

**NATIONAL BESTSELLER**

**"A POWERFUL READ THAT FILLS ONE WITH, DARE I SAY . . . HOPE?"**

*—The New York Times*

**ALL WE  
CAN SAVE**

**Truth, Courage,  
and Solutions for the  
Climate Crisis**

**Edited by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson  
& Katharine K. Wilkinson**



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Science tells us that it's not too late, but we have to pull hard, every day, together, to make a difference. . . . You don't have to know where we'll end up. You just have to know what path we're on.

—PROF. KIM COBB

## An Offering from the Bayou

COLETTE PICHON BATTLE

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It was about two years after Hurricane Katrina that I first saw the Louisiana flood maps. These flood maps are used to show land loss in the past and the land loss predicted to come. On this particular day, at a community meeting, these maps were used to explain how a thirty-foot storm surge that accompanied Hurricane Katrina could flood communities like mine in South Louisiana and communities across the Mississippi and Alabama coasts. It turns out that the land we were losing, including our barrier islands and marshland, was our buffer from the sea. The time-lapse graphic showed massive land loss in South Louisiana and an encroaching sea. But more specifically, the graphic showed the disappearance of my community and many other communities in South Louisiana before the end of the century.

I was standing there with other members of South Louisiana's communities—Black, Native, poor. We thought we were just bound by two years of disaster recovery, but we found that we were now bound by the impossible task of ensuring that our communities would not be erased by sea level rise due to climate change. Friends, neighbors, family, my community: I had just assumed they would always be there. Land, trees, marsh, bayous: I had just assumed that they would be there, as they had been for thousands of years. I was wrong, and my life forever changed.

To understand what was happening to my community, I talked with other communities around the globe. I started in South Louisiana with the United Houma Nation, a state-recognized tribe. I talked to youth advocates in Shishmaref, Alaska, whose barrier island is rapidly melting and eroding into the sea. I talked to fisherwomen in coastal Vietnam, justice fighters in Fiji, new generations of leaders in the ancient cultures of the Torres Strait. Communities that had been on Earth for thousands of years were suffering the same fate, and we were all contemplating how we would survive the next fifty.

By the end of the next century, it's predicted that 200 million people will be displaced due to climate change, and in South Louisiana



those who can afford to do so are already moving. They're moving because South Louisiana is losing land at one of the fastest rates on the planet. Disappearance is what my bayou community has in common with other coastal communities. Erasure is what communities around the globe are fighting as we get real about the impacts of climate change.

I've spent the last fifteen years advocating on behalf of communities that have been directly impacted by the climate crisis. These communities are fighting discrimination within climate disaster recovery while trying to balance mass displacement of people with an influx of others who see opportunity in starting anew. I hear people being called "refugees" when they leave or when they're displaced by climate disaster, even when they don't cross international borders. These misused terms, meant to identify the other, the victim, the person who is not supposed to be here, are barriers to economic recovery, to social integration, and to the healing required from the climate crisis and climate trauma. Words matter.

It also matters how we treat people who are crossing borders due to disasters. We should care about how people who are seeking refuge and safety are being treated, if for no other reason than that it might be you or someone you love who needs to exercise their human right to migrate in the near future.

We must start preparing for global migration today. It's a reality now. Our cities and our communities are not prepared. In fact, our economic system and our social systems are prepared only to make profit off disaster and people who migrate. Climate-disaster migration will cause rounds of climate gentrification, and it will also penalize the movement of people, usually through exploited labor and criminalization.

Climate gentrification that happens in anticipation of sea level rise is what we're seeing in places like Miami, where communities that were once kept from the waterfront are being priced out of the high ground. The land farthest away from the oceanfront vista is where poor and Black and immigrant populations were placed originally. Now, as resourced people escape the long-term coastal impacts of climate change, poor communities are being forced to relocate, away from the social and economic systems that they need to survive.

Climate gentrification also happens in the aftermath of disaster. When massive numbers of people leave a location for an indefinite amount of time, we see others come in and claim it. We also see climate gentrification happen when damaged homes are reconstructed as "green built" and warrant a higher price tag, generally out of the reach of Black and Brown and poor people who want to return home. The jump in rents or home prices can mean the difference between being able to practice your human right to return home as a community and being forced to resettle somewhere else—less expensive, but alone.

The climate crisis is a much larger conversation than reducing carbon dioxide emissions, and it is a very different conversation from just extreme weather. We're facing a shift in every aspect of our global reality. Climate migration is just one small part, but it's going to have ripple effects in both coastal cities and cities in the interior.

So what do we do? I have a few ideas.

We must reframe our understanding of the problem. Climate change is not the problem. Climate change is the most horrible symptom of an economic system that has been built for a few to extract every precious ounce of value out of this planet and its people, from our natural resources to the fruits of our human labor. This system has created this crisis.

We must have the courage to admit we've taken too much. We cannot close our eyes to the fact that the entire world is paying a price for the privilege and comfort of just a few people on the planet. It's time for us to make society-wide changes to a system that incentivizes consumption to the point of global imbalance. Our social, political, and economic systems of extraction must be transformed into systems that regenerate the Earth and advance human liberty—globally. It is arrogance to think that technology will save us. It is ego to think that we can continue this unjust and extractive approach to living on this planet and survive.

To survive this next phase of our human existence, we will need to restructure our social and economic systems to develop our collective resilience. The social restructuring must be toward restoration and repair of the Earth and the communities that have been extracted from, criminalized, and targeted for generations. These are the front lines. This is where we start.



We must establish a new social attitude to see migration as a public benefit—a nature-wide necessity for our global survival—not as a threat to our individual privilege. Collective resilience means developing cities that can receive people and provide housing, food, water, healthcare, and freedom from overpolicing for everyone, no matter who they are, no matter where they're from.

What would it mean if we started to plan for climate migration now? Sprawling or declining cities could see this as an opportunity to rebuild a social infrastructure rooted in justice and fairness and a physical infrastructure that works to restore and preserve our ecology. We could actually put money into public hospitals to both help them rebuild in a more eco-friendly way and prepare for what is to come through climate migration, including the trauma that comes with loss and relocation. We must invest more in justice, but it cannot be for temporary gain. It cannot be to help budget shortfalls. It has to be for long-term change.

It's already possible, y'all.

After Hurricane Katrina, universities and high schools around the United States took in students to help them finish the semester or the academic year without missing a beat. Those students are now productive assets in our communities, and this is what our schools, our businesses, and our institutions need to get ready for now.

So as we reframe the problem in a more truthful way and we restructure our social systems in a more just way, all that will be left is for us to re-indigenize ourselves and to conjure a power of the most ancient kind.

This necessarily means that we must learn to follow—not tokenize, not exotify, not dismiss—the leadership and the traditional knowledge of a particular local place. It means that we must commit to standards of ecological equity and climate justice and human rights as a base standard, a fundamental starting point, for where our new society is to go.

All of this requires us to recognize a power greater than ourselves and a life longer than the ones we will live. It requires us to believe in the things that we are privileged enough not to have to see.

We must honor the rights of nature. We must advance human rights for all. We must transform from a disposable, single-use, indi-

vidual society into one that sees our collective, long-term humanity, or else we will not make it. We must see that even the best of us are entangled in an unjust system, and we must acknowledge that *your* survival requires us to figure out how to reach a shared liberation together.

The good news is that we come from powerful people. We come from those who have, in one way or another, survived. This is reason enough to fight. And take it from your South Louisiana friend: Those hardest fights are the ones to celebrate. Let's choose to make this next phase of our planetary existence beautiful, and while we're at it, let's make it just and fair for everyone.

We can do this, y'all. We can do this, because we must. We must, or else we lose our planet and we lose ourselves. The work starts here. The work starts together. *Merci d'avoir reçu ce que j'offre.* Thank you for receiving my offering.



**"A FEAST OF IDEAS AND PERSPECTIVES, SETTING A BIG TABLE FOR  
THE CLIMATE MOVEMENT, DECLARING ALL ARE WELCOME."**

**—Rolling Stone**

**Provocative and illuminating writings from women at  
the forefront of the climate movement who are harnessing  
truth, courage, and solutions to lead humanity forward**

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