

TIME MACHINE MILLIONAIRE, EP 7
FORMS OF PROTEST:
ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS ARE CIVIL RIGHTS

Over the past decade or two, we have seen an increase in discussion about climate change and environmental protections. Partially this is because of what is going on around us in scholarship: scientists are now very aware that climate change is real (although some disagree on *what* is causing it). But the visibility of the issue is also a result of the disasters hitting us from every side: hurricanes, water pollution, oil spills on the regular.

Hurricanes are not man-made. But water pollution is a result of industrial waste and hydraulic fracturing (aka “fracking”). Oil spills happen when large oil companies engage in off-shore drilling without sufficient caution or just because the region is too cold, too stormy, or too deep to guarantee the safety of the process.

Even knowing this, massive corporations today do not slow down in their exploitation of the environment. If you do not already know, get familiar with these four major projects going on in the United States today: 1. The Mountain Valley Pipeline destroying the Appalachian Trail to install a natural gas line. 2. The Dakota Access Pipeline cutting into the homes and lands of the Lakota, Sioux, and other indigenous tribes. 3. The offshore drilling off the coast of Seattle, where conditions are risky and a cleanup would be near impossible and 4. The oil drilling of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), some 20 million acres in Alaska that were once under a reserve, but finally opened up for drilling this last year (2017), tucked away into Congress’ massive tax restructuring act.

Each of these projects has some really valuable *economic* benefits to the corporations involved, and potentially to American consumers: they potentially help us get gas at \$2 bucks a gallon or keep our monthly utility bill low. But this comes with a catch: each of these projects rob individuals (usually native communities) of their land and has the potential to result in massive spills and disasters, any of which could single-handedly wipe out a community’s livelihood and culture. When we take that into consideration, we recognize that the development of such projects comes at a cost: it abuses civic and social rights of citizens (#citizenship), of communities, of ethnicities. And what about the earth? Does the earth have any rights of its own?

There are groups of activists that believe that the earth *does* have rights. There are also activist groups fighting to protect the environment as an indirect (but critical) route to fighting for the civil rights of the communities losing their land. There are four different “strategies” that these activists pursue: social organization, artistic engagement, economic boycotting, and the use of targeted violence.

Here is the fascinating part: the strategies that activist groups use in their struggles today are strategies they learned from the civil rights movement in the 1950s-60s. They have taken their lead from Martin Luther King Jr, Malcolm X, and Amiri Baraka, central thought leaders and organizers of the period. **Dr. King** used social organization to pursue nonviolent resistance. He was the founder (1957) and leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Council and cooperated other organizations (Student NonViolent Coordinating Committee, Highlander Folk School, churches across the country), believing that social organization and staged protests (marches, sit-ins, parades) would allow for an organized dissent, drawing attention to the issues in a way that would earn allies and supporters. And while not as artistic as Amiri Baraka, Dr. King was open to using the arts for activism. He knew the power of song and encouraged people to sing during their protests in order to give them emotional and spiritual sustenance. He worked

with those in the Highlander Folk School to come up with anthems for the civil rights movement, and also used hymns from the church community to tap into a common cultural reservoir.

Malcolm X was less convinced about the value of the arts (listen to “The Ballot or the Bullet”) and social organization. His main two strategies were *economic boycotts* and the targeted use of violence when necessary. The first is especially important since history textbooks always gloss right over it: Malcolm X believed that the black community needed to use their finances to support: industries that would not discriminate during hiring, landlords and landowners that would allow blacks to rent property, and local businesses that were actually invested in the black community and would allow profit to flow back into it (helping local education, beautification, employment, everything). Malcolm X also believed that when in times of last resort, activists should pick up a gun to defend their own property and civil rights.

After Malcolm X was assassinated, his push for civil rights broke left its legacy in two movements: the Black Panther Party and the Black Arts Movement. The BAM was led by **Amiri Baraka**. Baraka organized a group of art-activists in NYC who used painting, music, poetry, and literature in order to further the civil rights movement and raise pride among the black community. Some of our greatest writers (eg Audre Lorde) come from that period, and no doubt that without that movement, we would not have spoken word or hip-hop today.

Malcolm X, Dr. King, and Amiri Baraka will join us for this episode of Time-Machine Millionaire, and they will sit down with three activist groups today to try and come up with a strategy for the wisest intervention with the ongoing challenge of the Dakota Access Pipeline. People from across the country are flying in for this debate.

From Seattle, we have **Matthew Horwitz** and **Chris Koffman**, the leaders of a group of art-activists called the Fremont Solstice Group. Read about them @ 350seattle.com and in the Works Cited references below. Also check out the annual Fremont Solstice Parade they hold (<https://fremontartscouncil.org/parade/>), in which they use art and costumes to bring awareness of the importance of protecting the environment.

From California, we have two members from the Environmental Liberation Army joining us. This group believes that legal complaints and parades are insufficient, especially when government sides with big business and allows companies like Shell and Exxon, giving these corporations permission to expand and exploit the environment. So the ELA uses targeted acts of violence, which they call “ecotage” (ecologically-motivated sabotage). The most famous cases occurred in California in 2003, when members of the ELA literally blew up a new Condominium and a car lot full of gas-guzzling Hummers (read about it in the Works Cited below). Since the ELA members are anonymous and in hiding, their leaders agreed to come, but were only willing to use the code names **X** and **Y**. Please respect their anonymity and don’t call the cops—at least not until after the TM Millionaire episode.

From the Dakotas, we have two social organizers and activists, namely **Little Thunder** and **Ladonna Brave Bull Alard**, who have created social alliances (eg the Sacred Stone Camp), with more than 200 tribes represented, and been involved with legal proceedings (such as the 2017 “Standing Rock Sioux Tribe vs US Army Corps of Engineers which featured the tribal alliance and the Korematsu Center for Law and Equality on one side, and Philipps 66, Sunoco, US Army Corps of Engineers, and Donald Trump on the other). Looking up to Dr. King, these activists have pushed for social organization, peaceful protest, and legal process as the way to advance their cause.

Finally, we invite Greenpeace Leader **Annie Leonard** to discuss the feasibility of an *economic boycott*. Back in 1995, the activist group Greenpeace encouraged people across Europe

to stop purchasing gasoline from Shell, since the company was planning to sink an old oil rig into the bottom of the ocean off the coast of Scotland (look up the “Brent Spar” case). Within days, Shell purchases fell by 70%, and the corporation began to look for an alternative to dumping the rig. But this is a rare success story: economic boycotts often fail (or never take off), especially when corporations are as large as Shell, BP, Exxon, and others.

Take the 45 minutes of the episode to discuss the various cases of protest and what strategy was used. Make sure to ask Dr King, Malcolm X, and Amiri Baraka about their experiences. Which strategies were most effective? What has changed between the 1950s/60s and today? And finally, what strategies should protesters pursue as the debate over the Dakota Access Pipeline continues?

Cast:

Dr. Martin Luther King (2)

Malcolm X (2)

Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones, leader of the Black Arts Movement) (2)

Matthew Horwitz (Fremont Solstice Parade and Shellno art-activist)

Chris Koffman (Fremont Solstice Parade and Shellno art-activist)

X (Environmental Liberation Army, leader of the 2003 Hummer blow-up)

Y (Environmental Liberation Army, leader of the 2003 Condo blow-up)

Little Thunder (social organizer and activist, in the Dakotas)

Ladonna Brave Bull Alard (social organizer and activist, in the Dakotas)

Annie Leonard (Greenpeace CEO)

Works Cited (check these articles out for helpful information):

1. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr: (on course site)
2. Malcolm X: “Ballot or the Bullet” and excerpt from “Autobiography” (on course site)
3. Shellno Protests: <http://www.alaskawild.org/shellno/> & <http://shellnodotorg.tumblr.com/>
4. ArtfulActivism in Seattle: <http://350seattle.org/artful-activism-workgroup/>
5. “Kayaktivism” in Seattle: look it up online and check out the “PaddlePowerManual” (How to be a Kayaktivist): <https://trainings.350.org/resource/paddle-power-manual-the-theory-and-tactics-of-kayaktivism/>
6. Some reflections on Ecotage. Steve Jones, “Ecotage: Practical or Punishable?” <http://darwin.bio.uci.edu/sustain/global/sensem/jones297.htm>
7. Recent Greenpeace work: Shaun Walker, “Greenpeace Activists Could be Charged,” Sept 20, 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/sep/20/greenpeace-ship-stormed-russian-coastguard>.

8. Lauren Gambino, March 10. 2017, "Native Americans Take Dakota Access Pipeline Protest," <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/10/native-nations-march-washington-dakota-access-pipeline>

9. On Amiri Baraka and the Black Arts Movement: <https://blackpast.org/aah/black-arts-movement-1965-1975>