

CONNECTING FIRES, REMAKING WORLDS

the Intertwinings of Indigenous and Latinx
Environmental Organizing with
Intergenerational Fire Justice



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Imagine the environmental justice movement as a healthy cultural fire.

It is a fire led by the most-impacted and underrepresented practitioners, who are cleansing the earth of systems that are overgrown and unhealthy.

Through this fire, resources are returned to the soil. Sunlight finds its way through an open canopy, no longer reaching just the tops of the trees, but reconnecting and recharging communities on the ground.

Life regrows and reshapes, from the earth up.

In this landscape, the fire-making can be passed directly from generation to generation. But sometimes, the winds of change play a role, and they throw embers ahead of the fire. This creates spotfires, and this is how I view many environmental efforts led by young people today - ignited by the same conditions, but in need of paths that connect us with the greater fire, to be informed by the knowledge of practitioners who have been stewarding that fire their whole lives.



I am a young, queer wildland firefighter and fire practitioner, and part of a diverse coalition of young people who want to further reconnect our generation with fire stewardship and healthy relations to the land.

Our goal is to create a role for our generation in fire decision-making, open that door to our impacted communities, and shape outcomes that meet our needs on the ground and inspire mobilizations of young people in the face of the climate crisis.

One pathway to connect us to the greater movement, that landscape fire, is to center the principles and organizing of Indigenous and Latinx communities. Indigenous and Latinx young people are forming and leading this coalition, from communities who have been on the forefront of the broader fire since early sparks touched the ground.

How can environmental justice principles and the work of Indigenous and Latinx environmental organizers inform and be centered in connected efforts for intergenerational fire justice?

This zine is a headlamp to light that pathway — like we light our way on the fire line. It will illuminate some histories and principles, and encourage travel ahead....



...further intertwining intergenerational fire justice efforts with the Indigenous and Latinx struggles we are a part of, and the greater fire for collective liberation.

RETHINKING FIRE WITH INDIGENOUS AND COLONIAL CONTEXTS

Wildland fires are frequently called a crisis and a catastrophe. Approaching fire-related issues, it is important to recognize that fire is not and has never been the problem. As professor and Miwko (Plains Miwok) cultural fire practitioner Don Hankins says, “**fire is codified in the law of the land, and it has been so since time immemorial.**”

Hankins describes what many other Indigenous fire-practitioners attest to: across regions, spreading fire is a process that unites human and natural systems in a shared purpose. By using fire to continually revitalize the land, and promote the livelihoods of culturally important plants and animals, people and nature support one another’s intertwined health.

Colonization began the “**decoupling of this coupled human-natural system**” (Hankins, 2021). Colonization also took the ability to use fire away from the average person, especially Indigenous people (Robbins, 2022). As fire researchers and practitioners Frank Lake and Sasha Berleman note, for over a century, fire access and use across enormous landscapes and tribal homelands has been monopolized by a small handful of government agencies primarily focused on fire suppression (Cagle 2019, Monthei 2021). Many of our landscapes are facing enormous deficits of fire in this absence of human and nature-led fire cycles, and this is a significant reason behind the catastrophic community disasters and megafires of recent years. The consequences of this system are increasingly apparent, but what may not be so clear is that the consequences fall hardest on those who are already most vulnerable and marginalized.

JUSTICE AND INJUSTICE IN THE HUMAN-FIRE PARADIGM

Who is most vulnerable and marginalized, and how are they affected? There is a growing focus on fire-related inequities, spanning from preparedness, to response, to recovery. A peer-reviewed, comprehensive study of US Census tracts found that Black, Latinx, and Native American people disproportionately comprise the communities most vulnerable to fire disasters, especially when measuring capacity for resilience (Davies, 2018). Further research indicates high endangerment among young, elderly, disabled, low-income, and non-English-speaking demographics (Pohl, 2021).

On the flip side of inequities are **environmental privileges**, defined by scholars Lisa Sun Hee Park and David Naguib Pellow as groups wielding economic, political, and cultural power to access environmental amenities while their actions force larger, often more marginalized groups to contend with displacement from, production of, and or externalized consequences of such privileges (Park and Pellow, 2011).

In the fire world, privileges include whose livelihoods are more separate from destabilized ecosystems and whose are not, whose land and communities receive fire-resilience or recovery work and whose lack it, and who gets firefighter protection when resources are stretched. It includes who drives primary demands for fossil fuels, exploitative forestry, and other exacerbating forces, who avoids breathing poor air quality while others work or live in it, and who can be comfortable in a heavily straight-white-male, para-military fire workforce, and who does that isolate?

Tied to the injustice around destabilized ecosystems, the deficit of healthy fire also threatens diets. For some Indigenous communities, millenia-long food traditions rely on using fire to support animals and plants adapted to landscape fire, such as salmon, deer, elk, huckleberry, species of acorns, mushrooms and more (Oliver, 2019). Lack of cultural fire and food sovereignty, and dependence on external sources, factor into widespread rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease (Gray, 2019).

Finally, I know firsthand from firefighting that the incarceration system is tied into fire labor. Inmate crews, disproportionately Black and Latino, make mere dollars a day working alongside us still admittedly underpaid-firefighters on the front lines (Mahoney, 2022). The lack of equal benefits for equal work intensifies the economic gaps already affecting Black, Brown, and justice-impacted people.

INTERGENERATIONAL FIRE JUSTICE

Environmental privilege, the climate crisis, and wildland fires have clear applications for intergenerational justice. One effect is that governments, corporations, and wealthier social classes have structured a society in which a small group of the modern generation lives lives of excess, safety, and comfort, while creating an increasingly unstable relationship with fires, and building vulnerable communities in unsafe places. Leadership is struggling to support successful restoration of Indigenous fire leadership and traditions, and struggling to mobilize proactive fire resilience work on a necessary scale. This puts young residents in increasingly unsafe and unlivable conditions, and as I have experienced, puts young firefighters in ever more dangerous or even deadly scenarios. What can we do about this? Facing environmental injustices, how can we apply and practice transformative environmental justice?

Pezzullo and Cox define **environmental justice** as halting disproportionate burdens on poor and people of color communities, making inclusive opportunities for the most affected to be heard in decisions, and visioning "environmentally healthy, economically sustainable, and culturally thriving communities" (2022, p. 41). With this in mind, a diverse group of young firefighters, Indigenous fire practitioners, and young people around the country are organizing for our most-impacted, diverse, young generation to shape fire decisions, and reshape resilience and relationships with the land. We call ourselves the FireGeneration Collaborative - inspired by ideas of a generation engaging with fire, the act of generating fire, and of regenerating our communities and ecosystems.

What struggles and philosophies lie in history to inform us and ensure our goals meet long-standing needs? As intergenerational fire justice is part of Indigenous and Latinx environmental justice, what principles do Indigenous and Latinx movements center that we can connect with and advance? It turns out young people have long been at the forefront of Indigenous and Latinx struggles, from the Young Lords and American Indian Movement of the '60s and '70s, to the Puerto Rico independence and pipeline resistance struggles today (Climate Justice Alliance, 2021).

What follows are four photos, and three sets of demands / principles from the Young Lords, the People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, and the Trail of Broken Treaties. The latter is a precursor to the **Red Deal**, a now-named yet age-old struggle to end violence against Indigenous people and non-human relatives, while securing sovereignty, self-determination, and restoration for Native communities (Red Nation, 2021).

METHODS AND ARTIFACTS

Approaching and Sharing Artifacts from Various Movements

The selection of movements and organizations from which to source artifacts was inspired by the Climate Justice Alliance, a network of BIPOC-led climate and environmental organizations, because their "Frontline Youth" page suggested historical Latinx and Indigenous movements in which young people played pivotal roles (Climate Justice Alliance, 2021). Furthermore their "Just Transition Principles" page alluded to the 17 Environmental Justice Principles. I felt drawn to these references because I was looking to find historical movements that provide inspiration and insight for organizers today. I then looked through public archives, online news reports, and websites to find photos, principles, and demands of the initiatives and organizations, and share some of these here.

For conciseness and application to a zine format, I summarize the demands and principles, using as close to original language as I can, and incorporating quotes where possible. These artifacts are by no means fully representative of the movements, or of Indigenous or Latinx demands and environmental organizing philosophies. These are not meant to generalize or diminish the complicated and vibrant efforts of these communities and organizations.

I encourage further reading into these principles and movements and hope you will find them as meaningful as I have.

THE YOUNG LORDS

The Young Lords were a Latinx and Afro-Latinx-led political and civil rights organization established in 1968, that spread across US Cities, advocating for Puerto Rican independence and oppressed peoples' solidarity, while engaging in programs and political issues to improve neighborhood environments and livelihoods (Morales, 2020).



Photo by
Michael
Abramson,
featured
by the
Gothamist

Young Lords' 13 Point Platform - 1970

Palante
Newspaper

- **"Liberation of the Island", "Self-determination"** for Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and third world communities (1, 2, 3).
- **"Power to All Oppressed People!"**: down with male chauvinism, equality for women, solidarity with "poor white people," and power to "the colored and oppressed peoples of the world" (1, 2, 3, 4, 5).
- **Transforming international relations** to "solidarity and aid," not oppression and racism" - **immediate withdrawal of "u.s. military forces and bases** from Puerto Rico, Vietnam and all oppressed communities inside and outside the u.s." (9, 13).

- An "end to attacks on our land by urban removal, highway destruction, universities and corporations" (6).
- **Rejection of anti-liberation propaganda** in media, schools, and books that opposes struggles for rights and freedoms by oppressed people (11).
- **Freedom for all political prisoners**, because they have been tried "by the racist courts of the colonizers, and not by their own people and peers" (10).
- **Opposition to a society where capitalist, Amerikkkan business, and govt. allies control the labor and wealth of oppressed communities and the land** (1, 2, 8).
- **Community control of institutions and lands** - including "police, health services, churches, schools, housing, transportation and welfare" (6).
- **A true education teaching Creole culture, Spanish language, and revolutionary histories** of "fighting against cultural, as well as economic genocide by the yanqui" (7).
- **"We believe armed self-defense and armed struggle are the only means to liberation."** Revolutionary war --against the violence of poverty and profit, the businessman, politician, and police, based on the right to create a new government when oppressed by the current one (12).
- **"We want a socialist society"** where people control their labor, and provide "liberation, clothing, free food, education, health care, transportation, utilities, and employment for all" (13).

Power, inequity, and justice plays a unique role as this 13 Point Platform expanded a 10 Point Platform to highlight women's equality, community control, and freedom for prisoners, speaking to the relevance of privilege and inclusivity for platform writing (Palante, 1970).

THE TRAIL OF BROKEN TREATIES

was a 1972 convergence of American Indian Movement activists and Indigenous people from 200+ tribes on Washington, D.C.. It involved a week-long occupation of the BIA headquarters, and advocacy for a 20-point platform to transform Indian-US legal, economic, political, and land-based affairs (Muscarelle Museum, 2020).

Photo: Bettman-Corbin Archive, NIH **20 Point Platform**

- **Congressional restoration of treaty-making authorities with tribes, establishing commissions to form new treaties with tribal consent and agreement, review violations, and resubmit unratified treaties to the Senate, applying to all Indian people in U.S. borders (1, 2, 4, 5, 6).**
 - **Reformation in the United States Code, judicial procedures, and judicial system (7, 8, 13).**
1. Provide legal recognition and support to Indian tribes, groups, or individuals whose rights and treaties are being violated by non-Indian parties and governing bodies.
 2. Provide Indian Nations greater agency to act as an equal or primary authority on interpretation and enforcement of treaty rights unless contradicted by the Supreme Court and other federal actors.
 3. Create a National Federal Indian Grand Jury of solely Indian members co-appointed by the President and Indian people, with authority over Indian jurisdiction, civil rights, federal programs, and law enforcement.
 4. Make non-Indians on reservations subject to sovereign nation laws.
 5. Establish a Commission on Rehabilitation of Indian Prisoners in Federal and State institutions to collect data on Indian prisoners, develop treatment and rehab centers, and empower Indian people such that “jails and prisons institutions may again be virtually eliminated.”

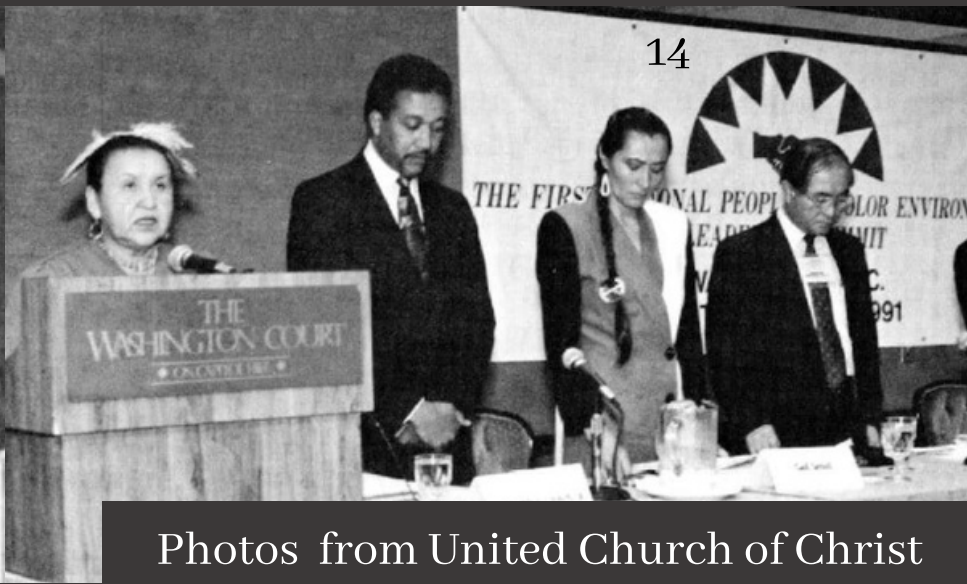
- Establishment of a Joint (House-Senate) Congressional **Committee on Reconstruction of Indian Relations**, to replace existing Congressional bodies focused on Indigenous affairs (9).
- Establishment of no less than a permanent **110 million acre land-base governed by Indigenous people**, prioritizing landless tribes and people, and restoring terminated reservation lands (10)*.
- Abolition of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to be replaced by an **Office of Federal Indian Relations and Reconstruction** that includes Indigenous elected officials in its leadership and provides equal standing in control of relations between the Federal Government and Indian Nations, to attack the multitude of problems confronting and consuming Indian lives in non-piecemeal approaches (14, 15, 16).
- The **protection of Indigenous religious freedom, cultural integrity, and bodily autonomy**, and punishment for violation of protections (18).

Invest broadly in jobs, housing, and education for Indigenous peoples, and reclamation for Indian nations over “community education authority to allow creative education processes in forms of free-choice” with mandatory recognition of accreditation in all US systems (20).

Source: AIMovement

*Indigenous lands in the U.S. today comprise around 70 million acres, the size of Nevada, and are almost entirely held “in trust” by federal agencies like the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Native Land Info, 2019).

Again, in writing a movement platform, power and identity comes into play, as Indigenous activist and legal expert Hank Adams supposedly served as primary author of these demands (Davis, 2022). The demands here leave out emphasis on centering women and queer two-spirit Indigenous people, which the modern Red Deal includes (Red Nation, 2021).



Photos from United Church of Christ

THE 1ST MULTINATIONAL PEOPLE OF COLOR ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP SUMMIT, 1991

brought together nearly 300 Black, Native, Latinx, Pacific Islander, Asian, and other marginalized activists to discuss environmental justice. They created and adopted 17 Principles of Environmental Justice that endure in the movement today (Rubiano, 2021). Due to the length of the principles, I summarized them below in a series of freedoms, rights, and responsibilities.

17 Principles of Environmental Justice

Freedoms

Freedom of the sacred Earth from ecological destruction (1).

Freedom of public policy from discrimination and bias (2).

Freedom of communities from extraction, production and disposal of toxins (4).

Freedom of workers from environmental hazards (8).

Freedom of people of color from experimental medical tests and procedures (13).

Freedom of all from destructive multinational corporations (14).

Freedom of all from military occupation, and exploitations of land, people, culture, and life forms (15).

Rights

Right to ethical, balanced, and responsible uses of land and renewable resources (3).

Right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples (5).

Right for impacted communities to participate as equal partners at every decision-making level (7).

Right of workers to a safe and healthy work environment (8).

Right of injustice victims to compensation, reparations, and quality health care (9).

Right of Indigenous people to sovereignty, self determination, and full realization of the treaties and agreements that establish these rights (11).

Rights of present and future generations to diverse cultural education on social and environmental issues (16).

Responsibilities

Of governments to hold toxic producers accountable to detoxification and containment (6).

Of global bodies to deem government acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law and universal commitments (10).

Of policies to clean and rebuild urban and rural spaces in balance with nature, honoring culture and providing fair access of resources to all (12).

Of individuals to make personal choices to minimize consumption and waste, and reprioritize lifestyles to ensure the health of the natural world for present and future generations (17).

Source: EJ Net, 1991

Relation of Articles and Discussion

I hoped that by looking into the past, we would find greater historical weight for our vision, and connect with strategies, principles, and guidance from generations who against all odds have helped us believe in the possibility for another world, and have begun its construction. These four photos and three movements, initiatives, and platforms show that our generation's needs are not isolated, or radical. They are in fact associated with generations of precedent and community struggle, from young people like us who couldn't stand on the sidelines, who faced the consequences of inaction, and who rose up for their communities.

I found the Young Lords' focus on cultural and revolutionary education, community control, anti-exploitative business models, self-determination, and solidarity with oppressed groups to be relevant for our values and strategies. I found the Trail of Broken Treaties' focuses on structural and non-piecemeal transformation for Indigenous sovereignty to be fundamental changes we must consider as potential groundwork for true Indigenous fire autonomy. I found the Environmental Justice Principles on the rights of impacted communities at every decision-making level, and the rights of future generations to not be sold out by personal and societal decisions to be meaningful for our conduct as an organization, and our intergenerational arguments and visions.

Opportunities for Further Research and Conclusion

These three movements, platforms, and events carry significant lessons and strategies to learn from and build off of. They are also only a small fraction of the environmental and social organizing work led by Indigenous and Latinx communities. Further research should explore modern principles and organizations, including the Red Deal, Indigenous Just Transition, and LandBack Movement, alongside Latinx-led organizations like Mijente and Poder, and intersectional organizations like the Climate Justice Alliance. The latter has identified and named common traits of false solutions that would be helpful in framing real solutions and concrete goals.

The four photos chosen among the artifacts moved me, as they showcase the hope, joy, diversity, and internal fire of the generations before us. It is on their shoulders, and due to their groundbreaking multi-racial coalitions, societal critiques, and visionary ideals that we can do the work we do today.

Our movement formalized in D.C. in November 2022, and we even held meetings in the same area where American Indian Movement and Indigenous activists gathered in the Trail of Broken Treaties - nearly 50 years later to the day. I find this alignment meaningful and symbolic for our story. I hope that the generations to come can say our visions and our work helped make possible a better reality for them. As the broader flames of environmental justice tend our damaged relational and political landscapes, I hope the future can point to moments in these years as the connecting of fires, on the way to remaking the world.

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Kyle, second from left, with co-founders of the FireGeneration Collaborative Bradley, Ryan, Alyssa, and Tim in D.C.

Creator Bio

I am a young, queer wildland firefighter and fire practitioner, and part of a diverse coalition of young people fighting for intergenerational fire justice.

Our generation will be the most impacted by intensifying fires, and are depended on to carry out a mobilization that restructures society to live with fire... **but restructuring must address the root behind fire vulnerability and inequities.**

This zine asks: How can **environmental justice principles and the work of Indigenous and Latinx environmental organizers** inform and be centered in connected efforts for intergenerational fire justice?



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