

Green & Black: Analyzing Environmental Responses to Black Lives Matter and Juneteenth 2020

Abstract

This paper looks at how select environmental groups responded to calls for mobilization by racial justice groups in the summer of 2020, including celebrations and days of action linked to Juneteenth (June 19) in the United States. My analysis draws on approximately 50 email communications to members of various social movements in June of 2020. I find that while many environmental groups sent communication to its members during this time, the links between racial and environmental justice issues were poorly developed or entirely absent. In addition to providing a review of environmental groups' responses to Black Lives Matter protests and Juneteenth, I also offer a detailed case study of how Friends of the Earth (FOE) responded to Juneteenth and movements for racial justice. A review of the FOE website and social media revealed a brief spike in engagement with Juneteenth and the Black Lives Matter movement in the summer of 2020. But despite messaging about the importance of social and environmental justice intersections, substantive resources and analysis addressing these links was largely absent from online materials, suggesting that earlier environmental justice critiques of mainstream green groups continue to be salient in 2021, despite a heightened attention to racial justice issues.

Keywords: Black Lives Matter, Juneteenth, Environmental Justice, Racial Justice

Introduction

2020 was an unexpectedly active year for social justice movements in the United States, with much of this activist driven by Black Lives Matter (BLM) movements in response to a series of killings of young Black men and women, including Ahmaud Arbery (February 23, 2020), Breonna Taylor (March 13, 2020), and George Floyd (May 25, 2020). The deaths of Taylor and Floyd in particular, both of whom were killed by police, sparked mass mobilizations throughout much of the summer and into the fall. Independently, but also interrelated, was a resurgence of white nationalist mobilizations in dozens of states, many linked to anti-covid-19 public health restrictions, including the April 30 storming of the Michigan State Capitol by a mix of far-right protests and armed militias. These events, we know now, were a prelude to the

January 6, 2021 white nationalist insurrection at the Capitol that attempted to stop certification of the Electoral College votes that would confirm Joe Biden as next President of the United States.

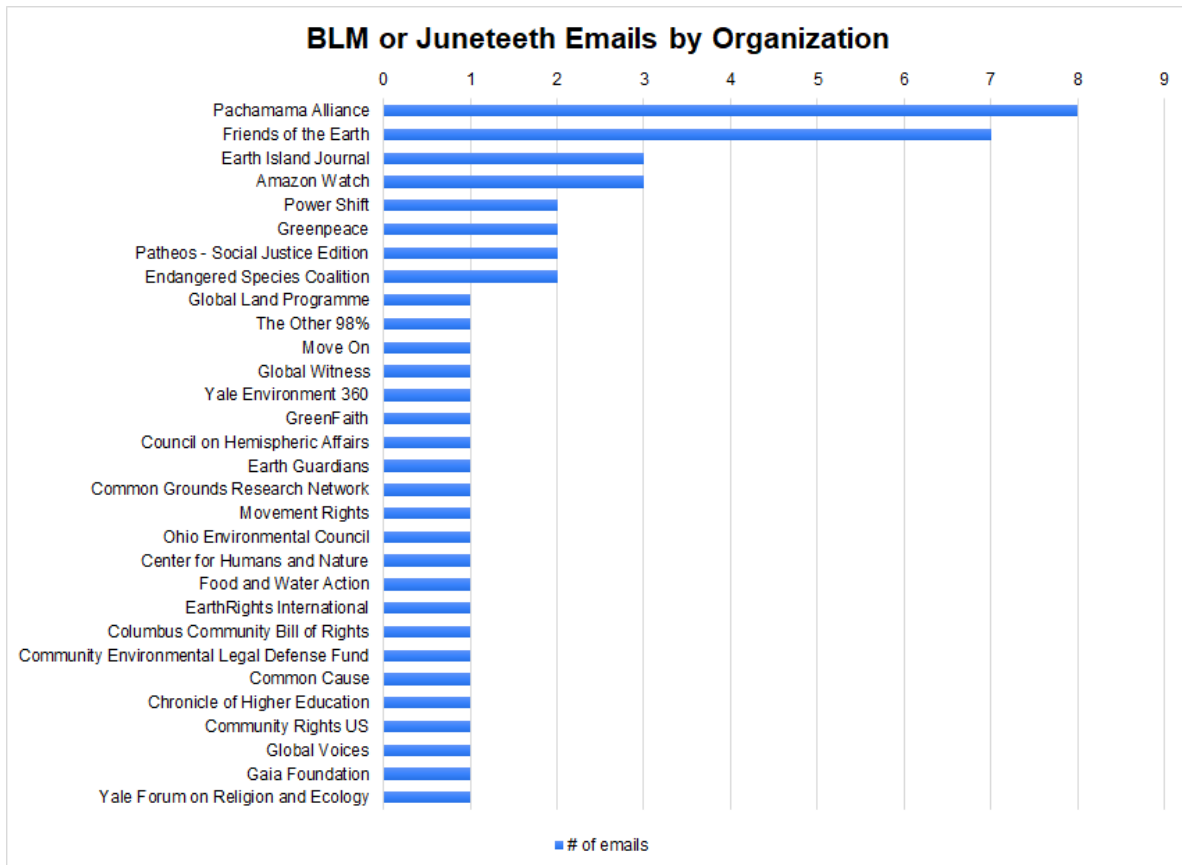
This research project emerges from my own involvement with these social movements, with special interest in issues of environmental justice. It is also informed by David Pellow's argument about the importance of looking at the Black Lives Matter movement in relation to questions of environmental justice politics. As Pellow argues, "This is a connection that many scholars might not make at first glance because police brutality and environmental politics would appear to be only tangentially related, but I argue they are in fact closely intertwined and that we must explore their myriad connections in order to excavate the roots of racist violence no matter the form it takes" (Pellow 2016, 222).

As these events were unfolding in late spring and early summer, I noticed a rise in communications from a wide range of groups who were declaring their solidarity with these racial justice movements, and in many cases, framing their work as supporting these racial justice struggles. In the wake of the murder of George Floyd in late May, and as Juneteenth approached, it felt like there was a spike in racial justice messages coming from many of these groups, including many environmental groups that had not previously been clearly engaged with the BLM movement, at least in terms of their core mission and programmatic activities. In response, I began to track emails in support of BLM actions and calls to support mobilizations for Juneteenth from groups whose email list I had subscribed to. While this is still an ongoing project, what follows are some initial findings from my tracking and research on this phenomenon, with a focus on a range of different environmental groups.

Following Pellow, I understand the roots of the environmental justice (EJ) movements as being primarily "composed of people from communities of color, [I]ndigenous communities, and working-class communities who are focused on combating environmental injustice—the disproportionate burden of environmental harm facing these populations" (Pellow 2016, 222). While this definition of environmental justice has some inherent limitations and problems in terms of who is counter or excluded, it provides a common starting point that I believe many scholars are already familiar with.

Methodology

In order to compile communication from environmental and other social movement groups I created an online tracking form to enter information from emails as I received them, including the date, sender, subject line, body of the message, any included visuals, and a link to an online email archive if available. I added content throughout June and July and ended up with a compiled list of 51 emails from 30 different groups or organizations (Chart 1).¹ While the majority of these groups are based in the United States, some also work or focus on international environmental issues as well. My analysis here is primarily focused on email communications in June, when the largest number of emails were sent out and when specific references to Juneteenth were included. In addition to collecting this raw data, I conducted some basic content analysis using Word Stat 8 to draw out core themes and keywords, and to look for frames or patterns I might have otherwise missed.



¹ A complete list of the emails (date, sender, and subject line) is provided at the end of this paper in Appendix I.

My analysis of environmental issue framing is informed by a social constructivist approach similar to that used by Dorcetta Taylor and others discussing environmental justice issue framing. Taylor describes these frames within environmental justice movements as "a scheme of interpretations that guides the way in which ideological meanings and beliefs are packaged by movement activists and presented to would-be supporters. Frames organize experiences and guide the actions of the individual or the group. Collective action frames are emergent, action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings developed to inspire and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns designed to attract public support" (Taylor 2000, 511). I was especially interested in how groups framed their work in relation to racial justice and how they articulated the interconnections between their own work and key racial justice themes, such as institutional or systemic racism, issues of police brutality, and calls to defund the police.

Background Context

Scholars involved in the study of environmental politics in the United States should be familiar with a longstanding critique of early environmental movements as wrapped up with problematic notions of nature as seen through a white, middle-class lens, and the problematic histories of excluding Indigenous communities, community of color, and poor communities from any meaningful role in shaping environmental policies and practices. For example, sociologist Nathan Hare famously noted in his landmark article on Black Ecology that "The emergence of the concept of ecology in American life is potentially of momentous relevance to the ultimate liberation of black people. Yet blacks and their environmental interests have been so blatantly omitted that blacks and the ecology movement currently stand in contradiction to each other" (Hare 1970, 2). While more nuanced environmental histories have begun to emerge in recent years that have complicated this singular narrative of race and environment and discussed how different racial and ethnic groups had their own historical forms of ecological politics (c.f. Finney 2014), that important discussion is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper. For my purposes here I accept as generally accurate the basic critique that environmental politics was (and in many ways still is) heavily driven by middle-class, white, liberal political interests.

In response to this history of environmental color blindness among white environmental advocates, a burgeoning movement with roots in the earlier civil rights movement emerged during the 1980s and 90s in places like Houston, Texas, Warren County, North Carolina, and West Harlem, New York and called attention to how industrial pollutants and toxins were disproportionately harming low-income communities and communities of color (Bullard 1990). This movement, which initially used the language of environmental racism, was the beginning of the modern environmental justice movement in the United States. Writing thirty years after Hare's comments, and at the start of a new millenia, environmental sociologist Dorceta Taylor suggested such issues were still prevalent. "The environmental movement is a powerful social movement; however, it faces many challenges. Among the most urgent is the need to develop a more inclusive, culturally sensitive, broad-based environmental agenda that will appeal to many people and unite many sectors of the movement. To do this, the movement must reevaluate its relation with industry and the government, reappraise its role and mission, and develop strategies to understand and improve race, class, and gender relations" (Taylor 2002, 41).

Important efforts were made to address these critiques during the 1990s and 2000s, and this work gave birth to a diverse and vibrant global environmental justice movement. Many of the core issues and critiques raised by early US environmental justice advocates have been taken up by global actors and social movements, and in many ways contemporary environmental justice issues have become deeply entangled with a growing climate justice movement, although some important differences still remain. And as is the case for any social movement, particularly a relatively young one, there is still much work to be done.

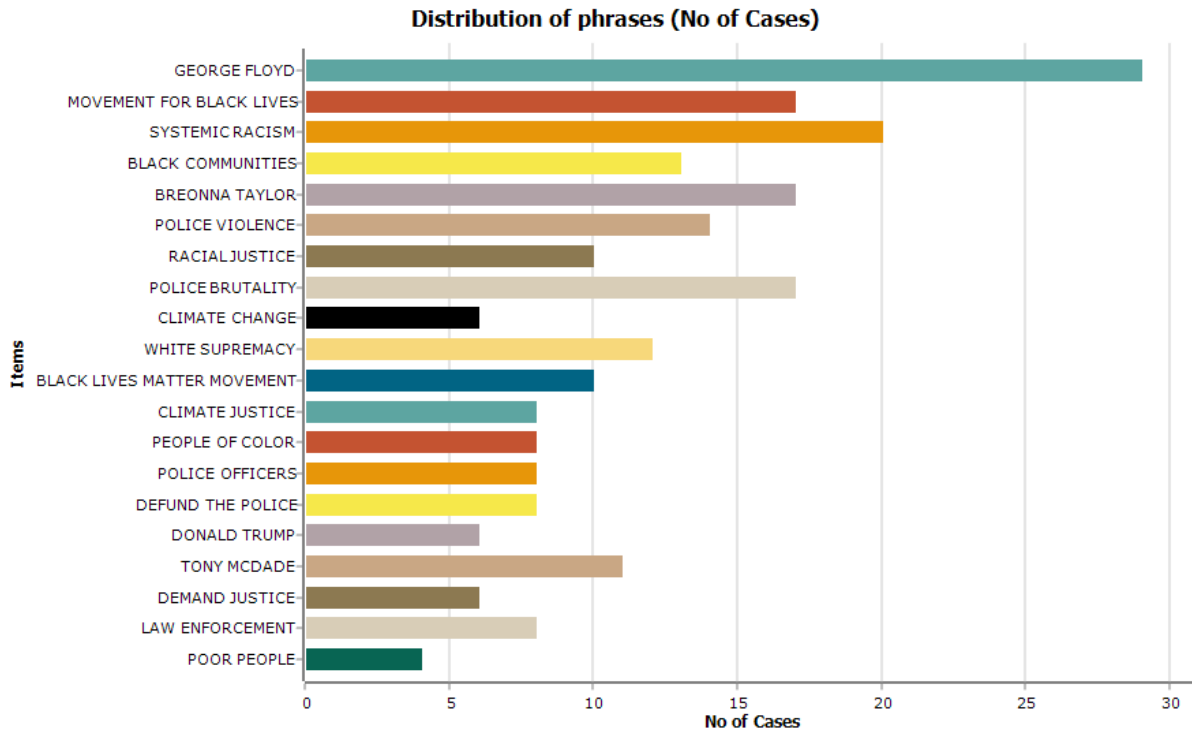
A Summer of Discontent

My goal with this analysis is to add to the growing body of research that looks at how issues of race and class intersect with ecological politics, broadly understood, and how these ideas are being put into concrete action by social movements on the ground. As I stated earlier, over the course of June-July, 2020 I collected 51 different emails sent out by 30 different organizations. Of these emails, I classified 39 as from environmental organizations. For example,

I classified an email from Friends of the Earth or Earth Guardians as environmental, but not one from Global Voices or Patheos - Social Justice Edition, which had a general social justice focus.

As already discussed, many of these organizations only sent out one email related to the racial justice protests taking place that summer. However, a handful of groups sent out two or more emails, with Friends of the Earth being the most active by far. This was both surprising and instructive, for reasons I explore in more detail below. Responses from these environmental organizations varied widely in how they framed protests in the street and in their analysis of those events. Some took a largely conciliatory tone, arguing for the importance of community accountability and police reforms. Others offered a much deeper, systemic critique of capitalist systems of oppression and state violence underlying the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and called for the abolition of the police state.

After running a content analysis on the combined messages, the following top phrases emerged from the assembled messages (Chart 2). It was interesting to see that only "climate change" and "climate justice" stood out as environmental phrases in the data, suggesting that many environmental groups may not have clearly articulated environmental and racial justice links, or if they did, the language of environment(al) was absent. When they did include an



environmental focus, it appeared to most commonly be in relation to climate change. One thing I found particularly interesting here was the absence of the language of environmental justice. In fact, only 6 messages included the phrase "environmental justice" anywhere, and those were sent by Food and Water Action, Yale Environment 360, Greenpeace (twice), Greenfaith, and the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology. "We stand in solidarity with the Movement for Black Lives' demands and the Week of Action against racism and state-sponsored violence," the Food and Water Action email stated. "We ask all our supporters to learn more about how to help. It's our responsibility to stand with our allies for racial and environmental justice" (Food and Water Action 2020). Of all the various messages, one of the emails from Greenpeace made the links between the two most clear.

We cannot have environmental justice without racial justice. Greenpeace's work is to challenge systems of power that destroy the environment and we know that the industries we fight against place a disproportionate burden on Black communities. Our work is fundamentally interconnected with the struggle for racial justice. In the past couple of weeks, we have gotten a taste of the change that is possible if we take collective action to defend Black lives and fight for collective liberation. (Greenpeace 2020, emphasis added)

The Greenpeace email asking people to take part in local Juneteenth actions was also notable for including some historical context for Juneteenth. "On June 19, 1865, Black communities in Texas finally received the news that they were free. Juneteenth (June 19th) is a day that honors Black freedom and resistance, and centers Black people's unique contribution to the struggle for justice in the U.S." (Greenpeace, 2020). In a similar vein, the email from Yale Environment 360 highlighted a new conversation on their website with environmental justice advocate Elizabeth Yeampierre. "Yeampierre, who co-chairs the Climate Justice Alliance, draws a direct line from slavery and the exploitation of natural resources to current issues of environmental justice" (Yale Environment 2020). However, such messaging appeared to be more the exception than the norm.

For example, the Pachamama Alliance included a link to a Black Lives Matter town hall they were hosting on July 6 with Reverend Deborah Johnson focused on "the themes of race and justice, and the need for both institutional and personal transformation to create a truly just society. Rev. Johnson will take questions from the audience about this moment of social

upheaval and possibility to generate space for the kind of transformation needed to meet this political moment" (Pachamama Alliance 2020). Johnson is founder of Inner Light Ministries in California and a board member of the Pachamama Alliance, and has been active in the diversity training circles and west coast eco-spirituality new age circles which Pachamama Alliance is a key member of. The event was part of an ongoing series of talks in response to Covid-19 called Resilience and Possibility in These Times. However, beyond the information about the planned town hall, no other information was provided to members, so those interested in these issues within the Pachamama Alliance network would need to attend the webinar for more information.

Similarly, the Center for Humans and Nature sent out a brief note to their community which began by declaring "The woundedness of our country—built on racism, white supremacy, and the exploitation of others—is profound. The militarization of our country—to acquire, guard, and defend stolen lands and transform life into “capital”—is profound. These wounds have infected our country and anguished Black communities for far too long, and we stand with the individuals and institutions calling for an end to injustice and systemic racism" (Center for Humans & Nature 2020).

One of the more radical critique was offered by the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF), whose email argued "The belief in regulating something which is structurally flawed or harmful is a lie, and it pervades society...A fully realized, emancipatory society requires deeper action, not lipstick on a pig. It is with this in mind that many groups and organizers have pushed for structural change to defund and abolish policing as we know it, and to reorient the priorities of society toward something that cherishes and respects life" ([CELDF 2020](#)). The CELDF email also included a link to a Google doc titled 'Anti-racism resources' which included a mix of web links, podcasts, books, articles, movies and tv series, and other anti-racism resources. As a note at the top of the document stated, "This document is intended to serve as a resource to white people and parents to deepen our anti-racism work. If you haven't engaged in anti-racism work in the past, start now. Feel free to circulate this document on social media and with your friends, family, and colleagues" ([CELDF 'Anti-Racism' 2020](#)).

Despite the heavy environmental focus of CELDF's work, environmental issues were not seriously raised in their post, other than when they pushed back on criticism of "violent" street

protests by calling into question the underlying logic that places greater value on protecting property over life. "Though property is not living and breathing, the law and its officers treat it as such and even superior to biological life. [Government] will, through the police, protect property, but kill humans without reason or remorse. It protects the private property owner, and his 'liberty' to destroy the people, neighborhoods, and ecosystems he 'owns' (CELDF 2020).

In order to delve deeper into these topics, I decided to use Friends of the Earth as a case study of how this environmental messaging around the Black Lives Matter movement and Juneteenth was taking place. I chose them for two reasons. First, they were one of the most active environmental groups communicating in this period, so they offer a valuable picture of how environmental groups were engaging with racial justice issues in early 2020. Secondly, because Friends of the Earth (hereafter FOE) was considered one of the "Big 10" environmental groups that were targeted for criticism in the 1990s by the emerging environmental justice movement, it offers a useful test case to see how they have, or have not, internalized and addressed these critiques today. [Editorial note: I'm still working on this section and my analysis, so some arguments and ideas are still missing. Apologies if it feels somewhat unfinished...]

Case Study: Friends of the Earth

As previously noted, of all the environmental groups sending out emails in this survey, Friends of the Earth and Friends of the Earth Action, a political action group under the US-based Friends of the Earth (FOE), sent out the most emails, seven in total, during the month of June.²

An initial June 2, 2020 email titled 'Sign now: Demand officers who killed Breonna Taylor be brought to justice' was signed by FOE President Erich Pica. It opens with the now well known phrase "I can't breathe" and focuses on the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis and calls on members to contact the Hennepin County Attorney Michael Freeman and demand that all four officers involved in Floyd's murder be charged, not just Derek Chauvin (Thomas Lane, Tou Thao, and J. Alexander Kueng were the other officers). The email also referenced recent

² Technically FOE sent out more individual emails than the Pachamama Alliance, but as I note in Appendix I, I have included 3 communications from the Pachamama Alliance in my collection which were independent website statements that were linked to through their emails, but not sent individually. Because of this, Pachamama Alliance has an overall higher message count, but in reality FOE had a slightly higher individual email count.

police killings in the United States, including Ezell Ford, Tamir Rice, Bettie Jones, Philando Castile, Breonna Taylor, and Eric Garner. The email argues the charges against Chauvin were not born from any real commitment to political form by local Minneapolis political leaders but rather "happened in response to public pressure -- Because even when a violent murder of a Black person is captured on video by an officer with a long history of misconduct, public officials drag their feet in securing justice for Black communities" (FOE, 6/2/2020).

Thanks to public pressure all four officers were eventually charged, and jury selection is currently taking place as of the time of this writing (spring 2020) for Derek Chauvin. In addition, on March 12, 2021 the Minneapolis City Council approved a historic \$27 million dollar pre-trial settlement in a civil rights lawsuit brought by the family of George Floyd, making it one of the largest civil rights settlements in U.S. history (Keller 2021). The email ended by noting that the "fight will not end with the prosecution of four killers in Minneapolis. It will not end until every police officer who commits violence against Black people is held accountable. It will not end until the structure of state-sanctioned murder is dismantled. It will not end until every single person recognizes -- and voices -- that Black Lives Matter" (FOE, 6/2/2020).

In addition to this action email, on June 2, 2020 FOE also posted a news story on their website titled 'Friends of the Earth stands in support of Black lives and echoes calls to defund the police.' Similar to the email sent that same day, it addressed the police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and Ahmaud Arbery. Tony McDade's story received far less media attention than the other three, including within Black Lives Matter circles. McDade was a Black trans man who was shot and killed by police on May 27, 2020 in Tallahassee, Florida.

The FOE post discussed different forms of systemic racism in America, including increasingly militarized and hostile police forces, the neglect of Black community during the Covid-19 crisis, and organized efforts to disenfranchise Black voters. The FOE post went on to state "We also recognize the many ways in which Black communities experience environmental racism, disproportionately bearing the burdens of pollution and toxic exposures," and ended by declaring "We recommit ourselves to doing the necessary advocacy, organizing, and mobilizing to dismantle systemic racism in achieving a more healthy and just world" (FOE, 6/2/2020).

While it was not the primary focus of the post, we do see an attempt to link the issues of systemic racism and police violence to broader environmental justice issues as well as visions of a more just political future, one elsewhere connected to the idea of a just transition in FOE messaging, although this post simply called for a "more healthy and just world." The message ends with a call to action that is also in a June 4, 2020 email, which was aimed at putting pressure on Louisville Mayor Greg Fisher to prosecute the police involved in Taylor's murder.

This email and news posts was followed on June 4, 2021 by a second similar email, this time titled 'Sign now: Demand officers who killed Breonna Taylor be brought to justice' and signed by Friends of the Earth Action VP of organizing and strategic alliances Liz Butler. The email provided a brief recap of the killing of Breonna Taylor and then, noting FOE's partnership with Color of Change, called on its members to demand that Louisville Mayor Greg Fisher bring charges against all of the officers involved in her death. Similar to the earlier email, it also called attention to the killing of other young people of color, specifically George Floyd, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Ahmaud Aubrey.

Importantly, this email also refers back to the earlier June 2 email and notes that "We know people power can lead to accountability. After more than 3.5 million people across the country signed petitions, and thousands took to the streets in protest of George Floyd's murder, Minneapolis officials announced yesterday that they would charge all four police officers involved and increased the charges on the officer who killed him" (FOE, 6/4/2020).

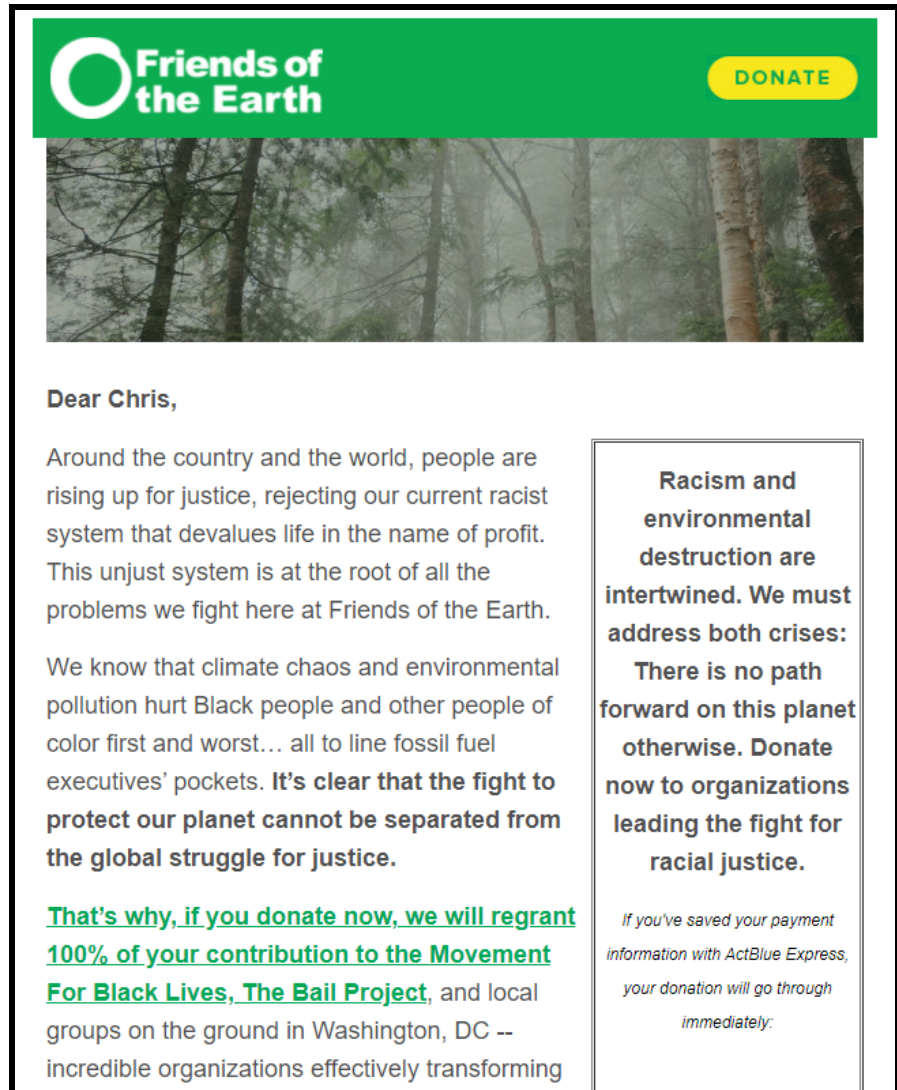
However, unlike the case with George Floyd, no charges have ever been brought against the Louisville Metro Police Department officers responsible for Taylor's murder. One former officer, Brett Hankison, was eventually charged with wanton endangerment for randomly firing into the apartment complex, but notably, not for his role in the death of Taylor. Local activists remain hopeful that justice will eventually be upheld, and there remains several ongoing FBI and DOJ investigations into civil rights violations by the LMPD. In addition, on Friday, March 12, 2021, just before the anniversary of her death, Breonna Taylor's boyfriend Kenneth Walker filed a new federal lawsuit against the LMPD and the officers involved for violating his civil rights. Earlier that same week Taylor's mother Tamika Palmer also filed an ethics lawsuit against six LMPD officers involved in Breonna's death, several of whom are under internal investigation.

A third email was sent out the following day on June 5, 2021 titled 'It's time for radical change. Are you with us?' and was again signed by Friends of the Earth Action VP of organizing and strategic alliances Liz Butler. Unlike the previous two emails, this one was much longer, and included multiple requests for donations, stating that 100% of donations would go to support "some of the hardest-working, most effective racial justice groups: the Movement For Black Lives, The Bail Project and local Washington DC-based groups" (FOE, 6/5/2021).

Importantly, this was the first email from FOE that highlighted the links between racial justice and environmental issues, with one of the call out boxes (Image 1) requesting funding support including the following text: "Racism and environmental destruction are intertwined. We must address both crises: There is no path forward on this planet otherwise. Donate now to organizations leading the fight for racial justice."

The email text along this sidebar noted that "climate chaos and environmental pollution hurt Black people and other people of color first and worst... all to line fossil fuel executives' pockets. **It's clear that the fight to protect our planet cannot be separated from the global struggle for justice.**"

The email goes on to declare "We're fighting multiple existential crises



at once, and they're intertwined. In order to win the environmental changes we need, we need to fundamentally reshape the racist and capitalist system that got us here. **This system is built on oppressing Black people and other people of color, extracting power and resources and hoarding them in the hands of the few.** To fight such systemic problems, we need systemic solutions" (FOE, 6/5/2021, emphasis in original).

After several paragraphs describing some of the work of the Movement for Black Lives and The Bail Project the email returns to an environmental justice focus, linking increased rates of air pollution and asthma in Black communities and emerging trends of unequal Covid-19 infections and deaths to a history of environmental racism. The FOE email notes that Black communities make up a large proportion of both frontline environmental communities and U.S. health care workers since they face greater threats from environmental toxins and the pandemic.

And now, as people rise up in defense of Black lives, governments are sending in militarized police forces to douse protesters in toxic tear gas and suffocating pepper spray. Every day we're seeing violent police officers shoving, beating, shooting, and dehumanizing people who just want to live safely. We're all watching as police instigate violence and exemplify lawlessness. This is the system maintaining the status quo at all costs. Enough is enough...We must address our interlocking crises: There is no path forward on this planet otherwise. We must not only end police violence, but also redistribute wealth and power. We need a just transition to a regenerative, democratized, and sustainable society -- where everyone is healthy and safe. Where no one is expendable. (FOE, 6/5/2021)

As we can see from this email, while earlier emails focused on support for the broader demands of the Black Lives Matter movement, this email highlights specific interests and environmental themes as part of a broader political analysis that links racial and environmental justice with critiques of capitalism, police militarization, movements for democracy, and a just transition.

This message was followed up a few days later on June 10, 2020 with an email titled 'Re: Our racist, capitalist system devalues life in the name of profit ' and was again signed by Friends of the Earth Action VP of organizing and strategic alliances Liz Butler. Like the previous email, this one was also longer and included multiple fundraising pitches interwoven with the text. Unlike the other messages, this one started out with a more traditional environmental appeal:

"Trump just signed an executive order gutting long-standing environmental protections -- yet another attack on communities of color," but instead of ending there, the email once more linked this issue back to the story of George Floyd. "In Minnesota, where police brutally murdered George Floyd, Black people make up 6 percent of the state's population, but 30 percent of the state's coronavirus cases. **Already suffering at the hands of corporate polluters and the police, Black Americans will yet again disproportionately suffer from Trump's rollback of bedrock environmental laws**" (FOE, 6/10/2020, emphasis in original).

Similar to the previous email, once again the interconnections between racial and environmental justice were highlighted, with the email drawing from part of a Movement for Black Lives policy platform document called "the people first" that addressed coronavirus recovery efforts and Black unemployment ([Movement for Black Lives](#)). "The Movement For Black Lives has condemned this disparity, demanding 'a just recovery that doesn't prioritize corporations and leave our communities behind' and to move the economy to serve 'the needs of the people and the planet, not the corporations and the wealthy'" (FOE, 6/10/2020).

To help drive this point home, the email ends with a story about the Marathon refinery in Detroit, Michigan and a series of examples about how air pollution from Marathon, combined with weakened environmental pollution laws under Trump, abuse of new Covid-19 relief funds by Marathon and other big corporations, and a long history of fossil fuel companies like Marathon using dark money to undermine environmental policies and legislation, are part of a bigger story about how corporations have treated BIPOC communities as environmental sacrifice zones. "As environmentalists, we must tell these stories. At Friends of the Earth Action, we recommit ourselves to doing the necessary advocacy, organizing, and mobilizing to dismantle systemic racism in achieving a more healthy and just world" (FOE, 6/10/2020).

A fifth email was sent out on June 12, 2020 titled 'Take Action: Put an end to systemic racism.' The email was again signed by Friends of the Earth Action VP of organizing and strategic alliances Liz Butler. The email provided a brief introduction to Juneteenth, linking it to the ongoing struggle of Black communities against "violence, injustice, and inequality in America" and calling for people to take part in various Juneteenth events being organized by the Movement for Black Lives. The email included three highlighted action points, which include

defunding the police, investing in Black communities, and a call for the resignation of Donald Trump. It also included a link to have your email added to receive updates relating to Juneteenth mobilizations. The message referenced local debates about defunding the police in Minneapolis and Los Angeles, as well as the recent slate of public protests in which Confederate statues and other symbols of white supremacy had been pulled down. The email ends by arguing "This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to dismantle systemic racism. This is a moment to show up -- as an environmentalist and as an advocate for social justice" (FOE, 6/12/2021).

A sixth email was sent out on June 18, 2020, the day before Juneteenth celebrations, titled 'Time for Action: Black people's lives are at risk -- Trump must resign' which was also signed by Liz Butler. The email opened with an ominous tone: "Gassed. Beaten. Shot. Dragged. The scene of terror created by Donald Trump" (FOE, 6/18/2020). Similar to the two earlier emails focused on George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, this email did not include any highlighted requests for money, but rather focused on a singular call for then-President Donald Trump to resign, citing the events of June 1, 2020 in Washington D.C. where local law enforcement and



National Guard troops pepper sprayed and attacked Black Lives Matter activists to clear a path to the historic St. John's Church near the White House for a Bible wielding photo op (Image 2).

Here we finally see a reference to Juneteenth appear, as it had been absent from previous emails. "As you continue to celebrate the Juneteenth weekend, use your voice and stand with the Movement for Black Lives in demanding change! Donald Trump has a long history of racism, division, fear mongering, and the weaponizing of hate. He continues to put Black people in danger with his racist messaging. Donald Trump must resign" (FOE, 6/18/2020).

The email also foreshadowed a theme that would resurface in early 2021 when white supremacists and Trump supporters led an insurrection at the Capitol Building as Congress was finalizing Electoral College results to declare Joe Biden as president. Noting the radically different responses by law enforcement officials to earlier white supremacist rallies compared to the St. John's Church events, FOE noted: "When Trump's base protested and rallied at state capitals and city offices, many with members armed to the teeth so they could get a haircut in the middle of a pandemic, Trump supported them. Not once were those protestors gassed, shot at, or arrested...Even in 2015 during his campaign, he encouraged people at his rallies to be violent against protesters. Frequent threats and hostility have become the norm for this so-called leader. But they're escalating dangerously" (FOE, 6/18/2020). Similar to earlier emails, the focus on environmental issues is absent, replaced by an emphasis on racial injustice and police violence.

A final email from FOE was sent on Juneteenth, June 19, 2020 with the title 'Your signature needed: Tell Congress to invest in Black communities' and again attributed to Liz Butler. Likely in response to events of the past months, this final email addresses head on the issue of police violence and brutality and calls on Congress to "defund police and invest in Black communities' health, safety, and education." It also includes a call to action button for members to contact Congress, with a form letter to Congress asking them to "invest in Black communities to help provide healthcare, housing, employment, and education resources. Invest in universal healthcare and fully funded education for all, sustainable energy solutions for Black communities, and restorative justice services" (FOE, 6/19/2020). The email also highlights the fossil fuel linkages, calling on Congress to "divest from industrial multinational use of fossil fuels" and invest in "community-based sustainable energy solutions" as part of a broader

reorganization of social and economic relations linked to earlier calls for a just transition (FOE, 6/19/2020).

So what can we learn from how the Friends of the Earth used their media messaging to address issues of environmental and racial justice and heightened public protests around the Juneteenth celebration in the United States in 2020?

First it is worth noting that among the environmental groups that I was tracking, FOE took a more proactive role in helping to publicize the demands of the Black Lives Matter movement to its environmental audience, including discussing issue of defunding the police, the ongoing legacy of systemic racism, and the ways in which communities of color continue to face rising police violence, increased health inequities, and roadblocks to political participation, particularly attempts to reduce the power of Black voters. This is especially noteworthy since despite its more radical leanings under founder David Brower in 1969, by the 1980s FOE had become deeply entrenched in conservative environmental policy making (Salzman 1990). As such, FOE was one of the "Group of Ten" environmental policy groups in Washington D.C. that were publicly shamed by the March 16, 1990 letter from the SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP).³ That letter, now a key document in the history of the environmental justice movement in the United States, called out FOE and other big greens for supporting policies that actively led to environmental injustices and exacerbated environmental harms in communities of color.

For centuries, people of color in our region have been subjected to racist and genocidal practices including the theft of lands and water, the murder of innocent people, and the degradation of our environment. Mining companies extract minerals leaving economically depressed communities and poisoned soil and water. The U.S. military takes lands for weapons production, testing and storage, contaminating surrounding communities and placing minority workers in the most highly radioactive and toxic worksites. Industrial and municipal dumps are intentionally placed in communities of color, disrupting our cultural lifestyle and threatening our communities' futures. Workers in the fields are dying and babies are born disfigured as a result of pesticide spraying. (SouthWest Organizing Project 1990, 1)

³ The Group of Ten consisted of Sierra Club, Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, National Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation, Environmental Defense Fund, Friends of the Earth, Izaak Walton League, The Wilderness Society, National Parks and Conservation Association, and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Although environmental organizations calling themselves the "Group of Ten" often claim to represent our interests, in observing your activities it has become clear to us that your organizations play an equal role in the disruption of our communities. There is a clear lack of accountability by the Group of Ten environmental organizations towards Third World communities in the Southwest, in the United States as a whole, and internationally. (SouthWest Organizing Project 1990, 1)

Given this sorted history with environmental justice and communities of color, FOE is not an obvious source to turn to for leadership on environmental justice issues, much less racial justice. As SWOP went on to argue, "The lack of people of color in decision-making positions in your organizations such as executive staff and board positions is also reflective of your histories of racist and exclusionary practices. Racism is a root cause of your inaction around addressing environmental problems in our communities" (SouthWest Organizing Project 1990, 3).

While a systematic analysis of why FOE has taken a greater interest in racial justice issues in recent years is beyond the scope of this paper, several factors are worth mentioning. One is the gradual growth in staff diversity within FOE, a trend evident across environmental orgs more broadly. A second factor is a change in emphasis brought about by Erich Pica, who became the Director of Friends of the Earth in 2009 at the age of 34 after working for nearly a decade at FOE. Pica now holds the title of President of FOE. Pica noted in his remarks in a June 1, 2020 note honoring the passing of FOE board member Arlie Schardt that the two had worked together in 2014 to draft a statement "expressing our solidarity with Black Lives Matters after the murder of Michael Brown. This was our first public expression aligning Friends of the Earth with the Movement for Black Lives. A commitment that will continue forward" (Leavy 2020). Both of these factors would help account for a broader culture shift within FOE over the past decade leading up to the events of summer 2020.

A third possible factor is linked to the above trends as reflected in the key issue areas that FOE works on, which currently include Climate and Energy, Democracy, Finance & Economic Systems, Food & Agriculture, Forests, and Oceans. The emphasis on Democracy in particular has expanded the work FOE does beyond a traditional environmental frame. As the Democracy Campaign page states, "Environmental progress — from curbing climate change to ensuring the

safety of the food we eat and the water we drink — is hampered by threats to our democratic system. In particular, gerrymandering is an attack on our democratic process that affects all citizens, especially frontline communities fighting for environmental justice. Politicians are rigging districts to benefit themselves and the corporations that fund their campaigns. This voter suppression blocks necessary environmental change and forces environmental battles onto defensive terrain. Addressing our broken political system is the task of this generation — and it is key to ensuring social and environmental justice. To bring about necessary environmental change for ALL people, we must fight to end gerrymandering and voter suppression and ensure that every vote counts" ([FOE, n.d.](#))

The Democracy Campaign page also includes two sections with additional resources focused on gerrymandering, voter suppression, and campaign finance, and FOE links these issues to a larger narrative in which, as noted above, progress on environmental issues is contingent on securing democratic political reforms and creating a more accountable and ethical politics. As one of the FOE "impact stories" from 2016 on the greening of democratic movements pointed out, "progress on every environmental issue we work on—from curbing climate change to ensuring the safety of what we eat and drink to fighting those who pollute our planet—is hampered by our dysfunctional democratic system" ([FOE, 2016](#)).

So what these various examples suggest is that the deeper critiques levelled by SWOP and other environmental justice advocates in the 1990s and later are finally bearing some fruit. At the same time, I don't want to give the false impression that FOE has suddenly got it all right and does not have more work to do in addressing environmental justice critiques of the broader landscape of environmental politics, and NGOs, in the United States, as it surely does. But I think it is also important to highlight where progress has been made, and to recognize that this work is always part of an ongoing process that is never really finished.

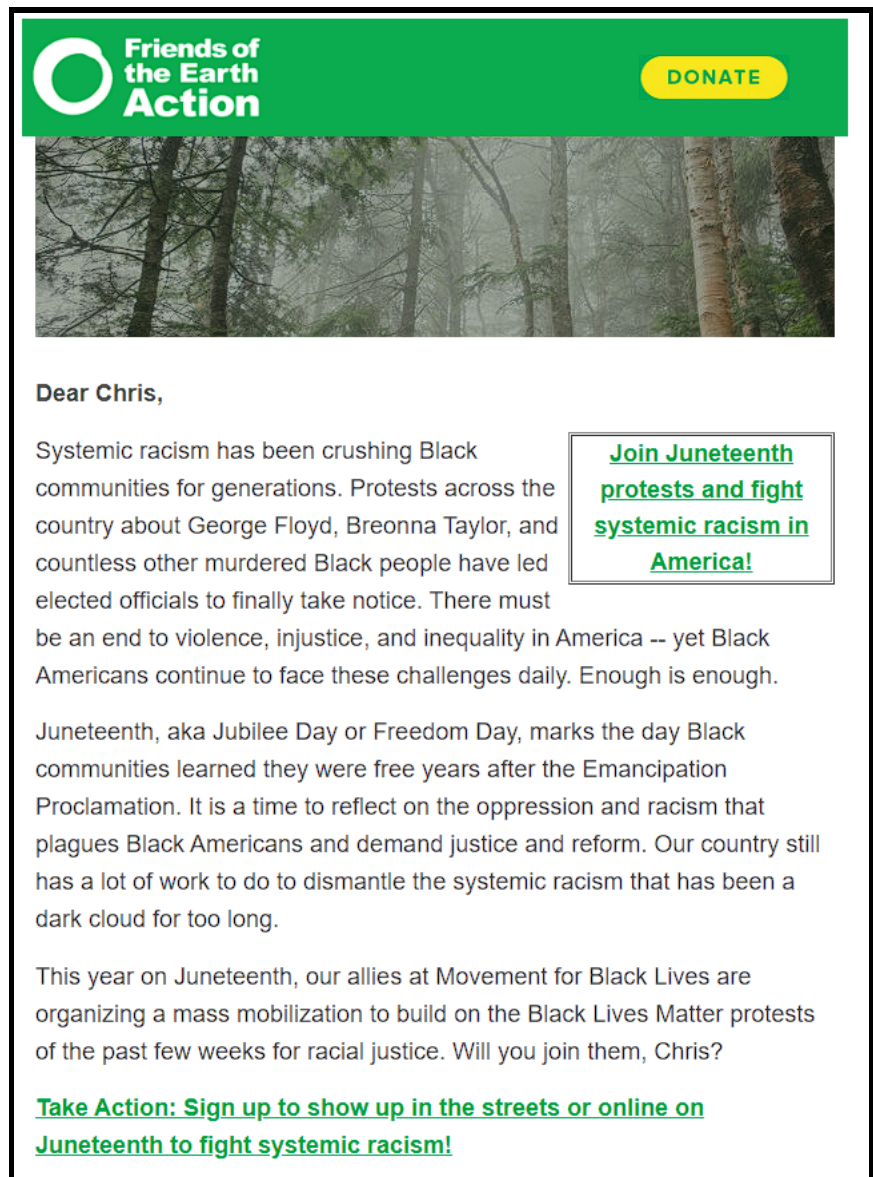
Having addressed some of these positive examples, I want to also offer some critiques of where I think FOE is still falling short, or perhaps more broadly, areas where there remains unfinished work to be done in taking into account these broader environmental justice critiques of how green groups have engaged with issues of racial and social justice, which, after all, was my original entry point into this conversation.

Juneteenth and Racial Justice

As already discussed, there were three explicit references to Juneteenth in the FOE media messaging sent out in June of 2020, in addition to the June 1 Arlie Schardt memorial note from FOE President Erich Pisa, which only indirectly discussed Juneteenth. The first important reference to Juneteenth, and the message that provided the most details on this issue, was the June 12, 2020 email. In addition to highlighting the upcoming Juneteenth events, it included an action link for members to join Juneteenth protests as part of FOE's work to fight systemic racism (Image 3). This call to action again highlighted three key demands, which were:

- Defund the police
- Invest in Black communities
- Call for the resignation of Donald Trump

These three demands were the same as those being circulated by other major Juneteenth racial justice organizing groups, including the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), which hosted the sixnineteen.com website where individuals could locate local events or plan their own and share with others (Sixnineteen.com, 2019). To reinforce this



message of interconnected issues the email reminded members that "This is a moment to show up -- as an environmentalist and as an advocate for social justice" (FOE 6/12/2020). This overlap in messaging makes sense given that FOE noted their support for the Movement for Black Lives explicitly in at least one email, even though the sixnineteen.com website does not list FOE or any other mainstream environmental groups on their partners page.

This message was briefly reinforced in the June 18 email, which included a passing reference to the ongoing Juneteenth weekend celebrations and protests. "As you continue to celebrate the Juneteenth weekend, use your voice and stand with the Movement for Black Lives in demanding change!" (FOE, 6/18/2020). Implicit in this email was the idea that FOE members were already active in Juneteenth events, possibly through actions that members had been linked to based on responses to the June 12 email urging people to get involved in Juneteenth actions.

Similar to the June 18 email, the June 19 message included a passing reference to Juneteenth events, reminding FOE members that "As you celebrate and reflect on Juneteenth -- a day that honors Black freedom and resistance -- it's time for you, [members' name], to join the Movement for Black Lives action with thousands of others across the country in the streets and online. Take this weekend of action to demand Congress defund police and invest in Black communities" (FOE, 6/19/2020).

Unfortunately I was unable to find any follow up reporting or posts about Juneteenth events on the FOE website, so it is unclear what role their engagement with these issues may have played. The only public metrics I was able to find were three social media posts sent out from the [@foe_us](#) Twitter account on June 19 between 12-2 pm.

The first tweet linked to a *New York Times* story about the history and meaning of Juneteenth, and had 17 likes and 10 retweets. A second tweet linked to a story from *The Guardian* about activists claiming environmental justice includes racial justice, and which had 17 likes and 7 retweets. A final tweet ([Image 4](#)), which included a thread with a second Juneteenth post linking to the sixnineteen.com page and a call to action graphic, had 19 likes and 9 retweets, plus an additional 9 likes and 2 retweets in the threaded response post. This final tweet included a note about the FOE staff being out of the office to celebrate the holiday and that they were also taking part in actions in the street. Taken together, FOE outreach efforts only solicited a handful

of responses (62 likes and 28 retweets). With 186.3K Followers as of mid-March 2021, this amounts to 0.04 percent user engagement. By comparison, a recent post announcing the confirmation of Deb Haaland as the new Secretary of the Interior had over 566 likes and 174 reposts in just over 24 hours. So while Twitter isn't necessarily an accurate gauge of FOE user involvement or activism, it does suggest a much lower level of interest and response from within its media networks.



Deep vs Shallow - Engaging Black Lives Matter

To try and gauge other ways that FOE may have engaged its members on these issues I did two narrow searches for 'Juneteenth' and 'Black Lives Matter' on their website (www.foe.org). In the process I was trying to answer two key questions. First, were there other resources on Juneteenth and the Black Lives Matter movement that FOE members (or the general public) could find, and if there were, what was included? Second, how did FOE frame its involvement with the broader movements for racial justice and how did it make clear the connections between social and environmental justice issues? As noted above, FOE emails sent in June of 2020 called attention to the importance of addressing the intersections of racial and environmental injustice, but was this same emphasis reflected in their website and social media content?

Following a review of their website and social media (focusing on Twitter), what I discovered was that a member of Friends of the Earth, or someone from the public who visited

their website looking for more information about Juneteenth or the environmental links to Black Lives Matter movements, would need to go elsewhere if they wanted to delve deeper into Juneteenth, Black Lives Matter, and the intersections between social and environmental justice.

Despite highlighting Juneteenth and Black Lives Matter in their June emails, the FOE website does not have any dedicated resources or articles on Juneteenth or the environmental links to the Black Lives Matter movement. A search of their website for '[Juneteenth](#)' only returned 1 article from June 1, 2020, which was about the death of Arlie Schardt, a former *Time* magazine reporter who covered the civil rights movement in the 1960s and later served as executive director of the Environmental Defense Fund and chairman of FOE. The reference to Juneteenth came at the end of a memorial statement attributed to FOE President Erich Pica, which I discussed briefly before:

"I would be remiss if I didn't recognize that we are celebrating Arlie's life on Juneteenth, a day honoring black freedom and black resistance. Today, this weekend, and for the past couple of weeks, Friends of the Earth has mobilized our more than 3 million members and activists to take part in Juneteenth activities and support the Movement for Black Lives more broadly" (Leavy 2020). So the three emails referencing Juneteenth that I have already discussed, of which only the June 12 email provided any real substance or details about Juneteenth, and this passing reference in a tribute to Arlie Schardt, were the only resources about Juneteenth on their website.

Similarly, a site search for '[Black Lives Matter](#)' returned a total of 13 articles for the ten year period between April 2010 and March 2021, but only 4 articles from 2020. Of these 4 articles, only 1 directly dealt with the Black Lives Matter movement, the brief June 2 statement of support for defunding the police which I discussed earlier. Two 2020 posts mentioned the Black Lives Matter movement in passing or indirectly, while the last 2020 post was an irrelevant piece about the cruise industry and climate-harming "black carbon" emissions. The majority of the returned posts were from 2016 or earlier and three more of these were also false positives. So in total I found 8 posts with indirect ties to racial justice issues and 6 with a clear link to Black Lives Matter or related racial justice issues and themes (46%).

These other semi-relevant posts were a mixed bag for someone interested in learning more about the links between social or racial justice and environmental justice. The most recent

article that came up in a search for 'Black Lives Matter' was a guest research article titled ['Climate, Clicks, Capitalism, and Conspiracists,'](#) which was published August 27, 2020 and co-authored by two policy experts who work on disinformation and conspiracies in social media. The authors noted the explosive impact of QAnon and other right-wing groups in spreading disinformation and how this has spilled over into other areas, such as climate denial and attacks on Black Lives Matter. "As part of our work studying climate denial conversations online, we've observed climate deniers shift their focus over several months from climate change to QAnon greatest hits, such as COVID-19 conspiracies and anti-Black Lives Matter content and disinformation" (Khoo and Ryan, 2020). The article noted the spread of QAnon in recent years not only had a negative impact on climate issues, but also on many progressive political issues, including racial justice. "But research shows that they are not just anti-climate; these climate deniers spread hateful and anti-science content about lots of things. While they were focused on denying climate change in January, the group moved on to denying COVID-19 by March, and then by June, moved to conspiracy content to discredit the Movement for Black Lives" (Khoo and Ryan, 2020).

Other relevant articles included one titled ['Why Supporting 'Black Lives Matter' Could Mean A New Chapter For Environmentalism,'](#) which included a brief text excerpt and a link to an external article written by Katie Valentine for *ThinkProgress* (FOE, 12/19/2014). Interestingly, the actual title of Valentine's piece published by *ThinkProgress* was 'Why Supporting The Fight Against Racist Police Killings Could Mean A New Chapter In Environmentalism.' While this is purely speculative, I couldn't help but wonder if the political framing of "racist police killings" was deemed too much by FOE staff for some of its more moderate white members, whereas "Black Lives Matter" was seen as more member-friendly. However, other messages about defunding the police and police violence suggest a more critical focus on police violence.

Another article that came up in my search for 'Black Lives Matter' was titled ['H.R. 1: Our Environment And The New Age Civil Rights Movement,'](#) and was published March 8, 2019. Unlike most of the earlier articles, this one was written by La'Meshia Whittington-Kaminski, who was identified as a North Carolina democracy campaigner for FOE (Whittington-Kaminski,

2019). While her piece did not address the Black Lives Matter movement specifically, it did consider the history of the civil rights movement in the South and highlighted a number of parallels between political movements of the past and today, including Black voter suppression. Whittington-Kaminski also discussed the 2019 For the People Act (H.R. 1), which had been introduced early in 2019, but quickly died in the Senate later that spring. Whittington-Kaminski suggested this latest act was a modern day piece of civil rights legislation that sought to address systemic forms of racism and discrimination similar to bills in the 1960s. She also stressed the importance of developing an intersectional political analysis.

We recognize that communities of color are also environmental communities of interest that should be protected. These communities are bound by natural resources, natural disasters and fossil fuel infrastructures that contaminate their homes. These communities are not just bound solely by race, but are linked by the fact that corporations often choose predominantly minority-majority areas as their dumping ground—as seen by the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline, the proposed liquefied natural gas plants, the coal ash plants, the hog waste cesspools and numerous other industrial corporations. They are bound together through the devastation wreaked by climate disasters such as Hurricane Matthew and Hurricane Florence that touched several eastern North Carolina counties. These same communities of color experienced gentrification through disaster and aid that was promised through our legislature but was withheld through two storms. These communities suffered the brunt of climate change deniers. (Whittington-Kaminski, 2019)

Articles like this can help readers see more clearly the connections between issues of racial and environmental justice, even if they don't explicitly refer to the Black Lives Matter movement. For readers somewhat familiar with such issues already, even without mentioning BLM the implicit links to a common racial justice discourse are clear. It's also worth noting the author, La'Meshia Whittington-Kaminski, is a young Black woman whose analysis shares a number of insights commonly advanced by intersectionality theorists, drawing on ideas developed in the 1990s by Black feminist scholars and writers like Kimberlé Crenshaw and Angela Davis.

For example, Whittington-Kaminski argues that "To be inclusive is to recognize that Black and Brown communities are not one-dimensional. To think about communities of color as protecting a race is short-sighted. **Inclusivity must be designed to protect disenfranchised citizens who have historically been targets; to protect environmental communities who are**

fighting coal ash plants in Northampton, or pipelines in Nash and Robeson County; to protect those who are fighting the local school board for fair school redistricting for their children. These in addition to protecting Indigenous peoples who hold water sacred and Black farmers and residents who are fighting for the right to breathe without adult-onset asthma due to hog waste in the air" (Whittington-Kaminski 2019, emphasis in original). This is a good example of the value of an intersectional lens for bridge racial and environmental justice issues, even if the original focus on gender discrimination is absent here. It was also noteworthy for being one of only two articles that addressed Indigenous communities and environmental politics, in addition to raising issues about Black farmers in the Southern United States.

Two other marginally relevant articles that came up in the search included one titled ['Coalition calls on the DNC to focus on racial and environmental justice in March 6 Flint Democratic presidential debate'](#) from 2016 (FOE 3/2/2016) and another article titled ['Massachusetts Has An Environmental Justice Problem'](#) published on January 20, 2015. The first article was a FOE press release that, as its title implied, called on the DNC to address racial and environmental injustices as part of the 2016 DNC debates, using the backdrop of the water crisis in Flint, Michigan as a jumping off point. "The water crisis in Flint has captured the conscience of the world. Everything about it — callous bureaucrats, so-called cost-cutting measures, disregard of science — shows the institutionalized, systemic racism faced by low-wealth communities of color nationwide" (FOE, 3/2/2016). The other article on Massachusetts included some brief text and a link to an external website featuring an [NPR radio story](#) produced by the Living Lab Radio for a local Cape, Coast & Islands NPR station (FOE, 1/20/2105). As the story noted in its opening segment, "While the high-profile deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner at the hands of police have drawn national attention, there's a more insidious threat facing communities of color across the country - environmental pollution. In recent weeks, some environmentalists have drawn a connection, giving double meaning to slogans like 'Black Lives Matter' and 'I can't breathe'" (Cape, Coast and Islands 2015).

The piece went on to interview Daniel Faber, a professor of sociology at Northeastern University and director of the Northeastern Environmental Justice Research Collaborative. After mentioning how under-resourced most environmental justice groups are compared to big

environmental organizations, Faber then offered his perspective on the shifts underway among some environmental organizations to take earlier racial justice critiques seriously in their own work. Faber's comments here helpfully connect back to my earlier discussion since he references the problematic past of some of the "Big Ten" environmental groups and explicitly mentions FOE. "The attempts of groups like Sierra Club, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, and NRDC to connect with police brutality protestors is one example. More broadly, Faber says large environmental groups have begun stepping back and asking 'how can we help?' instead of trying to take control. Faber points to recent alliances between ranchers and Native Americans opposed to the Keystone XL pipeline as an example" (Cape, Coast and Islands 2015).

Similar to the article by Whittington-Kaminski, this piece briefly mentions the Black Lives Matter movement before turning to the broader landscape of racial and environmental injustice and how they intersect, in this case through local environmental justice issues in Massachusetts. Unfortunately, because this was an external website resource, it is hard to know if FOE members might have continued to read or listen to the piece or simply moved on.

Case Study Conclusions

With the preceding discussion in mind, I want to return to my two opening questions, which sought to better understand what resources were provided by FOE related to Juneteenth and the Black Lives Matter movement and how they framed their involvement with these issues and the connections between racial and environmental justice movements. As I have tried to show, FOE did have some engagement with issues of racial justice prior to broader social movement mobilization around Juneteenth in the summer of 2020.

The posts on their website prior to June 2020 give us some insight into how the organization was already engaging with racial justice issues, but as I have argued, their engagement was neither sustained nor deep. The clearest example of an earlier effort to draw out these connections was the 2019 post from North Carolina democracy campaigner La'Meshia Whittington-Kaminski. As I mentioned, her piece did not refer to the Black Lives Matter movement or Juneteenth, and was written the year before the mass actions in the summer of

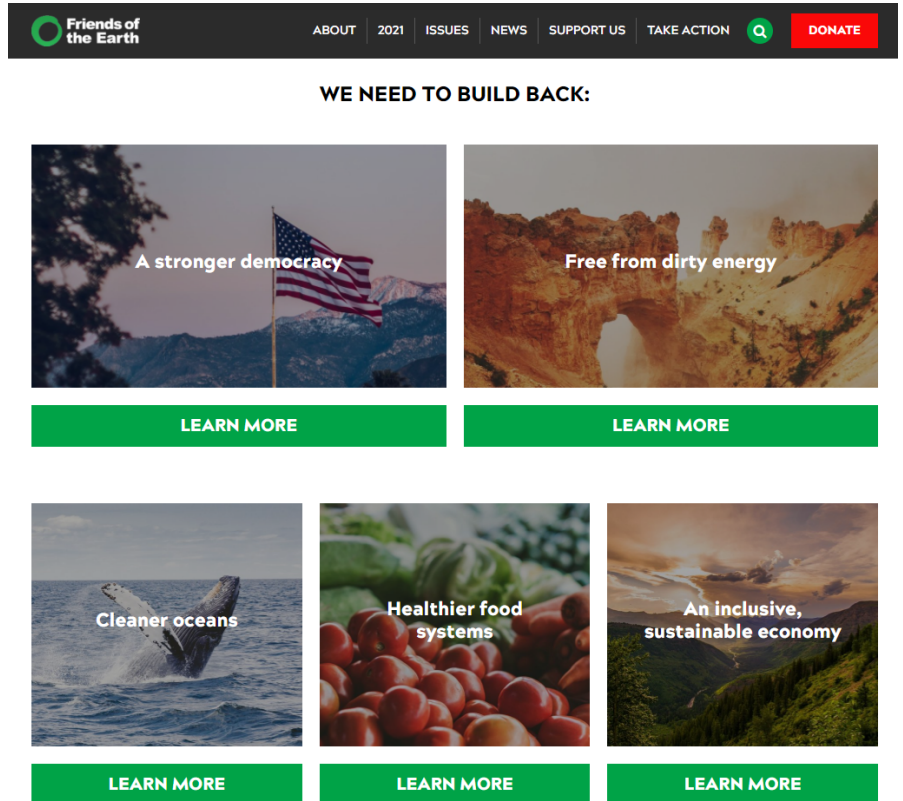
2020. The other examples I found, while including some mention of racial justice connection, were largely superficial, or else linked to external content not related to the work of FOE.

Despite comments from FOE President Erich Pina about the importance of racial justice issues to FOE, it appears that the surge of outreach in the lead up to Juneteenth did not emerge from a deep-seated engagement with racial justice or the Black Lives Matter movement. This finding echoes the findings of Taylor and others that most big environmental organizations continue to be dominated by a majority-white leadership and membership base and remain disconnected from broader communities of color and the environmental justice struggles they are engaged in on a daily basis.

When FOE did engage with these issues, their responses addressed several themes. The first was calling for an end to the systemic racism and violence faced by Black communities in the United States, in particular at the hands of police. This was linked to specific examples such as the murder of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, as well as a general criticism of the racial biases in policing in America. Second, and related, was a call for police reform, both in response to these killings and to the growing militarization of police departments nationwide. This critique was variously couched in the language of defunding the police, citing examples in Minneapolis and Los Angeles, or reinvesting in Black communities. Although the logic of this argument was never fully developed in their email, we might assume the idea is that financial resources freed up by defunding police departments could be re-allocated to support local Black communities. Third was an argument about democratic politics and political corruption (including unchecked corporate abuses), and the link between these and broader social and racial justice issues. As FOE argued in their various communications, in order to secure meaningful environmental reforms that would benefit Black communities we must first address our broken political system. This line of thinking, for example, was central to the entire piece by Whittington-Kaminski and helps explain the focus on H.R.1 as a bridge issue. This link was further strengthened by the fact that these topics were organized under the heading 'Democracy,' which as I noted earlier was one of the six major 'Issues' or program areas FOE works on.

The claim of Dorceta Taylor and many others about the ongoing disconnect between big environmental groups and racial justice issues finds further weight in a section titled '2021' on

the FOE homepage (Image 5), which lays out their 2021 political priorities under the tagline 'Build Back Better.' "We envision a once-in-generation just transition from an extractive economy to an ecologically regenerative society — a transformation that closes gaps in racial and wealth inequality, and creates a healthy and just world for us all" (FOE '2021'). Despite this claim, only two passing references are made to racial justice. One is a passing



mention under 'A stronger democracy' to the need to 'Tackle Voter Suppression,' which states that "Racist voter suppression tactics must be halted," while the other is a reference to public investments in communities of color as part of the Green New Deal under the heading 'An inclusive, sustainable economy' (FOE 'Stronger Democracy').

One might imagine that a deep commitment to racial justice and environmental change might have led FOE to identify Environmental or Climate Justice as a key priority for 2021, but this was not the case. This is doubly odd since recent communications in favor of Biden's nomination of Michael Regan as EPA administrator explicitly mentioned that FOE looked forward to working with the new administration because "**Regan and the EPA have a new opportunity to place environmental justice at the center of the agency and the United States' approach to the climate crisis**" (FOE 'EPA' 2021, emphasis added). An even stronger argument in favor of environmental and climate justice was made in a March 3, 2021 joint letter that FOE and other groups sent to Chuck Shumer urging him to abolish the Senate filibuster.

On behalf of the climate justice movement, communities on the frontlines of climate change, and our allied partners, we look to you to lead the rehabilitation of our institutions. That work must begin with abolishing the filibuster. Action on the climate crisis in a way that centers environmental justice should not be obstructed by a minority of Senators representing a minority of the country. Neither should progress be blocked by an even smaller minority of fossil fuel executives who have profited off of selecting as, and rendering disadvantaged communities into, sacrifice zones. ([FOE 'Filibuster' 2021](#))

Even more explicit than the March 3 letter was a March 18, 2021 joint letter from hundreds of activist groups, including FOE, opposing proposed definitions of clean energy in the CLEAN Future Act (H.R. 1512) and related Clean Energy Standards (CES) debates in Congress. Under a heading titled 'False solutions do not align with the principles of Environmental Justice' the letter argued that "Increasing the use of false solutions increases environmental racism, undercutting the environmental justice proposals in the current version of the CLEAN Future Act and rendering them specious. **Environmental justice must not be viewed as or reduced to a theory or political talking point. It is a set of living principles that must be practiced in an effort to dismantle years and decades of systemic racism, dehumanization, extraction, and the rendering of Black, brown, Indigenous, and poor communities into sacrifice zones.** The CLEAN Future Act and other CES proposals must remove false solutions to genuinely align with and adhere to these principles" ([FOE 'Fossil Fuels' 2021](#), emphasis added).

Since FOE is signing on to these letters, one would expect to see this emphasis on environmental justice (such as the references to systemic racism and sacrifice zones) clearly reflected in their website and other communications, yet with the few exceptions I have discussed, this is simply not the case. By contrast, the emphasis on electoral reforms and democratic politics is clearly and highly visible, yet the same cannot be said for this focus on racial justice or the importance of an environmental justice lens for understanding how racism and ecological issues intersect. I couldn't help but feel the letter is perhaps also meant as a movement self-critique of some of the very groups who signed the letter, particularly the part about watering down environmental justice or using it largely as a talking point. As my analysis shows, I think FOE can be considered guilty of doing precisely this at times.

To be fair, Friends of the Earth (along with the Sierra Club) does appear to be doing a better job of trying to address these issues compared to the other Big Ten environmental groups. But ultimately, signing letters supporting stronger efforts to address systemic racism and support environmental justice work is one thing. Earnestly putting those words into action is another.

As I have tried to show through both a review of the broad response of many environmental groups, as well as a more focused analysis of FOE communications, the gap that environmental justice scholars identified decades earlier is still quite evident today, even when the focus is explicitly on racial justice issues. While some groups have clearly taken the earlier environmental justice critiques to heart and have made efforts to seriously and substantively engage with these issues, the broader environmental political landscape in the United States, if these emails are any indication, still has a lot of work to do. The area where this seems to be the most developed so far is in relation to messaging around climate justice, as I noted earlier with my keyword frequency analysis. This makes intuitive sense given the growing role that climate justice issues are playing as a bridge between social and environmental issues globally, and suggests that perhaps a deeper focus on climate justice issues may be one important venue to help mainstream environmental organizations expand and deepen their understanding of the complex and interconnected issues of race, class, and the environment in the years ahead.

Appendix I - Group Emails (by date)

(Note: Emails with * were pages on the organization website which were linked to directly from the email, such as through a Read More button after a brief set of text. Although not strictly an "email" I have also included these, since they were included as part of the email messages.)

Date	Organization	Email Subject
6/2/2020	Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund	Stand With George Floyd: Life > Property
6/2/2020	Friends of the Earth	Sign now: Demand the officers who killed George Floyd be brought to justice
6/2/2020	Amazon Watch	Statement in Solidarity with the Black Lives Matter Movement
6/2/2020	Pachamama Alliance	Drawing on Indigenous Wisdom to Meet the Moment
6/2/2020	Pachamama Alliance	*A Message About the Black Lives Matter Movement
6/3/2020	Center for Humans and Nature	We stand in solidarity and love with Black lives.
6/3/2020	EarthRights International	Standing in Solidarity with Black Lives Matter
6/3/2020	Food and Water Action	Fighting to End a Corrupt and Racist System
6/4/2020	Friends of the Earth	Sign now: Demand officers who killed Breonna Taylor be brought to justice
6/4/2020	Movement Rights	Movement Rights Statement of Solidarity with the Movement for Black Lives
6/5/2020	Common Grounds Research Network	In Solidarity — Black Lives Matter
6/5/2020	Earth Guardians	Black lives matter. Every single one.

6/5/2020	Earth Island Journal	Our Promise to You
6/5/2020	Ohio Environmental Council	Black Lives Matter: Our Collective Call to Action
6/6/2020	Friends of the Earth	It's time for radical change. Are you with us?
6/7/2020	Columbus Community Bill of Rights	CCBOR Newsletter - June 7th, 2020
6/8/2020	Pachamama Alliance	Black Lives Matter.
6/9/2020	Endangered Species Coalition	ACTION: Congress must act to stop police violence
6/9/2020	Patheos - Social Justice Edition	Do We Need Cops?
6/10/2020	Friends of the Earth	Re: Our racist, capitalist system devalues life in the name of profit
6/11/2020	Global Witness	We are complicit
6/11/2020	Yale Environment 360	Can Europe Lead a Global Green Recovery?; plus The Deep Links Between Racism and Climate Change
6/12/2020	Friends of the Earth	Take Action: Put an end to systemic racism
6/12/2020	Pachamama Alliance	Discussing Black Lives Matter with Bill and Lynne Twist, and Rev. D
6/15/2020	Chronicle of Higher Education	Equity in 2020 Requires More Than a Diversity Statement - Chronicle Community Digest
6/15/2020	Move On	This Juneteenth we're mobilizing for justice
6/16/2020	Pachamama Alliance	*Panel Discussion: Black Lives Matter, Implications for a Connected Future
6/16/2020	Greenpeace	Let's show up for Juneteenth
6/16/2020	Power Shift	Climate Justice Depends on Ending Police Violence

6/16/2020	The Other 98%	National Moral March on Washington: A Digital Gathering
6/17/2020	Common Cause	Juneteenth: 3 important things you can do
6/17/2020	Amazon Watch	Take Action in Defense of Black Lives This Juneteenth!
6/18/2020	Friends of the Earth	Time for Action: Black people's lives are at risk -- Trump must resign
6/18/2020	Global Land Programme	A GLP statement of values and inclusion
6/18/2021	Endangered Species Coalition	Tomorrow is Juneteenth. Join us in mobilizing for Black lives and a new, just world.
6/19/2020	Earth Island Journal	Let's Set the Record Straight
6/19/2020	Friends of the Earth	Your signature needed: Tell Congress to invest in Black communities
6/23/2020	Council on Hemispheric Affairs	Reminder: "No Justice, No Peace!" George Floyd Breathes in the Cries of Millions
6/23/2020	GreenFaith	No going back to "normal"
6/23/2020	Patheos - Social Justice Edition	Does Our Advocacy Go Far Enough?
6/25/2020	Amazon Watch	"No One Is Free Until We Are All Free": The Movement for Black Lives and the Climate Justice Movement Are Inextricably Linked
6/26/2020	Community Rights US	Is there a unique role for the Community Rights movement to play in this extraordinary moment?
6/29/2020	Global Voices	Taking down statues: France confronts its colonial and slave trade past
6/29/2020	Power Shift	Check Out This Police Divestment Toolkit!
6/29/2020	Pachamama Alliance	*Pachamama Alliance Hosts a Series of Discussions Inspired by Black Lives Matter

6/30/2020	Pachamama Alliance	Black Lives Matter Town Hall with Rev. Deborah Johnson
7/1/2020	Gaia Foundation	Resilience in crisis - Gaia Solstice Newsletter
7/2/2020	Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology	Forum Newsletter (July 2020)
7/2/2020	Pachamama Alliance	Pachamama Alliance Summer Newsletter
7/3/2020	Earth Island Journal	The Cost of Incarceration
7/18/2020	Greenpeace	Greenpeacers Strike for Black Lives

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