ECOWOMANISM ECOFEMINISM EDITION

CELEBRATING BLACK WOMEN IN THE ECJ MOVEMENT

APRIL 2018

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Field Highlights

The Kansas City NAACP Branch’s community garden initiative.

The Kansas City Branch organized the planting of a community garden at the Public Housing building on 9th & Washington.

The Mobile, Alabama NAACP hosted a coalition building event.

“Building Coalitions for Success” had the goal to address issues heard during their recent door-to-door vote registering drive, by bringing local and state leaders together for dialogue and collaboration. The hope is to bring together multi-cultural communities together to create an action plan and create tangible solutions to problems in the community.

The Alachua County NAACP held an event on energy conservation.

“Busting Myths about Energy and Conservation: A community forum” took place on March 17th in Gainesville, Florida. The event aimed to teach residents how to lower energy costs, how to reduce energy use, and how to make their home more energy efficient.

Indiana NAACP to host ECJ Youth and College initiatives on Earth Day and this summer.

Indiana NAACP ECJ Leaders are coordinating an ECJ youth summit this summer and a youth initiative for Earth Day (April 20th). More information to come!

The North Carolina NAACP hosted a voter awareness town halls.

The North Carolina NAACP is hosting a series of “Fair Courts, Fair Votes” town halls. These town halls look at important issues impacting voters, including gerrymandering and limiting voting access. The goal of the town halls is to teach community members how to fight back against attacks on their rights. These events are taking place in multiple cities with the last town hall on May 1st. See the link above for more information.

Energy Democracy

ADVANCING EQUITY IN CLEAN ENERGY SOLUTIONS

Edited by Denise Fairchild and Al Weinraub

Mississippi State Conference members read about energy justice.

For the month of March, the Mississippi State Conference read the book they helped to author, “Energy Democracy: Advancing Equity in Clean Energy Solutions”.

Top Photo
Alachua County vendors at the community forum.

Bottom Photo
Alachua County NAACP leaders and Jacqui Patterson, NAACP Senior Director, ECJ Program
President Lytle wins Dr. Espanola Jackson Solar Justice Award

Congratulations to President Rosemary Harris Lytle, NAACP Pres. of the Rocky Mountain region, for winning Vote Solar’s “Dr. Espanola Jackson Solar Justice Award” for her leadership advocating for energy justice in the Interior West.

Pres. Ronald McCray working on solar education in New Jersey.

Pres. McCray is working with Vote Solar and the ECJ Program at NAACP to educate the public about pending solar legislation in New Jersey. The legislation would increase the communities’ access to solar and hold power companies accountable.

Southern Indiana NAACP Branch to partner with Sierra Club.

Southern Indiana NAACP is collaborating with Sierra Club and participating in a Town hall. More details to come in the following months!

Ball State Branch of the Indiana NAACP State Area Conference to host a youth-led clean up event.

Members of the Ball State Branch are planning a clean up their campus and a nearby big park. The college will be discussing the importance of environmental issues during the event.

Jeremy Orr, ECJ Chair of Michigan Area State Conference honored in news.

Scott Pruitt, EPA Administrator, appointed Jeremy Orr to the Federal Advisory Committee to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. LegalNews celebrated the appointment with an article outlining Jeremy’s goals and the importance of the appointment.
ECOWOMANISM. ECOFEMINISM.
celebrating black women in the environmental and climate justice movement
My indoctrination into civil rights was a result of having been born and raised in Mississippi during the height of the civil rights movement. Dr. King’s eloquent words: ‘I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice’, personally resonated at an extremely young, impressionable age. The struggle during the turbulent 60’s was for equality, human dignity, ending segregation and securing basic civil and constitutional rights.

The environmental movement was still about as insular as the Deep South. It was not racially inclusive or welcoming. It was not human rights or justice oriented. People of color had not been afforded privilege or the luxury of exposure, awareness or involvement into a movement which was essentially elitist. It lacked a sense of moral obligation to protect vulnerable populations which were subjected to environmental disparities. The rise of ecowomanism and ecofeminism may have been the inroad into demands from the civil rights community to acknowledge environmental racism.

Just as abolitionism and the Reconstruction Era gave rise to women’s suffrage, the Civil Rights Era spring-boarded the feminist movement along with ecowomanism and ecofeminism.

I moved to Gulfport several years into the recovery efforts following Hurricane Camille’s ravage of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. I had a deep affinity for nature and commitment to its protection, probably as a result of a healthy respect of my younger sister’s trailblazing work as a state government environmental regulator. She was really an anomaly in what was a white male dominated field in the 70’s and was my first environmental role model.

However, it wasn’t until Hurricane Katrina devastated my community, nearly destroyed my home, claimed the lives of two of my dearest friends and reaped economic havoc on what was planned to be a comfortable retirement that my civil rights advocacy became enmeshed with climate and environmental activism. Personally witnessing the horrendous injustices and disparities of Hurricane Katrina and experiencing climate devastation first hand, gave significant rise to the involvement of women of color within the ecowomanism and ecofeminism fora of the Gulf Coastal South.

There were now innumerable women who had been unexpectedly summoned and even somewhat reluctantly answered a call to action as agents of environmental and climate change. Katrina was the impetus to channel the pain and fear of women to reform. When I think of this compelling call, I am reminded of Tyler Perry’s novel, ‘Don’t Make a Black Woman Take Her Earrings Off’. It was humor which reflected the entrenched, instinctive lengths that women will go when the well-being of her family is threatened. It isn’t about violence or anger, but unbridled determination to protect loved ones. It is reflective of the nurturing and vigilant phenomena of women, which is central to ecowomanism and ecofeminism.

Hurricane Katrina was the moment I took my earrings off. Climate change was no longer an intellectual matter of the head; it had become a matter of the heart. Climate change was no longer an academic state of conversational consciousness, it was real and it had not only knocked at my front door, but had literally blown it, along with most of my home, down.

(continued next page)
The government failed miserably in Katrina relief efforts in Gulf Coast Communities. And then the good old boys’ politics in Mississippi callously defied the housing needs created by Katrina by diverting over half a billion dollars in HUD disaster grant funds, earmarked for housing, and instead channeled them to expand the Port of Gulfport. These funds would have benefited women and children by providing affordable and safe housing, but was politically maneuvered to fund a port expansion project, which sadly, has yet to live up to its promises of substantial jobs creation and economic prosperity.

But Katrina wasn’t the only wake up call to ecofeminist advocacy. I live a few blocks from the Gulf of Mexico. Five years following Katrina I walked out my front door and within a few minutes was witnessing the incredulous sludge from the BP Deepwater Horizon Macondo blowout. Oil mercilessly invaded the Gulf shores, reaping extensive havoc on our marine and wildlife habitats and crippling the commercial fishing and tourism industries. Local community fishing, which afforded an essential food source supplement, was no longer safe or consumable.

The oil gush seemed unending. As the spill and fears of the effects of the dispersants on the ecosystem escalated, so did the joblessness and then the domestic violence. Just as in the aftermath of Katrina, the post-traumatic stress, uncertainty and inability to cope, contributed to escalation of domestic violence, according to several research studies. Ecofeminism aspects steeped in religion are conflicted by religious ideology which often diminishes the roles of women as subservient. Some women are riddled with guilt when they can no longer ‘stand by their man’ but remain resolved to the reality that moving on alone is the safest and only option.

Just when I thought Katrina and the BP Oil spill would be my ultimate trials, the NAACP published its much heralded Coal Blooded: Putting Profits Before People report, which analyzed 378 coal fired plants across America. One of the failing plants listed, Jack Watson, was literally and figuratively at my back door, less than four miles from my home. I was becoming increasingly annoyed with these mounting infractions. The local ecofeminist NAACP Branch president, against all urging, joined forces with the Sierra Club, which had filed litigation in challenging the building of a lignite coal carbon capture sequestration plant in Kemper County, which was supposed to ultimately replace Plant Watson.

We were eventually successful in our efforts to have the burning of coal ceased at Plant Watson. But the perils of the Kemper County Plant, under the guise of the misnomer of “clean coal”, posed a significant socioeconomic threat to the ratepayers of the poorest state in the nation. The plant was years delayed and billions over budget. In the end it was a colossal $7.5 billion dollar failure and one which ratepayers were unwilling and unable to bail out, especially considering the corporate arrogance which propagated it. Again, we joined with the Sierra Club and other local community organizations petitioning Mississippi’s Public Service Commission against any consumer obligation in this company’s recklessness. We eventually prevailed again.

When your life has been plagued by a monstrous climate disaster, a vile oil spill, a compromised coal plant and a costly, failed fossil energy experiment, it isn’t easy to be soft spoken and passive.

Ecofeminism and ecofeminism still remain at odds with ever so resistant mainstream environmentalists. Despite efforts to cast a broader net to bring more diversity and racial and gender sensitivity, there is still tremendous hesitation to full acceptance and appreciation of the depth of passion exhibited from those who have suffered irrevocable, disproportionate harm.

Ecofeminists and ecofeminists are the winds behind demands of sweeping reform. I have walked the walk. My heart ached when I listened to the people embroiled in the Flint, Michigan water crisis. I have cried with the East Chicago, Indiana residents, mostly women, as they anguished in their family’s exposure to deadly amounts of lead in the contaminated soil upon which their homes were built.

So maybe I could be a bit more understated and less personally invested in an effort to assimilate more compliantly into mainstream environmental advocacy, but then again, why would I Dr. King was a radical whose worth was not appreciated until long after his death. Rosa Parks was a revolutionist who wasn’t heralded until years after she refused to give up her seat.

Ecofeminism is not about compromising principles; it is about the social change needed to achieve environmental justice. If privilege isn’t willing to be a party to that change, it shouldn’t be an obstruction to it. The stakes are rising and so are women. #TimesUp for all forms of systemic oppression which threaten our ecowomanist and ecofeminist mission!
Women and the Environment

Nkwanda Jah, Executive Director of Cultural Arts Coalition, Inc.

My connection to the Environment and life on the planet started far before I knew what it was. As a child I would love being outside exploring the more than 40 acres my family owned and lived on. I loved chasing the butterflies and mosquito hawks, I loved the fruit from the trees and vines. I loved working in the garden with my grandmother.

It was many years later as I enjoyed my work as a community activist that I (my organization, Cultural Arts Coalition) was asked by the City Commission to design an educational video about recycling. Our City had not been very successful in getting communities of color to participate in its recycling program. We combined rap, dance, double dutch jump rope and handjive and partnered with a local television station to produce an award winning video. We used local youth between the ages of 8 and 21. Not only did participation in recycling increase but the video was used in more than 20 other states as educational material.

I perceived this success as a sign from the Creator that I should be doing this kind of work. Over the years I have become increasingly aware of my unusual connectedness to the Earth/Planet/Environment. I take it personally when any part of life on the planet is threatened. That goes from the smallest of animals and plants to the largest, whether it be below the oceans and earth or flying high or low above. This sometimes is so strong that I feel a deep responsibility for protecting all of this life.

Since that time I have dedicated my life to doing better by the Environment and teaching others to do the same. In addition to recycling education we cover Food, Water and Air quality. We find ways to advocate for our planet. As chair of the NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice committee I am engaging the African American community to participate in the discussion and the work.

I am not saying you have to be a woman to truly be one with the Earth but I truly believe it helps. Its helps to understand the life born from the Creator because of the life a woman/female produces. Its knowing that as a mother you do not love one child more than the other.

This helps to understand that the Creator loves everything it produces as a mother loves all she produces.

I feel me, my womanism, my feminism my love for all of life has lead me to this journey. I find it to be fulfilling and I am fearful. I am fearful that not enough humanity has the capacity to love and appreciate ALL of Life.

I fear in human’s selfishness and GREED that we collectively will destroy life as we have known it.

I believe it will require the womanist, the strength of mothers to make our Environment/Planet well again.

LET THE HEALING BEGIN!!!!!!
Environmental Protection Agency Repeals "Once In, Always In", Paving the Way for Increased Toxic Air Pollution

Since Trump took office, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has continued to repeal environmental protections that had been enacted by previous administrations, moving toward policies and regulations that are more corporation-friendly and subsequently, more detrimental to the environment. In early 2018, the EPA repealed the "Once In, Always In" Clinton-era EPA regulation, which worked to regulate hazardous air pollution from industrial sources. This policy required "major" polluters, or polluters that emitted more than 10 tons a year of a particular hazardous air pollutant (HAP) or 25 tons a year of a mix of these pollutants, to reduce their emissions to the lowest standards set by peers in the industry. These standards are called the Maximum Achievable Control Technology (MACT) standards and this policy required large polluters to follow these MACTs permanently, hence called "Once in, Always In".

Now that this policy is repealed, polluters are only required to reduce their emissions enough so that they go from "major polluters" to "area polluters", which is any polluter emitting less than 10 tons of HAPs a year. For example, this means that a corporation that would have originally been required to reduce emissions from 11 tons of HAPs a year to 3 tons of HAPs a year, would now only have to install technologies that would reduce their HAP emissions to slightly below 10 tons a year. After lowering their emissions below 10 tons of HAPs a year, these polluters, such as coal-fired power plants will be regulated like "area" polluters, which are usually local businesses such as a dry cleaner or a local auto shop.

What does this mean for frontline communities? These loose regulations on corporations that are polluting the air have huge impacts on the public health of the communities in which they are located, which are primarily low-income communities and communities of color. The increase in pollution will lead to an increase in benzene and other particulate matter in the air, which are known to cause cancer and other chronic illnesses. The repeal of the "Once in, Always in" policy will loosen restrictions on large corporations that are poisoning the air with toxic emissions and augment the public health crises in front-line communities.
ECJ Team Attends Energy Democracy Arts Narrative Workshop

A few members of our NAACP ECJ Program team members attended a three day workshop in Berkeley, CA entitled, “Energy Democracy Arts Narrative Workshop” in March. The training focused on creating a collaborative, inclusive space to explore the diasporic energy democracy movement.

Innovative presentations helped ground us in our energy justice work. Denise Fairchild, President of Emerald Cities Collaborative, led us in an overview of the intersectionality between cultural, racial and generational perspectives of energy democracy as well as led us on a tour the Cliff Bar Headquarters, the Mission District of San Francisco, and to learn about the nonprofit, Poder.

William Copeland from East Michigan Environmental Action Council led us through conversations on trauma and the disconnect (from the consumer level) in the energy sector.

And Aurash Khawarzad, from the Center for Social Inclusion, led us in exercises about not defining ourselves by our work alone. By participating in these spaces, raising awareness and participating in these spaces, we were taught to breathe life into the work.

The narrative workshop was a truly refreshing space that was centered on people of color, art and culture. We were honored to share the space with folks working to advance an energy movement that has everyone in mind.

For more information on how your NAACP ECJ Committee can benefit from this training, please email us: ecjp@naacpnet.org.

Want to start your own energy democracy project?
Check out our Just Energy Policies and Practices ACTION Toolkit! 8 modules of “how to” guides that will get you started.

Newly released!

The ECJP Team recorded a webinar on how you and your ECJ Committee or community group can use the Just Energy Policies and Practices ACTION Toolkit.

The webinar was designed to guide you through the toolkit and all the components that each of the 8 modules encompasses. Then, we discussed ways in which you can use the toolkit.

To accompany the webinar, we created and designed a Facilitator’s Guide that suggests ways you can host your own screening of the webinar that will accompany a planning session on the toolkit itself.

Several NAACP ECJ Leaders helped us to compose and present the webinar to live audiences. Their insight into how they are making change in their communities for energy justice is inspiring! Thank you for all that you do!

Would you like to talk with us about how you can bring energy democracy to YOUR community? Want to discuss ways your current energy projects can be supported? Let us know!

Email us at any time: ecjp@naacpnet.org

Download and view today!

Just Energy Policies & Practices Webinar
Just Energy Policies & Practices ACTION Toolkit