



In collaboration with
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Transcript edited for clarity by narrator, Karen Campblin. Original audio and video are preserved.

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Interviewers: Megan Corey & Rachel Kamis

00:00 **Megan Corey** Okay, so just a little introduction. My name is Megan Corey. I am a second-year undergraduate at Duke.

00:12 **Rachel Kamis** Hi, I'm Rachel. I'm a third-year at Duke. I'm majoring in Cultural Anthropology, and minoring in Psychology, and I'm really excited to talk to you more and hear your story.

00:26 **Karen Campblin** And it's wonderful—it's great to be here. My name is Karen Campblin, and I'm in Northern Virginia.

00:33 **M.C.** **Great, so the first question that we just wanted to ask, you kind of already got started, but we were just wondering if you could tell us a little bit more about yourself: your name, which you already said, your position, and a little bit about your work and your connection to the environmental justice movement.**

00:52 **K.C.** Yeah. Like I said, my name is Karen Campblin. I'm in Northern Virginia—Fairfax County, to be exact. By day, I am a planner, so I do community development planning, focusing on transportation improvement projects, community revitalization projects, and public outreach, and I'm also an advocate in the environmental and climate justice space. Currently, I serve as the Environmental and Climate Justice, Chair of the Virginia State Conference NAACP, and I partner with a lot of different organizations throughout Virginia, in the pursuit of equality, fairness and transparency for all. I started advocating for environmental justice based on some of the experiences that I encountered as a planner,

in terms of seeing projects coming in and communities not really knowing how to mobilize, organize, and advocate for themselves. And so my environmental and climate justice focus is a little bit different than what I do professionally, but it's basically trying to make sure that, as we are looking towards developing things in the name of economic development, in the name of sustainability, in the name of moving forward, that there is a balance between the built environment and the human environment, and making sure that the community has access to the proper documentation to make informed decisions—but also have access to the table, to have their voices heard.

02:43	R.K.	That's awesome. Thank you for sharing that. Would you mind repeating the very beginning of when you said what you're involved with in your environmental justice advocacy. It cut out a bit. You could just repeat that first sentence, you were saying I'm involved with something in Virginia, and it got cut out.
03:00	K.C.	Oh no! I don't remember what I said!
03:06	R.K.	You were just saying what organizations you're involved with, I think.
03:14	K.C.	OK, so... I am the current Environmental and Climate Justice Chair for the Virginia State Conference NAACP, and I work with a lot of different organizations around the Commonwealth, on environmental and climate justice issues.
03:35	R.K.	OK, perfect. Yeah, that's all I was missing. So, I would love for you to—something that kinda struck me as you were talking, you were talking about the intersections between your work and climate, or environmental justice, and how you got involved in the movement through your work, but you still find it somewhat separate. I guess if you could talk more about the relationship between your work and your volunteering, and your activism, I'd love to hear more about that.
04:04	K.C.	Yeah, definitely. So, my volunteerism started before environmental justice. It started where I got involved in advocating for medical rights. I have two older parents; One was very ill at the time, and it was more senior care. And the more I

advocated for having dignity in the medical sector for aging community members, including my parents, the more I realized how much it was connected to other things, and I kept on going down deeper and deeper and deeper into this advocacy hole. And that's where I ended up in the environmental justice space, dealing with transportation—all of these things, it intersects, and it equates to making sure that our advancement does no harm. And we see that day and day, time and time again, in which, if there is a transportation project, it's always at the risk of the Black and Brown communities and communities of low wealth, to get those transportation projects in place to benefit more affluent areas, more economically vibrant areas, and there has to be a way—and so how do we make sure that happens? There are a lot of policy and regulations that are put in place, and we've heard a lot of different things about redlining and Jim Crow laws and all of those things; Even though those have been considered unconstitutional, the system that we're working with today is still functioning the way it was designed. And so, it takes both an inside game—people who are working with the policy, who [are] writing all these things—but it also takes an outside game, which is the community mobilizing together to say, “These things no longer work, this is where we are today, this is where we want to move into the future, this is our vision 20, 30, 50 years from now, and how do we work together to find the right policies?” And it was getting really frustrating because some of these changes [inaudible – happen on such incremental levels, we were like]. “Ok, well we're just gonna make sure that we put, whether it be sidewalks here, or we'd make a little tweak in here.” And it was about maybe five years ago I realized this incremental approach is no longer working, because the problems are just compounded. It's just building bigger and bigger and bigger, and communities and people are just—it's just having very harmful effects, that it is making it worse and worse, and now we're getting into this generational issue, in which we're preventing advancement for some generations. So, it needs a more radical approach. It needs practically a complete rebuild of some of the systems that are regulating and moving our projects forward. So, I don't know if I answered your question there—

00:07:24

R.K.

No, you definitely did, thank you. And Megan, I just have one follow-up question and then I'll let you jump in. So, with everything you're speaking about—remodeling the system, disabling the systematic structures that lead to this oppression, [these] issues, I'm just curious, because you have a very unique perspective, you're essentially an urban planner, right? I don't wanna misunderstand that. So you're kind of executing some of these projects, right, that directly work within these systems? So, in your opinion, what do you think are the solutions, like the new potential models that could create more equitable development. And then maybe we should...yeah, I'm very curious, so I just wanted to ask that.

08:13

K.C.

Yeah, let's take one of the biggest conversations that we have right now, which is transportation, right? Everybody was always like, "We have to save the environment," and a lot of advancement has occurred. And now, we're realizing the transportation sector is the largest contributing factor to greenhouse gas emissions, so what do we need to do? So that was one piece. The second piece that really resonates with me a lot is the effects from COVID, where we were in a complete lockdown, and how people looked at transportation kind of shifted, right? So, people weren't traveling from the suburbs to the downtowns to work anymore, they were doing hybrid. A lot of companies are now allowing employees to do hybrid work schedules, and during this time, we witnessed a decrease in ridership numbers for your more regional, longer commuter routes. But our local routes-maintained ridership.

So, it really kind of raised the flag that the way that our transportation system is designed, it was designed to support only a small fraction of our communities, which is the suburbs going down to the downtown centers, for work; Our local commutes where we really need it, really needs more focus on improving its transportation routes. It would provide—it would increase mobility for everybody, right? And what does that mean? It would increase accessibility for those who no longer drive, whether it's because of their age and their license had been taken away, right? So, we would be able to address social isolation, which is a medical issue among some communities. It would provide younger folks to have more access to better schools. It would provide people who need to stay closer to home because they have small schoolkids—single women-led households, they need to stay closer to their kids...even all families. So, we really need

to also start looking at that local approach. And that also equals to less miles traveled, right? So, we reduce greenhouse gas emissions from our cars. And so, it's those types of things that we, it just kind of has a domino effect, if we do this massive, robust redesign, how it would be able to appear in different types of communities is just—it's overwhelming. And it will just take, even though I say simple, but one move, which is: how do we redesign our transportation systems, where it's not trying to get from point A to point B, right? And without any regard to how it can help those people in between points.

11:41 **M.C.** **That was so super interesting, thank you. And kind of just backing up a bit, you mentioned how – you kind of explained your journey with advocacy and volunteering, and how you got into transportation, and work with urban landscapes, and you mentioned how you started with advocating for medical rights. So, I was wondering if you have kind of a specific moment or experience that brought you into specifically working with environmental and urban work, and that work that you do now.**

12:19 **K.C.** I did not have a ‘moment.’ I think I was having a conversation with somebody, and they said, the environmental justice—the environmental space (environmental justice wasn't a main term that I'd heard with great frequency), but it was, “Maybe, we need more diversity in the conversation on environmental work, and environmental advocacy; We need to start hearing viewpoints from Black and Brown people.” And so that's how they said, “Let's get involved—you need to get involved now.”

The Environmental and Climate Justice program with NAACP has been around for 14 years, and its evolution, I've always found very interesting. It started off by our former director, Jackie Patterson, she was brought on to to do a study on the ill-effects of the coal industry on Black and Brown miners. And so that study was housed within our Health Committee; Within NAACP and all of its units, there are different issue committees such as: justice reform, education, and all these different things. At this time, that program was housed under (the) Health Committee. And they did a lot of work, and found the harsh treatments and the harsh environment of the coal industry. And they started looking at pipelines and all of these other things, and how really impactful the fossil fuel and the oil and gas industries were on Black and Brown communities—but Black communities, in particular. And so, it then became a standalone, and organizationally, that means that all of the units within NAACP are now allowed... to develop

their own Environmental and Climate Justice committees within their own units, because now we're seeing that these are things that are happening around the country, and it's not just a big federal-level project, such as the coal industry, right? These are things that are happening on a grassroots, neighborhood level. And the more units started bringing that as part of their advocacy, the more NAACP really realized what a widespread issue it was. And then, in 2020, at the annual convention in New York, it was announced that the Environmental and Climate Justice program is now considered a Game Changer. And what the Game Changers are for NAACP? Issues that are deemed to have a significant influence on the Black community and everybody else. So now, it's up there (with) education, and justice reform, and next generation leadership.

And so, Environmental and Climate Justice Program (ECJ) has three simple objectives: The first one is to lower greenhouse gas emissions, and that's through efforts such as reducing vehicle miles travel, transitioning into a clean energy economy—working against pipelines whether new or an expansion of an existing (line), and supporting those clean and renewable and sustainable energies, such as solar and wind; The second objective is promoting energy efficiency, so that would include energy efficiency, building upgrades, those types of things; And then the third is promoting sustainability and resiliency, and that's where we talk about our emergency management—look at what happened with Hurricane Katrina – making sure that the Black community is part of the conversations about emergency planning, where we are making those plans ahead of time—when the extreme weather pattern is happening, that's too late for planning of what you're going to do for the Black community or the Brown communities, or communities of low wealth, so, making sure that we're part of the emergency planning management, making sure that we're certified in those types of things. So those are the program's three main objectives.

What is interesting, back in, I want to say 2019, NAACP was thinking of building a headquarters, and it was going to do a universal/energy efficient design, so the building could also serve as a demonstration project: This is what the energy efficiency—we were going to practice what we advocate, to show how do we incorporate energy efficiency in our homes and our commercial buildings, how do we do all these things? And as plans were being made, they realized how lacking in diversity the building sector was, so instead of moving forward with the building, a new program was initiated, Centering Equity in the Sustainable

Building Sector (CESBS), to help guide an equitable transformation of the building sector by identifying the why- what is the root, what are the solutions, and how do we get there. The program focused on three key areas for improvement:

And so that is: access to the resources and the information and knowledge, on how to upgrade your home or your commercial structure to be able to experience and benefit from energy efficiency, updated building codes, etc, to take advantage of us transitioning into a clean energy economy; Our economy is changing, so how do we make sure that Black and Brown contractors or vendors are able to have entrepreneurial competitiveness as we're doing this? So, there is also the business and workforce development piece; And then the third piece is, we have to make sure the pipeline of architects, of planners, of everybody—research and development for solar, all of these things need to also be accessible to the Black and Brown communities. We're not seeing students in the pipeline, it's not a diverse pipeline, so how do we make sure, academically, that all of these resources are made available to students, equally? Those are some of the programs that we're working on to ensure that as we're building solutions, we are also a part of it, not just giving feedback, but we have an active—not only an active role—but we're also benefiting. Right now, if you're looking at where pipelines are, or where toxic facilities are, and it's always a statement that everybody hears over and over again: These facilities are located in Black and Brown communities with the least amount of benefits. And so... we need to fix that. We need to shift that narrative and make sure that we're part of the solution—development and implementation of the solution, but we're also benefiting from that as well.

19:50

R.K.

Awesome. Thank you so much for all that information. It's really cool to hear that y'all are working on the future and future solutions, and how to make those equitable, because, as you said, we've had a lot of conversations about environmental justice and pollution, and that it's unfairly, unequally distributed on Black and Brown communities. And so, it's cool to hear that in addition to that focus, you guys are, you're thinking about the future. So, I wanted to ask you, pulling from one of the questions from our list, if you could just tell us a bit more about where you call home, what senses come to mind when you think of home, your experience in nature, growing up—things like that.

20:44

K.C.

OK, so originally, I am from Jamaica, and my early childhood was spent in Jamaica. I am not an ‘outdoor’ person, I will say, I’m not one to go camping, but I do have a very strong and deep appreciation of the outdoors. And so that might be a two-hour hike or something along those lines, but my sense in being a steward to the environment really started with just being in Jamaica—my parents, just always being in the land, and I had some aunts and uncles that were farmers, and cultivated orchids. So, it was always a part of me. So, whenever I think of home, I normally just think of some of the gardens that we would have in Jamaica.

But here, like I said, I’m located in Northern Virginia. Virginia is probably one of the most diverse—in terms of resources—states. We have got coastal, we have mountains, we have urban, we have suburban, and we have rural. Even within Fairfax County. Where I am, I can make a turn and drive a couple of miles, and I am by a one-lane bridge. And so, I love that there is a lot of biodiversity. And so, we have to make sure... as we develop, it is vitally important to make sure that we are not building an environment, for lack of a better term, that does not have the flora and fauna, such as native trees and birds. It is really important, and I know you probably heard a lot what’s going on about, making sure that we have tree canopy. I was a Tree Commissioner in Fairfax County for several years, and witnessed disparities and results of poor planning, there are some areas within Fairfax County with beautiful foliage, beautiful canopies, and you go into other areas and we do not have it. A heat study was conducted earlier, and areas like Tysons Corner¹—which is a massive economic driver—has hotspots within that area, that basically cannot properly sustain vegetation, just because the heat index is so high. So, it shows just how important it is to make sure that as we develop, we make sure we leave space for some kind of vegetation. Not only does it help lower the heat index, but it’s also a fantastic air scrubber, so it’s a win-win, and in some areas, it can help commercial and residential units keep their energy cost burden low.

So, I think for me, in my view, I just cannot see a future without a healthy and clean environment, to have a strong part of the conversation. Seeing how some of these decisions are moving, and how development and advancement has taken a such a priority over the environment is frustrating. And so, what can we do to make sure that that doesn’t happen? Development and environmental consideration can, and should, occur together.

¹ Tysons Corner Center, a major shopping center in Fairfax.

25:08 **M.C.** **Yeah, that's so interesting and so insightful. And I kind of have a two-pronged question along the lines of your work that you've done so far. What has been your favorite memory or accomplishment from your work, and on the flip side, what has been your most frustrating and troubling memory, if you have one?**

25:38 **K.C.** I think most troubling is seeing some of these reports—most troubling is hearing the stories, the narratives of people who are experiencing, and even just witnessing it with their own eyes. NAACP wrote a report, “Fumes Across the Fence-Line,” in which it identified that siting of some of these—not just uses—race is one of the main factors for where they are² sited. The report also identified that schoolchildren living within close proximity to these facilities experience, on average—collectively, of course—101,000 sick days per year due to upper respiratory issues caused by toxic emissions. Going back to the intersectionality of things, in my mind, what I envision when I read this was, you have a group of kids, whether they're in kindergarten or all the way up to twelfth grade, who are missing school, that is too early of an age to be put at a disadvantage. And then you have issues on being in an environment, in a space in which you don't have those trees to go tree bathing in, and some areas are so lucky to have that.

There are children that exhibit PTSD symptoms, which is frustrating that the lack of understanding of how important a clean environment is for a community (mentally and physically), and it pulls at your heartstrings. Sometimes you just need to be able to take some space and do some self-care, because it's just really, it's just heartbreaking. And just hearing these stories, and witnessing these stories, and being a part of it—and I think the, I forgot how you worded it, but the most positive experiences that I do have is those times when, even if it's a small win, in terms of saving a park from demolition, or seeing the creation of a community garden—or even higher, seeing a pipeline project be pulled off the books. And so, I think those are the positive experiences of being able to see the environment given a chance to be.

I feel like I have to end this on an optimistic note. There has been a lot of community mobilization, and coalition building over the past couple years. Witnessing grassroots participation in trying to combat some of these horrible projects that are still trying to move forward, seeing some of the grassroots allies who are going

² 'They're' references high-polluting commercial facilities.

for decision-making positions, on boards, commissions and in office.

29:59 **R.K.** **Thank you so much for all that. I guess we covered a lot of ground with that question. What I really took from it was fighting even for the small things is very important, and so having to do that and keep that in mind, as we simultaneously fight for larger policy changes that, hopefully, one day will make it so that you don't have to fight as hard to keep that park.**

But yeah, I wanted to follow up on one of your answers, a couple of questions ago—you were talking about the challenge of getting developers and environmental activists on the same page, getting developers to sacrifice a little bit of their profit margin for the sake of the environment. I was just hoping to hear a bit more about that and... the strategies to working with developers to try to get them to prioritize the environment a bit more.

31:09 **K.C.** It's still a work-in-progress, and I think it's going to take a lot of... pushback, I would say, and a lot of demanding. Good governance policies is also a part of the environmental justice fight. And what I mean by that is demanding that transparency is part of the process. So a lot of these development policies are not necessarily required to have 'adequate' public engagement periods. For instance, agencies can send out a technical document and have a public hearing, in some places within seven days, and for laymen such as me, if they have a pipeline project that they're trying to put through, I will need time to review it, and find my dictionary and Wikipedia, and whatever to determine exactly what it is they are trying to do, what does this legalese mean and how will it impact me, my family and my community. And so good governance in terms of making sure that people have have an opportunity to review and kind of digest it and formulate an educated response.

But also, there have been times where the information is not even readily available. So, if I'm housebound—because I'm ill, or whatever reason, or English is not my first language, or I have some visual impairment, or whatever impairment—the information should be required to be provided in multiple formats, and upon request. So, I'm not saying, "Do all 52 languages and have it available," because there is a financial consideration for localities, but a lot of those things, in terms of being able to keep up with projects within a community, the onus is placed on the

community, and it really should be on the developer, or the person who's putting the proposal forward, and the locality who's trying to do that. So I think that is part of it.

It is also working with the localities to change their policy and programs to require more robust and comprehensive public engagement programs, because, unless it's legally mandated, you can talk to the developer and hope for a good neighborly response, it's the laws that are required to change.

Finally, allowing for the community to provide information in multiple formats, and there's some people who prefer providing responses visually. So, let's say, for instance, there's a pipeline project that's coming through, it should be okay for property owners to easily submit video/ pictures to express for instance; "This is my family land, and here's all the things, and this is why it's important, and this is why there are intrinsic values to this".

in the end, marginalized communities must have a fairer way—I'm trying to figure out the best way to word it—to document the value of their land, and I mean this in terms of archaeological and historic resources. It is very difficult for the Black and Indigenous and other marginalized communities to have their story deemed valuable enough for preservation. There needs to be a more concerted effort of our localities or historical divisions. this is why I am really excited about your project. In addition to recording and documenting environmental justice stories, you're actually also documenting history.

When we were working on the, let's say, for instance, the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, and it was a proposed pipeline to go through a historically African American community, Union Hill, there were remnants of structures, albeit demolished it was evidence of the perseverance and establishment of this community by freedmen and women. Whenever there is a project, if it is found to have historic value, the chances that project given the approval to disrupt that land lessens. When these projects come through Black and Indigenous lands, it is very difficult for those historic resources to be taken into full account. And so, there was actually an archaeological study that says, "Even though there is remnants of the establishing the first settlement of this community, we do not feel that the historical value is significant enough for it to have any influence on the decision-making"—which is false.

And so, there's a lot of work to be done in terms of making sure that those are properly documented, and as days go by, we're

losing more and more of those historical significant resources, which highlights the contributions of Black and Brown and Indigenous peoples to the development of Virginia, and the advancement of the country as a whole. A couple years ago. I cannot remember the name of the association... but they identified that one of the most endangered historical resources in Virginia is Black history. I know we've passed legislation that is giving funding for it, but it's also who are the storytellers? And those storytellers are not the Black and Brown and Indigenous people. So there needs to be a focus on that, as well. How do we get those stories documented? How do we get those resources identified? There is a project in Hanover County, in which they are trying to build a Wegmans facility, and the community has been fighting that there is a known Black cemetery, but again, the official report they are getting from the archaeological survey that they're doing is that 'it's not significant enough to halt the development.' How do we protect the stories and the historic and archaeological resources of all communities here in Virginia? And when I say Virginia, I mean the entire United States, as well.

39:27 **R.K.** If I can jump in real quick. I have to step away for about five minutes to let my friend into the apartment, so I'm gonna let Megan take over, but I'll be back very shortly. Sorry about this.

39:37 **M.C.** **No worries. I was just going to say that that's such an important point, and one of the main aims with this project that we're doing is to preserve these communities' histories and... let them have ownership of their own voices. And you touched on this before, too, it's one thing to learn about environmental racism and redlining, but it's a completely different thing to actually hear these stories and connect with these communities on a more intimate level.**

And you also mentioned the mobilization of organizations, and your work with—working with localities, which is such an important and necessary aspect of environmental justice advocacy. So, I was wondering if you could kind of elaborate on the collaborative aspect of your work, and what kind of organizations, and maybe if there are specific people or communities that have helped you do your work.

40:42 **K.C.** Yeah, definitely. Let's see, There are a lot of amazing environmental justice organizations, and groups that are working, within the environmental space, focused on equity and inclusion, as well. I am a board member with the Virginia Conservation Network, and they look at a wide swath of environmental issues,

whether it's water quality, air quality, how do you ensure smart growth in the state, and at the heart of everything should be equity. And this is a policy that really took hold over the last three/four years. There's Virginia Organizing that has amazing leader—organizers and leaders. There's so many, there's CCAN [Chesapeake Climate Action Network], there's LCV [Virginia League of Conservation Voters], Generation 180,³ in terms of focusing on transportation... Each organization/group has their own focus, but the common goal is a just transition for everything.

So, sometimes I work with some, sometimes others. It just depends on where it is. A lot of the work, because I'm on a state level, is more on policy, legislation, and kind of bridge-building. It's the local community, the local units, whether it's—Pittsylvania had a compressor station that they were advocating against, so it was working with them, and they were working with other environmental justice movements within Virginia that are against pipelines—including Sierra Club and Virginia Interfaith Power & Light. So, it just depends on what it is that I'm working on, who are the primary point of contact, but, like I said, a lot of the grassroots work happens on a local level. And if it is regional effort, that's when I would jump in and take the lead, and coordination with our national office. We are getting ready to launch a campaign and get our local units to encourage their localities to seek federal funding for EV school buses. I think, what was it, 85 or 95% of school buses are still diesel, and going back to what I said about the fossil fuel and oil facilities are typically located in Black and Brown communities, so you have these transportation hubs, fueling stations, and all of those things are still located in Black and Brown communities; Transitioning our school buses over to clean energy will help to lessen the need for those types of facilities. Typically, these children have a longer bus ride to and from their schools, so transitioning to clean school bus fleet will result in not only less travel time on these diesel/fossil-fueled buses, but also lessen the need for operating transportation fueling hub to be located within their communities.

44:56	M.C.	That project with the transition from diesel-fuel school buses is something that is new to me, and that honestly makes me really excited for the future of environmental justice advocacy in addressing all of these issues that most people may not know about, but that are so important.
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³ Generation180, a clean energy-focused nonprofit.

And kind of a follow-up to this theme of collaboration—I can imagine how it might be challenging, bringing all these people with different focuses together, on a national level, regional level. So, what's the community like? Is it difficult collaborating with people? Or is it kind of uplifting that everyone has the same kind of goal?

45:51	K.C.	It's a little bit of both. I think there's still... everybody collaborates together. That's wonderful... but each organization has their own end goal. So, we share that common ground. It happens every time you work with a large group, there's kind of a mutual understanding, "Hey, I don't agree with you on certain things or it may not be the organization's primary objective.?" "Well, then, we'll just agree to disagree. You go off and do what you need to do, but just make sure that it's not conflicting with the big picture." And so sometimes you get a little bit of that happening. But for the most part, I think everyone understands, it is way beyond on the eleventh hour, we're approaching the—well, (not the) doomsday clock, I hate to be a pessimist—but I think everybody realizes that we are now in a state of urgency, and our urgency is now. And so, I believe everyone has become more focused and say, "This is the issue, and... this is what we need to work on." And this is where we are, we are in a state of urgency—from our coastal, midland, mountains etc....
47:31	R.K.	Hey. I'm back. Sorry about that. Megan, do you want to fill me in on what I missed, and then I can ask a question.
47:42	M.C.	Yeah, we were just talking about kind of the collaborative nature of the environmental justice work, and some of the challenges that environmental justice advocates face in trying to connect and collaborate with each other, and how there is a community, and everyone has an end goal, but it is kind of difficult (balancing) different, smaller goals and projects.
48:15	R.K.	Oh, OK, awesome. Yeah, I caught the end of that, so I feel caught up, thank you. So, kind of jumping off of that, talking about challenges and movement, Karen, what do you think are the biggest challenges that currently face environmental justice advocates?
48:33	K.C.	And this may sound a little bit contradictory to what I said, in that it's wonderful with all of the mobilization, but I think the biggest challenge is getting more people involved. And maybe, for me, I think, I would expect that we would have been in more of an outreach crisis than we are. It's always the same people in the

same space. And don't get me wrong, it's a lot of people, but it is also a space of burnout, because it's always the same people. But I think... as each day progresses, (unfortunately, and we're moving closer and closer to the end), we are starting to see more people mobilizing, but we are not seeing the change. in terms of the conversation on the legislative side. There is a lot of work being done locally, but I think the challenge is making sure that what we do locally cannot be reversed easily, so there is also a political component; Whoever is in power can take us out of something.

And so it's frustrating, for instance, in 2020, we entered—when I say “we”, I mean Virginia—entered into the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative. It's a cap-and-trade program, but it generates a lot of money, a lot of funds. And according to the legislation, 40 percent goes to environmental justice communities to support energy efficiency programs and flooding programs, either coastal or inland. And this current administration wants to take us out of it, but there isn't an alternate to the funding stream, particularly for flooding issues. And so, here is an instance where we made this great advancement on how to help restore and rebuild communities that have been damaged and ignored for decades that could be reversed—despite the great work that has occurred. And so, that's the challenge. How do you protect some of these advancements?

But not only that, it's also how do you get communities to be aware of it? So, I'm quite sure there are a lot of environmental justice communities that are not aware that these funds are available. It is kind of like, how do we protect, and how do we build awareness and expand the program at the same time? And there are only so many people that are working on this. NAACP is a civil rights organization committed to ensuring environmental protections will benefit all and through our units throughout the Commonwealth we are educating our members but it is a balancing act – getting the resources that are needed to get more people involved, making sure all voices heard, and also protect existing programs.

52:51

M.C.

You're so right. I think we're at kind of this crucial point in history, concerning the environment, and there's just so many challenges that we face today in addressing problems with the climate and inequality. And it can kind of be a little bit disheartening at times, so I completely understand that. And maintaining this future focus, but maybe in a more positive way, what is your vision for the future of this movement, and,

kind of more specifically, what makes you excited for the future of the Environmental Justice Movement?

53:36	K.C.	If I had my druthers, the kind of future? Or this is the trend kind of future?
53:46	M.C.	Either way, take your pick – more realistic or more optimistic.
53:56	K.C.	<p>I'll try and find a balance, but I think... a good friend of mine said this of her advocacy work, and I think it's absolutely true, is: her goal is to get this role to be redundant/no longer required. And it is true, and that is really my goal. I want get to be able to say this form of advocacy is no longer needed – equitable legislation and policies are in place, everyone has access, there is transparency etc. I would love a future where I feel as if my time is not needed anymore. And so that would be: we entered into a just and clean energy society, we are 100%, using clean energy, (a) clean energy grid, we've got micro grids, we've got all of those different things, and there are no barriers based on race, color, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, age, gender, religion etc. There should be no barriers, for the pursuit of anything. And then, it is up to the individual to pursue their goals to their fullest and brightest potential. So that is removing any vestiges of the influence of harmful and racist policies such as redlining, and removing those Jim Crow laws that are still on the books, that can still be pulled out on demand.</p> <p>We should also allow for non-traditional planning and smart growth techniques that support smart cities. Such as allowing high rises to have vertical gardens/vegetation., We should not have to be in the suburbs/rural areas to have a healthy tree canopy or lush vegetation, We have to start thinking of ways of doing that. Whether it's changing our zoning codes; another example a parking lots that are three/four/five stories high, but let's make sure that we have something on that front facade to soften it. Why, can't buildings/infrastructure have more than one purpose? So, let's get that vertical garden or solar panels on bus stops. Let's look at what we have before we go to undeveloped land, because there's a good portion of what we need that can be done in lands that we already have disrupted the environment. And how do we do that?</p> <p>There is a project down in the Route 1, where they are introducing more active transportation, so that's having it BRT⁴ circulators,</p>

⁴ Bus Rapid Transit, a short-distance, fixed-route bus system

sidewalks, adding tree canopy, all of these—undergrounding the street lights, which is fantastic during storms. But they also daylighted streams and they're bringing these things back to their natural flow. Those things can be done. This is what we should be figuring out: How do we retrofit past development mistakes?

59:27 **R.K.** **It was the future for environmental justice, I believe. But you did cover it, and your response was very interesting. I appreciated it so, yes, a little bit off-topic, but it was super interesting, and I think it actually tied it together `cause as the future comes, we need to approach it with concrete strategies, and you detailed one of them, very nicely. So kind of on a similar note, I was wondering if you have any advice for people who want to get involved in environmental justice work, and what you'd say... to them.**

01:00:07 **K.C.** I would say: “Make it fast, do it now.” But a lot of people are like, “I’m interested in it, but I don’t have a background,” or “I don’t know anything about the environment,” or “I don’t like speaking in public,” or all of these different things, and my advice is: everyone has their strength, and there is a need for every strength. So, if you’re a singer, create songs, sing and create TikTok videos,. If you’re a writer, and you don’t like talking to people, consider writing op-eds, blogs etc.or... working with a group to write an issue/research paper. You love talking to people: help canvass neighborhoods, inform and educate folks of the urgency and getting them encouraged and engaged—sometimes people just need to hear it and get that invite to be part of the space. You have a technical background—as I said, there are so many technical documents that is being bombarded in the community and public space, that people need translators. there is a strong need for help to translate that legalese speak, help a community to figure out what is it that they are encountering. You like to lead folks: we need organizers to mobilize organized movements to do things like go and speak to your local board of supervisors or other community partners.

There is always something that can be done. So, my advice would be: if you want to get involved, just find, an organization that is doing what resonates with you, where your passion is, and then go out and meet them, and figure out where the holes are, and how you can join. But it should also be a space in which you are comfortable. It should be a space in which you can flourish, and it should be in a space that respects you and uses your strength. If you have to go in and reinvent yourself, that’s not the space for

you, because... your self-care and your mental capacity is as important as fighting for the environment, and we need all the people in the fight as possible, so we don't all experience mental and physical burnout.

01:04:52 M.C. Yeah, that is great advice, and really inspiring to younger generations, especially those individuals who are trying to get involved and don't really know how to start.

I also found your explanation of integrating nature into urban spaces really fascinating, especially because you had mentioned before how the NAACP was considering doing that work with their own headquarters and their own buildings, so that definitely tied back to that. Those are all of the questions that I had, that I think that we had prepared, and we were just wondering if there's anything that we didn't quite touch on with those questions—you shared so much about your work, but is there anything else that you wanted to touch on or maybe share that we didn't get to?

01:05:45 K.C. I think the only thing, and I think I already mentioned it, is how important it is for the... environmental justice community to be able to tell their story. But I think there's also a need to view those stories not just as stories, but expert testimony. For instance, is a locality hires a consultant the project cost could exceed hundreds of thousands of dollars, depending on the size and scope of the project. The consultant then reaches out to the community and solicits feedback (the expert testimony) from the community, and the community does not see any tangible benefit from providing their time and resources to the product. So, regardless of where and how they are participating, there... has to be a consideration—an active effort in providing a benefit. Whether it's through a stipend, whether it's through developing a paying position in that project. And so, when we're talking to the environmental justice communities, we need to, one, make sure that they are viewed as providing expert testimony, and that their time is valuable, cited, and properly compensated, as well.

01:07:52 M.C. Yeah, definitely, the idea of having community members retain the rights to their own stories, and I think there's so many problems with erasure and marginalization of their voices. And, like you said, these communities know themselves best, and they know their histories best, and they should be considered experts, 'cause they are, at the end of the day. That's a great point, and I'm glad we could touch on that more.

01:08:23 **K.C.** And...the other thing I forgot, I've been in a couple spaces in which somebody would say, "Why do localities do not believe that the certified expertise that they need does not exist in the community?" And so, within the environmental justice community, they could have their own engineers, their own chemists, their own whatever—those roles also exist in the communities that they're going to. And so we should always anticipate that they exist there.

One of the things that I'm noticing—and I'm sorry, I know you were getting ready to end—but, with improvement projects in particular, going in and making sure that the existing community is protected because location, location, location. The moment an improvement project gets online, the attractiveness of the location increases significantly, and therefore its value, and it lowers the affordability of some of the folks or senior citizens on pension, people working two/three jobs because we still haven't reached the living wage, which is another big thing. So there are all these different issues within the community, so we have to also think of ways to protect existing residents.

So there are a lot of different things in terms of environmental justice—(it) incorporates the environment, it incorporates economic development, it incorporates the education, it incorporates economic justice, and all of these different things.

01:11:25 **M.C.** **No, I think that that was very well-put. I think, I remember, was it Hanover that you were talking about the installation of the Wegmans on a historical cemetery, and that just reminded me of issues with gentrification, and how all these salient issues, like you said, are so interconnected.**

01:11:50 **K.C.** Yeah, and then in Hanover, they've got a municipal airport, they've got a couple major highways that are intersected, and now they're bringing (in) this big distribution center that's going to increase traffic. And so, all of these things are compounded in this historically African American community. You don't see that in the suburbs. You don't see a concentration of all of these uses within a five/ten-mile radius of anywhere, unless it's in a Black and Brown, or a community of low wealth.

In Virginia, our air quality monitoring system is inadequate, making it difficult to properly address 'cumulative impact'. More

data is needed. The Clinicians of Virginia⁵ are great work in raising awareness about air quality and its associated health issues.

01:14:16 **R.K.** **Yeah, it's definitely very frustrating. And I think that everything you've said today really highlights the interdisciplinary nature of environmental justice, and how the environment is something that is important and necessary for all of us, and there's a space for everyone to contribute into making our world, our environment more equitable. So, thank you so much, Karen, you're incredibly knowledgeable, and you've shared so many amazing insights during our call today, and I really appreciate it, I'm sure Megan also really appreciates it, and on behalf of Duke University, Duke University really appreciates it. And if you have anything more you want to share, I don't have anywhere to go, so the floor is still open. If you have any more thoughts, we can continue talking.**

01:15:10 **K.C.** **I think that was it, really. I just wanted to make sure to kind of highlight the wealth of resources that are available within the EJ communities. So, as we fight to stop the bad practices, recognizing the wealth of history that's there, the wealth of knowledge that's there, and be able to celebrate—and... that's what made me think about it because what you are doing with your project is doing exactly what we need, and on statewide—nationwide scale.**

01:18:13 **R.K.** **Well, thank you so much, and I totally agree, it's a global conversation. We only got one Earth. So, I just wanna update you a little bit on future steps so we're on the same page. As we kinda discussed in the beginning, if you could please send us your informed consent form as soon as possible that'd be great, Thank you. And then we will be in touch sometime in March. I don't know when exactly, but in March, we'll send over the transcript. And you will be able to review it, tell us if there is any sections you would like redacted, anything that you would like edited, things like that. And after that, the transcript and video will be posted to our site, which is not currently up yet, but it should be up soon, in the summer at some point, and potentially on some other sites.**

But, as you know, this footage, this transcript, it is all your property. It's your voice. So, if there's anything that you don't

⁵ Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action, a group of medical professionals advocating for environmental issue solutions, for the sake of health outcomes.

want to be up, or if you don't want on a certain site, tell us, and we will make sure that doesn't happen. Do you have any questions before we end our call?

01:19:24	K.C.	No, you guys were pretty clear. I'm all good.
01:19:27	R.K.	All right. Thank you so much for your time. We really appreciate it.
01:19:32	M.C.	Also, I just wanted to add, I'm so glad that you could underscore environmental justice on a global scale. I think that was a great way to end our conversation, and thank you again so much. Your involvement with this project has been so invaluable, and it's been an honor to hear about your work, and your story, and your perspective. Like Rachel said, we'll send back your transcript to you, so that you can make sure aligns with your voice. We'll add a description also, so we can send that to you, as well. That goes beside this oral history, and if there's anything that you would like to be showcased in conjunction with your story—any photos or another project that you're working on, a link to a video or to a website, feel free to send that to us, and we can add that to the description, as well. But yeah, that's pretty much it. Thank you so much again, and we'll be in touch, for sure.
01:20:36	K.C.	Oh, thank you. Well, thank you for your time. This was an honor for me, as well, to be a part of this, so I look forward to hearing from you, and this was fun. I was a little bit nervous, as you could tell in the beginning, but you both are amazing moderators and made it easy, so thank you.