Media Justice is a Green Issue

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CITATION: *Malkia Cyril, "Media Justice is a Green Issue." Seattle Green Festival keynote speech, March 29, 2009. http://www.youthmediacouncil.org/publications.html*

Many of you are here today because you care about our environment. You've heard and heeded the warnings about climate change, you've felt in your bodies the effect of cars on our air and ozone. You're here because you've watched corporate farms drive out family farms and been witness to the decline of food security in poor communities throughout this nation and across the globe. You know that environmental degradation disproportionately impacts those pushed furthest to the margins of society by racism, economic inequity, gender oppression, and ablism. You know that poor communities around the world have become the dumping grounds of corporations. You're here because you've felt the impact, because environmental abuse cannot be contained to a neighborhood or even to an urban environment- and you are determined to ensure that your children and their children are not forced to live with the devastating consequence of a battered earth. And most important, you're here because you know deep in your heart, in the hard lines forged in your hands, that there is something that can be done.

This knowledge that there are ways to live and be with earth isn't new. The idea that access to healthy food, safe living wage employment, affordable or free health care, and a relevant first-rate education is connected to the ability of this planet to survive isn't new. For the last three decades grassroots organizers across this country have been building a movement with grassroots organizers around the world for environmental justice. Environmental Justice has been defined as the pursuit of equal justice and equal protection under the law for all environmental statutes and regulations without discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and /or socioeconomic status. Equal justice And Equal protection. In its very definition, the environmental justice movement seeks access to what is good and transformative as well as protection from what is bad and harmful.

In the last five years, we've seen the emergence of a great new idea. Green jobs is a new and important way to re-frame the solutions of the environmental justice movement for the problems we face today. That we build a movement for environmental justice that seeks a sustainable economy that can help transform how we live with earth and offer economic and educational opportunities to those most excluded is an incredible and necessary venture. It is the necessary outgrowth of a powerful demand by Native Americans, African Americans, Latinos, and poor whites living under toxic conditions created by corporate intervention and government neglect. Those demands were for energy solutions that allow us to reduce our impact on earth and education that trains our young people in trades and fields that increase environmental sustainability and the sustainability of our communities. Like many solutions of our day, Green Jobs is a powerful one borne from the struggles of those suffering most from toxic pollution, lack of access to healthy foods, overcrowding, unsafe and unsanitary school conditions, and more. Green Jobs has a history in the environmental justice movement, and it behooves us all to give a moment of great thanks to all those who labor and vision allowed that solution to come to fruition.

We're lucky. The election of President Barack Obama has also resulted in the appointment of Green Czar Van Jones, a sharp and thoughtful strategist with a deep commitment to sustainability and to justice. But a Green Czar and a black U.S. President is not enough to save the planet. Especially corporate speech and the first amendment rights of corporations are continuously prioritized over the first amendment rights of everyday people like you and me. In fact, corporate power and the enormous influence of corporations over our media and cultural systems is one of the greatest threats to environmental sustainability and security.

It has been said that the environmental justice movement has for too long focused on gaining protection from what's bad, rather than seeking access to

what's life giving and what's good. I submit to you today that for the last forty to fifty years, the movement for environmental justice and reform has been battered by the frame of personal responsibility. This way of conceiving environmental problems, issues, and solutions makes the individual more responsible for food insecurity, toxic waste, poor land use and environmental degradation than multi-national companies who make hundreds of billions of dollars emitting toxic gasses, burying plastics, and leaking oil into body of our planet.

This frame has been able to gain traction through a media system owned by the metaphorical cousins of the same big business that has wrought such devastation on our planet. And this story that blames you for pollution and also holds you responsible for the solution- pushing the story of corporate accountability to the wayside; moving campaigns for regulation and local governance to the margins; forcing the environmental justice movement into a defensive position where it's vision was hidden from view. Until now.

In the last ten years a parallel movement has grown. This parallel movement is called media justice and we share the same goals as the movement for environmental justice. Like you, we want limits to the power of big business to control basic human resources. For us, those resources include phones, broadcast networks, and broadband. These are basic communications systems which provide a lifeline in emergencies, allow a migrating world to remain intact regardless of the direction of capital, and create opportunities for new forms of action and change. We know that when big business controls our communications infrastructure, that the voice of earth herself is stifled. Earth cannot speak for herself, she requires strategic communicators to tell her story. Without a vibrant and independent media system, the strategic stories that, in their telling inspire policy change that limits the power of companies to act without regard for earth or for our economy demand a fair and publicly owned infrastructure through which they can freely pass. Media Justice demands communications policy that prioritizes the first amendment rights of people over

those of corporations.

What's at stake is green speech versus corporate speech. Say it with me. Green speech is the free and unabated public conversation about the environment and the policy fights that will return balance to our climate, our land, our world. While media consolidation and corporate control pose a threat to green speech, in the midst of a green-washed public debate- media justice provides a path to power.

Media Justice is a bold new vision for understanding the role of media in society that suggests that first amendment rights are more than civil rights, they are fundamental human rights that have been historically denied to the vast majority, and as such require legal battles to re-distribute them fairly across a fractured and diverse populace. When those most impacted by environmental threats have a renewed right and access to free speech, can you imagine the public conversation about the health and well-being of our world that would be at hand?

Media Justice recognizes that fights for public access, digital inclusion, media literacy in schools, net neutrality, diverse media ownership, and media accountability represent a secondary struggle that must be integrated into your primary goals. The primary goal is to sustain our planet and ourselves- but a media that is designed to connect, inform, heal, give voice to the powerless and watch the powerful provides a medium through which our cities can act and amplify the action.

Through digitally connected towns and villages we can begin to address water shortages and collectively re-imagine land use. With enforced journalistic standards and a re-investment in journalism we can expose and produce investigative reporting on repeat corporate violators of the environmental protection agreements often hidden from view. When television, be it broadcast or digital, is free or affordable an informed public can make real decisions about

whether our elected government is truly doing all they can to increase the sustainability of our planet, knowing that this requires international collaboration and that war is bad for the environment. Culturally media justice demands that our children be protected less from the interpersonal sex and violence that is so much the focus of the FCC's indecency commission and more from the commercials and ads that incite self-hatred, over-eating, lack of exercise, and news that inspires a tremendous, unnecessary and overwhelming fear.

To innovate and demand the regulations necessary to build this vision, Media Justice offers a change model for transformation that prioritizes regional organizing and grassroots policy advocacy led by those pushed furthest from public debate on behalf of us all.

All over the country orgs and communities are using this model to fight for the right, access, and power to tell the earth's story and the story of how justice is being won on her surface. Minneapolis Main Street Project, San Antonio Texas MEP, the Bay Area's Media Alliance, and Seattle's own Reclaim the Media are working together ensure that on June 12th no community is left behind by the digital television transition. they are also they only ones raising the question of what happens with all of those analog tv's? What is the environmental impact of the digital transition, and how can we ensure that even in a digital age we live with earth in a way that causes the least harm.

These are a few of the organizations in the Media Action Grassroots Network representing public access stations in New York, media literacy advocates in New Mexico, independent artists in San Antonio, working people in Philadelphia, poor media producers in the Bay Area, prisoners and rural communities across Appalachia, immigrants in Minneapolis, and you in Seattle!!!

Like top soil on mature earth media justice is a fresh idea born of ancient wisdom, and the Media Action Grassroots Network is tapping the deep well of

those lesson to build an environmental justice vision for media change.

A digital age can be green, and we can build it together, public not private, prioritizing people, not profits. Media Justice and Environmental Justice go hand in hand. One is the power, the other the path.