

Breakthrough Communities

Sustainability & Justice in Our Metropolitan Regions

The Earth, the City, and the Hidden Narrative of Race: New Foundations for the Great Work of Our Time

By Carl Anthony

The Earth, the City, and the Hidden Narrative of Race provides resources for the next generation of ecojustice leaders by drawing on my life experiences as they shed light on ecological issues, demographic change, and metropolitan development. The central thesis of *Earth, City, Race* is that climate change and peak oil compel a re-evaluation of how we live in cities, opening up major opportunities to simultaneously transform the legacy of racism in the U.S.

Earth, City, Race is a resource for accessing wisdom from 7 distinct but deeply interrelated areas, gathered from a breadth of archival research and firsthand experience: 1) The current climate justice movement; 2) the genesis of the regional equity movement; 3) the environmental justice movement from 1990 to 2000; 4) the relationship between the civil rights movement and architecture/urban planning during the 1960's; 5) the evolution of cities from the 15th century onward; 6) African-American prehistory to present; 7) the Universe story, Big History, and the present moment of unprecedented anthropogenic climate change. The lessons gleaned from these seven areas provide tools for the next generation of ecojustice leaders.

The story of the climate justice movement in *Earth, City, Race* brings the understanding that climate change hits vulnerable communities first, and hardest. Solutions that lead with equity produce better outcomes for the whole of society. The recent advocacy around California's SB-375 and SB-535 shows increasing participation by communities of color, resulting in new solutions that work better for all.

The regional equity movement demonstrates how the polarization of cities and suburbs must be addressed to build sustainability. The concept of regional equity helped build a movement that brought inner cities and suburbs into alignment, creating more livable communities for all.

The history of the environmental justice movement in the U.S. demonstrates how new issues emerging from communities of color become a viable asset in articulating environmental issues. Knowledge of this history illuminates the pitfall of a Eurocentric environmentalism that ignores the differential impacts of pollution depending on social location. The emerging environmental justice movement recognizes the vitality and agency of communities of color in generating new solutions.

The relationship between the 1960s civil rights movement and community design is key to understanding the way that urban planning, infrastructure, and space can be used as instruments to exclude or include different segments of the population, to reify socially constructed boundaries, and to restrict access and opportunity. The Kerner Commission, appointed by Lyndon B. Johnson in 1968 in response to riots exploding in 160 American cities, reported that there were two Americas: rich white people and poor black people. The findings and recommendations of this report were summarily ignored, but 50 years later, they are the foundation of the regional equity movement. Understanding the connection between race, politics, power, place, and planning processes provides a baseline for understanding how we can develop viable integrated neighborhoods in the 21st century.

The story of the evolution and development of cities challenges the dominant narrative, which begins with the fertile crescent, and focuses on Europe and its colonies, excluding the influence of Africans, African Americans, and other communities of color. This dominant narrative fails to address the way in which our cities, our society, and our relationship to the environment were (and still are) shaped by the triangular slave trade. Historic moments of excessive abuse—slave trade, colonization, genocide—develop in tandem with humanity's unsustainable relationship to the environment. As we now reconsider that relationship, we also have the opportunity to reconfigure the legacy of racism in our cities.

The story of the African-American experience, including ancient and medieval urbanism in Africa, the Atlantic slave trade, the Great Migration, new urbanism and inner city abandonment, and the new metropolitan agenda, is one of a multiplicity of community narratives needed to counterbalance the dominant European narrative of conquest. Each community narrative reveals solutions and resources found within our own traditions that can be employed to solve local and global problems.

The Universe Story and the evolution of our planet and species expands the imagination and encourages a deeper, more spiritually grounded approach to our relationship to the Earth and our ecological resources. Connecting ecojustice movements to Big History and Deep Time inspires the next generation of ecojustice leaders to understand that they truly belong to this planet and this history, and to step into the privilege and responsibility of caring for our home.

This next generation of ecojustice leaders have lived the majority of their lives familiar with global climate change; with global communication networks; with economic globalization processes. In short, this generation is primed to understand that we're all in the same boat. Now, in the time of peak oil when our love affair with the automobile is ending and many are seeking walkable, diverse urban communities, and as the majority of our population is trending towards people of color by 2040, this next generation is ready to lead our cities forward into diverse, equitable, and sustainable communities.

Earth, City, Race finds the following implications for the African-American community: 1) There will need to be a reintegration at the regional level, ending the cycle of displacement and the suburbanization of poverty. 2) Communities still suffering from toxic environments and the school-to-prison pipeline will need to continue the EJ movement and develop new strategies to dismantle the prison industrial complex. 3) We will need a cultural shift toward communities of color leadership, not only to defend our most vulnerable communities but to reimagine and recreate the kinds of communities we want to live in. *Earth, City, Race* is a resource for facilitating this transition.

It is my hope in offering this book to the world that each reader will be inspired to recognize the compelling historic moment we are living, and to know that we each have a vital role to play.

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Discovering New Foundations for the Great Work of Our Time***

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