

## Injustice Is Not an Investment: Student Activism, Climate Justice, and the Fossil Fuel Divestment Campaign

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On March 19, 2015, the student club Swarthmore Mountain Justice (MJ) began an occupation of Swarthmore College's administration building that would last for 32 days. As students, alumni, and supporters gathered outside of the college's finance and investment offices, the spotlight of the fossil fuel divestment campaign turned toward the very place the campaign began four years prior. In a spin on the classic labor song, "Which Side Are You On?" MJ student occupiers sat and sang, "Oh students can you stand it? / Oh tell me how you can. / Will you let the world burn / or will you take a stand?" By occupying the administrative building, the students posed a clear dilemma to Swarthmore's Board of Managers: "Make history or be vilified by it" (Swarthmore Mountain Justice, 2015, para. 8).

The sit-ins spread across the United States, as students called on their universities to divest their endowments from the fossil fuel industry. Mountain Justice was just the first of a coordinated series of actions across the United States, from northeast schools like Yale and Harvard, to southern schools such as Tulane and the University of Mary Washington. The next month and a half would find seven sit-ins, dozens of escalated actions, and 22 arrests for civil disobedience from student campaigns around the country. The wave of escalation marked a turning point for the fossil fuel divestment campaign. "For months," noted Julia, a sit-in organizer at Bowdoin College, "our Board of Trustees ignored our concerns. The only way to move forward was to take matters into our own hands, and show them our collective power." Students were organized, and if their universities wouldn't take action, they would.

With an unprecedented number of wins for the divestment campaign in the first half of 2015, the string of sit-ins represented merely the tip of the

iceberg for fossil fuel divestment and youth climate organizing. While at its most visible in such moments of escalation and success, student mobilization around climate change has grown exponentially over the last decade. In 2005, a small number of student organizations were working on climate issues. Today, the scene is dramatically transformed, with large networks of campaigns that support more than 400 campuses across the United States and Canada (Fossil Free USA, 2016).

Fossil Fuel Divestment is the most common campaign to address the climate crisis in North America. The campaign works with college and university students on their campuses as they encourage their governing councils, boards of trustees, and other leadership bodies to divest their endowments from the 200 fossil fuel companies with the largest reserves. These campaigns have experienced mixed results, with many rejections by university administrations. Recently, though, they have achieved significant wins, including Syracuse University and the University of California system's divestment from coal and tar sands, reaching a total of \$2.6 trillion divested by September 2015. In this chapter we ask what impact divestment campaigns have. We explore the potential of divestment, but also look beyond the tactic to explore the learning and political development that divestment campaigns can foster. Reflecting on a spring of sit-ins and direct actions in the United States, followed by a wave of weeks of action in Canada, we examine the state of youth climate organizing and explore the divestment campaign's potential to create change. The student activists engaged in fossil fuel divestment are taking a powerful stand—not just against the world burning, but against what they argue is a fundamentally unjust system that disproportionately impacts frontline communities.

## YOUTH ACTIVISM AND STUDENT CAMPAIGNS

Youth activism is thoroughly established as an important site of learning and development, and many academic researchers are involved in this work politically and professionally. Ginwright, Noguera, and Cammarota's (2006) edited volume has served as a cornerstone for this work, as has work by Fine (Cammarota & Fine, 2010; Fine, 1991) and Calabrese Barton (Calabrese Barton, 1998; Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2010). These authors have worked to illustrate and support youth activism related to schooling and learning, extending the traditional boundaries of the classroom and insisting that youth's experiences of activism are indeed critical spaces for identity development and resistance. Many researchers have documented the ways that youth participatory action research can be used as an activist strategy in classrooms, expanding approaches to critical pedagogy and looking beyond the classroom, to include discussions of civic engagement, school reform, and the

myriad ways youth engage in politics (Booker, 2010; Checkoway & Gutierrez, 2006; Conner, 2011; Kirshner, 2008, 2015; Kwon, 2008; Rogers, Morrell, & Enyedy, 2007). The field is expanding rapidly and brings value to discussions of schooling, learning, and civic development, and creates space to explore systemic oppression and the work youth are doing to resist and recreate those systems in local and global ways.

Within this field, though, there is less work on student campaigns, despite the fact that in the last 15 years, the campaign has become one of the most common forms of activist action on college and university campuses. Student campaigns ask that students take action on issues outside of their immediate self-interest or role as students. Examples of student campaigns include students against sweatshops and the student fair trade campaign, where students use their institutional position as students on the issues of fair labor practices, international trade policy, development, and other areas (Cravey, 2004; Featherstone & United Students Against Sweatshops, 2002; Silvey, 2004; Wilson & Curnow, 2013). These campaigns are often coordinated in conjunction with larger nongovernmental organizations, reflecting the NGOization of activism today (Choudry, 2010; Kwon, 2013), and tend to use guidebooks circulated by NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) to launch affiliates or chapters of the campaigns across the country. Affiliates take up the same types of actions across time and place, following the steps of the guidebooks to achieve their wins. There is variety among the campaigns, where different types of political action are asked of students, from raising funds to raising awareness to raising hell.

Surprisingly little has been written on youth climate campaigns. The academic work on student environmental issues tends to center on campus-specific work to change individual and institutional behaviors, including implementing campus recycling programs, promoting energy efficiency, and managing green initiatives on campus (Helferty & Clarke, 2009; Stephens, Hernandez, Román, Graham, & Scholz, 2008). For high school student organizing around climate change, even less is documented, though important curricula has been developed as part of youth participatory research projects that bridge the climate crisis and science curriculum to encourage youth projects to address climate change (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2010; Niemeyer, Garcia, & Naima, 2009). These studies reflect a long-running theme in some parts of the environmental movement to focus on individual environmentally friendly behaviors rather than look systemically (Grady-Benson, 2014). As climate change has become the big environmental and political discussion over the past years, the individualization of responses has begun to shift, as both scientists and activists have called for international policy change as the most fundamentally necessary intervention to prevent devastating climate change. As this discursive and strategic shift has occurred, campus-based

activists like Sam at University of Toronto have sought campaigns that move beyond the recycling and energy-efficiency strategies, quipping, “We need to change policy, not lightbulbs.”

### **Situating Ourselves**

Drawing on the contributions of Indigenous researchers (Absolon, 2011; Wilson, 2008) and feminist researchers (Bloom, 1998; Hill-Collins, 2002), we locate ourselves within the context of the fossil fuel divestment campaign and our research. Indigenous researchers have emphasized the importance of relational accountability and context (Wilson, 2008) in allowing readers and research participants to fully understand why we commit ourselves to certain questions and how the lessons we learn from the research fit into a broader theory of change that will benefit the communities we are accountable to. These scholars argue that who we are as researchers matters for what we investigate and how we do our work and that making our standpoints and political commitments known is foundational to making sense of our relationships to our participants and our research questions.

Joe has been involved in the fossil free divestment campaign at University of Toronto for two years, primarily as a researcher, and also as a participant. She spent five years as a student organizer in the fair trade movement and as an anti-oppression trainer for multiple student-led campaigns, including environmental and global justice movements. Allyson has been involved in the movement for fossil fuel divestment since January 2014 as a student leader and organizer with Bowdoin Climate Action and the Divestment Student Network (DSN). Since joining, Allyson has helped develop national escalation strategy with 350.org and worked to develop the regional network structures and long-term strategy of the DSN. Our engagement in the fossil fuel divestment campaign across North America positions us to offer an insider’s account of how youth are engaging in climate activism. It allows us to articulate the dominant frames of the campaign, as well as to contextualize the challenges the campaign faces as the student climate movement attempts to stretch the frames and extend the political analysis that structures our tactics and materials. Our relationships with participants foster accountability to the movement and a reliable accounting of the state of the fossil fuel divestment campaign.

Our chapter draws primarily from ethnographic data. We draw from our firsthand experiences of campus campaigns, regional and national conferences, national planning and alignment meetings, and marches documented with ethnographic field notes, as well as our personal emails, tweets, and Facebook timelines. We also analyze primary documents, including the kits and materials produced by 350.org, the Divestment Student Network, the Responsible Endowments Coalition, and the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition.

From the Divestment Student Network, we draw on seven interviews with members of the organization's Coordinating Committee and representatives from their national working groups. Interview data were coded based upon participants' involvement with the DSN. Additionally, at the University of Toronto we draw from semistructured interviews of eight focal participants and video data of most meetings and actions over the course of the campaign. These data were collected over eight months using multiple camera angles for each event. Once data were captured they were content logged and thematically coded for areas including the dominant frames of the divestment campaign; instances of climate justice, solidarity, anticolonialism, and decolonization being discussed; questions of race, class, and gender; and other content areas. These preliminary codes were developed based on the initial research question and were refined through iterative rounds of coding, which reflected the data and participants' use of the terms. This thematic coding was supplemented with the field notes and primary sources in order to clarify significant themes across all the data.

Our analysis focuses on widespread themes across the divestment campaign in both the United States and Canada and identifies the potential and limitations of divestment as a tactic and a tool for politicization. To connect the U.S. and Canadian contexts, we compared and contrasted the dominant themes that emerged, looking for places of convergence as well as divergence. We often built off each other's experiences and supplemented each other's analyses with data from the other context. Initial drafts of this paper were shared with several willing participants, and their feedback is gratefully integrated into our analysis.

## FINDINGS

### Fossil Fuel Divestment on Campus

The Fossil Fuel Divestment campaign represents the greatest focus of the youth climate movement on campuses right now, yet almost nothing has been written about this topic in academic spaces. Grady-Benson and Sarathy (2015) outline the divestment tactic and the logic of fossil fuel divestment and provide case studies of campuses that have been successful at their bids for divestment, as well as some that have not. Such documentation is an important first step in establishing fossil fuel divestment as a significant student campaign that deserves attention. We build on the foundation laid by Grady-Benson and Sarathy (2015), but draw on multiple contexts to extend their discussion and complicate it by looking at what people learn and are wrestling with at the different levels of the campaigns. As part of this extension, we focus on students as political actors, look at how students' political praxis

shifts through their engagement, and ask what significance those shifts hold for student and youth activism today.

The first fossil fuel divestment campaign originated at Swarthmore College in early spring of 2011, as Mountain Justice—originally intent on fighting mountaintop removal for coal extraction—decided upon divestment as a way not only to support those on the Appalachian front lines, but also to engage with their school's complicity in the crisis and attempt to build a student movement against the fossil fuel industry.

Swarthmore was joined over the following 18 months by a handful of campus groups campaigning for coal divestment, united around the Divest Coal coalition in the fall of 2011 (Grady-Benson, 2014). Less a movement than a loosely connected conglomeration of campaigns and organizations, it was not until 350.org's *Do the Math* tour in November 2012 that mass action for divestment gained traction across the country. The tour, headlined by environmentalist Bill McKibben and a rotating panel of movement celebrities from author/activist Naomi Klein to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, advocated a mathematical logic to the growing necessity to stop the fossil fuel industry—"Unless we rise up to stop them," they argued (350.org, 2016, para. 2), the industry would burn the 2,795 gigatons of carbon dioxide in its reserves—far more than the planet can handle—and push global temperatures above the 2°C recommended by scientists and into climate catastrophe (350.org, 2016).

*Do the Math* (Nyks & Scott, 2013) not only laid out the facts against the fossil fuel industry, but also called for its audiences to join together in the creation of a mass movement to combat their destructive practices. Through promoting a neatly packaged "ask" and easily replicable pathways toward starting a local campaign on the resource website GoFossilFree.org, campaigns for fossil fuel divestment flourished across the country. By April 2014—just three years after Swarthmore's first calls for divestment—the campaign had grown to more than 300 campus campaigns, and more than 560 worldwide (Grady-Benson, 2014). Today, the numbers have grown to more than 400 student groups, with 33 commitments from colleges and universities to divest as of February 2016 (Fossil Free USA, 2016).

In Canada there has been explosive growth around the divestment campaign as well. Twenty-five schools have launched campaigns since 2013. At the time of this writing, three schools—Dalhousie, McGill, and University of British Columbia—have seen high-profile rejections of their divestment proposals from administration decision makers; others have quietly rejected student proposals, including Trent and University of Calgary. However, Queen's University has established a committee to evaluate the moral and fiduciary responsibility that the institution has vis-à-vis climate change and fossil fuel investments (CYCC, 2015). At the University of Toronto, the

president's ad hoc committee has recommended divestment and student activists are hopeful, awaiting a final decision.

### **Do the Math: Framing the Divestment Campaign**

*Do the Math* (Nyks & Scott, 2013) introduced the idea of divestment to many involved in or running fossil fuel divestment campaigns from 2012 to today. As such, its rhetoric has influenced the primary frames of the original phase of the campaign. The first frame, the numerical logic of divestment, focused less on the human impacts of climate change than it did the hard facts of its numerical implications. The “simple math” of the tour’s numbers—2,795 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub> in reserve, and 565 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub> available to burn to stay under 2°C—established an understanding of the need to divest as a logical action based upon rational facts (350.org, 2016). Many campaigns adopted such numerical rhetoric further into their arguments in support of the finances of divestment. A 2011 white paper published by corporate responsibility organization As You Sow introduced the financial concepts of “stranded assets” and “carbon risk” associated with long-term investments in the fossil fuel industry (Lowe & Sanzillo, 2011). On top of the numbers supporting the need to target the fossil fuel industry popularized by McKibben, the financial language disseminated by As You Sow further solidified the rhetoric of the movement. Based in monetary returns, assets, and financial risk, to divest from fossil fuels became a logical course of action for the rational institution.

The second frame promoted on the tour and further popularized throughout the campaign is that of the impact of industry stigmatization, which served to justify the rationale behind the tactic of divestment itself. McKibben argued that “[the fossil fuel] industry has behaved so recklessly that they should lose their social license, their veneer of respectability” (Stephenson, 2012, para. 4). To divest, then, was to act upon the simple mathematical reality of the growing climate crisis, and publicly point the finger at the fossil fuel industry as culprit. Ben, an organizer at Ryerson University, explains this logic, saying:

Divestment is about the stigmatization and the movement building. That's what will carry things forward. The idea is that we take away the social license—so, like, the entire thing is about taking [fossil fuels] and turning those into toxic investments.

Through divesting the endowments of institutions across the country, the campaign seeks to hold the fossil fuel industry accountable for its actions and shift public support out from under its wide range of influence. For Sara, alumna and organizer of Swarthmore's MJ, stigmatizing the fossil fuel

industry means that “people in their daily lives are coming to terms with the fact that this industry does not have our stake at heart in any way,” and serves to highlight producers of fossil fuels as part of a “noncompliant, irresponsible, rogue industry.” The stigmatization found through divestment ultimately attempts, McKibben argues, to “tarnish [the] brand” of the fossil fuel industry (350.org, 2016).

Just how the campaign seeks to accomplish such stigmatization is accounted for in the several hundred campaigns on college campuses across the continent and around the world. Following the *Do the Math* tour, where attendees were encouraged to join the campaign by starting their own divestment campaign, the campaign ballooned through the easy-access kits and resources made available by 350.org to provide a template for the campaign format. Templates found on the resource websites GoFossilFree.org (United States) and GoFossilFree.ca (Canada) ask students to form a team and create a petition outlining the standardized demands of the campaign. The petition asks universities to “freeze new fossil fuel investments and drawdown current holdings over the next five years” (Fossil Free, n.d., p. 15), leading students across Canada to cheekily adopt the chant, “What do we want? Divestment! When do we want it? Gradually over five years!” These petitions intend to gain access to decision makers and gather support across campus. Alongside a series of actions used to put pressure on campus targets and engage the campaign’s base of support, this format is the standard for U.S. and Canadian fossil fuel divestment campaigns, with variations based upon campus context.

At the University of Toronto, for example, the campaign is coordinated by a group of undergraduate and graduate students who have worked to develop an extensive brief on the issue of divestment and climate change. They collected the necessary signatures to trigger the university’s divestment process, which established an ad hoc committee to advise the president and governing council on whether or not to divest the endowment. The students involved in the campaign organize their work within three subcommittees: outreach to the Governing Council and ad hoc committee, including developing the brief and providing arguments and information for the official bodies; outreach to the university community, including alumni, faculty, and student groups; and member outreach that seeks to educate and mobilize students to get more involved in the campaign. In the last 18 months, the committee has grown to around 25 regular members and scores of peripherally involved students. They have met with and advised the ad hoc committee members appointed by the university president. Additionally, they held a divestment meme party, Divestment Action Week, including outreach events like the signature drive, which they called “Cookies for Climate Change,” a panel of environmental and financial experts, and marches of more than 200 students through central campus to the doors of the office of the

president to submit signatures of community members demanding that UofT divest. The campaign follows the guidebook's step-by-step instructions and coordinates with other campaigns across Canada and the United States to align strategies and show solidarity with other campaigns. Their coordinated actions are shaped by the materials and the dominant frames of the larger fossil fuel divestment campaign, focusing on building a rational and well-argued case to present to decision makers and building support on campus to push those decision makers should they balk.

### **Shifting Frames: “Divestment Is the Tactic. Climate Justice Is the Goal.”**

While divestment is a tactic primarily based in financial and media strategy that argues that pulling institutional resources will make a bold statement against the fossil fuel industry to stop the worst of the extraction and emissions, participants in the divestment campaign have been quick to extend that frame. Through the introduction and incorporation of a climate justice analysis and an intersectional framework, the divestment campaign has sought to broaden the dominant frame beyond the mathematical and financial. According to Amil, an organizer at the University of Toronto, “When we talk about climate justice, we’re not only talking about climate change as a problem; we’re hoping to have our actions challenge the systems that cause climate change and makes certain communities more vulnerable than others to the impacts of climate change.” This climate justice frame attempts to expand upon the notion of removing the “social license” of the fossil fuel industry and shift such public support toward the front lines of extraction, burning, extreme weather, and other climate change–related impacts. The climate justice frame works against the notion that divestment is a purely economic strategy, in part acknowledging the limited scope of power that campus divestment holds economically, but also resituating the terms of the debate. Instead, this frame intentionally integrates an analysis of race, colonialism, and capitalism into the divestment talking points and centers the experiences of frontline communities. As Joanna, an organizer at UofT, explained it, “Climate issues do not exist as an island; they are intersectional. They interact with different social constructs and power relations, such as race, gender, and class.” As the divestment campaign is focused on changing public discourse around fossil fuels and removing the “social license,” they also insist on integrating a climate justice frame into divestment. This has the potential to shape a generation of activists to be more attentive to the racialized, classed, and gendered impacts of climate change, as well as the ways that racialization, colonialism, class, and gender influence the ways we do activism, the strategies we choose, the voices we hear and amplify, and the fights that we invest in.

Students organizing for fossil fuel divestment in the United States have also worked to incorporate an analysis of climate justice into campaign rhetoric and action. Distinctly departing from a strictly financial or mathematical perspective, the incorporation of climate justice into the campaign has sought to highlight the disproportionate impacts of the fossil fuel industry on low-income communities and communities of color. As the first campaign at Swarthmore was originally formed as a means of solidarity organizing with those on the front lines of mountaintop removal in Appalachia, such rhetoric has worked to reincorporate and reinfuse such a purpose back into the campaign's narrative. As noted by organizer Jess Grady-Benson, "[Divestment] is not about carbon—it's about humans." Focusing on the human impacts of the fossil fuel industry has allowed for a departure from the original framing of the *Do the Math* tour's numerical analysis, as demonstrated at campaign convergences in the United States and Canada and in the burgeoning reinvestment projects of the Divestment Student Network and Climate Justice Alliance.

The first national convergence, or conference, of the fossil fuel divestment campaign, held in February 2013 at Swarthmore College, sought to infuse a climate justice analysis within campaigns by highlighting frontline narratives throughout its programming, principles, and goals for gathering. The organizing principles put forth by the planning team included a commitment to an "environmental/economic justice framework" that recognized divestment as "a form of solidarity organizing—a way to be an ally with frontline organizations" (Power Up!, 2013, p. 5). The agenda for the weekend specifically sought to elevate frontline voices over the traditional leaders of the environmental movement, as Crystal Lameman, an Indigenous leader from the Beaver Lake Cree Nation, delivered the keynote address on the transition from divestment to climate justice. She shared stories of how her community has been impacted by tar sands development and drew on treaty rights to connect Indigenous land struggles to the fight against climate change. According to convergence organizer and DSN Coordinating Committee member William Lawrence, "Bill [McKibben] had been in the spotlight so much that year from the *Do the Math* tour, and we thought that there were other perspectives that students ought to be hearing." The intentionality behind inviting Lameman rather than McKibben to speak and the general focus of the agenda on climate justice frameworks exemplify the shift in the student movement away from a mathematical analysis and towards an intersectional perspective of the impacts of the industry. By presenting more diverse perspectives, the DSN sought to exemplify the diversity of the climate movement. Convergence planner and DSN organizer Sachie noted how they

tried very hard to build a program for that convergence that was almost entirely speakers of color. I really felt the significance as a person of

color in centering communities of color in the climate movement and grassroots struggles, and also just generally making broader narrative interventions around the whiteness of the movement and lifting up the amazing organizing that was happening in these communities.

For the DSN, divestment without centering those most impacted by the climate crisis was inadequate. With such goals in mind, the oft-used campaign phrase “divestment is the tactic, and climate justice is the goal,” coined at the convergence, has proliferated throughout the campaign.

In Canada, this step toward intersectionality and solidarity has occurred concurrently but manifests differently. The attention paid to Indigenous solidarity fits within the broader context of social justice organizing in Canada, where far more attention is paid to Indigenous solidarity than in the United States. Interestingly, the only differences between the divestment toolkits in the United States and Canada is that the Canadian guide explicitly addresses (briefly) Indigenous land rights, settler solidarity, and the tar sands being on stolen Indigenous land (Fossil Free Canada, 2016, p. 9). Joanna, a Canadian organizer, described the importance of climate justice, saying, “Indigenous peoples and marginalized communities are often at the front lines of climate impacts because of the legacy of colonialism, racism, sexism, and other –isms, so it is important that we keep that in mind when we are doing climate organizing.”

At the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition convergence in 2014, Indigenous solidarity featured centrally in all discussions of divestment because of the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition’s partnership with Indigenous organizers (Canadian Youth Climate Coalition, 2015). The keynote speeches were delivered by Indigenous women activists fighting extractive industries in their communities and a settler woman working with Indigenous communities. The main plenary featured Indigenous organizers, making the case for why it is important for settler students campaigning for divestment to take Indigenous land struggles seriously. They made arguments for why campaigns should take up the practice of territorial acknowledgment, relationship building, and substantive solidarity in the face of the Canadian government’s aggressive policy agenda that devastates the environment and undermines Indigenous sovereignty and land claims. They stressed that the divestment campaign needed to build and sustain relationships with Indigenous communities.

On the third day of the convergence, one of the three breakout groups focused on Indigenous solidarity. The group’s task was to operationalize ways for campaigns to act in solidarity with Indigenous peoples. While the group of all settler-identified students from different campuses worked together for two hours, participants struggled. There were two campus campaigns

where the language of Indigenous solidarity was already entrenched in their practices, but the students from the other seven campuses felt challenged to find ways to do the work. Many student activists were afraid of messing up, didn't know how to start a relationship with Indigenous people whose territories they occupied, wrestled with settler guilt, and overall found it hard to find space within the day-to-day campaign work to fit Indigenous solidarity. One organizer from Mount Allison was concerned about how to approach and engage Indigenous Elders. Hannah, a student organizer from Quebec, worried that territorial acknowledgments were inadequate and could become rote and stale. Others struggled to understand the language of colonialism at all, since it was completely new material for them. Riley stressed how important it had been for her to hear from impacted Indigenous people, saying, "This was my first exposure to these ideas." When University of Toronto students discussed it afterward, some group members resisted, suggesting it was a "distraction from the actual campaign." Melina responded,

We were there and we heard these people talk, right? And that's why I think I am having such a hard time, like understanding—I mean, I do understand where you are coming from—but—like—hearing them talk—Y'know what I mean? Hearing them explain it, you were like, "Oh that makes sense!", right? And I just want other people to hear it the same way too. I don't think, like, it should be something that we just don't do, just because it might . . . like . . . because it's really important.

Though she didn't have a clear idea of how to act on the ideas of Indigenous solidarity yet, she felt strongly that it was a priority that the group should commit to.

This move to grapple with the complexity of climate justice is one of the biggest contributions youth are making to the climate movement. Doing the work of bringing anti-oppression conversations into a space that otherwise may not enable or encourage engagement with these issues, especially in the parts of the environmental movement that historically have been white, settler, and upper/middle class is significant. In many ways, students' attempts to bridge the dominant frames of divestment and climate justice demonstrate the hard work facing the climate movement today and indicate how under-equipped settler students are to take on anticolonial and decolonizing work as part of the environmental movement. Yet despite the challenges, student activists do seem to have a sense that this is the right direction to take, and they are fighting hard to reframe the campaign. Climate justice is moving from being the mantra to becoming the *raison d'être* for the divestment campaign. Sam, a University of Toronto organizer, said,

Oppression and race and injustice are the whole reason I am involved in climate change. Because, um, I mean, I love the polar bears, and the trees and the fish, but that's not the reason that I do this. It's because it's so fundamentally unfair, based on race, gender, age. Basically all the people who have decision-making power on climate change are not the ones getting the short end of the stick when it comes to the effects. It's time we stop framing this as an environmental issue and start framing it as an issue of justice and oppression.

This shift to embrace climate justice also shows us some of the limitations of the divestment strategy, where divestment does not require attention to justice issues. As campus groups follow the set of steps laid out in the guidebooks, it is possible, and arguably much easier, to proceed without attention to the ways that race, colonialism, and capitalism shape questions of climate change and activism. However, students are reshaping how they understand divestment and working to integrate deeper forms of solidarity throughout.

### **Toward a Deeper Solidarity**

The rallying cry of the student divestment campaign speaks volumes about the direction in which the campaign is heading. We find this turn to integrate climate justice hopeful and radically necessary for addressing climate change meaningfully. However, from our research and our engagement in the campaign, we recognize the limits and potential of divestment as a climate justice tactic. Divestment is not inherently a tool for advancing climate justice, but many students are working to situate divestment within broader conversations about colonialism, institutional racism, and the limits of capitalism. There is much to be done to take climate justice from a recently introduced frame to a deeply integrated strategic and tactical set of actions. We know from our research that this work is slow, and that while in some spaces, discussions of climate justice, intersectionality, and solidarity are central, in many spaces they remain nascent, sometimes dormant, complicated, sometimes fraught. There is significant potential within campaigns for the language and political analysis of intersectionality and solidarity to take off and become inextricably linked, but there is more to be done in order to make sure all divestment activists understand a political analysis that ties climate change to race and colonialism explicitly.

Reinvestment is an emergent conversation that is coming up in more and more campaigns and has the potential of bridging some of the gaps between the climate movement and the environmental justice movement. Where youth activists have felt that divestment may not necessarily give them a way

to work in solidarity, reinvestment makes explicit direct ties to community-driven development projects that seek to create the backbone of a just transition. Alexandra, a reinvestment partner of the campaign, described the shift to more solidarity driven work, saying, “Over the past couple of years of building the fossil fuel divestment movement, we’ve realized that it’s not just important where our money isn’t going, but it’s also equally if not more important where our money is going. So we have an obligation to push our universities to invest their money in the right places as well.”

Reinvestment attempts to move campus investments away from the carbon economy and redirect them to grassroots climate justice organizations working on alternative energy development. Students are working with grassroots climate justice organizations and larger NGOs to develop strategies to reinvest portions of funds divested from the fossil fuel industry into the “just transition” of affected communities. As this initiative develops, divestment organizers are hopeful that attempts to include a climate justice analysis in the campaign will have the potential to be grounded in real solutions over symbolic rhetoric. DSN organizer Sachie said,

I really believe that where the movement is heading is towards a focus on community reinvestment and to frontline-led solutions. I think that’s both vital in terms of lifting up real solutions, in terms of shifting power to communities who have been most disenfranchised in the extractive economy, and to the DSN’s mission of movement building and actually building shared power beyond campus with the broader grassroots climate justice movement.

For many, reinvestment offers divestment campaigns and their institutions an opportunity to put their money where their mouths are, and serves to anchor the climate justice framework in real solutions for affected communities.

## CONCLUSION

The fossil fuel divestment campaign is important activism at an important historical and ecological moment. Students are leading a campaign that fits into a much broader movement to stop climate change, and in so doing they are developing a political analysis that has the potential to greatly expand the discourse of a generation of activists and the environmental movement. Through their campaigns, divestment organizers are working to bring solidarity, anti-oppression, and climate justice to the fore for the next/current generation of leaders of the environmental movement. They link the histories and continuities of colonialism to climate change and understand that the root causes are shared. Ben explained,

We're not going to actually deal with climate change until we, like, address, like systemic issues around race and class and gender. In a sense, all I mean, really is that, like, climate change is the by-product of colonialism—those structures have led to climate change and are what make it difficult to address. The fact that some lives don't matter and some voices are, like, immediately discounted from political power is a big reason why what should be an obvious issue is not at all politically salient.

Tracing the shifts over the last years allows us to see how this political analysis is becoming more present in the campaign and how relationships are growing, usually tied to local campaigns and rooted in trust and accountability. We can also see it across the national campaigns, as the convergences have centered Indigenous activists' voices and challenged students to find ways to bridge land and sovereignty struggles with the campus campaigns. As activists and scholars, we are hopeful that the shifts we see occurring in the environmental movement are representative of larger transformations in youth-led activism, where anti-oppression, intersectionality, and justice are being integrated into the core work more centrally. We are optimistic about the alliances being built between racial justice organizations, Indigenous struggles for sovereignty, and environmentalists, and hope that it signals a dramatic shift. Amil, an organizer at University of Toronto, often argues that this shift toward climate justice is fundamentally necessary for the youth climate campaign, saying, "This is the way most of the world frames environmental issues, and without this understanding we cannot build a movement." We want to stress his concept here. In youth organizing today, the logic of movement building is deeply tied to the antiracist and anticolonial approaches. Though making connections is difficult work, student organizers we work with are clear that this is the work. About integrating intersectionality into the campaign, Lila said, "It's not just divesting. If we divest and that's it, we've failed. We have to build something bigger." This is one of the great opportunities and challenges youth organizers offer social movements today.

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