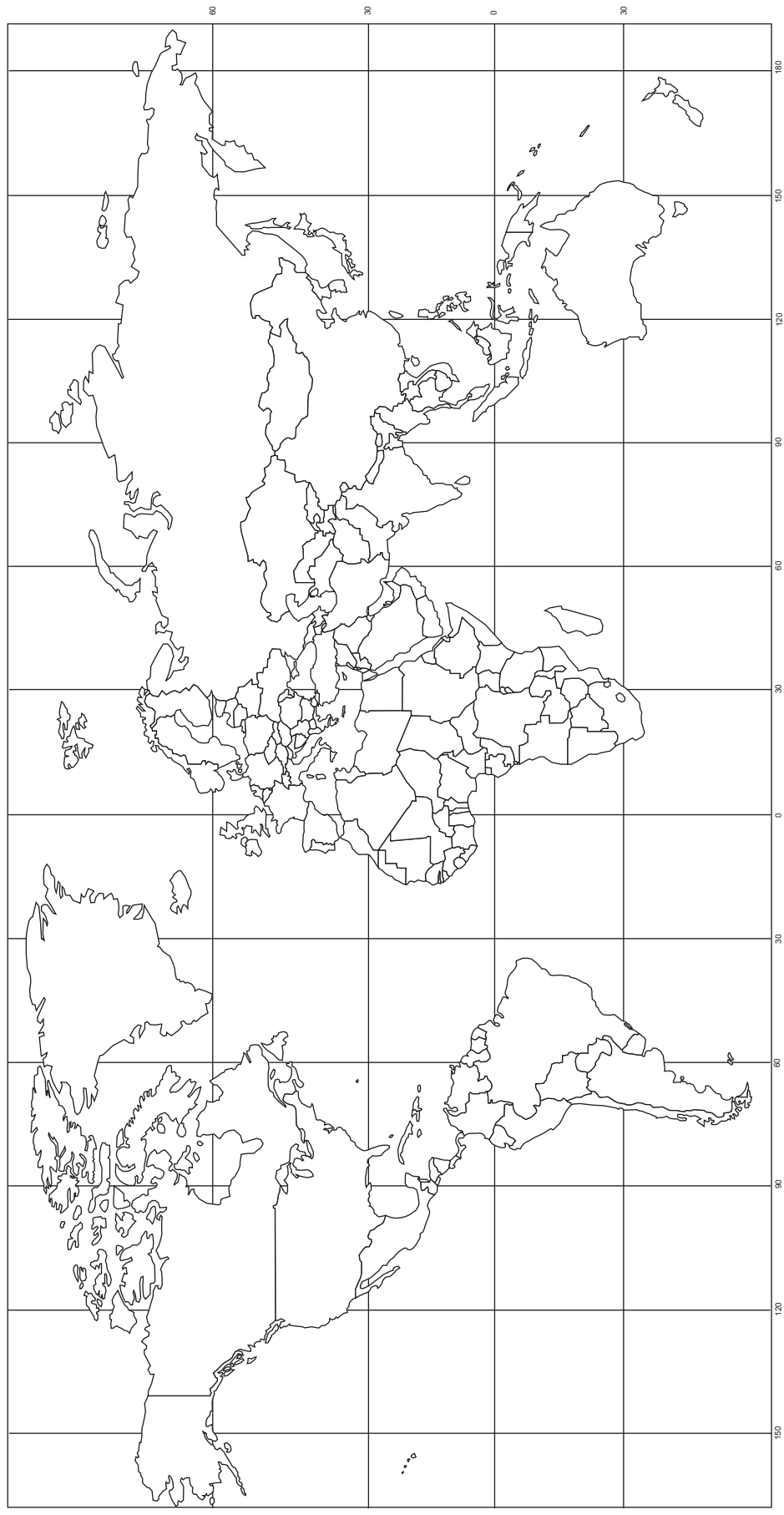
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# World Mercator Projection Map



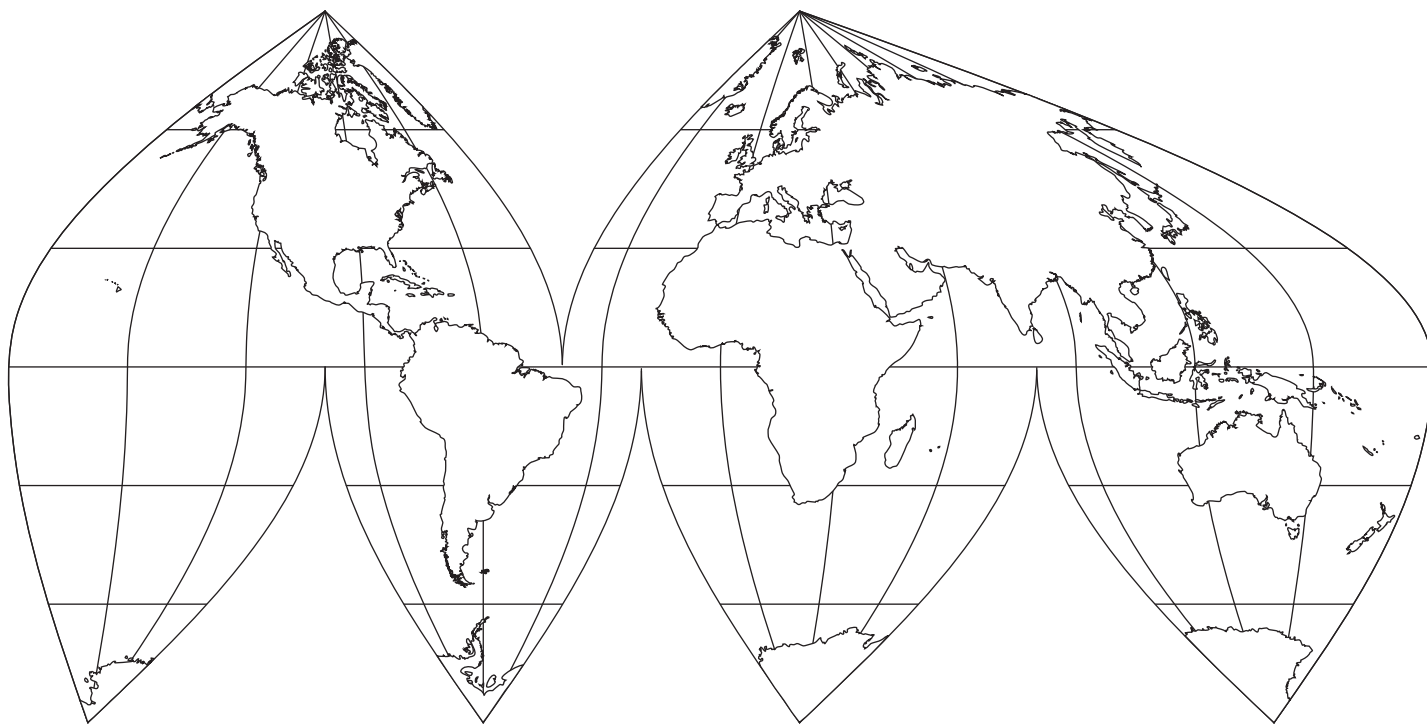
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# World Mercator Projection Map



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# Sinusoidal 6pt Projection Map



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# North America Globe



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# Europe Globe



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## Getting Ready for Action — Visioning a Just and Restored Earth Community

As people concerned about climate change and its impacts on our environment and health and the future for all living beings, we are often focused on protesting what's wrong as we undertake campaigns to keep fossil fuels in the ground/ban fracking, etc. These are important to be doing. But without a clear vision of what a transformed Earth Community would look and feel like, we don't know our final destiny. And it's hard to map a route without knowing where you're going.

In Paris in December 2015 after the climate negotiations, author and climate/economic justice leader Naomi Klein said that people must see the urgency of the climate crisis and also say "yes to the world we want...Now is not the time for small steps...Now is the time for boldness." (*Common Dreams*)

My hope is that you will use the meditation and suggested art project in this section of the journaling workbook to create your personal (or group) vision and a route with bold steps to get there so that together we can make the transformation real by 2050...just over 30 years from today. I have created some chart tools that you can use to map the process as well.

These exercises can be part of a several-session workshop that uses the film and workbook together.

**Step One:** Watch two films. In the **Down to Earth** film and in a short companion film, which is available for download through the *Down to Earth* website [downtoearthstories](http://downtoearthstories.com), the Horch family of Brunswick, Maine, shares their efforts to put their vision for a sustainable world into practice in their home and community. Their story can be a launching pad for your visioning meditation, which is described below.

### Step Two: Do the Visioning Meditation (individual or group)

I first did an imagining a world without violence/without weapons back in the 1980's. Quaker educator and feminist Elise Boulding developed this idea as she was doing Alternatives to Violence workshops with prisoners. I later led the workshop with Young Friends in Indiana. The idea was to step 30 years into the future when there were no weapons/no violence and pay attention to what that looked and felt like. Then work backwards from the vision (rather than forwards from the present) to create the pathway to that world. Later Elise led a workshop for the Maine Council of Churches on creating an environmentally sustainable community.

Like Elise, the late Donella Meadows, an ecological economist, developed a visioning meditation for a sustainable world. This grew out of her experience of realizing that people who wanted to end hunger really didn't have an exciting vision of what it would be like to live in a world where there was no hunger. Initially people were reluctant to go deep and do the visioning...wanted to get right to the solutions, the studies, the public policies, etc....after going through all the reasons not to have a vision, they came around to laying out and sharing each one's vision. And that vision has been growing.

Generalities about visioning

- Not a left-brain activity
- Need to focus on what you want, not what you think is "possible"/real.
- Path is never clear at first...just need to keep focusing and it becomes clearer/share it with others who can help give it clarity
- Stay in touch with your vision so you are not seduced by substitutes

Because we are looking at how all the movements for justice are coming together as we recognize that they are inextricably linked, I have drawn from the two concepts and created my own version...

## **MEDITATION**

Get in a comfortable position, close your eyes, and take a few deep breaths. Imagine you are traveling to 2050, about 30 years into the just, compassionate and sustainable world you envision. Take time to look around your home, your community, your state and country, and the Earth community. What do you see in each of these places? How does it make you feel? ? What does it feel like to wake up in this world? What are relationships like between diverse peoples and people and other living beings? How is energy produced, food grown? What kinds of work are people doing? How are governments run and by whom?

This is a meditation that can be done over many sessions. When you have completed a meditation, write down what you experienced...what you saw, what you felt.

## **Art Projects Ideas (individual or group)**

Art activity, like meditation, is a right brain function and can move you into a creative space where you are able to explore what you really want, without being encumbered by the “realist” left side of your brain that filters ideas through a “reality check.”

Drawing: On large sheet of paper, using colored markers/crayons, begin to sketch in various elements you see. Write balloon comments to fill in details. You may wish to use symbols to indicate some of the components of this transformed Earth community.

Diorama: Use modeling clay of many colors and recycled objects to create a diorama that depicts the 2050 Just and Restored Earth Community that you envision. This can be created in a cardboard box lid, a Clementine oranges box, or whatever makes sense to you. As a group activity, this can bring together different ages to create the three-dimensional vision and individuals can play off each other's ideas.

## **Suggested Background Reading for Visioning/Planning Your Action Steps** *(back of workbook)*

“From Occupy to Climate Justice “ by Wen Stephenson (**The Nation**, 2/7/2014)

“Climate Activists Can Learn from Black Lives Matter” by Kate Aronoff (Dec. 30, 2015 Nation of Change online newsletter)

Observed Changes towards Just & Sustainable Living								
Me/My Family	Energy	Food	Transportation	Land Use	water: fresh and marine	Economic Justice	Social Justice	Animal Rights
Community	Energy	Food	Transportation	Land Use	water: fresh and marine	Economic Justice	Social Justice	Animal Rights
State	Energy	Food	Transportation	Land Use	water: fresh and marine	Economic Justice	Social Justice	Animal Rights
USA	Energy	Food	Transportation	Land Use	water: fresh and marine	Economic Justice	Social Justice	Animal Rights
Earth	Energy	Food	Transportation	Land Use	water: fresh and marine	Economic Justice	Social Justice	Animal Rights

Further actions I can take towards Sustainable Living by 2050								
	Today Date:	This Week	This Month	This Year	Five Years	Ten Years	20 Years	30 Years 2050
Me/My Family								
My Community								
My State								
USA								
Earth								

## NEXT STEPS FOR ACTION: ALLIES AND RESOURCES

This is a **brief** list of background information, organizations and resources you might check out to become more familiar with Maine's climate change actions and solutions as you consider how you want to be more involved immediately and into the future. Additional resources and up-to-date actions will be posted on the Down to Earth website — **downtoearthstories.org** We encourage you to check back often as we will be continually posting updates on the website.

**Changing Maine Directory** — a listing of over 1500 social action and social change, economic/social/environmental justice groups. Available online at Resources for Organizing and Social Change website under "Projects" [resourcesforsocialchange.org](http://resourcesforsocialchange.org)

### Maine Climate Change

- 2004 Maine Climate Action Plan (Mitigation and Adaptation) Plan lists measurable solutions to address climate change. Good background reading. **maineghg.raabassociates.org**
- Maine's Climate Future: 2015 Update: A Report by Fernandez, IJ; CV Schmitt, SD Birkel, E Stancioff, AJ Pershing, JT Kelley, JA Runge, GI Jacobson, and PA Mayewski. Orono, ME. University of Maine. 24pp. February 2015, Revised March 2015 with corrected Figure 2 and Figure 9 legends and captions. **climatechange.umaine.edu/research/publications/climate-future**
- Maine Climate Solutions Mapping Project **maps.climatesolutionsme.org** (*work in progress*)
- Sierra Club — Maine Chapter Climate Action Teams — local citizens are putting solutions into play in their communities including solar initiatives, community gardens, weatherization and energy efficiency, plastic bag bans, etc. The Maine Chapter is helping to resource and network the efforts. **sierraclub.org/maine**

### Maine Ocean and Coastal Acidification

Final Report of Maine Commission to study the effects of coastal and ocean acidification...January 2015  
<http://www.maine.gov/legis/opla/Oceanacidificationreport.pdf>

### Energy/Transportation

#### 1) Energy Efficiency/Renewables

- Efficiency Maine [efficiencymaine.com](http://efficiencymaine.com)
- Window Dressers (interior storm windows) **windowdressers.org**
- Community Solar/Solar Advocacy
  - Sierra Club-Maine **sierraclub.org/maine**
  - Natural Resources Council of Maine [nrcm.org](http://nrcm.org)
  - Midcoast Green Collaborative [midcoastgreencollaborative.org](http://midcoastgreencollaborative.org)
  - Guy Marsden/All Things Sustainable — inventive ideas [arttec.net](http://arttec.net)



## 2) Oil Trains/Pipelines/Anti-Fracking/Tar Sands

- [350.org](http://350.org) and **350maine.org**
- [stand.earth/](http://stand.earth/) — formerly Forest Ethics; national focus on oil trains
- Indigenous Environmental Network **ienearth.org**
- Protect South Portland **facebook.com** — Community organizing on local environmental issues

## 3) Divest/Reinvest

- Fossil Fuel Divestment Student Network [studentsdivest.org](http://studentsdivest.org)
- Green Faith [greenfaith.org/programs/divest-and-reinvest](http://greenfaith.org/programs/divest-and-reinvest)
- [gofossilfree.org](http://gofossilfree.org) — international divestment effort

## 4) Alternative Transportation

- The State of Alternative Transportation in Maine State of Maine's Environment 2014, Colby College Environmental Studies Program. [web.colby.edu/stateofmaine2014/the-state-of-alternative-transportation](http://web.colby.edu/stateofmaine2014/the-state-of-alternative-transportation)

## Local Foods Initiatives

- Maine Food Strategy — [mainefoodstrategy.org/reports](http://mainefoodstrategy.org/reports)
- Maine Food Map — [eatmainefoods.org/page/maine-food-map](http://eatmainefoods.org/page/maine-food-map) — Map of farms, farm stands, farmers markets, local foods producers, seafood initiatives, etc.
- Portland Food Map — [portlandfoodmap.com](http://portlandfoodmap.com) — Restaurant reviews and news
- Maine Food Councils — [mainefoodcouncils.net](http://mainefoodcouncils.net) — Networking local food councils to build vibrant local food system to feed all Mainers nutritious and affordable food.
- Maine Seaweed Council — [seaweedcouncil.org](http://seaweedcouncil.org) — New food enterprises

Published on Friday, February 7, 2014 by [The Nation](#)

## From Occupy to Climate Justice

**There's a growing effort to merge economic-justice and climate activism. Call it climate democracy.**

by [Wen Stephenson](#)



(Photo: Reuters/Kevin

Lamarque)It's an odd thing, really. In certain precincts of the left, especially across a broad spectrum of what could be called the economic left, our (by which I mean humanity's) accelerating trajectory toward the climate cliff is little more popular as a topic than it is on the right. In fact, possibly less so. (Plenty of right-wingers love to talk about [climate change](#), if only to deny its grim and urgent scientific reality. On the left, to say nothing of the center, denial takes different forms.)

Sometimes, though, the prospect of climate catastrophe shows up unexpectedly, awkwardly, as a kind of non sequitur—or the return of the repressed.

"I don't know anyone who has all the answers, but I do know a few people who are at least asking the right kinds of questions, starting the necessary conversations and actually working to connect climate and economic-justice organizing across the country."

I was reminded of this not long ago when I came to a showstopping passage deep in the final chapter of anarchist anthropologist David Graeber's *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement*, his interpretive account of the [Occupy Wall Street](#) uprising, in which he played a role not only as a core OWS organizer but as a kind of house intellectual (his magnum opus, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, happened to come out in the summer of 2011). Midway through a brief discourse on the nature of [labor](#), he pauses to reflect, as though it has just occurred to him: "At the moment, probably the most pressing need is simply to slow down the engines of productivity." Why? Because "if you consider the overall state of the world," there are "two insoluble problems" we seem to face: "On the one hand, we have witnessed an endless series of global debt crises...to the point where the overall burden of debt...is obviously unsustainable. On the other we have an ecological crisis, a galloping process of climate change that is threatening to throw the entire planet into drought, floods, chaos, starvation, and war."

These two problems may appear unrelated, Graeber tells us, but "ultimately they are the same." That's because debt is nothing if not "the promise of future productivity." Therefore, "human beings are promising each other to produce an even greater volume of goods and services in the future than they are creating now. But even current levels are clearly unsustainable. They are precisely what's destroying the planet, at an ever-increasing pace."

Talk about burying the lead. Graeber's solution—"a planetary debt cancellation" and a "mass reduction in working hours: a four-hour day, perhaps, or a guaranteed five-month vacation"—may sound far-fetched, but at least he acknowledges the "galloping" climate crisis and what's at stake in it, and proposes something commensurate (if somewhat detached from the central challenge of leaving fossil fuels in the ground). That's more than can be said

for most others on the left side of the spectrum, where climate change is too often completely absent from economic and political analysis.

It's unclear what explains this reticence about the existential threat facing humanity, beginning with the poorest and most vulnerable people on the planet—unless it's that the implications of climate science, when you really begin to grasp them, are simply too radical, even for radicals.

Two years ago, the International Energy Agency reported that corporations and governments must shift decisively away from new long-term investments in fossil-fuel infrastructure—such as Keystone XL and any number of other projects—within five years, meaning by 2017, in order to avoid “locking in” decades of carbon emissions that will guarantee warming the planet, within this century, far more than 2°C above the preindustrial average, the internationally agreed-upon red line. But on December 3, the eminent climate scientist James Hansen, recently retired as head of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, and seventeen co-authors released a study in the journal *PLOS ONE* confirming that the United Nations–approved 2°C ceiling has no real basis in science, only politics, and would itself set in motion “disastrous consequences” beyond humanity's control.

Instead, according to Hansen and his co-authors, we should do everything we can to stay as close as possible to a ceiling of 1°C. Given that we've already warmed about 0.8°C in the past 100 years (with still more “baked in” as a result of the climate system's lag time), you would be correct in concluding that the time frame in which to act is vanishingly short—and that the scale of action required is epically large. On our current trajectory, with global emissions still rising, we're headed to at least 4°C this century. Even to have a shot at the 2°C goal, global emissions must peak by, say, 2020, and then plummet to near zero by mid-century. That may appear unlikely, but as Hansen et al. write, “There is still opportunity for humanity to exercise free will.”

Anyone who is committed to the hard work of bringing deep structural change to our economic, social and political systems—the kind of change that requires a long-term strategy of organizing and movement-building—is now faced with scientific facts so immediate and so dire as to render a life's work seemingly futile. The question, then, becomes how to escape that paralyzing sense of futility, and how to accelerate the sort of grassroots democratic mobilization we need if we're to salvage any hope of a just and stable society.

A lot of people I know in the climate movement think the left, and the economic left in particular—pretty much the entire spectrum from mainstream liberals to Occupy radicals—has not yet taken on board the scale and urgency of the climate crisis. Not really. Not the full, stark set of facts. At the same time, mainstream climate advocates, wanting to broaden the climate movement, are told that they have too often been tone-deaf on issues of economic justice and inequality. How to reconcile these? How to merge the fights for economic justice and climate action with the kind of good faith and urgency required to build a real climate-justice movement?

I don't know anyone who has all the answers, but I do know a few people who are at least asking the right kinds of questions, starting the necessary conversations and actually working to connect climate and economic-justice organizing across the country. As it happens, more than a few of them were engaged in Occupy. (David Graeber should be proud.) They point to a convergence of movements for economic democracy and climate justice, and show us what a trajectory from Occupy to something new—call it climate democracy—might look like.

Equally important, they're acting with the kind of urgency, and commitment to civil resistance, that the crisis demands. They know there can be no climate justice without economic justice, but they also know there won't be any economic justice—any justice at all—without facing up to our climate reality, simultaneously slashing emissions and building resilience. They know the “climate” part of “climate justice” cannot be an afterthought, some optional add-on to please “environmentalists.” Because this shit is real. And the game is far from over. No matter what happens in terms of climate policy in the next few years—and the prospects are not pretty—current and future generations have to live through what's coming.

\* \* \*

Rachel Plattus was speaking to a roomful of college students and recent grads at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center in Pittsburgh, where they'd gathered for a weekend in late October along with some 8,000 other young activists at Power Shift, the biannual national convergence of the youth climate movement. Rachel is the 26-year-old director of youth and student organizing for the New Economy Coalition, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. By her side was 35-year-old Farhad Ebrahimi, who serves on the NEC board and who founded and runs the Boston-based Chorus Foundation, which supports grassroots climate and environmental-justice organizing in communities around the country.

I know Rachel and Farhad from the Boston-area climate movement, and I was tagging along with them and their colleagues at Power Shift. It was strange to see the two of them in front of a room at a high-tech convention center; in the past year I've been more apt to see them in church basements and community-organizing spaces, leading nonviolent direct-action trainings, or on the streets leading protests against tar sands pipelines and coal-fired power plants.

"I met Farhad at Occupy Boston," Rachel told the hundred or so young people who'd come to hear about the intersection of climate and economic justice (a strong showing, given the dozens of concurrent breakout sessions offered at Power Shift). "We spent a lot of time there a couple years ago, and it was a transformative experience for a lot of us."

Two important things came out of her Occupy experience, Rachel explained. First, she and several friends who had been "radicalized on climate issues," including Farhad and her NEC colleague Eli Feghali (who was also in the room), decided to form an organizing collective "to do resistance work around climate justice." At the same time, she began thinking seriously about the central question raised by Occupy but never really answered: "If you're so angry at this system, if all the people here have been wronged by the system, what are you proposing that we do instead?" While she and her friends wanted to keep organizing resistance, she said, "I found myself looking for a way to have an answer to 'What do you want instead?'" She dove into the worker-ownership movement in Boston and tried unsuccessfully to start a worker co-op with some friends.

"We have to be willing to tell the truth about what the dangers of [climate change](#) are and how we balance immediate economic survival with longer-term survival. We have to be willing to be honest about those things. But we also have to recognize when we're building power toward addressing the climate crisis—even if people aren't calling it the climate-justice movement." —Rachel Plattus

It was around this time, in late 2011 and early 2012, that she started talking with Bob Massie, a longtime social-justice and environmental activist, ordained Episcopal priest with a doctorate from Harvard Business School and, among other things, the initiator of the Investor Network on Climate Risk. Massie had recently been hired to head the New Economics Institute, which merged early last year with the New Economy Network to form the NEC. Rachel began to realize, she told her Power Shift listeners, that the kind of work going on in the "new economy" or "solidarity economy" movement—with things like cooperatives and worker-owned businesses, community-development financial institutions, community land trusts, local agriculture and community-owned renewable energy, as well as efforts to reconceive corporations and redefine economic growth—is challenging the dominant and unsustainable corporate capitalist system. And not simply rejecting that system, she emphasizes, but "creating new economic institutions that are democratic and participatory, decentralized to appropriate scale so that decisions are made at the most local level that makes sense and, rather than only prioritizing one thing—the maximization of profit—prioritizing people, place and planet."

"New-economy innovations are occurring all over the country, bubbling up," Massie told me. "What they lack is mutual awareness, mutual support and mutual connectivity." There's potential for real transformation, he believes, in providing those connections. "As people become aware of each other, their frame of reference about what's happening, and what could happen, changes. They realize all these problems are linked—but all these solutions may also be linked." He points to what happened recently in Boulder, Colorado, where voters approved a grassroots energy initiative, by a two-thirds landslide, to move the city from a big, corporate, coal-dominated utility, Xcel Energy, to a publicly owned municipal utility that will expand renewables at the same or lower rates.

When I followed up with Rachel back in Cambridge, I pressed her to explain how she connects the new-economy work—which seems to represent real progress, at least in pockets around the country—with her work organizing nonviolent resistance to the fossil-fuel industry. First, she pointed out, "in a civil society that is essentially owned by multinational corporations, driven to maximize profit over all else, to engage in building these parallel economic institutions is to engage in civil resistance."

But even more, she suggested, in the merging of climate justice and economic democracy, it's the democracy part that may ultimately matter most. Rachel understands that the kind of deep, systemic change envisioned by the new-economy movement is no doubt a long-term, evolutionary process, on a time scale out of sync with our climate emergency. But she argues that grassroots economic democracy, actually organizing to create those alternative institutions, can also build a base of political power in the near term, at the local level, which is not only where all politics has to start but all resilience as well—something we're going to need plenty of in the years ahead.

Rachel told me that she knows a lot of people who are focused primarily on the economic-democracy piece—and yet, she added "almost all of them recognize the level at which that also plays into climate issues, how we build resilient communities." She pointed not only to something like the community-owned energy initiative in Boulder, but to projects like the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in the Roxbury/North Dorchester neighborhood of Boston, which has brought a racially diverse, low-income community together around fair and affordable housing, community economic development, food justice, education and youth empowerment. The initiative, she said, is "building relationships, making sure the community is there, people interacting with each other in the kinds of ways we need people to be interacting with each other.... Occupy did that, too. Being part of participatory democracy, in all its forms, does that: it gives people the skills and capacities they need" to help build a social movement. Rachel

noted that NEC will launch an initiative this year to expand and strengthen organizing among its coalition members around racial and economic justice.

And yet, I asked, where's the climate crisis in that picture? What happens to communities like Roxbury and Dorchester, where people are already struggling, if we don't urgently build the kind of grassroots power we need to shift the politics of climate and deal head-on with the crisis?

"We have to be willing to tell the truth about what the dangers of [climate change](#) are," Rachel said, "and how we balance immediate economic survival with longer-term survival. We have to be willing to be honest about those things. But we also have to recognize when we're building power toward addressing the climate crisis—even if people aren't calling it the climate-justice movement."

\* \* \*

Farhad Ebrahimi stood in front of the room at Power Shift wearing a gray hoodie with the words Kentuckians for the Commonwealth printed across it. He was talking about what he'd learned since diving into climate work in 2006 and seeing even the most inadequate national legislation die in Congress in 2009 and 2010. What was missing, he and others began to see, "was any sense of building political power, any sense of a social movement, and the intersectionality of climate justice and other social-justice movements." Through his young foundation, Chorus, he decided to start supporting grassroots organizing in frontline communities, those already bearing the brunt of the fossil-fuel industry. One of the first places he went was Kentucky.

"We went to look at the extraction stuff going on, mountaintop removal," he said, "and we saw that the folks who were trying to fight the coal companies, stop them from blowing up their mountains, were also doing great work around energy efficiency and renewables—and when it was tied together with this resistance work, it was actually much more effective."

He learned about Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, a statewide independent grassroots group that's been working for more than thirty years on democratic reform and economic and environmental justice. KFTC does far more than work on coal and environmental health issues, central as those are in eastern Kentucky, where the group has its strongest base. Confronting climate change is the first plank of the KFTC platform, but much of its work is on local and regional economic development, tax-justice issues, mass incarceration and voting rights, as well as worker cooperatives, local agriculture, and community-owned and -distributed renewables.

The folks at KFTC frame all of these as essential parts of a "just transition" from the old, extractive, exploitative economy to a new, more democratic clean-energy economy. The idea is that even as they build grassroots political power, they're also creating real economic alternatives to fill the void left by the coal industry. KFTC has established its presence in state politics. In 2010, as part of its strategy to move rural electric cooperatives away from overdependence on coal, the group helped prevent the East Kentucky Power Cooperative from building a new coal-fired plant and reached an agreement with the utility to explore energy efficiency and clean-energy alternatives. Last year, KFTC convened the Appalachia's Bright Future conference, which influenced the agenda of a major Eastern Kentucky "summit" in December, called by Governor Steve Beshear, a Democrat, and Republican Congressman Hal Rogers, to jump-start an economic transition in a region reeling from the loss of coal-industry jobs.

In the face of our climate reality, Farhad told me back in Boston, "economic transition is inevitable." In Appalachia, as coal declines, it's already happening. The question is: "Will the transition be just or not?"

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, he noted, is part of the recently formed Climate Justice Alliance, a national collaborative effort among more than thirty-five organizations committed to grassroots organizing in frontline communities, especially communities of color. Its recently launched Our Power Campaign focuses on three "hot spots": in the Black Mesa region of the Navajo Nation, led by the Black Mesa Water Coalition; in Detroit, led by the East Michigan Environmental Action Council; and in Richmond, California, led by the Asian Pacific Environmental Network and Communities for a Better Environment. Each of these groups is not only fighting the local impacts of fossil-fuel extraction and infrastructure—coal mines and power plants in Arizona, a coal plant and oil refinery in Detroit, and the massive Chevron refinery in Richmond—but just as much, applying principles of economic democracy to work toward more sustainable and resilient local economies in struggling communities.

Jihan Gearon, executive director of the Black Mesa Water Coalition, grew up on the Navajo reservation in Arizona. She told me that their approach to climate is "holistic," addressing not only emissions as they move away from coal but also adaptation—especially as water becomes scarce—and economic transition. "We are not content with parts per million of CO<sub>2</sub> reduced," she said. "We also want to ensure that we protect health, water and jobs as we reduce CO<sub>2</sub>."

In any likely scenario, Farhad asked, "what are we going to need, no matter what? Local political power and local resilience." We won't get where we need to be politically on climate change, at the national and international levels, "without real local base-building," he added. And if we don't get anywhere at the national and international levels,

“well, then, we’re going to need the local work in place so that we can take care of each other as the old way of doing things slips away.”

Farhad and Rachel both like to think of this work as having three essential pieces. The first is resistance: saying “no” to a corrupt, oppressive, extractive system, whether through legislation and litigation, at one end of the spectrum, and nonviolent direct action or mass protests at the other. The second is “replacement”: creating the alternatives, which can itself be a form of resistance, as Rachel noted. And the third essential piece is resilience.

“So we’re trying to go from ‘no’ to ‘yes,’” Farhad said, “but it’s gonna be a really fuckin’ rough ride. It’s gonna be a rough ride because of climate change. But it’s also gonna be a rough ride politically and economically.”

Resilience becomes crucial, but so does social justice, because the two are intimately linked. Resilience requires strong communities—and there’s no real community without social justice.

“We have this journey, this transition, that we have to make,” Farhad told me. “And we have to figure out how to organize so that we’re not only going toward ‘yes,’ but we’re doing it in a way that’s equitable.” Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, he pointed out, is important right now because of how it intervenes in Kentucky politics, organizes communities and fights the big coal companies. “And when the climate changes and what grows there changes and how they can live there changes—they’re going to need that ability to act collectively to deal with all of that as well.”

Farhad thought of another example. “Occupy Sandy happened not because people responded to Sandy really well; it was because the relationships and tool sets were already built through Occupy Wall Street.”

David Graeber argues in *The Democracy Project* that Occupy reawakened the radical imagination in this country. To the extent that’s true, it’s possible that the merging of climate justice and economic democracy can matter in a similar way—reawakening the sense of democratic possibility and grassroots power in our communities. But Occupy did something else, too: it reminded us of the sheer speed and unpredictability with which unrest can explode across the country, taking everyone (including the organizers) by surprise.

In Cambridge, I asked Rachel if she agreed that much of the economic left has yet to take on board the full magnitude and urgency of the climate crisis. “I mean, the climate movement has barely taken it on board,” she replied. “There are a lot of folks, even in the climate movement, and certainly in the economic left, who haven’t even made the decision to take on the reality of it—and to recognize that this fight, [which] for them was never really about survival, all of a sudden is.”

When that recognition finally comes, anything could happen.

“It’s interesting,” Rachel said, “because there certainly are parts of the left, not the liberal elite, but parts of the left”—like those, she pointed out, who have fought their whole lives for racial justice—“for whom being engaged has always been about survival.”

“There is a deep, rich tradition of organizing for survival,” Rachel said. “In fact, it’s the only thing that’s ever worked.”

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# Climate Activists Can Learn a lot From Black Lives Matter

By **Kate Aronoff** - December 30, 2015 | Op-Ed



*Changing anything means building a big, brash movement. And doing that means talking about people, not statistics.*

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Yesterday afternoon, Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Tim McGinty told a cramped room of reporters that no officers would be tried for the killing of Tamir Rice. The announcement came just over a year after the 12-year-old was gunned down by police for waving around a toy rifle in a Cleveland park. Within two seconds of arriving at the scene, officer Timothy Loehmann had fired two very real bullets at Rice — including the one that killed him.

Calling Rice’s death a “perfect storm of human error, mistakes and miscommunications by all involved that day,” McGinty spent several minutes laying out the ways in which the child should have known better than to play in a park while being black. It was “indisputable,” he said, “that Tamir was drawing a gun from his waist.” McGinty added that the boy’s “size made him look much older” and that he “had been warned that his pellet gun might get him

into trouble that day.”

Before the press conference was over, Twitter had issued its own verdict. One of the most popular (and representative) came from “Selma” filmmaker Ava DuVernay, who [posted a photo](#) of Tamir smiling in a restaurant with a one-word caption: “Innocent.”

As the movement for black lives has pointed out over the last year, the fact that police can kill a 12-year-old boy with impunity is grounds for moral outrage and disobedience. Organizers are already channeling that outrage into protests in Ohio, New York and elsewhere. The non-indictments of the officers that killed Mike Brown and Eric Garner drove thousands into the streets last year. The rallying cry Black Lives Matter was birthed in similar environs two years prior, when George Zimmerman was acquitted of murder after shooting Trayvon Martin dead on a sleepy Sanford, Florida street. Continued police shootings around the country have prompted further escalation, with protesters moving to shut down business as usual in shopping malls, airports and highways from coast to coast, most recently in a series of actions known as BlackXMas.

These efforts have catapulted a conversation about police brutality and systemic racism into the mainstream. [Sixty percent of Americans](#) — compared with just 43 percent the year before — now believe that black Americans’ fight for equal rights isn’t over. The movement has also racked up a [string of legal and political victories](#), including California Gov. Jerry Brown’s decision to ban the use of grand juries in cases of excessive police force.

Central to the movement’s success has been its ability to outline the appropriate public response to killings and non-indictments. On top is a call for empathy, with the families of victims and the countless others who have experienced similar losses.

Alongside it is a sense of justified anger. Nearing 2016, law enforcement’s ability to kill unarmed children and walk free isn’t shocking. As Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote of Rice’s case last year, “Convicting an officer of murder effectively requires an act of telepathy.” The anger that the movement for black lives has articulated, then, is not for specific incidents or errant prosecutors; it’s for a system that was designed to fail large chunks of the people living in it. Events like Monday’s non-indictment are reminders to keep fighting.

Samaira Rice, Tamir’s mother, said as much in [her statement](#) on the grand jury’s decision:



“I don’t want my child to have died for nothing and I refuse to let his legacy or his name be ignored. We will continue to fight for justice for him, and for all the families who must live with the pain that we live with.”

The facts of her son’s case were all part of the discussion Monday — no less so than among legal analysts — but they served mostly to bolster the movement’s larger narrative that “the whole damn system is guilty as hell,” and shutting down business, as usual, is the only way to change it.

Of the many lessons, the climate movement can draw from the one for black lives, this might be the most valuable. Building on a scaffolding erected by Al Gore and his ilk, mainstream climate activists have for years billed their battle as one for the truth, believing that if they tell the truth, the people (and the politicians) will follow. But faced with disappointments like the Paris agreement, more environmentalists are coming to realize what many organizers in the movement for black lives already knew: that changing anything means building a big, brash movement. And doing that means talking about people, not statistics.

To be fair, climate denial is a colossal problem. There are still plenty of truths to be told. The GOP’s party line is to disagree with 97 percent of scientists, and its 2016 hopefuls range from quiet skeptics to [dues-paying members of the Flat Earth Society](#). A year-long investigation by *Inside Climate News* revealed that ExxonMobil funded cutting-edge research into climate change starting in the 1970s, only to spend millions covering up its findings over the next 40 years. Republican obstinacy provided an easy excuse for U.S. negotiators to excise the Paris agreement’s few binding sections, on the grounds that any agreement that had to pass through a GOP-controlled Congress would be dead on arrival at American shores.

Only sheer stupidity, the argument goes, could obscure the links between [devastating floods](#) in the United Kingdom, a nearly 70 degree Christmas in New York and the impotence of the climate deal reached in Paris a few weeks back. “If only they knew better,” goes the thinking of mainstream climate activists.

Content explaining how stupid Republicans are on climate is its own renewable resource — just look at the climate change tab of any major progressive news outlet. A cottage industry

has cropped up to generate rapid-fire fact-checks on Republican presidential debates and just about anything Donald Trump says.

But what good does caring about the truth really do? Trump's resilience against reality is a case in point. As journalist Paul Waldman [recently explained](#), "Not only does [Trump] refuse to be held to any standard of truth, he refuses to act ashamed when he gets caught in a lie, or even grant that he might have been mistaken. And his supporters go right along — if Donald says it, it's true, and no bunch of media jerks are going to tell them otherwise." For Trump supporters, facts are irrelevant. The same might well be said of many Americans — not because they're ill-informed, but because stories do more work than a slideshow ever can. And most people generally don't like being called stupid. Trump and the climate deniers are telling one story, and the media jerks another. Movements have to up-end them both.

As the movement for black lives already understands, dismantling racism is not about proving racists wrong. Climate change will not be solved by convincing climate deniers of their own idiocy. Each are about power and affecting near-tectonic shifts in national values and priorities: Whose lives matter? Who controls our future? What does security mean amidst rising tides, and who deserves it?

The point here is not to draw a hokey analytic comparison between the movement for black lives and the one against climate change. For one, the links between climate and racial justice aren't abstract. Reducing that relationship to "links" at all belies how deeply interwoven the two really are. It was Cleveland's polluted Cuyahoga River, after all, which [sparked national outrage](#) when it caught fire one June morning in 1969 — a scandal that led to both the Clean Water Act and the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency. Additionally, some of this country's longest-running fights against pollution and extractive industry have taken root in the communities of color that are first to feel their worst impacts. It's no secret, either, that the nations currently feeling the blunt force of climate change tend to be poorer and browner than the ones that contributed most to it.

These connections aren't just facts. They're lived reality. Necessarily, the movement for black lives has always been a struggle for life and death. The climate fight — for many — is no different. As protesters respond to yesterday's grand jury decision, environmentalists should be taking notes and joining in.

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## Kate Aronoff

Kate Aronoff is a Brooklyn-based freelance writer, the Communications Coordinator for the New Economy Coalition, and a co-founder of the Fossil Fuel Divestment Student Network. Her writing has appeared in The Nation, The American Prospect, Dissent and The New York Times.

[Comment](#)

**Down to Earth Climate Justice Stories**  
*Questions for Reflection/Discussion/Journaling*

**Which filmed stories/storytellers reflect your own story and/or inspire you?**

- ❖ **Sylvia** wrestled with what she would need to do if she were to truly live her values and beliefs. **Iris** spoke of embracing activism as “just something inside of me.” What are the values you hold deepest and dearest? Where did those come from? How do you live those values daily?
- ❖ **Chloe** fell in love with Maine’s wilderness. **Skip** felt profound concern for frontline communities experiencing painful social, economic, and environmental injustices. **Dawn** loved two horned owl friends and was always drawn to the Penobscot River. Love prompted them to act. **Rachel** and **Wendy** both shared their belief that love is at the heart of actions for justice. What/whom do you love that climate disruption/ injustices might impact? What bold new action(s) will you pledge to take to protect that which/whom you love? *(See activities for creative ways to show your love and actions)*
- ❖ **Maria** recounts her Wabanaki peoples’ prophecy, saying this is the time foretold when all people must come together to light the 8<sup>th</sup> fire. **Chloe** says that the beautiful, yet scary, thing about climate change is that it impacts all of us, though to different degrees. And that it is not going to be political leaders who solve the problem...it’s you and me and our families and friends. Where do you see signs of a paradigm shift/of people coming together for justice?
- ❖ Each storyteller found his/her own path to be active in the movement towards a just and sustainable world. **Fred** and **Hadley** are “practivists” while **MJ** is a contemplative and puts prayer into action. **Hilary** found courage and her voice to share her Healing Walk and tar sands experience when she returned. **Becky** finds joy and hope in getting off the couch and into action. What is your role to play on this new Earth?

*(Last revised 8/3/16)*

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### Some Suggested Activities/Actions

- ❖ *All about Love*: Create a list of the things/people/places you love and actions you would take to protect them from the impacts of climate disruption. (Love Chart available for download on the **Down to Earth (DTE)** website: [www.downtoearthstories.org](http://www.downtoearthstories.org)) Make a poster, a t-shirt, a banner, a community collage, that expresses your love and actions. Wear/display this conversation starter everywhere! Post something on the **DTE** webpage so we build a visible community showcasing love into action.
- ❖ **DTE** is pleased to present a *House Tour* short film, on DVD or for download through DTE website, featuring Fred and Hadley Horch and their lifestyle choices addressing climate change. Watch the film and then quietly contemplate what your just, compassionate, and ecologically resilient home/community/ state/nation/Earth would look like and what the steps are to get there. In a group or alone, write it down; sketch it on large paper; build a diorama out of modeling clay and recycled objects; make a collage or mobile model of your perfect world.
- ❖ Download from the **DTE** website the journaling workbook and the section on taking action and contemplate and write down on the chart the actions you will take today and in the future to address climate change and build that just world you envision.
- ❖ Schedule a **DTE** workshop for your community or join our next virtual workshop. Contact us at [downtoearth145@gmail.com](mailto:downtoearth145@gmail.com) for more information about our resources that can provide a path for you/a group to unearth your own stories.

### Brief List of Resources for Information/Action

- ❖ Visit our website for information about upcoming climate justice actions and solutions, workshops, film screenings, and more resources ([www.downtoearthstories.org](http://www.downtoearthstories.org))
- ❖ Resources for Organizing and Social Change (ROSC) publishes the *Changing Maine Directory*, and organizes social, economic and environmental justice projects. ([www.resourcesforsocialchange.org](http://www.resourcesforsocialchange.org))
- ❖ Sierra Club-Maine Climate Action Teams (CATs) are working on local solutions to global climate change. ([www.sierraclub.org/maine](http://www.sierraclub.org/maine))
- ❖ Divest/Reinvest info: [www.350maine.org](http://www.350maine.org); [www.divestinvest.org](http://www.divestinvest.org)

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