



# Getting to the Roots

**Requisites for Climate Reparations**

**Anthony Rogers-Wright, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest**



# Climate Change is a Social Construct

- **As the preeminent environmental justice scholar and practitioner Dr. Robert Bullard reminds us, frontline, low-wealth communities of color are hit “first and worst” by the impacts of climate change.**
- **“Environmental and public health threats from natural and human-made disasters are not randomly distributed. Healthy places and healthy people are highly correlated. It should be no surprise that the poorest of the poor within the United States have the worst health and live in the most degraded and at-risk environments.”**

# Climate Disasters Are Not Just Natural Phenomena

Disasters are commonly thought of as 'naturally occurring' (such as earthquakes and hurricanes) because they are not thought to be directly caused by humans. However, disasters can be considered social constructs because they emerge from social and economic situations of everyday life (Morrow 1999).



# Ghettoization and Climate Vulnerability

We have a myth today that the ghettos in metropolitan areas around the country are what the Supreme Court calls *de facto*, just the accident of the fact that people have not enough income or to move into middle class neighborhoods or because real estate agents steered black and white families to different neighborhoods or because there was white flight.

But the truth is that while those things existed, the major reason we have ghettos in every metropolitan area in this country is because federal, state and local governments purposefully created racial boundaries in these cities. It was not the unintended effect of benign policies. It was an explicit, racially purposeful policy that was pursued at all levels of government. And that's the reason we have these ghettos today, and we are reaping the fruits of those policies (Richard Rothstein 2014).

# Climate Change Affects Us All... But Not Equally

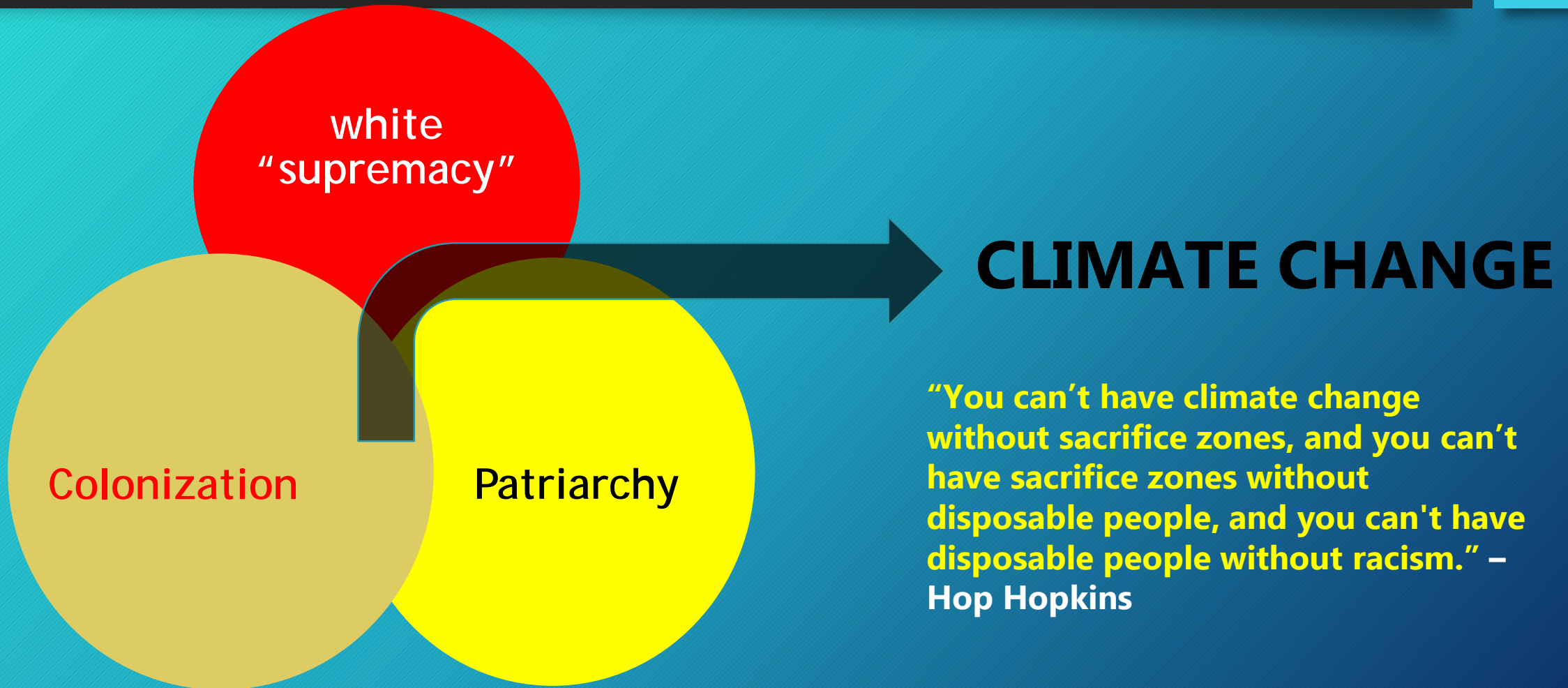
## **The Climate Gap:**

The disproportionate and unequal impact the climate crisis has on people of color and the poor (Morello-Frosch, et al).

Climate change is an issue of great importance for human rights, public health, and social fairness because of its profound consequences overall and the very real danger that poor neighborhoods and people of color will suffer even worse harms and hazards than the rest of Americans.



# Climate Change = System of Oppression



# Getting to The Root of Environmental Racism

- “Mainstream dictionary definitions reduce racism to individual racial prejudice and the intentional actions that result. The people that commit these intentional acts are deemed bad, and those that don’t are good. If we are against racism and unaware of committing racist acts, we can’t be racist; racism and being a good person have become mutually exclusive. But this definition does little to explain how racial hierarchies are consistently reproduced.” – Dr. Robin DiAngelo
- “Racism is racial prejudice PLUS power. Racism is the intentional or UNINTENTIONAL use of power to isolate, separate and exploit others. This use of power is based on a belief in superior racial origin, identity or supposed racial characteristics. Racism confers certain PRIVELEGES on and defends the dominant group, which in turn sustains and perpetuates racism. Both CONSCIOUSLY and UNCONSCIOUSLY, racism is enforced and maintained by the legal, cultural, religious, educational, economic, political, environmental and military institutions of societies. Racism is more than just a personal attitude; it is the INSTITUTIONALIZED form of that attitude.” – Toxic Wastes and Race (United Church of Christ)





Legal

Political

Cultural

Religious

Educational

Economic

Military

Environmental

# Sectors With A Praxis of Racism



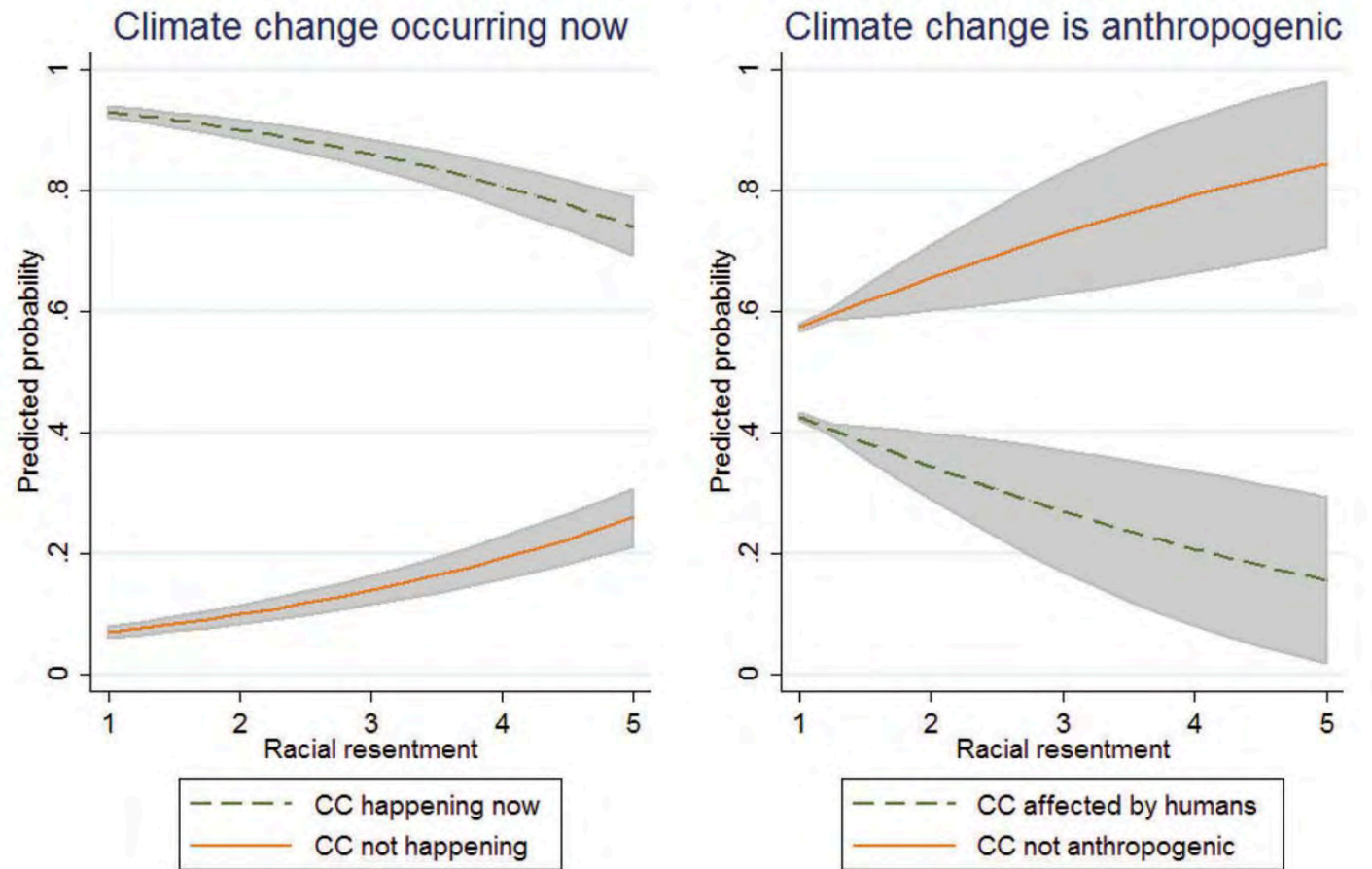
## White Supremacy + Climate Change = Sinister Symbiosis

Racial identification and prejudices have spilled over into Americans' perceptions of environmental matters.

People who don't believe that climate change is real are more likely to be old, more likely to be Republican, and more likely to be white. They are also more likely to have racist beliefs.

While these trends emerged during the Obama presidency and intensified during Trump's campaign, they continued throughout Trump's first year as President with narratives of white grievance and resentment being frequently employed in the context of climate change and energy policy.

### Agreement with scientific consensus on climate change



# ~~Anthropocene~~ – Racial Capitalocene

- As long as the climate crisis is articulated solely or primarily through an Anglocentric lens, it will never be dismantled as we inch ever closer to total global entropy.
- A history of the racialized Capitalocene will help us understand that climate change is not about human hubris, but the result of the long history of colonialism and racial capitalism and its Promethean thinking—the idea that “Man” can invent a mechanical, technical solution to any problem.
- “The Capitalocene dates back to the sixteenth century, which also witnessed the “discovery of the New World” into which people were brought through the force of “blood and fire,”<sup>22</sup> the slave trade, the division of colonies among European powers, and the organization on a global scale of a mobile, racialized, gendered, and bonded workforce. Slavery and colonialism had a deep impact on the world-ecology.” – **Jason Moore**
- We must, in our narrative of the racial Capitalocene, integrate this long memory of colonialism’s impact and the fact that destruction in the colonial era becomes visible in the postcolonial era.



# A Preamble for Climate Reparations

"WE, THE PEOPLE OF COLOR, gathered together at this multinational People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to begin to build a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities, do hereby re-establish our spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth; to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves; to ensure environmental justice; to promote economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods; and, to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples, do affirm and adopt these Principles of Environmental Justice." - **1991 Principles of Environmental Justice**

# Conditions for a New Social Compact

## 1996 Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing

#1 Be Inclusive

#2 Emphasis on Bottom-Up Organizing

#3 Let People Speak for Themselves

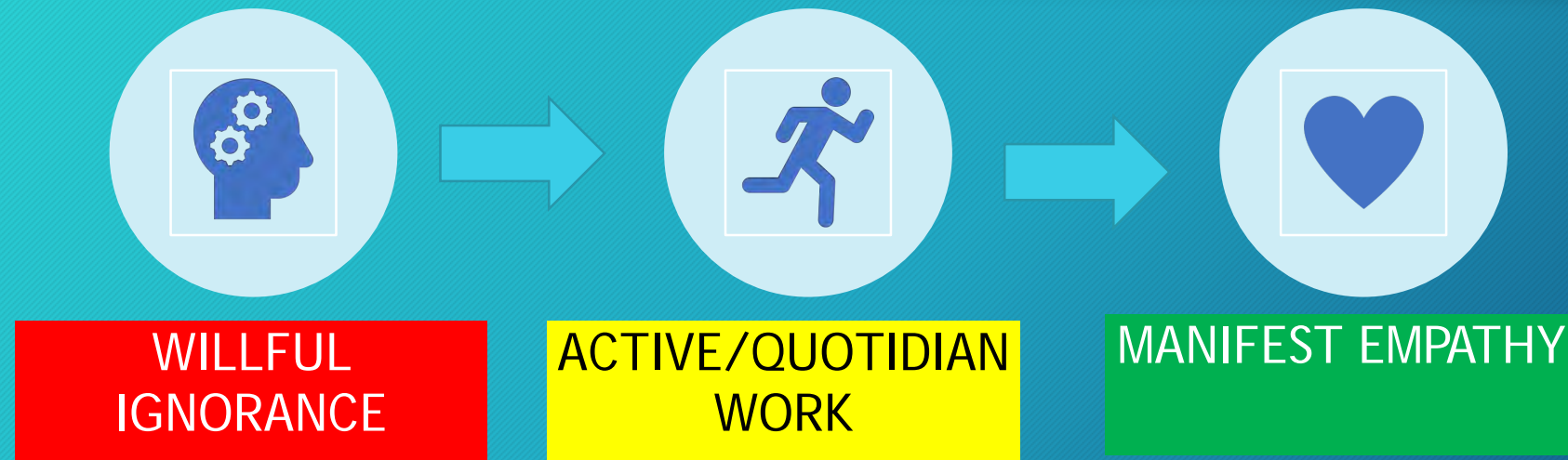
#4 Work Together In Solidarity and Mutuality

#5 Build Just Relationships Among Ourselves

#6 Commitment to Self-Transformation

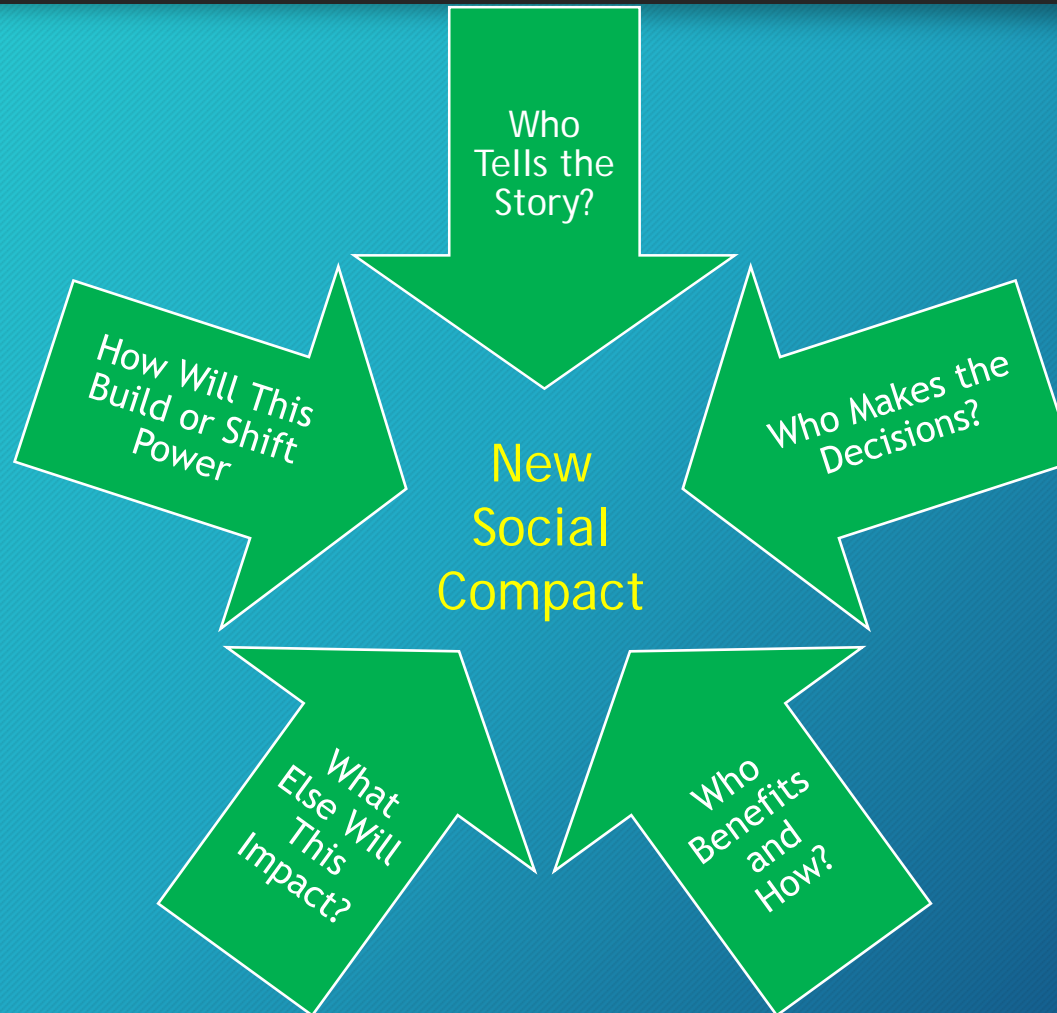


# Pathway to a New Social Compact



“You already know enough . . . what is missing is the courage to understand what we know and to draw conclusions.” – Sven Lindqvist

# Five Perpetual Questions for Equity Through a People's Solution Lens



**Source:** Climate Justice Alliance and Labor Network for Sustainability, 2019



# The Five Points of Intervention...Getting to a People-Centered New Social Compact

“So, at the center of an ecological social contract are ethical principles, rules, and norms, which, when they are accepted and practiced widely enough, become an orienting and directing force in a society. “The orientation offered by the substantive norms of a social contract is not solely tacit or habitual. Persons behaving intentionally and reflectively—that is, persons exercising “agency”—also make these rules and reflect on their broader meaning and justification. Moreover, when historical shifts occur in social contracts, the resulting transformations and reconstructions of outlook and values can be radical and systematic.” – Bruce Jennings

