

BLACK-GREEN HISTORY AND GROUNDSWELL

By Nick Sanders

“Survey finds a disconnect on climate change and Latinos.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 27, 2018. Page B3.

Maybe you saw this recent *Inquirer* article. The survey revealed that although Latinos have been found to be more likely than any other major ethnic group in the U.S. to care about climate change and be informed about it, they are far less likely to act politically on it. Further evidence suggested that the reason has been that governmental and nonprofit organizations did not attempt to engage Latinos in working on the issue. The survey’s director was quoted as saying “The common wisdom then, and even today, is that it’s an issue that only ‘upper-middle class, white, latte-sipping liberals’ care about.”

As someone who considers himself to have been an active environmentalist all his adult life (reading lots on environmental organizations; writing many letters to newspaper editors and politicians about the problems with fossil fuels and the promise of solar power; conserving water and electricity--much to the annoyance of my housemates; and managing recycling collection points in neighborhoods and recycling in the School District of Philadelphia), I would have to say that I, too, have considered global warming and other big environmental issues to be so abstract that only those of us who were not so burdened by everyday cares were the ones to raise the alarm. I thought that those who bore the brunt of poverty and discrimination just did not have the time and attention to act on big environmental concerns.

Of course, this was pretty shallow thinking. I had realized that the poor and people of color were often the ones most impacted by environmental degradation. Some examples: EPA scientists reported in the [American Journal of Public Health](#) (2018) that non-whites in the U.S. were 1.28 times more likely than the overall population to be exposed to air pollution in the form of very small particulate matter generated by industrial and other commercial activity. Blacks, specifically, had 1.54 times this burden! A compilation of other recent studies by the Center for American Progress revealed negative environmental impacts on Blacks and others of color from air and water pollution, waste processing plant

location, adverse climate change, and lead poisoning. ([“5 Things to Know About Communities of Color and Environmental Justice,”](#) 2016)

But I wondered: Where are the Black environmental activists and organizations raising this issue of these greater negative environmental impacts on Blacks and other people of color? Then I came across “Black-Green History.”

“Black-Green History” is the title given to many actions and actors in Black communities ... for much longer than the time-span initiated in 1970 as “Earth Day.” It is a term that the nonprofit organization Groundswell coined in its effort to focus public attention on those actions and actors in Black communities.

“Black-Green leaders don't sound like “greens” because they don't fit the mainstream profile of what being green is. ... The climate leaders in the black communities aren't those leading pipeline protests or organizing divestment campaigns for mankind's collective benefit. They are community organizers and ministers working on everyday energy equity to help struggling families keep the lights on. They are environmental justice advocates organizing people around the disproportionate threat that pollution-fed cancer alleys pose to working families and communities of color. They are former civil servants and academics fostering thought-provoking and transformative environmental justice policy inside and outside of government.” ([Groundswell web site](#)) Groundswell's web site goes on to present short biographies of 28 of these “Black-Green” leaders. Quite enlightening...