

## **2016 Greenfield Peace Writing Scholarship Honorable Mention**

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The immediacy of climate change is hard for some to see firsthand. Though a city dweller in Portland, Oregon may not witness an alteration in the usual dreary weather, someone in Kiribati is trying to keep their home above water. But while climate change may be a distant topic, one does not need to look far to find stories addressing the oppression of African Americans, another fatal police shooting, or rallies against the government. The United States, though a prominent world leader for progress and innovation, is reluctant to change its own system. The issue of racial equality and unjustified treatment from the government is far more relatable to Americans. All across the country, people are unifying to demand just treatment. This could be the key to transforming the influence governmental decisions, thus providing valuable solutions to climate change.

In the video “This Changes Everything,” Naomi Klein highlights the problems Native Americans faced when their protected land was confiscated to make way for fossil fuel extraction sites. The Beaver Lake Cree watched their traditional land be destroyed, without even access to their sacred burial grounds. Klein explains how these are “sacrifice zones”. Not only resources are being stolen, but the rights of the people living there have become nonexistent. They are sacrificed along with the land. This is the perspective that many fear is dictating government decisions: certain people and where they live have a lower priority than others. How can we expect to assist refugees from drowning islands when society is already tainted by inequality? Will government similarly see their presumed fate as a sacrifice? Has climate change created a new apartheid?

However, current movements to combat racism show that peace and unity is possible by calling attention to blatant inequality. For instance, the Black Lives Matter movement is a tremendous step toward transforming how society values every person of every race. The goal of the movement is not just to spread the idea that black lives matter, but that no life is superior to another. Those around the world suffering from climate change’s consequences and the oppressed in local communities alike will not be seen as expendable, and will be justly treated the way they have always deserved. Black Lives Matter exemplifies what can happen when the oppressed are aware that they are valued.

The turning point will not be spraying chemicals into the atmosphere in an attempt to artificially deflect solar heat. Proposing empty promises to solve issues in 2025 or 2030 refuses to address the inequality that has plagued the United States for centuries. The key is to ensure that all voices are not only heard but taken into account. The global aspect of a climate change movement will emulate the unity created by anti-racism movements, and people will realize they do not have to succumb to the neglect of first world countries. Committing to a climate movement will end the mentality of saving the Global North’s values at the expense of the Global South. The Black Lives Matter movement is exemplary of how unity instigates progress, and no one is considered a sacrifice.