



GET SOME ACTION

TAKING OUR PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF US SOCIAL MOVEMENTS



“I can’t understand why there aren’t rings of young people blocking bulldozers and preventing them from constructing coal-fired power plants.”

- Former Vice President, Al Gore

[PART 1:] OUR DEFINING MOMENT →→

We are on the verge of some of the most significant changes in human history. Put aptly by the head of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Rajendra Pachauri, “what we do in the next two to three years will determine our future. This is the defining moment.”

The climate crisis was once only the concern of environmentalists and scientists. As we begin to experience its real human impacts, it’s now in the public view. We are starting to see news headlines like:

The Biggest Environmental Crime in History
- *The London Independent*, December 10, 2007

The Race Against Warming
- *The Washington Post* September 29, 2007

100 Months to Save the Planet
- *BBC News*, July 21, 2008

Warming May Cause Economic Chaos
- *CNN*, October 30, 2006

The Problem with Capitalism
- *Yale Alumni Magazine*, March / April, 2008

A Key Threshold Crossed
- *Christian Science Monitor*, October 11, 2007

Civilization’s Last Chance
- *The Los Angeles Times*, May 11, 2008

...and in the midst of all this:

Big Business Says Addressing Climate Change ‘Rates Very Low on Agenda’
- *The London Independent*, January 27, 2008

GLOBAL WARMING IS A JUSTICE ISSUE

Dirty energy isn’t just about carbon. Extracting and producing coal and oil is a process that destroys land, steals resources (like water), and makes people sick. It is no coincidence that communities with less economic power, people of color, and those on Native reservations bear some of the worst impacts of our addiction to dirty energy.

As evidenced by hurricane Katrina, those with limited resources often have the least ability to cope with the devastating impacts of global warming and will be the hardest hit. Katrina was a vivid wake up call for many, making it clear that racism and economic inequality are exacerbated by climate change. Communities that are the most affected are also the most innovative in standing up for their rights and building solutions. These struggles have led the way for groundbreaking environmental policy that benefits everyone.

We are in a **revolutionary moment**, on par with any in our nation’s history; it has the potential for systemic change. But just like past revolutionary moments, like the era of the **New Deal**, change does not just happen - people make it happen. Climate science calls for a drastic change in the way we run our societies; in the way we live our lives. Solving the climate crisis can only be done by moving our society from one of **ecological destruction** and **economic inequity** to one that is **sustainable and just. We have a window of opportunity, but we must open it.**

Our nation has made revolutionary changes in a short amount of time before:

- >> The American Revolution, 1775-1783
- >> Women’s suffrage movement, 1900 – 1920s
- >> The New Deal, 1933-1938
- >> Labor, civil rights, women’s rights, 1950s-1970s

[PART 2:] RESPONSIBILITY →→

NASA’s chief climatologist and the world’s preeminent climate scientist James Hansen recently called for the jailing of oil executives. Many political and business leaders have a very real stake in the fossil fuel economy of the past, and are doing everything they can to keep us addicted to oil and coal, big cars, and unsustainable farming practices. As long as they’re making profit, these big corporations and their government supporters will fight tooth and nail AGAINST meaningful climate legislation. While personal choices do contribute to the problem, there are institutions that bear tremendous responsibility for **creating** this climate crisis.

Take a look at the numbers; while we’re feeling pain at the pump, CEOs are pumping up their pocketbooks.

Self Serving

Rex Tillerson, Age 56
Exxon Mobil

2007 Total Compensation: **\$27,172,280**

David O’Reilly, Age 61
Chevron

2007 Total Compensation: **\$31,543,185**

Amidst the climate debate, we have seen virtually nothing come out of Congress that is anywhere close to the scale of change we need. No wonder Dr. Hansen went on to declare that “democracy is not working.” **It’s up to us to make it work.**

[PART 3:] WHAT KINDA POWER WE GOT?

Throughout history we can look to examples of how everyday people have used their **community-based power** to win a more just society in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

In fact, many of the rights and comforts we now take for granted resulted from people like us getting together and collectively taking action when injustice couldn't be ignored anymore, like...

- >> The 40 hour work week (and weekends!)
- >> Voting rights for women, youth (over 18), African-Americans
- >> The end of formal slavery
- >> Ending child labor / The right to go to school
- >> The rights of people with disabilities to reasonable accommodation to hold jobs and access businesses.
- >> Maternity leave
- >> Civil rights

These social movements faced massive opposition in their time - the power holders put everything they had into maintaining the status quo, and making it seem like there was no alternative. **But they were wrong.** People used the power of their numbers and, at **strategic moments**, took bold actions to demand changes, which were eventually put into law by policy makers.



Civil Rights

In the 1950s and 60s, when lunch counters were segregated by race, **groups of young people held sit-ins** in exactly the places they were barred from. These actions of **civil disobedience** created a **vision of the world they wanted** – one in which they had the same rights as anyone else to sit where they wanted. They were our age, high school and college students, who decided to take personal risks to build a different future for themselves and the rest of the country.

So they sat in. They were breaking the law, but were committed to a higher purpose. In the face of arrests and police violence they held dear to what they knew to be their inherent rights and the only righteous path for America. They were right. And so are we.

The time to act is now. Our special-interest dominated politics and short-sighted economic system are simply not set up to act on the climate crisis with the scale and speed that the science calls for to avoid catastrophe. Just like us, **young people** in the past were told to be patient and sit back, that America needed to move slowly to make the changes they were proposing. **But they didn't sit back; they made America move faster.**



“We who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive.”

- Martin Luther King, Jr.



Overtime Pay & the 8-Hour Work Day

In the 1830s U.S. labor conditions were appalling. People worked long hours in factories under horrific conditions. A movement rose up to demand a 10-hour workday. **Direct Action in the form of strikes was a central tool** that was used for workers to fight for basic rights and dignity. By the 1880's, another movement rose up for the 8-hour workday we have now. The strategic application of direct action combined with political action led to government workers getting reduced-hour days, and then to regulated norms for everyone requiring overtime for excessive hours.

[PART 4:] DIRECT ACTION: →→ TOOLS IN OUR TOOLBOX

Every major movement in our country's history that has won lasting institutional gains did so, in part, through their strategic use of Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA). NVDA is just one of many tools, but when applied within a broader strategy it can help us build strong movements to create a world of ecological and social sanity.

Non-Violent Direct Action is any kind of non-violent action we take that interferes directly with an established process. Some examples are tactics like blockades, sit-ins, walk-outs, banner drops, strikes, demonstrations and street theater.

Civil Disobedience (CD) is one kind of direct action. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines it as refusal to obey governmental demands or commands especially as a nonviolent and usually collective means of forcing concessions from the government.

NVDA is about stepping-it-up. With massive direct action happening all around the country, it puts heat on decision-makers from Congress to corporate boardrooms.

Good NVDA/CD Can:

- >> Be really fun and exciting.
- >> Alert folks to a problem, issue or idea.
- >> Create & envision solutions.
- >> Assert or defend a human or ecological right.
- >> Directly stop bad things from happening.
- >> Amplify our voices, magnify our visibility.
- >> Inspire, recruit and energize.



[VICTORY # 7,363,028:] GRASSY NARROWS

Grassy Narrows is a First Nations community in Canada - Indigenous people living on their traditional territory in the Boreal Forest. After logging companies came in and began to clear-cut and poison their ancestral homeland, young mothers, high school students, and grandmothers blockaded the main logging road on their territory, using their bodies to prevent trucks from coming in. The blockade lasted six years and served as a core strategy in the campaign that victoriously kicked the companies off their land in 2008.

[PART 5:] STEPPIN' IT UP: →→ THE BOLDNESS OF YOUTH ORGANIZING

We are in the early stages of a climate movement with the potential to become one of the most important and inclusive movements in human history. It's a movement that isn't just about reducing carbon – it's about fixing our economy and building a more just world.

Successful movements have always blended multiple strategies coming from many different groups. **Youth have historically played the role of being as bold and direct as we possibly can;** we call for justice based on the reality of what needs to change, not based on what we think those with power are willing to give us. In the civil rights movement, it was **young people** who sat-in. Even though they were ridiculed as being audacious and extreme, young people's actions put civil rights in the national spotlight and their courage inspired millions more to march in the streets.

For this reason, we need Nonviolent Direct Action and Civil Disobedience in the climate movement now more than ever.

[PART 6:] SUCCESSES →→

[CLIMATE NVDA SUCCESS #1] NUEVA AZALEA

In 2001, the proposed Nueva Azalea power plant in South Gate, California, **a city of majority people of color, was challenged by grassroots organizations and people power.** The power plant would have added 150 tons of pollutants to the air in a city that is already plagued with industrial pollution and bad air quality. Through grassroots organizing and direct action **(even the Mayor went on a hunger strike!)** opposing groups secured a ballot measure, which allowed the people to vote—the power plant lost by a margin of 2 to 1!

[CLIMATE NVDA SUCCESS #2] CITI

In October of 2007, 300 young people gathered outside Citibank's financial center in Washington, DC, to say no to their financing of coal fired power plants and mountaintop removal mining. **Led by representatives from Appalachian coal mining communities,** these young people, acting in solidarity, laid down across the sidewalk in a **"die-in."** Some had visionary signs, cardboard wind turbines, and green hard hats; others had haz-mat suits, dumped coal across Citi's entrance and spun "global warming crime scene" caution tape across the doors.

The action publicly identified Citibank as one of the major financiers of the climate crisis, and inspired thousands to participate in a national day of action just a month later. Since then, both banks have committed to meet with Appalachian community groups and tour mountaintop removal coal mining sites.

“Walk the street with us into history. Get off the sidewalk.” - Dolores Huerta

PART 7: THE FUTURE →→

Imagine its 2075 and you are talking to your grandchildren. How proud would you be if you could tell them that when the planet was on the brink of ecological collapse it was our generation that rose up to save it? Imagine telling the story...

We occupied the offices of CEOs. During election season, we followed every candidate around with stunts and signs they couldn't ignore. We kept dirty refineries out of our neighborhoods with demonstrations. We dropped banners with **visionary and bold ideas**. We made newspaper headlines around the nation.

And when we blockaded coal plants, the American public knew why—because **we organized**. Our formula was **bold actions + millions of people = success**. We talked to everyone about the issues. We went door knocking, we set up phone banks and petition drives, and we made presentations at neighborhood groups. We brought tens of thousands to rally in Washington.

Before long, strong national and local legislation was passed to solve the climate crisis and to create **a new green economy. There were green jobs for the people who needed them most** making energy efficient buildings and organic gardens in urban neighborhoods. There were incentives to produce locally. Mass public transportation was cheap and fast. Our electricity came from **wind and solar**. People stopped blowing up mountains for coal, and threatening indigenous land with nuclear waste. We took the billions and billions of dollars that we previously spent on oil wars and invested them in a **new green future**.

Another world is possible – we know because history has seen people just like us transform society time and time again. **We are standing on the shoulders of our ancestors, and now it's our generation's turn.**

This pamphlet is a project of Rainforest Action Network's Action Tank in partnership with Energy Action Coalition.

RESOURCES →→

RAN's Action Tank - <http://ran.org/actiontank>

The Ruckus Society - <http://ruckus.org>

Environmental Justice and Climate Change Initiative – www.ejcc.org

School for Unity and Liberation - www.schoolofunityandliberation.org

Smartmeme - <http://smartmeme.org>

Energy Action Coalition – <http://energyactioncoalition.org/>



Join Rainforest Action Network's Action Team! Email action@ran.org to get some resources and get involved.

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