

The Arc of History Bends Toward Climate Change

Panelists: Alex Amend, Andrew Curley, Tamara Toles O’Laughlin, Shanté Wolfe
Moderated by Dr. Koki Mendis

03/11/2021

Koki Mendis: We are going to go ahead and get started today.

Thank you all for joining Political Research Associates today for a roundtable discussion on climate justice and injustice in the U.S. context. Political Research Associates is a national nonprofit entering its 40th year. We provide research, analysis, and strategy recommendations to understand and combat anti-democratic forces by exposing patriarchal and racist movements. PRA defends a vision of a feminist, multi-racial, democracy.

Today, we are diving into climate change and climate justice in the U.S. right. From ecofascism to science denialism, and the lobbying power of extractive industries, the Right does not present a unified opposition to climate action. Social justice organizers have a four-fold task: build buy-in on the urgency of addressing climate change; counter the xenophobic authoritarian rhetoric of the ecofascist Far Right; hold Joe Biden accountable to promises made on the campaign trail; and center this work in the deep and justice of several settler colonialism in this struggle.

For this broad and complex discussion, we are honored to be joined by [Andrew Curley](#), Assistant Professor in the [School of Geography, Development, and Environment](#) at the [University of Arizona](#), whose work focuses on the everyday incorporation of Indigenous nations into colonial economies; [Tamara Toles O’Laughlin](#), an environmentalist focused on equity, access, and community, who was most recently the North America Director at [350.org](#) where she drove mission critical work and organizational investments to build a multiracial, multi-generational, climate movement; Shanté Wolf, Electoral Politics Director at [Sunrise Movement](#), and former Deputy Campaign Manager for [Charles Booker](#) for US Senate; and last but not least, [Alex Amend](#), freelance writer and researcher focusing on the Far Right in the politics of climate change, Communications Director on [The Sierra Club’s Beyond Coal Campaign](#), and author of PRA’s featured piece, [“Blood and Vanishing Topsoil.”](#) a must-read

on the fascinating and the evolving ecofascism movement.

Just to note, Alex will be keeping his camera off for this conversation. Shanté may or may not come off camera depending on technical allowances. You will also notice a Political Research Associates account on the call; that is Harini, PRA's Communications Coordinator and our behind the scenes whiz keeping everything moving today.

So thank you to our esteemed panelists and to you, our wonderful audience for joining us today. Please know that the webinar will be recorded and the recording will be distributed by email and on PRA's website in the next few days. Our audience today also has access to live closed captioning which you can toggle on at the bottom of your Zoom screen. And audience members, feel free to introduce yourself in the chat so we can see who all is with us today. We will also be taking time for audience questions which can be dropped into the chat at any point in the discussion.

So all that said, I want to thank you all again for coming and joining us today. If you're in New England, like PRA staffers, it's a beautiful day outside so I appreciate your willingness to sit in front of a computer with us.

I want to begin our conversation today by framing climate justice and Indigenous struggle. Centering our discussion on the necessity to address climate change in the context of the ongoing violence and settler colonialism. Andrew, can you talk us through your use of the resource curse as a framework for understanding the ways in which water rights and enclosures represent the continuation of settler colonialism, and the implications of colonial infrastructure and this version of Indigenous sovereignty for climate justice thinking and action moving forward?

Andrew Curley: Yes, thank you very much for the invitation to be here, and thanks to all the other panelists for joining in this conversation. I'm really happy to be part of it. [in Diné] Yá'át'ééh. Shí éí Andrew Curley yinishyé. Bilagáana nishłı́, Honágháahnii bashishchiin, Bilagáana dashicheii, Kinyaa'áanii dashinalí. [end Diné] That's how I introduce myself in Diné language for our relatives to practice kinship for any Diné people who might be on the call. I'm also speaking from Tucson, Arizona, which is the traditional unceded lands of the Tohono O'odham Nations, the Yavapai Nation, and Apache Nations, here in the state. And to this we're speaking to the origins of settler colonialism in a settler society.

So the prompt really got me thinking about "okay, how do we think about ecofascism and climate change." And tyranny was one of the words used in the introduction, and we have to source this idea of tyranny in the origins of the country and the continuation of the policies of federal Indian law. So federal

Indian law is at root an undemocratic source of domination by the federal government and the state governments over Indigenous nations. Even though we are afforded citizenship and some sort of participation in rights within the United States, where our nations are still captured, we don't have title to the land of the reservations; we still have to clear everything through the Department of Interior; we still have to go to the state governments, and to colonial governments like the State of Arizona, or the federal government, in order to get water rights and other kinds of resources we need to survive. So fundamentally colonialism is a tyrannical enterprise, and it's one that is still in practice. It didn't go away in the 19th century. It's a 21st century phenomenon. It's an everyday phenomenon that is speaking to the conditions of Indigenous nations, so 567 federally recognized tribes within the United States at this moment.

So when I'm talking about the resource curse I'm talking about a literature of development that's often used to think about not only, like, Indigenous nations, but developing nations often is where it's used. And I call this literature to question because it often puts the blame of the problem on those people, those communities that are impacted by resources for development. And it's to suggest that what many of us struggle through are not resource curses. It's not that because we have these resources that we have an underdevelopment or an overreliance on certain industries, it's because of the way colonialism was structured around us. And either through colonialism in the height of the British Empire and other empires, or the continuation of settler colonial regimes in Canada and the United States, Australia, New Zealand. And so for us, as Indigenous people, Indigenous nations, our curse is a colonial curse and one that we haven't overcome.

So when we're thinking about coal economies, when we're thinking about water rights, when we're thinking about everyday practices and tribal governments, which is the area of life that I focus on within tribal nations, within federally recognized tribes (and I can go into the meaning of all these terminologies and in later on in Q&A when people have questions) but these are the complicated stories that I'm trying to tell. And thinking about the way that colonialism, and the policies of the federal government and the state governments continue to create environmental inequalities between Indigenous nations, and non-Indigenous people, settler communities.

And some of these things have to do with access to water, basic infrastructure. We've seen especially in the Navajo Nation, COVID became a real epidemic. I mean, it's an epidemic everywhere but our rates were as high as New York City during the summer of 2020, and our infection rates... and much of this can be attributed to the denial of certain kinds of basic needs and

infrastructures within our communities. 30 percent of reservation households lack basic indoor plumbing or running water and that's thought to contribute to the infection rates across a reservation community.

So these are the things that we have to deal with. Settler colonialism is a contemporaneous problem, it's a current problem, that is structuring our relationship with the environment. And also is fundamentally a right-wing problem. It was founded, colonialism and the death of Indigenous lands, in the expansion of enslaving economies and genocide and a lot of of the worst human rights crimes in the annals of this country in world history. Sorry to go really dramatic at the end, but that's the kind of stuff that we're dealing with. So, anyway, that's—that's my response to the resource curse.

Koki Mendis: Thank you, Andrew. I know that was a lot to capture in a short time and I think ending on a really expansive note makes sense for the kind of conversation we're having today.

I want to continue in this theme. Tamara, in your ongoing work to engage communities who most poignantly feel the ruinous impact of climate change, we just heard from Andrew about the relationship between unequal impacts on Indigenous communities. Similarly, can you talk us through the intersection between white supremacy, COVID19, and the climate crisis? I'm particularly interested in understanding the disproportionate effect of climate change on black and brown communities as drawn into high relief with coronavirus death as it intersects with the demographics interests of the people who are driving energy and resource extraction policy in the US. Another big question for today.

Tamara Toles O'Laughlin: So there's a lot there to unpack. I'll just ground us a little bit by saying the Biden administration's CDC, which he just inherited from the worst president in history, and that's saying a lot, has given us some really interesting stats just to kick off this month. As of March 1st, the data is already showing—after lots of Black, Indigenous, People of Color really fought for racial demography in the data just for vaccine rollouts—race and ethnicity is a huge factor in who's even getting the option of having a fighting chance. Not to set aside all the horrific death that has destroyed our communities as a secondary or knock-on effect from long-term racist and white supremacist systems. Just over half of the folks, 54 percent of the people who have received at least one dose of the vaccine, two-thirds of them are White identifying people. That's 65 percent of those folks are White identifying people, 9 percent are Hispanic, 7 percent were Black, 5 percent were Asian, and 2 percent were Indigenous community.

So I just want to flag that, like, we don't have to look at any far-off statistics to find out how White supremacy, embedded into systems, harms Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. We can look at every single thing that's even

attempting to do any harm reduction or care repair work in the moment that we are currently in. The system was built to serve very specific groups of people by the use of many different levels of compounding harm, designed into systems embedded in law, meted out from policy. And so it's really important for us to recognize that nothing that we are currently seeing is natural. Poverty is not accidental space. Lack of access to resources is not good or bad fortune. It is the subject of design. Poor design if you are Black, Indigenous, a Person of Color, because the system is not designed to serve you.

In the context of how this shows up in climate change, for many people who have been experiencing the pandemic in North America, specific harms have been happening to the same communities: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, as climate change has made no sort of a truce or agreement to stop harming communities already disadvantaged by systems that work against them. So if you are in a community that's at high risk for exposure to COVID, if you are honorably called "essential" while your life is being put in a precarious situation to continue servicing people who have a lot more capacity to avoid exposure, you are probably also someone who is facing severe impacts from either a fire, or a flood or freezing weather that has come on suddenly. And so we are in a compound crisis of COVID, climate, and White supremacy. That is a killer combination for people of color. And we have to look at every single system in this new political moment and identify where the data has failed because it doesn't look at our communities. Where the law has failed because it pretends that our resources, our effort, and how we were delivered here has no impact on how we operate in the systems. And we have to design all of our policies to be anti racist interventions in the system from its own operation and our destruction.

Koki Mendis: Thank you Tamara. Again, a really grounding statement to start us off today. We've heard from both Tamara and Andrew. White supremacy and settler colonialism are two of the systemic roots of climate injustice in the US. I'd like to shift our focus to some of the movements that embody these systems and take them to their logical conclusions.

The recent large scale mobilizations of the far-right from the "Unite the Right" rally in 2017 to the January 6th Insurrection this year, are stark reminders that far-right ideologies have far reaching material consequences. For example, in the election of Donald Trump, the war of attrition on civil rights, and the deaths of Heather Heyer, Brian Sicknick, and the victims of racism misogynist violence.

Alex, your work looks at the intersection of environmentalism and the Far Right, particularly with the ecofascist movement. Can you talk us through ecofascism,

particularly what the movement looks like, currently, in the United States, and what does ecofascism on the Far Right tell us about the mainstream Right?

Alex Amend: Thank you Koki. Thank you for putting us all together. Great to meet you, Andrew, Tamara, and Shanté. Good to see you again. And everybody here.

So, [my article](#), a big, kind of, point of my piece was focusing on the confluence of two phenomena. Obviously the worsening climate crisis, which I think everyone in this room agrees is going to become the baseline political fact, and the demographic projections in this country of a majority-minority country. That is spun into the fever dream of White genocide, “the great replacement”, these general ideas of race suicide that animate white supremacist movements, since the beginning of time. And what ecofascists—I want to start small because there’s a lot of noise around kind of, a challenge in defining what eco fascism is. For me, it’s a real core extreme group—it’s a fringe—it is not widespread, but it is obviously very deadly, as we’ve seen in both the attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand, and El Paso, Texas in 2019. And both of those incidences are, again, I think outcomes of this confluence. They both had environmental grievances, and they talked about this idea of the White race under threat.

So quickly what ecofascists believe: they believe that there’s an inextricable link between the health of the White race, and the well-being of what they view as their ancestral lands and the environment, that both need protecting, both are under threat. They believe that humanity is subordinate to nature, and nature demonstrates a natural hierarchy which should be obeyed. Naturally, the White race comes out on top of that hierarchy. They reject the kind of man-centered, anthropocentric view, placing that in, you know—responsible for the modern liberal society, and capitalism, kind of coming from the Judeo-Christian tradition. And often ecofascists embrace kind of a volkish paganism, and other, kind of, alternative spiritualisms. And that rejection of capitalism is a big one. Because they see that as, you know, ruining the White race and the environment via wasteful consumer economies. Globalism and population growth particularly among the Global South and placing blame on the Global South as the true culprits of environmental degradation. And then of course behind the modern capitalistic systems are Jews, feminist, people of color, and so on. And importantly, it’s worth mentioning that this really, kind of, comes also out of the fascist third position tradition, which was, some people described, the left wing of the Nazi party, going beyond capitalism and communism. And as we get further into this discussion I will...I will, kind of, talk about how that implicates some stuff that’s going on right now.

But as I mentioned with El Paso and Christchurch, well, as it remains a fringe of a fringe, it can be extremely deadly. Kind of lost in the mix. Really just

to put into context—the attack in El Paso is the biggest, the deadliest from the Far Right since the Oklahoma City Bombing. These killers fit the same profiles as other mass killers that we've seen, kind of, increase in frequency since 2011, since Anders Breivik's attack in Norway. These are self-radicalizing online, for the most part, though they are not. There's a lot of talk of, like "lone wolf" radicalization, that is not really the case here, because there is, through the internet, quite a bit of international cross pollination going on. And I think it's a really awful irony that these shootings really, kind of, got interrupted by another type of mass death in this pandemic and the lockdowns. And so I do fear this still, kind of, picking up once we get back to normal.

Importantly ecofascists are pulling on a long tradition of going back to blood and soil ideology in Nazi Germany. Which itself emerged from really the, kind of, dawn of environmental consciousness in Germany and Europe. And that happened around the same time as German nationalism was, kind of, activating. But post-war, it's always been... this has been important for White supremacist propagandists for a long time. But it's just not really come to the fore for analysts until really recently.

And for instance, David Lane, who is one of the most influential neonazi propagandists post war. He died in 2006. He was a member of the White supremacist terror group The Order. He is one of the coiners of the "Fourteen Words." He wrote extensively about nature and its relation to the White race and White spirituality. And I want to, kind of, point out too that, you know, in overlooking how deep and wide this tradition goes on, the White supremacist Right, there have been, much less so recently, but there has been a lot of, kind of, temptations to, kind of, say that it is insincere, or that it is a ruse or just, kind of, a way to break into other movements. I think it is clearly a core belief of these actors, of these propagandists. It is not something that they're just doing for the propaganda impact.

Quickly, again sorry I'm trying to run through a lot here, but ecofascists have quite—they have a growing presence online. There's an enormous, enormous amount of ecofascist content online. They've got new symbols, memes, even works of fiction. The main character for my article for PRA is Mike Ma. He came out of Milo Yiannopoulos's kind of entourage back when he was a cause celebre, and he basically has created his own party, what he calls the Pine Tree Party, and has written a novel called Harassment Architecture. And anyways, these are circulating all over Telegram and far-right spaces. And Koki, you mentioned at the very top, you know, the death of Heather Heyer in Charlottesville, it's useful to remember that chants of "blood and soil" were ringing out in the streets of Charlottesville. The killer of Heather Heyer, the man behind the wheel that drove through the crowd of protesters, Alex Fields,

he was actually in the uniform of the neonazi group that was doing those chants and that had a website that was BloodAndSoil.org I believe.

And then, you know, just quickly the influential, kind of, intellectual, if you will, White supremacist publication Counter Currents—they celebrate Earth Day every year. A couple years ago, journalists uncovered that one of the founders of the neonazi terrorist group, Atomwaffen was a former member of Earth First! and another group that got a lot of headlines, and has been a focus of federal law enforcement, The Base, was... described itself as a survivalist group focused on acquiring land for training, off in the Pacific Northwest. And that kind of plays into the historical efforts of White supremacists in this country under what they call the Northwest Imperative to establish “Whites only” kind of colonies in the northwest away from the federal government and away from multicultural urban centers.

So that’s really the core core core of ecofascist violence, extreme. And then, so zooming out a little bit more there, there’s a whole bunch of still-on-the-Right-but-not-explicitly neonazi conversations and content and groups that get together for camping outings, that get together for small weapons training, that you know, share memes. I’ve documented on Instagram for instance a company that makes chest rigs to carry rifle magazines, who uses the symbols of Mike Ma and pine trees. And there’s a whole subculture here that you know, getting into eating raw meat and drinking raw milk, weightlifting, you know, growing your own food. It’s quite an active subculture there. And then zooming out, there’s also, you know, history of, kind of, I would call eco-authoritarianism centered around neo-malthusian populationist fears. And this is best embodied by what is called the Tanton Network. John Tanton, again, PRA has done a lot of work on these groups, these anti-immigrant groups like Federation for American Immigration Reform and Center for Immigration Studies. All of these groups have for a very long time advocated for immigration restriction on the basis of supposed environmental impact.

And so this, looking, you know, back to the prompt, how does, kind of, ecofascism in the Far Right, kind of, embrace of environmentalism get back to the mainstream Right and conservatism? I think that this is going to be unfolding again around that demographic issue that younger generations do not adhere to the kind of climate denialism of older generations; That the GOP is kind of slowly evolving on the environment. There’s several, kind of, advocacy groups in DC, that really was like a business minded approach (you know talking about tax credits for clean energy and so on and so forth.) But that ethnocentric block which we saw, kind of, erupt under Donald Trump, take over the Republican party, that is pretty resilient and that’s going to be here for a while. And so again, that gets back to the broad point about the confluence of

these two phenomena. I think we will see that, you know, just becoming more and more of an issue within the ranks of the GOP.

Koki Mendis: Thank you Alex, I think, you know, sort of where you took us—the journey you took us on from the margins back to the mainstream, and thinking too about generational shifts and the GOP with climate denialism becoming less salient for younger members of the Right. And then thinking through to the sort of systemic context. We have a pretty good sense of where in the conversation of what we're up against and the various manifestations of climate injustice.

I'm actually going to have us continue, perhaps, in a more positive direction with Shanté. So this year, 2021, we watched Georgia turn blue, which was both a joy to behold but also a reminder, particularly to the Right that most historically red states are red not because the majority of the electorate in those states believe in conservative political values, but because of the disenfranchisement of Black and Brown communities has been a fundamental component of White supremacy and U.S. democracy since the first moment of settler colonialism.

So Shanté, you took a year off from the Sunrise Movement to manage Charles Booker's 2020 senate primary race in Kentucky. Booker ran a grassroots campaign supported by the Sunrise Movement and later endorsed by major political figures like Warren, Sanders, and AOC, coming extremely close to beating Amy McGrath's extremely well funded primary campaign and DNC endorsement, which would have put him in a position to potentially unseat Mitch McConnell, alas. Can you tell us a little bit about Booker's historic campaign and the implication it and the Green New Deal platform hold for challenging republicans and centrist democrats in historically red and purple states?

Shanté Wolf: Certainly, and thanks for having me. Happy to be here. Wow, what a moment. I think I'll start by saying, off the surface, that what we did in Kentucky certainly set the stage for us to kick the door in, defeating Mitch McConnell. Whether or not directly in Kentucky, but in a roundabout way in Georgia.

So, what we knew to be clear was we were in a moment that was at the height of unrest in several ways in Kentucky, right? Like, we're in a pandemic, we're also at the height of the Breonna Taylor demonstrations, and we also have this budding candidate that has the potential to win. However, the powers that be did not select him as a forefront runner, which created a lot of nuance on the trail that ultimately caused us to face the facts that people are tired of reverence. It's good to hear that we value our essential workers, that we value our working class people, and they need tangible ways in which the

government is going to work in their favor. And that was a narrative across the Hood to the Holler, as we said in Appalachia.

We did a good job of demonstrating that White, and Black people, and Latino folks have a lot more in common than they think they do. And certainly how White supremacy tends to allow us to think that we don't. And that turned into one of the most inspiring field operations, storytelling operations, all fronts that I have experienced. Granted I'm 27, and I have a long way to go. But we said that, as you said, like the South isn't a red area, it's a voter suppressed area. So no matter what we thought we saw in the polls, we knew that the value add of inspiring people to know that the change, first of all the change that they want to seek actually lies within themselves, and they actually do know what they want out of a great government. We just need, you know, people that come from these experiences, as opposed to career politicians, to fight for them in the seats. You know, Mitch McConnell has been alive—and been in office longer than I've been alive and what has he done for Kentucky? Kentucky, typically falls within the 45th percentile of anything unhelpful. So, change was clear. We thought that it would be best while we were on the campaign trail to also train people in how to lead. And I think that Charles did a good job of inspiring that as he went on with his Hood to the Holler organization.

But more broadly in my work with the Green New Deal, it proved that there is an audience that really does, if not understands like the sort of Boogeyman of climate, right, like the fossil fuel execs and the CEOs and those that are very real threats. We went deeper and talked about the symptoms of climate change. Symptoms of climate change is healthcare inequality, it's displacement, it's poverty. And it's all these things that intersect with Southern working class people. We proved it that is a viable narrative in the South. And so once I got back to Sunrise, I also led an IE campaign in Georgia that was centered around the same narrative. We are people that should not be choosing between Medicare and putting food on the table. Asking for these things aren't actually radical concepts. And the more that we sit down and have conversations about what some of these buzzwords mean around Medicare for All, or attaching the Green New Deal to how this would look like in the South is something that we thought was a priority.

And now that we flipped the senate blue, we are interested in seeing how we can continue to strengthen that narrative, and frankly protect what we did in Georgia, in 2022 but also grow this into a working narrative, and a working new Southern strategy that everybody can adapt. But the Green New Deal has a place in the South, has a place in working class families. I think that—you know, there was a piece of data that came out, I think it was Yale that put this out, that the Green New Deal has actually declined in favorability, over the past

couple of years since 2018 and, in part, that was due to some of the republicans messaging around “Oh, the Green New Deal, they just want to tear things down and build things up again,” and all these inanimate things about planes and you know, stuff our former president was saying. But when we talk about how it relates to healthcare and jobs, it’s a winning strategy. We have to do the work to make sure that people understand that climate justice and the Green New Deal does center racial justice, and it does center healthcare inequality. That’s what we did in Kentucky. That’s what we did in Georgia. And that’s what we’ll continue to do these coming years.

Koki Mendis: Great, thank you Shanté. I think that’s a great way for us to pivot our conversation to thinking a little bit about future strategies and narratives that we as strategists and movement folks can construct. And your work in Booker’s campaign and that campaign in general was incredible to watch, and to be able to reflect on now, as a basis for strategy development too.

And in the next section of our discussion, I’m going to open up our discussion to questions posed to our whole panel and include any audience questions as they come in. Before we continue our conversation in earnest, I wanted to take a moment to ask our discussants a lighter question, reflecting on sort of the somber content that we’re contending with today. Bare with me, it’s kind of a bit of a departure from PRA’s typical modus operandi. But I would love to hear from each of you, what is one really interesting aspect of what you research or strategize around, your post-pandemic cocktail party talking point. What is one fact, theory, or scenario that may be novel information or particularly compelling to our audience today? And I’m going to start with Andrew.

Andrew Curley: Thanks for the question. You know, I think I’ve written a lot about...or thought about, and written about these dystopic environments that are created by the colonial infrastructures and legal institutions around, and within Indigenous communities, especially when we’re talking about extractive industries and, more to point lately, water rights and access to water in the southwest and the southwest region. And you know one thing that has changed recently that has been kind of under reported, and to which we don’t know the complete significance, is Arizona changing its water laws. And it’s changing its water law, away from this...I mean it’s still a quantification scheme, but it’s moving away from this “use it or lose it” principle within western water law. which means that if you don’t use all your water that you have gained rights for, through the water code in the state, then other people that have access to that same water system can claim that water use. And so what that does is, it incentivizes wastefulness in water. And it’s been long critiqued, you know, as

a wasteful feature in western water law, and Arizona has moved to eliminate that from its water code. And so that's interesting because you know, these are things, these are tendencies or features of water law that seemed to be chipped into stone almost, within the west. And they're also completely unsustainable, and create the conditions for a bad future for everyone living in the region. And the fact that we're having this kind of change, and that people in the state, you know new members, new people in the communities, are interested in fundamentally changing the nature of water rights, and water law, and water distribution, to be more equitable, to be more sustainable. I think this is a basis, a seed for a future conversation, for policy and action, and so both of those things, kind of working in tandem. And so that you know, that one little nugget of information that I saw, like, go across my Twitter feed over the last couple days. I mean I think there's a lot of potential there, and a lot to think about and unpack. So that's one kind of factoid that I think goes to your question.

Koki Mendis: That's great. It sounds like a powerful factoid too for future action. Tamara, what is your cocktail fact?

Tamara Toles O'Laughlin: Yeah. My favorite is that one in four of us will be climate refugees in our lifetime. If we aren't already. Fires are already moving us, mold is already displacing us, cold temperatures are already taking us out of our natural environment and shifting what we grow and when we grow it. So, it's a really short and potent thing. Because you're often in a room, even in, you know, these zooms where it's happening, you know. There's more than four of us here and so "one in four people will be impacted in your lifetime by this thing that is already upon us," is pretty short, sweet, and to the point. And it feels like it represents so much more research and harm that's already happening. So that when people push off conversations about what we need to do to adapt, how much of our stewardship principles we need to try to remember, and how quickly we can do it, it snaps people's attentions. And it's also easy to say in between, you know, a theoretical Martini, fairly quickly.

Koki Mendis: Is that in the U.S., one in four?

Tamara Toles O'Laughlin: Yes.

Koki Mendis: Yes, that is fire under your butt, so to speak. Alex, what is your cocktail fact?

Alex Amend: Yeah, I thought it'd be a pretty kind of...be a downer at one of

these cocktail parties with my subject here.

But no, something that I've been really thinking about is, you know, the amount of land that we need in order to build clean energy, large scale renewable projects, kind of, ballpark figure is the equivalent to the area of the entire state of Colorado. We've got to build. We've got to scale up massively, right? And what we already see, kind of, in my work at The Sierra Club, right, quite a lot of "nimbyism" activated. Concerns over view sheds, right, and then like all sorts of random conspiracies about cancer or, you know, bird kill offs. But what I'm, you know, trying to think through this lens, that I was kind of talking about before is that, this perhaps provides quite a bit of opportunity for the Far Right to organize around. Because we're seeing, you know, still, I mean I totally agree with Shanté's point about, you know, the south being a voter restricted country, you know, part of the country, not a red part of the country, but there is truly a deepening urban-rural divide, you know in our polity.

So, what does that look like? We need all of this land for large scale renewable development. It's going to be in the backyard of rural communities. And, you know, it kind of, just already maps over the kind of threat and enemy, kind of, frame. In the sense that, you know, "you're coming in, destroying my land in order to power, again multiracial cultural centers in urban environments and sending the power there. They're truly the ones who are, you know, ruining the environment, not me and my rural community." So, and then of course, if that were to really take off, and I think there'd be a lot of fossil fuel companies would love to, you know, put money behind those efforts, right, and that's just going to make it even more difficult for us to decarbonize, lock us into more warming, and the picture just gets worse from there. And then at that point I get kicked out of the party.

Koki Mendis: Maybe not a party of these folks. That's interesting, Alex, especially in the context of settler colonialism to think about the amount of land that is needed and you know what the implications are there in the land already being very much a contested unceded question in the US. Shanté, will you or will you not be kicked out of a cocktail party with your fact?

Shanté Wolf: Well, if Alex is going to get kicked out, I'm going to leave with him, first of all. But I think my cocktail would be: despite the high number of young voters that turned out, there was also the flip side of that coin, that was an extreme number of high youth turnout for Trump. Which makes me wonder, why? I have some theories. I think you know the job promise, certainly one that may have caused them, also just straight out White supremacy, or wanting to be aligned with that as much as possible. But it's certainly, you

know, commendable of course, that we have youth turning out but we can't go to sleep on this demographic, especially if it's not clear what's attracting them to such White right-wing policy.

Koki Mendis: That is definitely an intriguing fact, and certainly I imagine, particularly relevant to Sunrise Movement's work and orientation to generation. Yeah, I mean I think we would have a pretty glum cocktail party on our hands but definitely want to give us a lot of motivation to keep going and our work.

On that note, before we start talking about what's next and ways forward, I'd like to spend a few minutes together evaluating Joe Biden and his administration as agents of climate action. With a long history of working across the aisle, or compromising democratic values to work hand in hand with the party of white supremacy and misogyny, Biden's track record is at odds with promises made on the campaign trail. Despite the rhetoric espoused while vying for votes, Biden's administration will likely occupy a center right position on the global political spectrum, at a time when the country is in desperate need for equitable left policy. While still in early days, I'd like to ask our panelists: is Joe Biden the first step and seeing real climate justice or a continuation of the neoliberal lack of response to climate disaster? So this is a big question. It's an open question so whoever would like to take the first crack at it, please do.

Tamara Toles O'Laughlin: I'm happy to just say, I think what we're currently seeing from the administration is the end result of lots of organizing work. These are early days, this is the beginning of the beginning, as one would say. We're not even in the middle of the beginning. This administration has made it clear that it's climate ambition is a part of its conversation. It is our continued job to point out places where there are gaps, where good meaning has to meet good doing. And that stuff remains to be seen. So, ending KXL on day one. And among 30 different executive orders coming out, having them focus on racial equity, being clear to follow up on our demands for investments in our communities, that has to be followed up with real deep plans for what 40 percent of benefits mean for communities that are disadvantaged when that word just encapsulates so many things. So I think it's only going to be as good as our ability to continue to push for enforcement like we've never seen, data that the EPA has never seemed to have its hands on. HUD and DOI are going to have as much work as USDA because the movement is robust. Our voices are those of people who have seen a lot and not gotten enough of what we need. So I do think it's a little too early to give the administration a grade, but the marks are for a government which is only as good as what we push it to do, seems solid.

Koki Mendis: Thank you Tamara. Thank you for, you know, grounding that response and movement organizing. I really appreciate that perspective. Anyone else like to respond?

Shanté Wolf: Yeah, I think Tamara hits on a good point. As far as Sunrise, we've seen some, some tangible wins that I think we could take credit for with the Biden administration. I mean, we started out giving him an F on his climate policies. And we've gone from that to seeing a lot of our verbiage around climate policy. And also some effects of our direct organizing around getting Deb Haaland confirmed are things that we see as wins. But we're in the same boat. Like we think that the real power comes from us continuing to make sure that they are doing the best that they can do, and being proactive and asking them about what we need. Because you know, he works for us. He doesn't work for Mitch McConnell; he doesn't work for anyone else, frankly. So, yes, I just wanted to plus plus what Tamara said.

Koki Mendis: Thank you both. This is why it's great having you both in the movement and organizing us. Alex, Andrew, any response before we move on? Andrew?

Andrew Curley: Yeah, I think that, um, you know when he was campaigning and what some centrist Democratic candidates like Mark Kelly in Arizona—who recently won the election—when they were campaigning they were distancing themselves from the Green New Deal. And they were saying that it wasn't feasible and they were trying not to scare off, I guess, a demographic of voters who are reliant on extractive industries. Who are...you know, who are invested in those kinds of jobs or who make money off of it in some form or another. And... and so, you know, after the election and kind of the early stages of this administration, it's like everybody's saying, it's hard to tell, but there are, you know, because things were so bad, things seem to be better. Certain kinds of like, executive actions were taken to stop permitting of oil and gas in Arctic National Refuge. I believe that happened early on.

And, and the nomination of Deb Haaland is one that is of importance for Indigenous people. you know, because the Secretary of Interior is in charge of all Indigenous lands. It's really an absurd situation and one that is, you know, going back to that issue of tyranny. But for so many decades and generations, it's been a primarily White man overseeing, you know, what we do in our own communities that we've lived on, lived in for centuries. So it's been really a terrible situation for Indigenous peoples. To have a woman Indigenous leader in charge of that is somewhat optimistic. But you know those power

structures are still there, you know. and you know that she's been confirmed on the condition that she'll continue extractive industries. That's the condition that the Republican senators are really pushing in the confirmation hearings, and why some of them are hesitant to confirm her. And it's really this crazy scenario where they are speaking against the first Indigenous person over the Department of Interior, so that they can continue to have exploitative and extracted relationships with the earth and the environment, right? That they see her as a threat for those reasons. And maybe because of their racial attitudes and the racisms against Indigenous peoples, like we're the ones that are being subjected to that kind of double scrutiny when put into positions of power like that. So it's really telling, I think, when you see the way, the questions that are being asked of Deb Haaland. So anyway that's, that's my response.

Koki Mendis: Alex, did you want to chime in?

Alex Amend: Yeah, I would just say that what concerns me again from the vantage of looking at far-right movements is kind of the natural—excuse me—national securitisation of climate under Biden, right, with John Kerry coming in as National Security Envoy for climate change. And to kind of push back a little bit around the issue of so-called climate refugees, right. I think the verdict is still very much out on that. There's a lot of very dramatic estimates out there about climate migration. However, the study of migration is very complex and people migrate for a whole variety of reasons. And, you know...and I think there's even...I've seen some research more recently about, you know, I think to Tamara's point, that there's a lot more migration that happens within countries. However, the specter, right, of the Global South fleeing into northern countries, that is the script that plays right into the hands of the Far Right. And I think that the national securitisation of it, that Biden, you know...again the Democrats, this is how they come across as tough and serious, right? You know this is the, both Biden and Kerry voted for the Iraq war, and they're still leaders in the party. This is how they prove their seriousness and their toughness. John Kerry sat on a panel with the author of that big bombshell New York Times Magazine cover piece on climate migration. So it's something that the defense industry, you know, has spent a lot of time thinking about, writing about. And so I think we on the liberal and the left side of the climate movement, we should be cautious there, because I think that believing that it is going to be...in the worst possible estimates and projections, that I think plays into both the national security state, and the Far Right, and so it's just it's something to be cautious around.

Tamara Toles O'Laughlin: But, before we land on too much civility when it

isn't necessary, I'm just going to flag that I think some of the things that we might determine vital statistics and facts are going to be buried under other kinds of problems. Folks who have moved from the U.S. Virgin Islands to Texas, which is now the epicenter of what's happening in the Permian Basin, are all folks who've been moving because of climate, and not particularly determined to be climate refugees, because of what fossil fuels have already done. So, I think the question is whether or not we're going to call the autopsy for the harm on this specific issue that caused the immediate death or the syndemic, or the multiplier of causes, which are the conditions, enabling conditions for destruction of entire communities. Folks in Kivalina sued, in 2008, Exxon Mobil for \$89 million for having to be moved then. Will they be counted in that number as climate refugees? given that the Juliana 21 is holding a lot of space for some of that conversation now. As Baltimore and every other state in the union is actively looking at how they will capture the harm that falls inside of our borders, I do think the war games are being predicated on this idea that where you belong, your citizenry, your paperwork, will be a determinant of whether you live or die. And so part of the signifier in having climate change become a public part of the National Security Council conversation is it should be a red flag to lots of folks. Even though plenty of folks have been flagging this for a long time in the pro-war and anti-war communities because it makes it difficult to do all kinds of planning. So I'm just flagging that I think that number might end up being more conservative than we imagined, not that Alex and I are particularly in a disagreement.

Koki Mendis: Thank you Tamara. Thank you Alex. I think a good bit of back and forth always makes these conversations more engaging and gives us more food for thought to leave with.

I am going to pivot us to brighter futures, which may be an impossible goal in the next half hour, but definitely really interested in hearing from all of you, what your priorities are for the implementation of climate justice in this country. What are some of the concrete steps that you can see organizers pushing for the state taking to see real justice?

And also Tamara, just flagging that Tracy Lewis asked you, could you talk a little bit about how we plan to address the issue around climate refugees and displacement of jobs and housing? So when you're thinking about your priorities if you could also address Tracy's question. Who would like to start us off with a vision for the future?

Tamara Toles O'Laughlin: I'll take that pause and jump in. One because this is what I do.

Like the present sucks so I got nothing but time to build a vision! I mean, I love my COVID accommodations, that's not the point. What I want to flag is that the problem that we're experiencing even in this Biden administration moment of glow, (like this is the honeymoon everybody, no shocker) is the fact that we got so many things that we asked for right off the bat. That's because the number one thing that it takes to build a government is to have one. And so while the people are feeling the glow, folks are digging out the government to try to find any pieces, doorways, windows, documents, all sorts of things.

The vision of the future that we need is one where there are Black, Indigenous, and, People Of Color, and that's not something that's necessarily built into our current trajectory, without a lot of interventions coming from those same communities. So my vision for the future involves fossil fuel nonproliferation becoming as real as nuclear nonproliferation. Us coming up with a global registry that weaponizes the information on all the stranded assets that are left all over the world from this fossil fuel empire, so that we don't become stranded assets. Pushing for climate reparations that show up in the global space as loss and damage because people are effectively being moved or constructively evicted from their homes, their communities and their nations as a result of the endless reign of fossil fuels. If only we listened to George Washington Carver and did more with those peanuts then eat them.

I also think in terms of things I'm envisioning, it's having an old style, old world, farmers revolt. Five...we just got a lot of money into the hands of Black farmers, of communities who have been left with nothing but debt. It's only a drop in the bucket of what folks are facing. What are we going to do? Our vision as far as agriculture involves two roads and we're in the fork right now. On the plus side of it, we can empower folks to grow what they love and places that they live with the information they have. Or we can force them into cash crops, make their work into commodities, fail to give them insurance for what climate change is already doing to them, and give them the opportunity to make more money shorting themselves in the stock market than growing their food because of false solutions and the carbon market. So I do think we're at a crossroads and a lot of different places. And my hope is that we will get and give reparations, that we will get and give information about the harm that's already happened, and that we will get and give people the right to grow food and pay them to do it, because we need it.

Koki Mendis: Thank you Tamara. Those are some seriously good plans. Let's see them come to fruition. Who would like to jump into this conversation?

Shanté Wolf: Yeah, I'll go next. I think I'll say ultimately, my vision is to see a

world where we spend a lot less money on the damages of not caring for our communities and our climate. And addressing that head on by making sure that the climate conversation is not a monolith, and it's not singular to the previous demographic that the conversation of climate change is normally addressed to which is, you know, White middle class and/or young people. Climate change impacts different communities differently. And not only do I think that it's time to take that head on as a part of antiracist work within climate communities, but also being a lot more rigorous around paying attention to the electoral cycles outside of the big wig cycles, outside of like the presidentials. Like, you know, climate change can also start at the local level. from the ground up. and I think in order for us to get the wins that we need, we will have to do that. So my vision is us, you know, implementing climate change on every possible level from public service commission to the school board, and so on and so forth.

Koki Mendis: Thank you, Shanté. I think that sort of cohesive comprehensive approach is going to be key, absolutely. Andrew?

Andrew Curley: Yeah, I think getting Joe Biden elected...no, just kidding. That's my vision for the future, that stops right there.

No, I think I just want to echo, I mean, I, you know, my focus is on like understanding certain things, and understanding histories and power structures. And when I look towards visions, I look towards the work of other Indigenous actors and other Indigenous movements. There's so many out there. And their articulations to the problems and their solutions to the problems are really in depth, and thoughtful, and optimistic, and give us pathways forward. And so, you know, I'd like to draw our attention to, like the work of the [Indian Collective](#) and this [LANDBACK](#) campaign and, you know, putting together a manifesto of thinking about settler colonialism as something that needs to be dismantled in order to get to this place of climate justice, in order to get to this place of ending White supremacy, and returning Indigenous lands back to Indigenous peoples.

And then you can think about that as a climate change mitigation strategy. You know, what happens when you return treaty lands? You know, this is something that offsets carbon emissions, because of the fact that we have philosophies, and governing practices around land care. And then my relatives and comrades at the...at [The Red Nation](#) who have put forward a three point... not three point, but a three part proposal called [The Red Deal](#) in response to the Green Deal, which is being made into [a book](#) that will be available on Common Notions Press soon. And so theirs is similar to the LANDBACK campaign but talking about, you know, ending imperial borders and ending incarceration and

thinking about healing bodies as a form of healing our land. And it really gives us a template for our vision forward. And then you know, when I'm looking in the Navajo Nation, when I go back, there's a lot of people on the ground that are doing food sovereignty work, that are trying to revitalize traditional food systems and move away from monoculture crops, and to alleviate like health impacts from diabetes and from these heavily processed foods. and that's part of the, you know, the water rights struggles to take water and put it towards those kinds of activities and not just towards industry, and in small capitalist ventures that, you know, exploit the environment, but things that are sustaining and things that were part of our history going back before colonialism.

And so those are the things that we need to recapture as Indigenous people and to teach other people who live on this land now, you know, how to take care of this continent. Because we've been here for many years and we've developed relationships with, with the land and all of its nonhuman kinships: animals and what have you. And so, you know, those are kinds of things that are philosophical, those are the things that are part of our traditional laws. we have them codified in tribal government laws, you know, they're not just things that are like, you know, will end up in a Disney movie, but they're actually existing practices among Indigenous nations. But they've been, they've been downplayed and they've been trying to, in colonial institutions: Department of Interior, boarding school policies, relocation programs which were forms of cultural genocide. I mean you just look at any Indigenous textbook of the 20th century and you see really atrocious campaigns of ending Indigenous culture and livelihoods and lifeways. And those are the things that...and these things that have survived all of the onslaught, those are the things that we need to really emphasize and bring back. And even language revitalization is a big part of that too. So I think those are all things that we can look for for a future on this continent and for a future on this land. and in the waters on the land. So yeah, I think that's a vision: looking towards other Indigenous social movement actors is what I do to think about these visions.

Koki Mendis: Thank you, Andrew I think you also raise a good point about, you know, thinking historically about, you know, future ideas for addressing climate change in ways that have been already proven to be much more sustainable, equitable, just. Any other responses to that question before I move us on to our next?

I'm going to depart a little bit from my typical questions here. PRA, which is, to reiterate, a research and strategy organization that monitors the U.S. and Global Right, is currently building out our climate justice program. Pieces like Alex's piece are our first early steps in building out our literature and our

research agenda thinking about climate justice. So, we have a panel of experts today, so I really want to take this moment to ask you, each of you, where and on whom would you recommend we turn our fact finding analytical lens? Who is mobilizing ecofascist, climate denialist, or free market responses to climate change? Which movements warrant a closer look? And Alex I might start with you on this one.

Alex Amend: Thanks. Yeah, I think...I mean there's a whole host of good organizations, including you guys right, monitoring the Far Right. Impressive infrastructure...a lot of like citizen doxxers right, going out there finding all these people who staged a coup, attempted coup on the Capitol.

I think my answer to that previous question too would be that the climate movement needs to become antifascist, as well as becoming more antiracist. But yeah, looking forward, you know I think what I want to kind of convey, and history teaches us this too, and this actually gets to Shanté's point about where these conversations happened, you know previously: middle class, White organizations. You know, there's been a lot of right-wing ideas shared by these groups and a lot of purchase found in these places. So you know, Sierra Club, back in the 50s and 60s: obsessed with population, right, and population control; published *The Population Bomb* by Paul Ehrlich. You know, the radical environmental movement of the 70s, 80s, into the 90s, Earth First, right, went awry with it, went into, you know, saying that AIDS was a good thing that it was, you know, clearing people off the planet so that it was more sustainable. And then more recently, there's you know radical groups like the Deep Green Resistance, who basically want society to collapse, you know, and that there'd be again another population cull, and some of those leaders have even kind of...or one leader in particular, very anti-trans, shown up and given interviews to White nationalist groups, but this guy still is respected as, you know, a radical environmentalist.

And what I kind of alluded to very early on about third positionist getting real wonky and fascist studies, but you know Extinction Rebellion, for instance, you know they claim to go beyond politics right? They kind of have an idea that people on the Right can maybe be brought over or convinced, you know, to actually take serious climate action. But the "beyond politics" thing gets beyond the Left and Right. And there's this great quote in Andreas Malm's new book, [*How to Blow up a Pipeline*](#). But he says, "a movement that refuses to make the distinctions between classes and colliding interests will end up on the wrong side of the tracks." And so that's real risky and it's kind of been a standard part of environmental politics for a long time right? Like we are not at the Left and the Right, we are...this is something that affects us all. Yeah, I can't say it better than Malm did about the real risk there. And so, I think, yeah, the movement

needs to police—ha, police its borders, it's a bad metaphor—but we need to watch for that. And I think yeah we can all play a role there.

Koki Mendis: Thank you Alex that's a great note, a word of caution to add to the conversation as well. And Andrew, Tamara, Shanté, any other areas that you think would be, you know, worth, PRA investigating and turning our lens to?

Tamara Toles O'Laughlin: I'll just say very briefly, I think we...we have given up ground. We've never lost any, we've given up ground in failure to connect with people through communications. Climate communications is its own form of work, science communications is its own form of work. And we've given up so much ground trying to make it all perfect as opposed to relatable. We failed to focus on microtargeting and lost our friends and neighbors and had to go back and get them in kitchen table organizing. So as much as I think that there are cool outlets that we need to find, we also need to do a better job of being in community with folks, because then it's less likely that they will be lost to discussions about what the world should look like.

Koki Mendis: Thank you Tamara, I think, you know, going back to the Booker campaign, like really learning that lesson of being in conversation, being in community. And I will move us to our last question, and then just double check if there's Q&A.

But I want to ask you all, I mean I think we got a good sense from our conversation today that this is really hard work, it's a long struggle, it's complex, it's, you know, marrying questions of racial and economic equity and injustice. I really want to ask you, for those who are on this call with us, and for people who may watch or listen to this to this conversation in the future, what keeps you all doing this work? What keeps you from burying your head in the sand, compels you to open your inbox every day, continue your research and your advocacy? I'd love to hear, sort of your motivation in doing the work. any first takers?

Shanté Wolf: I'll go. My first and always forever motivation will be my mother, who was a PE teacher of 34 years in Georgia. Fighting for, like, things like equitable healthcare, fighting for my mom, she's a diabetic. That has, I watched her, you know, make that sacrifice that, you know, Charles also lived: about deciding between healthcare and putting food on the table.

I don't want our generations to have to be doing this same organizing. I want our children to be able to think about something other than how this, you know, how climate impacts us and oppresses our communities.

And my last why is for youth, for children. I think that young people are a

lot more smart than we give them credit for being. I don't agree with the notion that children are our future, they are our present, and they are presently aware of a lot of the things that need to be fixed. So to the extent that I can have their back and show them that you know, the power that you seek actually lies within, I feel like I'll be doing something right.

Koki Mendis: Thank you Shanté. I think that's a, you know, a unifying thing that keeps us all going in this work. Alex or Andrew? I just want to mention to those of you who are not on the chat, Tamara had to step out. But, you know, thanks everyone so much for being the conversation with her. Alex or Andrew, what keeps you going?

Andrew Curley: Yeah, for me, I think it's learning new things, which sounds very generic but I, you know, I got interested in...I took the direction I did in doing research and academic work because I was trying to understand the way that coal...the way that the coal economy was impacting the Navajo Nation. Like trying to uncover it from a perspective, trying to get beyond some of the rhetorical back and forth but thinking about, you know, kind of a larger structuring of these economies. Which then would hopefully give us a way, a conceptual way to think about solutions to it or how to address some of the problems that it's created and caused. Not just environmental problems but social, political problems.

And in that process of uncovering the origin of the economy then you start to find other kinds of hidden powers and hidden, kind of, structuring dynamics which are in the case of the research I did, the utilities, right? Knowing the power of utility, shaping Indigenous lands, or the state governments, and, and the way that they're advocating around water rights. And they're just... they're continuing to limit, and continuing to colonize in unexpected ways. And I think knowing about that and being attentive to that is important and so that's why, you know, getting to the point, that's why I feel like motivation is kind of pulling on that thread a little bit more, to try to get a better sense of what's going on. What are the historical legacies that we don't know about that are continuing to perpetuate themselves in the present? So yeah, that's my motivation.

Koki Mendis: Thank you, Andrew. I think you know those of us at PRA can certainly relate to wanting to learn and to better understand, certainly. Alex, do you have an answer to this question before we conclude?

Alex Amend: I don't know if it'd be any more insightful than what's already been shared. But you know, I don't—I feel like I don't have an option, right? I

mean this is for my family, my friends, my community. Everything that I care about kind of depends on this question. So we all have a role to play on this, and the more I think...same with Andrew, like the more I learned, the more I dig into this, the more, you know, committed, the more eager I am to do the hard work. So, yeah, I think...I think we don't have any other option.

Koki Mendis: Thank you Alex. If that's not a call to action to end us with I don't know what is.

And thank you all for this conversation, this was really... really engaging, really interesting, and really motivating. I think, you know, we have to keep having this conversation. Exactly what you said Alex, we need to keep digging, Andrew. I think that, you know, PRA is definitely really interested in continuing in this vein and I hope we will have you all back for future conversations.

Before I close us out today, I will just mention once again, the webinar will be recorded and distributed. Today's discussion was the first of our five part spring webinar series, so stay tuned for future conversations ranging from trans liberation to reproductive freedom to the politics of precarity. There will be one every second Tuesday of the month until June or July, whatever the math is that, that adds up there. And when we hope that you'll join us for that. And I want to say thank you again to those in the audience, and to our wonderful panelists Andrew, Shanté, Alex, Tamara - this has been a really great conversation.