

Intro Music

Keely Kriho: Welcome to Just Justice, a podcast created by a group of John Lewis Fellows seeking to answer the question, what is intergenerational justice?

But first, let me provide a bit of background. The John Lewis Fellowship is an Atlanta-based Fellowship through Humanity in Action. This summer, we came together—virtually, due to the COVID-19 pandemic—to discuss issues related to democracy, human rights, social justice, and other complex and important topics through the lens of civil rights and ongoing activism of Black communities in the US South. The Fellowship includes folks from all over the US, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and Poland. Though our Fellowship was virtual this summer, it had deep and lasting impacts in terms of how we conceptualize justice.

It would be remiss not to contextualize our Fellowship experience with the events taking place as we virtually connected for three weeks. On Zoom, as we discussed what justice means in our communities, outside in the streets protests erupted as a result of ongoing police violence against the Black community, in particular the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery at the hands of police. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic also reached its first peak in North America and Europe, and thus most Fellows were in lockdown or quarantine during the three-week Fellowship. In this context, conversations about justice were understandably more challenging and also held greater relevance given the historical moment they were situated within.

Our group was tasked with answering questions specifically about intergenerational justice. First, what is intergenerational justice? Second, what does or could intergenerational justice look like when applied to climate justice? And third, how can intergenerational justice be used as a tool to begin to combat climate change at the theoretical and practical level?

To find answers to these questions took our entire team of dedicated John Lewis Fellows. I'll let them introduce themselves.

Piper Prolago: My name is Piper Prolago, I use she/her pronouns, and I'm currently living in Wichita, Kansas.

Sonja Kosanovic: My name is Sonja Kosanovic, I use she/her pronouns, and I come from Bosnia and Herzegovina which is where I currently live.

Mahir Turkmen: My name is Mahir Turkmen, my pronouns are he/him, and I'm living in Berlin.

Beth Awano: My name is Beth Awano, I use she/her pronouns, and I'm originally from New York but living in Chicago, Illinois.

Keely Kriho: And my name is Keely Kriho, I use she/her pronouns, and I'm originally from Chicago, Illinois and currently living in Pembroke, North Carolina, and I'll be your host for today's podcast.

Keely: Our group quickly realized that we wanted to center the voices of folks already thinking about and acting within various frameworks of intergenerational justice for the project. This seemed like a more enlightening and exciting way to structure and guide the podcast. So we invited three guests who each bring a unique perspective to the intersectionality of our two themes: intergenerational justice and climate justice.

Now, before we dive into our interviews, it's important for us to first generally define the term "intergenerational justice," the core of today's discussion. Intergenerational justice is a particularly empathetic form of justice; it requires us, by nature, to advocate for someone other than ourselves, for individuals who have not even been born. Essential in advocacy for the future is the recognition that promoting justice does not just mean justice for ourselves, but for everyone, past, present, and future.

The first person we interviewed was Dr. Tina Sikka. Our team learned about Dr. Sikka's work when doing initial research for the project. We came across her article titled, "Will the Idea of Intergenerational Justice Mobilize Us Into Climate Action?" The article argues that an inextricable link exists between redressing environmental racism and seeking intergenerational justice. Here's Dr. Sikka:

Tina: Tina Sikka is my name. I use she/her pronouns. I'm a lecturer in media, culture and heritage at Newcastle university in the UK. A lot of the work I'm doing now is around social studies and science and technology. And I use feminist approaches to science to look at different kinds of scientific practices, like climate change and environmental science and also health science and nutrition. Looking at gender race and science is something that I sort of focus a lot on.

Keely: In defining intergenerational justice for us, Dr. Sikka shares the following definition.

Tina: Looking at intergenerational justice, it's really about, it not just being a synchronous, but an asynchronous sort of idea that, we are also placed to think about our obligations to subsequent generations and that our actions and what we do is important to the extent that they don't have a voice but they're going to live without decisions. So thinking about intergenerational justice is how can we accord justice and just a sense of what do we owe generations going forward.

Keely: Dr. Sikka defines Intergenerational justice as "those responsibilities and duties the present generation has towards the next generation and those that come after it." Our second interviewee, Roo George-Warren, provided a new framework for understanding what intergenerational justice could mean. Roo, a Humanity in Action Fellow a few years before us, gave two presentations during our virtual Fellowship about colonialism in the US and globally. Roo brought the lens of settler colonialism into our Fellowship conversations, and we wanted to see how that might change or complicate our understanding of intergenerational justice.

Roo: My name is DeLesslin George Warren, but everyone calls me Roo - like kangaroo. I'm a citizen of Catawba nation. I use he/him or they/them, or any pronoun said with love is fine by me. I am a consultant and my primary clients are my tribal nation, the Catawba Indian Nation.

And so those projects include educational sovereignty, justice and healing work that we're doing, language revitalization, food sovereignty, and right now a lot of COVID response stuff.

Keely: For their HIA action project, Roo created the “Indigenous Corps of Discovery,” a performance-tour that intervenes in the colonial narratives perpetuated by museums by reframing exhibitions through the stories and histories of Catawba Nation and other Indigenous communities. We asked Roo what their definition of Intergenerational Justice is:

Roo: A lot of the rhetoric about the next generations even, are focused on, “I want my grandkids and great grandkids to have nature.” And it is, that is not the value that a lot of indigenous communities are operating under.

So there's lots of great phrases that get used around Indian country. One of them is “be a good ancestor,” which I love. It's recognizing that you want to be a good ancestor, but it's also not necessarily, it's not making it implicit, although I think when we're coming from a Western or European perspective, we might imply this, but it's not saying the people that you will be biologically related to. Right? Because that definition of descendancy is really, really tied up in colonialism.

Um, I believe it's the Haudenoshonee and several other tribes have similar practices to this and my tribe also talks about this sort of thing, but we're not talking about the next generation or the next generation or the next generation, we're talking about seven generations into the future, right? So when we're talking about the timescale of what our responsibilities are, we are not talking about the next 50 years, the next 100 years, the next 200 years, right? We're talking about a long time. And I think that is also born out of the fact that, as indigenous communities, when we talk about the need to protect our stories and our culture and our dances and our music and all these things, what we're saying is we want to protect our knowledge because what that knowledge brings to us is a perspective that is much, much, much longer than the timeline that the United States is very comfortable with talking about.

Keely: Roo’s discussion of the expansiveness of the concept of ancestry raised an important point in our conversation of intergenerational justice. Not only do we have an obligation to accord justice to our children, and our children’s children, but in fact, we have a responsibility to do so for future generations regardless of biological lineage.

Thinking about climate change, our team wanted to talk with someone working in movement-building in the US South and understand how their work was influenced by or compared to intergenerational justice. We were able to talk with Matt, a member of Sunrise Movement in Durham, North Carolina. Here’s Matt.

Matt: I’m Matt Wisner. I'm 22 and my pronouns are he/him and I'm a part of Sunrise Movement. Yeah, I think I've been with Sunrise for a little over a year now, about a year. Sunrise Movement is an army of young people. We are fighting for a Green New Deal and it's a ten year transition for the entire U.S. economy to move from being based on fossil fuels to renewable energy and the whole thing also centers like social justice while doing it.

Keely: As a member of the Sunrise Movement, Matt draws our attention to an active example of an organization that recognizes the intersectionality of climate justice and intergenerational justice.

Music Break

Keely: Now that we've briefly defined intergenerational justice, it's important to ground our theoretical understanding in a more tangible example. To do so, we'll focus on how this dimension of justice is applied in the fight for climate justice, which is also called environmental justice.

Tina: For climate justice, I guess I'll start there, it really is about creating a kind of approach to nature and the natural world just sort of in general where we break down the binaries between nature - culture. And so a lot of approaches to environmental justice is really about starting to think about ourselves as part of the natural world and then think about our obligations to the natural world in which we are inextricably linked to everything around us.

Keely: As Dr. Sikka will elaborate, our discussion of intergenerational justice and climate justice would be incomplete without discussing the effect of intersectionality, or how people's interconnected social categorizations and identities such as race, class, and gender create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. Dr. Sikka sees the environment as the site of intersecting inequalities that highlight the importance of approaching environmental racism through the lens of intergenerational justice.

Tina: Yeah, I think when we're talking about environmental justice, part of it is looking at it as a, as a very intersectional concept where you can kind of ground inequalities that exist in the environment. If we want environmental justice, we have to attend to these intersectional sites of oppression and marginalization. You know, they tend to have to bear the brunt of the effects of, of environmental change and environmental destruction. And so any idea or any concept of environmental justice has to take account and to really attend to the different kinds of injustices that work together, and then looking at them synergistically as well. So not just the marginalized racialized group, but marginalized, racialized women, and how that type of justice and injustice works differently for different kinds of identity positions.

Keely: The empathy inherent in the framework of intergenerational justice is particularly urgent for those who have already begun to feel the effects of environmental racism. Allocating hazardous pollutants to be dumped in already marginalized communities, for example, not only immediately threatens the health of these individuals in the present, but also further solidifies the division of resources and opportunity that disempower Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, abbreviated BIPOC. These actions are not only representative of an overarching problem of pollution, but also foreshadow the means by which communities of color do, and will continue, to feel the effects of pollution sooner and more urgently.

Based on the disproportionate effects of environmental pollution felt by BIPOC, understanding intergenerational justice requires an intersectional approach. Contemporary solutions to future

problems cannot be fully realized without a consideration of how these problems have already begun to affect people today.

Matt and other Sunrise Movement organizers also recognize the importance of fighting against environmental injustice by centering the experiences of BIPOC communities in the present.

Matt: How the Green New Deal is written right now, it's kind of authored in a way that acknowledges that black people and poor people in particular are harmed first and worst by the climate crisis. So that can mean a lot of things. Environmental injustice is the fact that, you know, these disgusting industrial hog farms are built in majority black communities, in poor communities. And it's not an accident that these massive corporations who are profiting off of ravaging acres and acres of land with pig feces, it's not an accident that they're in towns that are all black. And that's true, a lot of things, right? Like there's, you know, when it comes to climate change, I think we talked about emissions a lot and like, something that isn't often talked about is that highways go right through poor and generate black communities. And truck stops are in those communities. And, you know, those are the people that have to breathe the dirtiest air and not have clean drinking water all the time. And I think a lot of times with climate change, we talk about it as something that's kind of abstract and distant, but I think for a lot of people, the consequences of the climate crisis are here right now.

Whenever we're protesting the construction of something, there's always like racism implicated in, in whatever project is proposed, right? Like basically there's no nasty project that's gonna affect somebody's air to breathe or water to drink, unless it's a poor community or a Black community, or it's the entire global South.

Keely: Matt's statement of the climate crisis being present in the here and now for marginalized communities echoes Dr. Sikka and Roo's emphasis on thinking about environmental racism as an intergenerational phenomenon that requires examining the past injustices inflicted on particular marginalized communities.

Tina: Environmental racism is a very intergenerational phenomenon. You can trace it back to slavery, you can trace it back to colonialism and that rooting an idea of environmental justice and the past and the past history is really important because it sets the ground for making us start to think about the kinds of environmental legacies we're going to be remembered for in a hundred years or so.

Keely: In the same vein of thinking to the past to inform the future, Roo applied the framework of settler colonialism to thinking about intergenerational justice and climate justice.

Roo: When we think about the breadth of environmental racism, um, and I'm going to use more of the term settler colonialism, because that's the story that I'm more familiar with talking through. And also because as someone who is seen by the world as white, even though I'm a Catawba, I don't identify as a person of color. So I try and make it a practice of mine to not speak on, speak authoritatively on racism. Cause it's like, it's not my experience. I don't know. But in terms of settler colonialism, we have to think about that there was a purposeful, not just removal of people from the land and the land state stayed static, but the land itself was changed in a

drastic way, right? And so this is a process that is at the heart of settler colonialism - is changing the landscape.

Keely: Roo explained the way that environmental racism has affected and continues to affect Native communities through the example of the Fish Wars, which they explain here.

Roo: So it was a conflict that really came to a head in the '60s in which tribes in the Pacific Northwest were asserting their fishing rights. So usually when treaties are made there's stipulations, like hunt and fish will not be impeded. So pretty standard, like pretty strong language. But then States and federal governments come in and say, "Oh no, you can only take five fish this year or something like that." And so try just saying, no, you can't actually tell us how to manage this resource because that's not part of the deal. And so they started doing fish-ins where they would build fishing villages in these places where they were told that they could not fish and they would actually fish these rivers and then take that fish to their community to feed their community. And so it was a long standing fight that was happening in the Pacific Northwest.

Keely: The Fish Wars are one of many examples of the ways that environmental racism and settler colonial logic denied the treaty rights of Native peoples. The activism of Native fishers that Roo described escalated and eventually resulted in the federal government suing the state of Washington in 1974 in the Supreme Court case *United States v. Washington*. The Bolt Decision, which is the widely-known outcome of this court case, reaffirmed the rights of Native peoples to co-manage the fish in the Puget Sound region and to use and harvest the fish along the guidelines of the original treaty agreements. This victory for Native peoples also constituted a victory for environmental justice. To read more about the Fish Wars, visit a resource that Roo shared with us at the URL <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/pnw-fish-wars>. Link is also in the podcast description.

Music Break

Keely: As we look to the future, climate change is one of the most pressing crises in the world today. As we've learned from these interviews, it stands to affect low income communities, the Global South, and BIPOC the most, and its occurrence is also rooted in histories of capitalism, colonialism, and slavery. The concept of intergenerational justice accounts for these histories and offers a framework that can motivate and inspire anti-racist, community-based, and socialist climate activism in the US South.

This activism takes many forms, and one of its major goals is to influence the development of policy to mitigate the effects of climate change, which disproportionately will affect the southern United States. Many changes can be won at the local and state levels, particularly in matters relating to environmental racism, which are often the result of state-level decisions.

At the national level, The Green New Deal is an integral piece of federal legislation that, if passed, will lead to large-scale federal efforts to combat climate change through an anti-racist lens. The next step for this movement is the 2020 general election, in which Sunrise Movement is working to flip the Republican-majority Senate and elect the Democratic presidential nominee.

As I record this podcast, this election is only two days away. Once achieved, Sunrise movement's next step is to pass the Green New Deal.

At the international level, the United States is currently set to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement of 2015, a decision made by President Trump in 2019 that is set to be finalized in November of this year—again, the month that we are currently in. The decision was a major set-back for climate justice advocacy, since the Agreement included a national pledge to reduce greenhouse gases as well as provide financial assistance to lower-GDP countries with their climate change plans. An immediate next-step would be to halt the withdrawal process and remain a member state of the Paris Climate Agreement.

Dr. Sikka voices concern about the intimidating nature of organizing to combat climate change and environmental racism...

Tina: It's just so daunting of a task, you know, in terms of the kinds of things that would have to change. You're sort of a hopeful when you see this, and then you sort of look at the statistics and you're just like, Oh my gosh, you know, for there to be a big dent in our emissions, there's so many things they'll have to change.

Keely: However, she's also optimistic about the intersectional movements that are coalescing.

Tina: I'm actually quite, quite hopeful. And just to the extent that there are groups that are working for climate justice from different kinds of intersectional positions. So looking at it in terms of law, even kids bringing lawsuits against governments for not paying attention to what they're going to have to live with in terms of climate change.

Also having groups from black communities, some there's some really interesting like black lives matter groups that are looking at environmental justice and environmental racism. Even I've seen some signs at the Black Lives Matter protests, and the ones that are protesting police violence that are connecting environmental racism to it, and also around COVID-19 and how some of the ways in which it's having more deleterious effects on black and racialized communities because of the legacy of environmental racism.

Keely: The Sunrise movement is another group of changemakers that continues pushing for change, and Matt is optimistic about their strategy...

Matt: We've kind of had this three year grand strategy for a while. The plan was to kind of grow our movement in 2019, you know, bring a lot of new people in, kind of have the organizing infrastructure that we need to really throw down for something big in the coming years. And then the win for 2020 was to elect Green New Deal champions to every level of government. And I think we're going to do it. There's some, there's some really exciting races happening right now.

The Green New Deal, it's not actual legislation. It's a congressional resolution. So that means that, uh, it's been introduced as like an official document in Congress, but it's not like legislation that's being voted on. So right now senators and representatives can co-sponsor the Green New Deal, which is kind of like signaling their support for something. The main thing that, um, is

good to know is that it's like a 10 year plan to transition the U S from an economy based on fossil fuels to renewable energy and to assist the working class in the process through what's called adjust transition.

Keely: Similar to the intentional language and goals of the Green New Deal, Dr. Sikka seems to suggest that the ways that models are framed and discussed is imperative to their efficacy and relevance in day to day conversations about climate change. This points to a usefulness of thinking about climate justice in the framework of intergenerational justice.

Tina: I think that it is getting better in terms of mainstream media coverage. And, there are some sort of more alternative media sources online that are doing a better job of discussing climate change and climate change issues, climate science. But I think that the biggest problem with mainstream media is this tendency to do the both sides of them type thing where it's if you have a climate scientist on, you're going to have to have a climate denier on it and give them equal time. I'm still finding that a lot of mainstream media is tending to do that, to have, the one side and the other side, or pit them against each other, or to look for sensational kinds of coverage that doesn't really do anything to talk about substantive issues or change.

I don't blame media a hundred percent as well, because just the way that models work, they're not predictive. They're trying to think about possible worlds, right? It's almost like an act of world building these models. And they're trying to think about different scenarios and if they don't get it right, that doesn't mean that science could be thrown out the window. Right? We have to engage with the models and think about the values of the presuppositions and, you know, why certain things are chosen over others. And then I think really good science journalists have to bring that to the public and sort of make them understand the nuances of scientific practice that doesn't come out.

Keely: Utilizing storytelling as a tool for the movement is particularly important given the narrative that appears in the media, as Matt discusses.

Matt: A big component of our strategy is that we do like a lot of storytelling and I think like, um, being able to talk about like being young and like being terrified for our future or like how we're already like seeing the effects of the climate crisis in our lives and like I'm only 20 years old, you know? I think that does a lot for the messaging for the movement.

Keely: Roo echoes Matt's emphasis on the importance of storytelling...

Roo: With the unveiling of the Green New Deal, like there was so much excitement about it, but then you also saw politicians who were in the same party as the representatives who created the green new deal saying being dismissive of it or saying will never ever work. The thing that you're saying couldn't work is, "I don't think that we could ever convince people to do it." And that sort of calculation is what I find exhausting. Like I want leaders who are doing what is right, who will tell me what they think is the right thing to do, even if they think I'm going to disagree with it. And then we can have a conversation based on that. But I hate it when they're trying to figure out what I may or may not be willing to accept. And so I want to see leaders who will just tell us what is possible. It feels such a disservice, particularly for elected officials to not be

imagining about the future and to not be bringing people into that possible future. So that's a lesson that I would take is that we got to tell the stories, we got to tell the things that are possible. We got to make those imaginations and we got to let people know what could be and where they could be in that world. Um, and, and then if, if something happens, you know, might become one of the most talked about things in the world, right? So we just got to start telling those stories.

Music Break

Keely: In today's Just Justice podcast, we took a closer look at what intergenerational justice means and how it works in various aspects of life, from climate justice, through the rights of indigenous communities, all the way to how it reflects in presidential campaigns and how it manifests in the time that we live in, which is the time of fight for civil rights and fight for Black lives.

We learned that the key to making a change is activism, coalition building, and that our awareness should not be determined by our race, age, or social status. Everyone has an equal right to a fair and healthy future. This is what we are fighting for today, and what we will continue to fight for in the future.

We want to thank you for listening to our Just Justice podcast. We encourage you to take part in activism, to choose your role in creating a more sustainable future for the present generations and those that are yet to come.

Outro / Background music begins

Keely: A big thank you to our guests: Dr. Tina Sikka, Roo George-Warren, and Matt Wisner for providing their insight in this issue. You can find more information about their work in the description of the podcast.

We want to give a special thanks to Humanity In Action, National Center for Civil and Human Rights and The John Lewis Fellowship Staff – Adama Kamara, Hanane Abouellotfi, Kali-Ahset Amen, Kendell Miller-Roberts, and Yael Herskovits.

The music we used in this podcast was found on the Free Music Archive and clips were taken from the song Siesta by Jahzzar. Link to the music can be found in the description.

This podcast was written and produced by Beth Awano, Sonja Kosanovic, Keely Kriho, Mahir Türkmen, and Piper Prolago.

Outro music