

# RACE, ECONOMICS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

With Earth Day fast approaching on April 22nd, it's the perfect time to reflect on important environmental issues, educate ourselves, and renew our commitment to improving our carbon footprint in the coming year.

However, Climate Change is affecting millions of people across North America. This year's Earth Day theme is Invest in our Planet. Data has shown that has disproportionately affected marginalized groups.<sup>1</sup>Their "investment" therefore is limited—they will find it difficult to prepare or escape the effects of climate change.

What are those suffering on front lines of our changing world usually experiencing?

- Economic Disparity.** People who do not have the resources to increase their "adaptive capacity" cannot escape excess heat or cold. They cannot travel further to access clean water or rebuild a house that has been lost by forest fires or floods.<sup>2</sup> They may live in areas without adequate services (such as Canada's Arctic regions), or areas reliant on agriculture.<sup>3</sup>  
One important impact of climate change is the new reality of constantly occurring natural disasters. These create an ever increasing cycle of poverty that very difficult for those affected to escape.<sup>4</sup>
- Racial Disparity.** This is related to the idea of Environmental Racism, which is defined as: "the injustices suffered by marginalised communities in terms of unequal distribution of environmental resources and hazards, and discrimination in environmental support and policymaking." In essence, the burdens of pollution, natural disasters, and poisoned resources are distributed unequally in society, with marginalised communities being hit disproportionately harder.  
Let's look at this through one concrete example: air pollution. In the US, people of colour are most impacted by air pollution. An important ratio to consider when assessing the distribution of adverse impacts of pollution is the ratio of how much pollution one is responsible for relative to how much pollution one is exposed to.

Scientists have found that Hispanics and African Americans breathe in 63% and 56% more pollution than they make respectively. On the other hand, Caucasians are exposed to 17% less air pollution than they make.

This means that relative to their contribution to pollution, people of colour in the US are disproportionately exposed to pollutants. Across the country, people of colour on average are also exposed to far higher levels of air pollutants (PM2.5), regardless of region or household income.<sup>5</sup>

- Generational Disparity.** We are all aware of the activism of Greta Thunberg, and the movement she started with the School Strike for Climate. Her message, and the messages of many other young activists around the world, is a call for accountability. Coming generations will be living on an earth significantly different than the one we inhabit now. They will come to adulthood already affected by decisions made years before they were born.<sup>6</sup>

Climate change creates a helplessness in young people that even has a name: Climate depression.<sup>7</sup> From the Guardian: "A recent survey by a team of psychologists probed the climate anxiety felt by 10,000 young people aged 16-25 from countries in the global south and north. In the survey,



**77%**  
said "the future is frightening"



**68%**  
feel sad



**63%**  
feel anxious



**39%**  
feel "hesitant to have children"

This distress correlates with a belief that climate action from governments is inadequate."

This Earth Day, let's consider not only our personal commitment to reducing the impacts of climate change but supporting those in historically marginalized communities. It's clear this problem is going to affect us all—but the unjust reality it is already impacting some of us much more than others.

<sup>1</sup> EPA Report Shows Disproportionate Impacts of Climate Change on Socially Vulnerable Populations in the United States, EPA.gov  
<sup>2</sup> How Marginalised Groups are Disproportionately Affected by Climate Change, Earth.org  
<sup>3</sup> Effects of Climate Change on Marginalized Communities, Charlotte Dwyer  
<sup>4</sup> Poverty and Inequality, Prevention Web  
<sup>5</sup> Blacks, Hispanics breathe more pollution than they make, AP News  
<sup>6</sup> 10 Young Climate Activists Leading the Way on Global Climate Action, Earth.org  
<sup>7</sup> Climate depression is real. And it is spreading fast among our youth, Guardian.org

## SPOTLIGHT

- Here's a great way to teach kids about climate change: Start with the food they eat**  
Following a plant-based diet and reducing food waste are climate-friendly behaviors that kids can understand »
- UN resolution billed as a turning point in climate justice »**
- How Can Urban Architecture Help Mitigate the Effects of Climate Change? »**
- What is Willow? How an Alaska oil project could affect the environment »**

## RESOURCES

Caution: Read and Watch recommendations have not been vetted for emotional triggers and have an assumed adult audience.

Watch	Read	Get Involved/Support
<b>Fleeing climate change - the real environmental disaster</b> dw.com	<b>Decolonizing Design: A Cultural Justice Guidebook</b> Elizabeth (Dori) Tunstall	<b>Front and Centered</b> Volunteer & Donate
<b>Human Flow</b> Amazon Prime	<b>The New Climate War</b> Michael E. Mann	<b>Got Green Seattle</b> Volunteer & Donate
		<b>Opal Environmental Justice Oregon</b> Volunteer & Donate
		<b>Rogue Climate</b> Volunteer & Donate

## APRIL 2023

Local Events  
Days to Know

