

Washington Newsletter

September/October 2022 » No. 811

Photo by Julie Dermansky



▲ A home in Meraux, Louisiana is overshadowed by the Valero Meraux Refinery in an area referred to by some as "Cancer Alley".

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Environmental Justice for All People

By Clarence Edwards



The oil refineries in the Diamond community in Norco, Louisiana, were built on the site of two former plantations—one of which was the location of the largest slave revolt in U.S. history.

Environmental injustice takes the form of gas flares only blocks away from homes, rural communities saddled with foul drinking water, and neighborhoods divided by highways. It has a common thread—people whose needs have been disregarded living in communities whose environments have been degraded.

In many ways, environmental discrimination was planned and engineered as the United States modernized. During the New Deal, home ownership programs valued communities based on their racial and ethnic makeup, creating “redlined” communities that attracted little investment. Federal highway programs bulldozed Black, brown, and ethnic communities like Lower Albina in Portland, Oregon, and Tremé in New Orleans.

In 1982, a Black community in Warren County, NC, said “enough” and protested the siting of a hazardous waste landfill near their town. Although they lost, their protests gave birth to today’s environmental justice movement.

It is a movement that was started largely by people of color. The concept was crystallized by Dr. Robert Bullard, considered the father of environmental justice, who said “environmental justice embraces the principle that all people and communities have a right to equal protection and equal enforcement of environmental laws and regulations.”

The growth of the oil and gas industry brought its own, more lethal, form of dirt and dust wherever it established operations. The experience of the Diamond community in Norco, Louisiana, offers a textbook example.

I visited the area in November 2021 as a guest of the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice. Norco has been home to a Black community since the era of slavery. The oil refineries there were built on the site of two former plantations—one of which was the location of the largest slave revolt in U.S. history.

Gradually expanding refinery operations in the early 20th century compelled residents to move across the road into the area known as Diamond. The community spent decades battling with Shell while enduring toxic air pollution and two plant explosions. In 2002, the company agreed to buy out most Diamond residents.

What remains of Diamond consists of four streets and a handful of residents living only 25 feet away from the petrochemical facility’s fence.

Diamond is just one of the communities in a 90-mile corridor stretching from New Orleans and Baton Rouge lined with oil and gas facilities. Incidents of cancer, heart disease, and respiratory ailments in the area regularly exceed acceptable levels. The area is called Cancer Alley.

Despite our country’s long history of environmental injustice, the first significant federal response was Executive Order 12898 issued by Pres. Bill Clinton in 1994. The order, “Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations,” directed federal agencies to “make achieving environmental justice part of its mission.”

In 2020, pressure to respond to climate change merged with our country’s ongoing racial struggle catapulted environmental justice onto the nation’s conscience. In response, the Biden administration placed environmental justice at the center of its plans to address climate change. In addition, its Justice 40 Initiative aims to direct 40% of the overall benefits of government investments toward disadvantaged communities.

Congress has also turned its attention to environmental justice. It passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (P.L. 117-58) which includes \$1 billion to reconnect communities divided by highways and \$12 billion for clean water programs. It also passed the Inflation Reduction Act (P.L. 117-169) which invests \$60 billion in environmental justice programs.

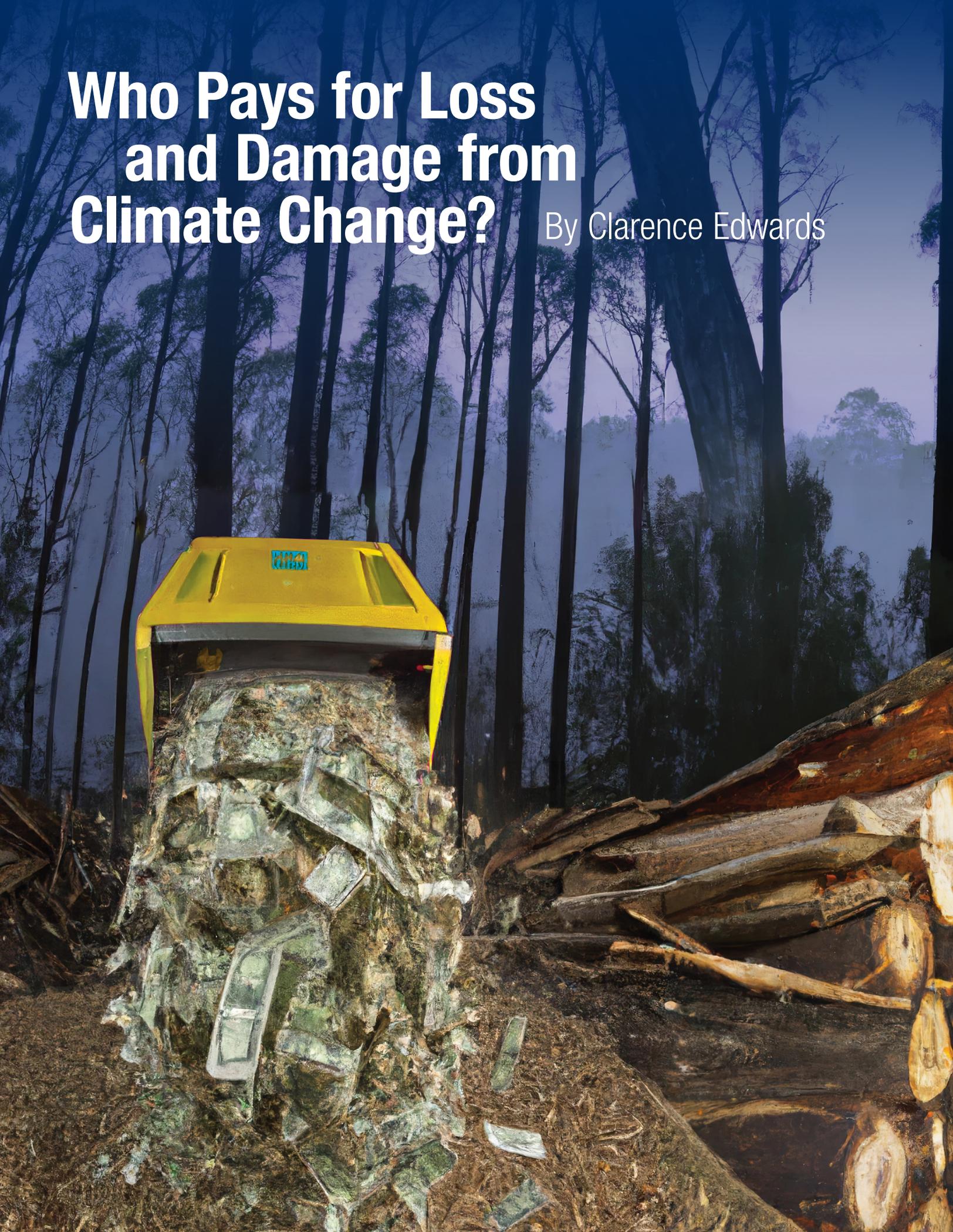
These investments mark a significant turning point as the government moves from being the cause of environmental discrimination to being part of the solution.

Efforts to bring environmental justice to disadvantaged communities have, however, only just begun. Ensuring that the programs passed by Congress work for the communities who need them is vital. To expand environmental justice programs and ensure their longevity, we will need the support of more members of Congress from both political parties.

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Who Pays for Loss and Damage from Climate Change?

By Clarence Edwards



As a member of the Australian delegation to the World Bank/IMF annual meetings in 2016, I attended a meeting of small island developing states. I sat next to a delegate from a Pacific Island country and listened to a World Bank official outline their strategy for the region.

When it was time for responses, my neighbor turned on his microphone. “What we’ve heard sounds fine, except that I have heard nothing about what the bank is going to do about the fact that my country, and many others in our region, face a crisis that may lead to our disappearance in the not-too-distant future,” he said.

I tried not to look completely floored and thought, “What on Earth is happening? How have I not heard about this?” That was when I decided to point my career toward climate change advocacy.

For many people living in the Global South, climate change isn’t an event that will unfold in the distant future; it is already here and is accelerating. Countries there are experiencing sea level rise, extreme heat, intense droughts, and stronger storms.

From some perspectives, and particularly from the vantage point of developing countries, loss and damage are tied to the legacy of colonialism.

We see them on the news almost daily: enormous floods in Pakistan left one-third of the country underwater; persistent droughts in East Africa worsened food insecurity, and record-breaking heatwaves roil Iran.

These climate impacts can destabilize societies, fuel existing conflicts, and drive migration. They have the potential to jeopardize the economic growth needed to build prosperous and stable societies. At worst, as my neighbor at the World Bank meeting noted, climate change threatens their existence.

The Global North’s Historic Responsibility

Industrialization and the economic growth path chosen by today’s developed countries or the Global North—the United States, the United Kingdom, and the countries that make up the European Union—played a key role in shaping today’s climate landscape.

Decades of greenhouse gas emissions from these countries contributed to the global warming impacts felt by everyone, but most intensely by developing countries.

As United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said, “The countries that are most effected by climate disruption did the least to contribute to global heating.”

The question is this: What do developed countries—or the Global North—owe to developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, as the Global South faces the impact of climate change? This question crystallizes around the increasingly pressing issue of “loss and damage.”

Loss and Damage

While there isn’t one definition of loss and damage, it generally refers to the consequences of climate change beyond what people can adapt to or when options exist that a community cannot afford or access. It can include the loss of your country, loss of traditions, loss of cultural heritage, or loss of livelihoods.

Developed countries (including the United States) are extremely wary of the loss and damage issue. They see it as a potential admission of guilt that opens the door to enormous amounts of litigation and potential legal liabilities. In addition, there is a wide range of unanswered questions over how to define loss and damage, who would be compensated more clearly and how any loss and damage mechanism might work.

From some perspectives, and particularly from the vantage point of developing countries, loss and damage are tied to the legacy of colonialism. For many observers, it is difficult to separate the wealth that Western countries extracted—in the form of both people and natural resources—from colonies in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

Many would also say that colonialism didn’t end; it merely shape-shifted into the form of international oil, gas, and mining operations with the same extractive mindset. Unsurprisingly, loss and damage are emerging as significant points of discussion between the developed and developing world at the 27th UN Climate Change Conference, Nov. 6-18, in Egypt.

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BRAVE & CONSTANT

Building the World We Seek

FCNL 2022 Annual Meeting and Quaker Public Policy Institute • November 16–20, 2022

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based in Washington, D.C.,
and span the country.

fcnl.org/annualmeeting



For All People (from page 3)

It is also important to ensure that the harm done to communities in the past is not perpetuated as we transition to cleaner energy sources.

It is with this goal in mind that we support the Environmental Justice for All Act (H.R. 2021/S.872).

This bill can help to ensure that as we build a clean energy economy, everyone will have the right to clean air, clean water, and healthy soil.

In line with the Quaker commitment to social justice and an Earth restored, FCNL will continue to stand as an ally to the environmental justice community as we seek a just and sustainable clean energy economy.

Clarence Edwards grew up in Baltimore where the legacy of heavy industry falls on low-income communities. 

Who Pays? (from page 5)

For me, loss and damage also present an interesting moral question. What does the developed world owe the developing world as it confronts climate change? How do we acknowledge the legacy of the past while moving into a more sustainable future?

It is a challenging issue that, like environmental justice, asks us to consider our moral responsibility to our fellow humans.

The U.S. government has a significant role in addressing loss and damage. I believe that FCNL and the Quaker community's voice can significantly contribute to how the U.S. engages on the issue in the coming year.

Clarence Edwards is FCNL's legislative director for sustainable energy and environment. 



The Washington Newsletter is a publication of the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) and the FCNL Education Fund, two national nonpartisan Quaker organizations working for peace, justice, and environmental stewardship.

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Design/Layout: Wesley Wolfbear Pinkham

Reprinting: Encouraged with credit
Cost: Free upon request
Frequency: Published 6 times a year

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FSC-certified paper in a facility
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Viewpoint: Embracing Discomfort While Advocating

By Jus Tavcar

While growing up in the small Eastern European country of Slovenia, I took clean air and water for granted. Slovenia is one of the greenest places in Europe, with forests covering 60% of its land.

I was lucky to live in the capital, Ljubljana, which has good bike lanes and an efficient public transportation system. I only began to appreciate it when I moved to the United States for college.

As I began my studies at Earlham College in Indiana in 2018, I experienced culture shock. Suddenly, I was in a small, spread-out town with infrequent bus connections.

Though bicycle lanes had just been installed downtown, some residents organized a campaign against further development. They said that the bike lanes shrink the roads' width and worsen traffic flow.

It was the first time that I was exposed to people who disagreed with the scientific consensus on climate change.

Today I realize that living in a town with people who think completely differently from me prepared me for the real world. It prepared me for my work in climate justice.

Through the uncomfortable interactions I was exposed to in Indiana, I became more aware of the importance of including the voices of people impacted by climate change in the policymaking process.

Black, brown, and other people of color and residents of vulnerable

communities are often left out of these discussions. Yet, they disproportionately bear the brunt of the impacts of climate change. This is an injustice that must be corrected.

As I focused on climate justice for my work, the Quaker values of mutual understanding and seeking "an earth restored" continued to ground me.

Young people like me fully understand the urgency of actions needed to address the climate crisis.

There are currently more than 1.8 billion people aged between 10 and 24 years old. Our futures are uncertain due to the severe consequences of climate change. Luckily, young people are leading the charge in addressing the climate crisis.

It is a crisis that knows no political boundaries, and it is no longer discussed only in classrooms. We live it daily and see the climate disasters that happen regularly worldwide.

People who have not been directly impacted by climate change disasters may think that they are exhausting

and unsolvable. Yet, throughout the world people are impacted by climate change—people who did the least in contributing to the problem.

While we advocate for solutions to climate change, we must also advocate for an increase in development aid to help developing countries become more resilient in adapting to the impacts of climate change.

People impacted by climate change must be involved at the local level in deciding how such development aid should be used.

As we advocate for policies to address the climate crises, we need to stay determined in including people of color and people living in these vulnerable communities in the policy-making processes.

Advocating for solutions to the climate crisis is uncomfortable and hard work, but we must embrace our discomfort to ensure that we can adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Jus Tavcar is FCNL program assistant for sustainable energy and environment. 



The future needs an advocate

Consider naming FCNL in your will or IRA.

To get started, contact **Mary Comfort Ferrell** at **202-903-2539** or **marycomfort@fcnl.org**

Q&A: Care for the Environment as a Testimony

With Francisco Burgos



Burgos is the executive director of Pendle Hill, a Quaker learning and conference center outside of Philadelphia. Kristen Archer spoke with him about the link between a personal relationship with the natural world and advocating for economic justice.

What sparked your interest in protecting the natural world, and how has it evolved?

As a teenager, I had the opportunity to go for a 10-day hike in the mountains of my native Dominican Republic. I was deeply touched by the beauty of the trees, the clean water, the clear night sky, and the fresh air. It transformed me. I wanted everyone to have the same opportunity to be in a relationship with nature and recognize that we are part of it and that it is an essential value for life.

My love for nature deepened as I took every opportunity to learn more about how my personal choices impacted the natural world. My studies in sustainable development enriched this. I wanted to support social transformation with attention to nature by engaging in education and policymaking to protect the environment.

That led me to the Organization of the American States, where I was part of a team that supported the deployment of renewable energy to address climate change and promote sustainable development in the Americas.

What lessons can your work with sustainable development in Costa Rica teach us?

When we relocated to Costa Rica, my family found that it offered everything we were looking for: a Quaker education for our kids, a small multicultural community, a bilingual setting, and the opportunity to be in the cloud forest.

There I learned that community education and participation are critical for any progress toward sustainable development. Also, advocating for good environmental policies does not impede socioeconomic development. By investing in environmental protection, we enhance our living standards. Good policies save lives; good environmental policies are no exception.

Finally, everyone can take part in making the world a better place. We can support our community, share

concerns, and learn with others how to collaborate as we carry out our tasks. Our voices and actions can greatly impact the policymaking process toward environmental stewardship.

How is Pendle Hill supporting healing the natural world, and how do you see that work growing in the future?

At Pendle Hill, we strive to exercise good environmental stewardship. We focus on protecting the land and providing good management to our arboretum. We avoid using dangerous chemicals and maintain a pollinator garden.

We recently expanded our organic garden, which supplies our kitchen with fresh produce and supports our farm-to-table strategy.

We want to install solar panels on our buildings, update our facilities with more energy-efficient features, and eliminate our fossil fuel consumption. We look forward to installing more electric vehicle chargers and offering learning opportunities on nature and spirituality.

What could Friends do to support sustainable development and environmental justice efforts?

I celebrate that as Friends, we recognize our responsibility to care for nature as an important part of our faith and practice. At the same time, I am aware that we are not yet where we want to be regarding environmental sustainability. For me, that includes environmental justice.

Our Friends communities can model what other faith communities can do around environmental protection and justice. I hope my practice of caring for the environment is a testimony of solidarity and a concrete act of love. Hopefully, that can be a powerful tool for closing the environmental justice gap.

Burgos will lead worship at the 2022 Annual Meeting. 