

Addressing Climate and Environmental Inequities in Black Communities

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Why This Conversation Matters

- **"You can't have climate change without sacrifice zones... and you can't have sacrifice zones without racism."**

— Hop Hopkins

- Black Californians breathe 40% more particulate matter from vehicles than white Californians.
- Redlined neighborhoods have 13°F hotter surface temps and less green infrastructure.
- 91% of residents near hazardous waste sites in LA are people of color. **This is not a coincidence. This is environmental racism.**
- ***Source: AB3121 Reparations Task Force Report***

Opening Questions

🛑 Why are Black communities still disproportionately impacted by climate risks?

📊 How are past harms continuing to shape environmental outcomes?

📢 What can local leaders do—urgently and strategically?

Historical Roots of Environmental Harm

Redlining → Zoning → Pollution → Poor Health Outcomes

- Freeways & industry were deliberately placed in Black communities.
- Exclusion from tree planting, green space, and housing protections.
- Displacement through eminent domain & urban renewal.

These harms require more than “DEI.” They require repair.

What the Reparations Task Force Said

Chapter on Environmental Justice (AB 3121):

1. Fund climate resilience hubs in Black communities.
2. Prioritize Black workers in green job pipelines.
3. Provide free environmental health screenings.
4. Invest in stormwater, cooling centers, air filters.
5. Stop displacing Black residents through green development.
6. Mandate racial impact assessments in all EJ policies.

How Reparations & Climate Justice Intersect

- Air purifiers for homes near freeways = reparations.
- Free job training in climate fields = reparations.
- Rebuilding redlined neighborhoods with trees & clinics = reparations.

Reparations is not just about cash—it's about long-term repair & systems change.

Current State of Play

- **SB 1000:** Requires cities to include Environmental Justice in General Plans—but few cities are implementing it.
- **AB 617:** Clean air planning in overburdened areas—but community input is limited.
- Funding exists through Prop 64 cannabis tax and air district fines—but rarely reaches Black communities.

Community-Led Climate Solutions

- West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project
- People's Fresh Market (Acta Non Verba, Soil Sisters)
- East Oakland Climate Alliance
- Marin City's Shoreline Academy

These initiatives work—but they are underfunded, understaffed, and under-recognized.

The Displacement Dilemma

-  New parks, transit, or waterfronts → **rising rents & evictions**
-  Tree planting must be paired with **rent stabilization**
-  Climate improvements without protections = gentrification in disguise
-  Development without displacement must be **policy**, not just intention.

The Health Crisis

Black communities suffer:

- Highest rates of asthma & cardiovascular disease
- Higher rates of premature birth & birth complications
- Increased vulnerability to heat, floods, & pollution

Climate change is a public health emergency.

[Data](#) / [GHO](#) / [Indicator Metadata Registry List](#)

Years of life lost from mortality (YLL)

**Short name:**

YLL

Data type:

Statistic

Topic:

Mortality and burden of disease

Rationale:

The total number of deaths from specific causes does not provide a good metric for informing public health priorities. Such a measure, for example, assigns the same weight to a death at age 80 as it does at age 30 or even at 1 year of age. Years of life lost (YLL) is a measure of premature mortality that takes into account both the frequency of deaths and the age at which it occurs.

Definition:

One YLL represents the loss of one year of life. YLLs are calculated from the number of deaths multiplied by a global standard life expectancy at the age at which death occurs.

Disaggregation:

Age, Sex, Cause

What Local Governments Can Do (Now)

- 📌 Enforce SB 1000 Environmental Justice Elements
- 📌 Redirect Prop 64 + AQMD fines to Black communities
- 📌 Fund Climate Resilience Hubs in redlined zones
- 📌 Create workforce pipelines for Black youth in climate industries
- 📌 Support community-led participatory budgeting processes

Why Aren't We There Yet?

- ✗ Lack of enforcement
- ✗ Weak accountability mechanisms
- ✗ DEI frameworks that fail to repair actual harm
- ✗ Workforce strategies that erase health impacts
- ⬢ We need **reparative policy**, not performative diversity.

➤ Toward a Deeper Understanding of Environmental Justice in Black Geographies

Beyond Industrial Pollution

Environmental justice is often reduced to the regulation of modern industry. But power and environment have always been entangled—from the ancient to the postcolonial.

Extractivism & Labor

From mineral technologies and forced labor in empires and colonies to today's green energy supply chains, resource extraction has disproportionately harmed African and diasporic communities.

Land, Animals, and Food Systems

The domestication of plants and animals, the politics of foraging and game hunting, and peasant cultivation reveal deep histories of environmental control, enclosure, and resistance.

Disease, Medicine & Environmental Risk

Epidemics and medicine were not just biological events—they were also racialized environmental events, shaping who had access to healing and who was abandoned.

Urbanization, Conservation, and Displacement

Settler colonial cities, “protected” game reserves, and modern gentrification all stem from racialized control over land and leisure.

Climate Emergency as Historical Reckoning

Contemporary climate disasters amplify long-standing inequalities in environmental access, risk, and recovery—calling for reparations, not just adaptation.



Key Takeaways

- Policy change is urgent.
- Black communities must lead solutions.
- Climate justice requires racial justice.
- Reparations are the framework that connects it all.



Final Call to Action

1. Push your city to audit its climate plans for racial impact
2. Fund Black-led climate organizing
3. Pass local policies that **repair past harm**, not just “adapt” to climate
4. Join us in making environmental justice **real**, not rhetorical.