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June 2020



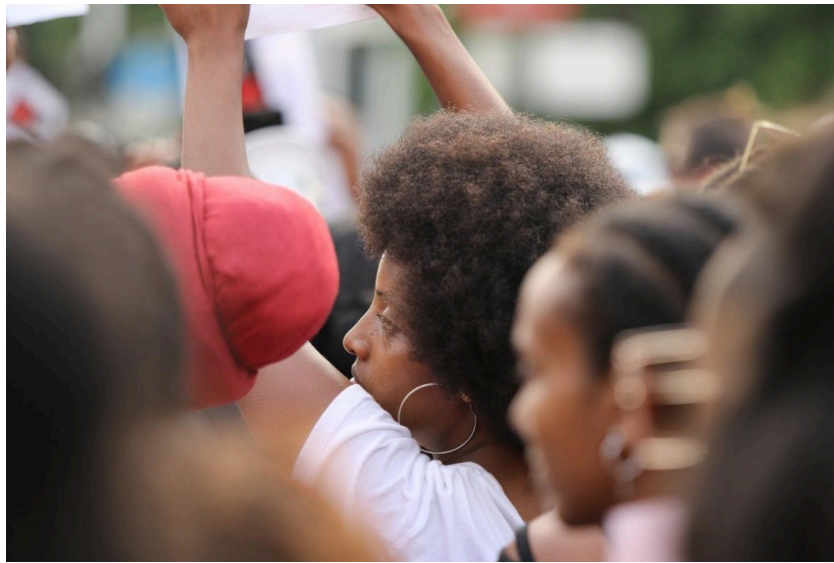
This is a heavy time, Dear Optimists. But hope comes from how this month's wave of protests has [captured attention](#) and ushered in [concrete reforms](#) while highlighting just how much is left to do. In this issue we explore the work and words of Black environmental and public health leaders while shining a light on their calls for action.

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**WE CAN'T ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE UNTIL
WE ADDRESS RACISM**



“I need you to become actively anti-racist. I need you to understand that our racial inequality crisis is intertwined with our climate crisis. If we don’t work on both, we will succeed at neither. I need you to step up.”

— Dr. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson
Ocean Collectiv

Read her op-ed "I'm a Black climate expert. Racism derails our efforts to save the planet."

RACIST POLICIES PUT LIVES IN DANGER

Watching a congressional hearing may not seem like the sexiest way to spend an evening, but these are extraordinary times.



Jacqueline Patterson from the NAACP Environment and Climate Justice Program highlighted how systemic inequities make communities more vulnerable, including poverty, housing insecurity, racial profiling, access to healthcare, under-resourced education, and

privatized criminal justice—all social determinants of health. [Watch her opening statement](#).

“Racism is a through-line that imperils us at every turn,” she said during powerful testimony before a Congressional hearing on COVID-19 and environmental justice communities.

She joined Mustafa Santiago Ali from the National Wildlife Federation, who spoke about how systemic racism from housing policies is part of the reason frontline communities are disproportionately exposed to pollution. [Watch his opening statement](#) and [conversation about sacrifice zones and health](#).

They offered policy and investment solutions ([watch now](#)):

- Restore and strengthen EPA regulations that have been rolled back, and advance clean air ordinances at the local level
- Transition bus and truck fleets to electric
- Address food deserts and food insecurity
- Focus on pre-emergency mitigation, put civil and human rights at the center of emergency management, and set a new standard that goes beyond returning homes to pre-disaster states

Learn more

Watch a brief history of segregation and redlining, and how they are still harming health in this NBC10 segment with Adrienne Hollis from the Union of Concerned Scientists and our Director, Dr. Aaron Bernstein. [Watch now](#)

By the numbers:

- [Wastewater from fracking sites](#) and [oil and gas facilities](#) are more often built near Black communities.
- [Flooding](#) disproportionately harms Black neighborhoods
- [71% of African Americans](#) live in counties in violation of air pollution standards.

[Learn more on our page about Environmental Justice and Health research](#).

HEATWAVES ADD TO INJUSTICE

Frontline communities [experience hotter temperatures](#) during heatwaves, and new research adds another layer of injustice by pointing to [higher energy bills for Black households](#), which may put air conditioning out of reach.

Our Director Dr. Aaron Bernstein offers [tips for keeping cool](#) in his latest column:

- Drink water and limit caffeine and alcohol, which can dehydrate you.
- Stay on the lowest floor of your home and cover windows during the hottest times of day.
- Take a cool shower or bath.
- Check on neighbors.
- Avoid using your oven or range.
- Open windows and use a fan to circulate air if the temperature falls below 70

See also: [Our tip sheet for city, state, and local officials](#) offers approaches to protecting health as we prepare for



the hottest months. Many cities are already tackling extreme heat with *innovative solutions*.

TAKE ACTION



I'm more hopeful than I've been in a long time. I've never seen such a broad conversation about racism ... What's most important is that the conversation opens the door to action, and that's what we should all be held accountable for—action."

—Mary T. Bassett, our Board Member
& Dir. FXB Center

Harvard Chan School's Dean Michelle Williams and Jeffrey Sánchez, a former MA state representative, wrote a powerful op-ed, [Racism is killing black people. It's sickening them, too](#) and [spoke](#) about where we go from here:

Actions for Individuals

- **Be clear on what the problem is:** It's systemic racism. And we have to understand how pervasive it is, and then structure solutions in proportion to the size of the problem.
- **Be truthful with yourself:** If you are not Black or Brown, examine what you've done every time you've seen something that might have made you uncomfortable, even if you were not committing the seemingly racist act.
- **Vote** and hold elected officers accountable.
- **Celebrate** the symbolic victories, but don't stop there.

Solutions for institutions

- **Ensure representation** on boards, committees, in leadership offices, and in C-suites, and be sure they are working to really see, hear, and act on the things that need to be addressed.
- **Be sure representation is not just tokenism.** It's not fair to have a handful of representatives at the table and not have the full cooperation of the institution be

fully committed to changing, appreciating, and addressing how tenacious and how insidious racist behavior and attitudes can be.

- **Change your culture.** You can't have an institution that is working against persistent and enduring strains of anti-Black and Brown behavior just by fixing your numbers.

VOTING CHECKLIST 130 DAYS UNTIL NOV. 3

A new survey found that 60% of Americans are more concerned about climate change than in previous elections. Read ecoAmerica's [full report](#), and check out their [voting resources](#).



Check your registration status
(30 sec)



Register to vote
(2 min)



Get your absentee ballot
(2 min)



Get election reminders
(15 sec)



Pledge to register, get reminder on your 18th birthday.
(15 sec)

STAY CONNECTED

