



The Annual HBCU Student Climate Change Conference is designed to **educate students, empower communities and build the capacity of HBCUs to work in and with their communities.**

This year's conference theme was, ***"The Unjust Costs of Climate Change."*** Nearly five hundred students, faculty, faith leaders, researchers, community leaders, environmental justice leaders gathered in New Orleans to participate in discussions on building fair and solutions to the climate crisis facing frontline communities.

481
ATTENDEES

25
COLLEGES

25
SESSIONS

46

POSTER PRESENTERS



The conference kicked off with a **free Community Forum: *Environmental Justice Pioneers and Torchbearers: Passing the Torch to Elevate the Voices of Emerging EJ Leaders***. As we celebrated ten years of training the next generation of environmental and climate justice leaders, our keynote speaker, [Dr. Ben Chavis](#) reflected on the history of the environmental justice movement and its impact on amplifying voices in vulnerable communities. There was a passing of the torch ceremony celebrating seven dynamic environmental justice pioneers: **Dr. Beverly Wright**, **Dr. Robert Bullard**, [Peggy M. Shepard](#), Co-founder & Executive Director of We ACT for Environmental Justice, [Vernice Miller-Travis](#), Executive Vic-President, Metropolitan Group, [Dr. Paul Mohai](#), Professor, University of Michigan School of Environmental Sustainability, and [Dr. David Padgett](#), Associate Professor, Department of Geography, Tennessee State University.

OUR TORCHBEARERS:

- **Dr. Dominic J. Bednar**, Assistant Professor, University of California, Irvine,
- **Dr. Michelle Dovil**, Research Scientist, Adjunct Professor, Howard University
- **Simone English**, Program Manager for Community Resilience & Stakeholder Engagement, DSCEJ
- **Olivia Lopez**, Program Manager, Multi-state Water Justice and Climate Policy Project, DSCEJ
- **Dr. Alexandria McBride**, Senior Program Officer, Waverley Street Foundation
- **Dr. Regan Patterson**, Assistant Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering, UCLA
- **Dr. Joy Semien**, Founder & CEO, LEED with Joy
- **Dr. Stephen Pinkney**, Postdoctoral Scholar, Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice



The **impactful work of emerging environmental justice leaders was acknowledged by the EJ Pioneers** who then ceremoniously “passed the torch” to the next generation of **Torchbearers** in a **medallion ceremony**. The community forum delved into the EJ movement's roots, spotlighted the trailblazers who have championed sustainability and community voices, and provided a platform for emerging leaders to share their vision for the future. Poet, **Sunni Patterson**, delivered an inspirational poetic summary of the Torchbearers Ceremony.

BOOK SIGNING

Participants gathered during a book signing and reception, meeting authors, **Dr. Ben Chavis**, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: Overcoming the 500-year Legacy*, **Dr. Beverly Wright** and **Dr. Robert Bullard**, *The Wrong Complexion for Protection: How the Government Response to Disaster Endangers African American Communities*.



EXPERT PANELS

The conference featured a number of **nationally known authors, researchers, practitioners and iconic figures in the environmental justice, weather and climate arena**, including Dr. Robert D. Bullard, "Father of Environmental Justice," Dr. Beverly Wright, DSCEJ founder and Heinz Award recipient, [Dr. J. Marshall Shephard](#), Georgia Athletic Association Distinguished Professor, University of Georgia, [Alan Sealls](#), President-elect, American Meteorological Society, [Paul Goodloe](#), Meteorologist, The Weather Channel, [Congressman Troy Carter](#), Louisiana 2nd Congressional District, [Dr. Mithika Mwenda](#), Executive Director of the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA), [Rev. Lennox Yearwood, Jr.](#), President, Hip Hop Caucus, and [Dr. Calvin Mackie](#), Founder of STEM NOLA.



Expert sessions included topics on ***Navigating Equitable Climate Disaster Solutions, Using Environmental Data to Drive Community Advocacy & Solutions, Climate Change: Where Are We Now and Where do we Go From Here?*** Conference attendees participated in engaging conversations about innovations, data-driven solutions and the collective action needed to address the climate crisis.

STUDENT PANELS

Taking on the challenge of this volatile climate crisis, **students are developing innovative research and advocating for policy reform.** They understand that climate justice means more than reducing emissions; it means protecting vulnerable populations and ensuring that solutions consider the wishes of the communities they impact.

We welcomed student presenters from 25 colleges and universities throughout the nation. There were **seven excellent student panels** with topics such as *Multiscale Analysis of the Impact of Green Infrastructure and Green Buildings on Urban Heat and Stormwater Management*, *A Clothing Crisis: The Impact of Textile Waste on the Environment*, and *The Impact of Climate Change on Chronic Diseases in Black Communities*.



POSTER SESSIONS

During the poster session, **student researchers presented their posters to conference attendees and anonymous judges, explaining their research findings and answering questions.** Their presentations were scored and **winning posters were awarded trophies, certificates and cash prizes.**

There were **46 dynamic college student poster presentations** and **12 high school poster presentations.** Our young scholars are bridging the gap between environmental science, social justice, and grassroots advocacy. **Many of these students come from frontline communities**—those most affected by climate change—and bring lived experience to the forefront of the climate conversation.



COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATION PANELS

There were two CBO panels representing **six community based organizations** including, **Clean, Healthy, Educated, Safe & Sustainable (CHESS)**, **Memphis Town, CAG**, **Concerned Citizens of St. John**, **Coalition of Community Organizations (COCO)**, **Sankofa CDC**, and the **Descendants Project**. These sessions addressed the power of collaborative partnership in strengthening community resilience.



INTERNATIONAL PANEL

The **Global Dimensions of Climate Change Panel** discussed the [Nairobi Summer School on Climate Justice](#) strategic intervention plan to incubate a new generation of activists well equipped to broaden the discourse on climate justice.

The panel included moderator **Abby Haile**, Senior Project Manager, DSCEJ, **Nia Jones**, President and CEO, [The Energy Queen](#), **Zandisile Howe**, Founder & Director of [EcoHarmony Eswatini](#), and **Dr. Mithika Mwenda**, Executive Director of [Pan African Climate Justice Alliance \(PACJA\)](#).



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ATTENDEE FEEDBACK

“This convening was the best yet – they become better each year. The 2025 conference had an electric energy that reflected the confluence of intense EJ work, a heightened awareness about the threats to justice across the nation, a celebration of cultural contributions, and how these elements strengthen and advance our ongoing struggle for fairness, justice, and equity.”

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STUDENT POSTER COMPETITION WINNERS

GRADUATE GRAND PRIZE WINNER



Oluchukwu Obinegbo, Stanford University
*Advancing Justice: New Frontiers for Energy
Equity Metrics in Sub-Saharan Africa*

UNDERGRADUATE FIRST PLACE



Khalil Johnson, Morehouse College
*Atlanta's Growing Invasive Plant Population's
Impact on the Soil Health and Microbiome*

UNDERGRADUATE SECOND PLACE



Mariya Ronczyk, Paul Quinn College
*Broken System, Broken Spirits: How Systemic Racism
Fuels Demotivation and Environmental Injustice*

UNDERGRADUATE THIRD PLACE



Selena McCrear, Florida Agricultural and
Mechanical University
Campus Sustainability: A Call to Action

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ATTENDEE FEEDBACK

“All the students were highly brilliant and their presentations were excellent. It was very refreshing to see the younger generation so committed and activated. The conscious level of the Black community needing to "build our own" was prevalent and distinct. The agenda was packed and very informational.”

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GENERATION NEXT HIGH SCHOOL POSTER SESSION WINNERS



Alongkorn Lafargue, Ben Franklin High School
Pure Flow



Anala Beevers, Patrick F. Taylor Science and
Technology Academy
Mold Un-Mask



Brooklyn Clinton, Warren Easton Charter High School
The Road to Resilience



GENNEXT: CLIMATE JUSTICE SEEKERS WORKSHOP

With the **goal of introducing students to climate science and EJ advocacy**, **35 students ranging from grades 3 through 12** participated in the **GenNext Climate Justice Seekers Workshop**, on Saturday, March 8th.

The GenNext Sessions were coordinated by two HBCU graduates **Dr. Joy Semien**, founder of LEED with Joy and **Simone English**, Program Manager for Community Resilience and Stakeholder Engagement at DSCEJ.



GENNEXT: CLIMATE JUSTICE SEEKERS WORKSHOP CONTINUED

The GenNext students were from **17 Gulf Coast middle and high schools located in New Orleans, LA, Phoenix, LA, Gulfport, MS, and Pensacola, FL**. These talented students represented interns from the **DSCEJ Environmental and Climate Justice Storytellers internship, Unity in the Family Ministry, EJ Yes Summer Camp, STEM NOLA**, and school partners with the **Crescent City Chapter of Links Inc.**, our **sponsor** of the GenNext Workshop.



There were two concurrent morning sessions that focused on ***the Unjust Costs of Air Pollution***. The Lab #1 *Globe Up in the Air Particulate Matter*, a learning activity led by **Dr. David Padgett** (Tennessee State University) assisted participants in collecting pertinent GLOBE (Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment) data, including air temperature and surface temperature, latitude/longitude, land cover, wind speed, and qualitative site characteristics data, utilizing the Xavier University's air quality sensor network, the Purple Air Sensor network map, and the Clarity Air Sensor network map.

Lab #2 Urban Heat Island Activity: Surface Temperature, was led by **Dr. Morrell Gasseler** (Xavier University of Louisiana). Students collected surface temperature, latitude/longitude, and other qualitative site characteristics. After gathering data, they returned to the GenNext "EnvironLab" for a presentation on urban air quality and health, focusing on the criteria of air pollutants and the urban heat island effect (UHIE). College student assistants pitched in by entering the collected data into the GLOBE Data Visualization System. Climate Justice Seekers engaged in a group discussion and data analysis, including conversations on the unjust costs of air pollution.



DSCEJ Technical Trainers, **Kim Dunn** and **Bruce McClue** facilitated the "Unjust Costs of Disaster Recovery" session, providing their expertise regarding *"The Costs of Climate Change on Disaster Response & PPE Needs"*, while **EJ Mascot Al the Bear** illustrated the undesired chaos of climate calamities.



GENNEXT: CLIMATE JUSTICE SEEKERS WORKSHOP CONTINUED



Dr. Joy Semien and **Simone English** facilitated the EnvironLab with the Climate Justice Seekers to explore the game of **Environopoly**. The jumbo-sized game brought the real-world challenges of climate change to life through strategies, teamwork, and fun. Climate Justice Seekers bought and sold properties, prepared for disasters, and made smart decisions to protect their communities. They learned hard lessons from bankers, those charged with providing resources, accessibility issues while they faced floods, heatwaves, hurricanes, and other natural disasters. Some Climate Justice Seekers invested in long-term resilience, although upfront costs may have been high, while others risked losing everything when disaster struck due to lack of preparedness and, most importantly, lack of funds and the associated high costs during and after disasters.

Our students are leading resilience initiatives and research in their communities and on their college campuses by driving bold, creative, and urgent solutions with a vision of a more just and livable climate for all.

DAMU SMITH POWER OF ONE AWARD

Damu Smith was one of the world's preeminent civil rights activists and the voice of a thriving local environmental justice movement. The Power of One Award was instituted in memory of Mr. Smith and his most vital work and contributions to Environmental Justice activism and environmental health science related to communities disproportionately affected by pollution.

The 2025 Damu Smith, Power of One Award was presented to **Dr. Femi Adesanya**, a seasoned chemical engineer with over 38 years in environmental monitoring, pollution prevention and education, specializing in air monitoring and water resource management.



DAMU SMITH LEGACY AWARD

Mrs. **Croscina Crockett** spent 24 ½ years of her career as an educator and researcher with Xavier University of Louisiana and is a former Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Clinical Laboratory Science. Mrs. Crockett began her work as an environmental justice consultant for the DSCEJ in 1995. As a dedicated researcher, she contributed to research on environmental and health disparities, assisted with grant writing, and developed curricula for community workshops.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

The HBCU Climate Change Consortium would like to thank all of the sponsors and volunteers for their generous support of this event.

FUNDERS



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ADDITIONAL SUPPORTERS

Black in Marine Science (BIMS)
Black Sustainability
LEED with Joy LLC
STEM NOLA

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ATTENDEE FEEDBACK

“HBCUs and EJ communities have super powers to accelerate climate solutions!”

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In the midst of a myriad of difficult conversations, heartbreaking firsthand accounts of communities in peril and research and data that often painted a bleak future for our planet, a collective spirit of resilience, perseverance and **JOY** prevailed amongst our attendees.



OUR JOY IS OUR STRENGTH!

