



**JUNG HOTEL
NEW ORLEANS, LA
MARCH 18 - 22, 2026**

CONFERENCE RECAP REPORT



[Dr. Beverly Wright](#), founder & executive director of the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice (DSCEJ) and [Dr. Robert D. Bullard](#), executive director, Bullard Center for Environmental and Climate Justice at Texas Southern University co-convoked the 11th Annual HBCU Climate Change Conference in New Orleans, March 18 – 21, 2026.

This year's conference theme was, ***"Legacy Rising: Charting our Future at the Crossroads of Climate and Justice."*** Nearly five hundred students, faculty, faith leaders, researchers, community leaders, environmental non-profits, and environmental and climate justice leaders gathered in New Orleans to participate in discussions about continuing the environmental justice legacy of advocacy, faith, resilience and strength.



ATTENDEES



SESSIONS



STUDENT POSTERS PRESENTED



COLLEGES REPRESENTED

COMMUNITY FORUM

The conference kicked off with a free Community Forum “*EJ Roots Reunited: We’re Still Here*”

The EJ Roots Forum honored national environmental justice leaders whose work has been foundational in shaping the movement. This historic moment featured video tributes to twelve pioneer leaders, each recognized for their groundbreaking contributions to EJ, as well as a medallion ceremony.

The forum was moderated by **Dr. Margot Brown**, Senior Vice President at Environmental Defense Fund, who facilitated a dynamic discussion on key milestones of the EJ movement. The honorees reflected on their most impactful moments and shared what continues to bring them joy and purpose in their work.

Poet **Sunni Patterson** delivered an inspiring poetic tribute and the program concluded with a vibrant New Orleans cultural performance by **Shaka Zulu**, adding a powerful artistic expression to the celebration.



THE EJ GROUNDBREAKERS HONORED INCLUDED: *Listed in order of photo appearance (L-R)*

- **Jose Bravo**, Executive Director, Just Transition Alliance
- **Donele Wilkins** Executive Director, Green Door Initiative
- **Vernice Miller-Travis**, Executive Vice President, Metropolitan Group
- **Dr. Paul Mohai**, Professor, University of Michigan School of Environment and Sustainability
- **Dr. Beverly Wright**, Founder & Executive Director, Deep South Center for Environmental Justice
- **Dr. Robert Bullard**, Founder & Executive Director, Bullard Center for Environmental & Climate Justice
- **Tom Goldtooth**, Executive Director, Indigenous Environmental Network
- **Susana Almanza**, Executive Director, People Organized in Defense of Earth and her Resources (PODER)
- **Charles Lee**, Visiting Professor, Howard University School of Law Environmental and Climate Justice Center
- **Dr. Mildred McClain**, Executive Director, Harambee House
- **Richard Moore**, Co-Coordinator, Los Jardines Institute
- **Dr. Ben Chavis**, President and CEO, National Newspaper Publisher Association (**not pictured**)

BOOK SIGNING

Participants gathered during a book signing and reception with authors, Dr. Beverly Wright and Dr. Robert Bullard, *The Wrong Complexion for Protection: How the Government Response to Disaster Endangers African American Communities*, Dr. Ben Chavis, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: Overcoming the 500-year Legacy*, Heather McTeer Toney, *Before the Streetlights Come On: Black America's Urgent Call for Climate Solutions*, and Sunni Patterson, *We Know This Place*. On Saturday, Dr. Calvin Mackie also signed copies of his book "A View from the Roof: Lessons for Life & Business" and gave them to our students free of charge.



EXPERT PANELS

The conference featured internationally recognized leaders across environmental justice, climate, weather, and the arts.



The conference featured a number of internationally known authors, researchers, practitioners, multi-media artists, filmmakers, and iconic figures in the environmental justice, weather and climate arena, including **Dr. Beverly Wright**, DSCEJ founder and Heinz Award recipient, **Dr. Robert D. Bullard**, "Father of the Environmental Justice," **Alan Sealls**, President, American Meteorological Society, **Congressman Troy Carter**, Louisiana 2nd Congressional District, **Dr. Mithika Mwenda**, Executive Director of the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA), **Dr. Gregory Jenkins**, Professor, Penn State University Department of Geography, **Rev. Lennox Yearwood, Jr.**, President, Hip Hop Caucus, **Dr. Sacoby Wilson**, Professor and Director, T.H.E. EJ Lab, University of Maryland-College Park, **Dr. Calvin Mackie**, Founder of STEM NOLA, **Traci Curry**, Academy Award-nominated, Emmy-nominated Director, **Edward Buckles, Jr.**, Katrina Babies Filmmaker, Director, and Producer, and **Brandan "BMIKE," Odums**, Artist Studio Be.

Expert panelists addressed pressing issues such as the rollback of environmental justice policies, the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women of color, the burden of cumulative impact on vulnerable communities, the emerging threat of data centers in fenceline communities, and the power of film and storytelling to advance climate justice. Throughout the conference, participants engaged in thoughtful dialogue on innovative approaches, data-informed solutions, and the collective action required to meet the challenges of the climate crisis.



CBO PANELS

Two CBO panels featuring seven organizations highlighted the role of collaboration in strengthening and sustaining communities.



There were two community-based organization (CBO) panels representing seven community-based organizations including, **Memphis Town CAG** (Columbus, MS), **Clean, Healthy, Educated, Safe, and Sustainable (CHESS)** (Africatown, AL), **The Descendants Project** (Wallace, LA), **Shiloh Community Center** (Elba, AL), **Greater Greener Gloster Project** (Gloster MS), **Spectrum Community Development Corporation** (Jackson, MS), and **Sankofa Community Development Corporation** (New Orleans, LA). These sessions emphasized the critical role of collaborative partnerships in enhancing and sustaining community resilience.

CONFERENCE FEEDBACK

This conference rejuvenates our community based-organization. We sit with the people who created this movement and the future torch bearers.

INTERNATIONAL PANEL



The international panel featured communities across the globe who are organizing, resisting, and building transformative solutions in response to shared climate threats, while emphasizing the power of cross-border solidarity and collaboration. The panel was moderated by **Abby Haile** (DSCEJ) and included **ZamZam Boru**, Founder & Executive Director, Northern Vision Community Based Organisation, **Dr. Gregory Jenkins**, Professor, Penn State University Department of Geography, and **Dr. Mithika Mwenda**, Executive Director of Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA).

STUDENT PANELS

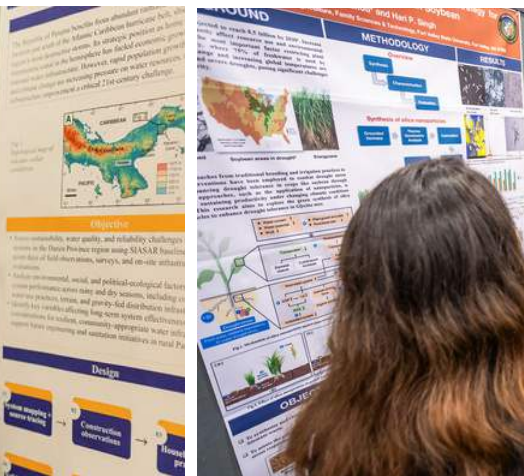
Six student panels addressed key environmental and climate justice issues, with students from 48 colleges represented at the conference.



As the climate crisis intensifies, students are rising to meet the moment by driving innovative research and championing policy change. They recognize that climate justice is not solely about reducing emissions, but it also requires addressing systemic inequities, protecting vulnerable communities, and ensuring that solutions are inclusive, equitable, and led by the communities most affected.

POSTER SESSIONS

College students shared 54 research posters, exploring the intersection of environmental science, justice, and lived experience.



Fifty-four college students participated in the poster presentation competition, sharing innovative research. Rooted in equity, inclusion, and sustainability, these emerging scholars are connecting environmental science with social justice and community-based advocacy. Many are from frontline communities - those disproportionately impacted by climate change - and bring critical lived experience that enriches the significance and real-world impact of their work.

The Deep South Center’s HBCU EJ Media Internship advances environmental justice for Louisiana’s Cancer Alley communities, which face disproportionate impacts from oil, gas, and petrochemical development. These fenceline communities are exposed to elevated levels of toxic pollutants and related health risks, yet their concerns are often underrepresented in policy and decision-making processes. Four interns delivered poster presentations highlighting the environmental challenges faced by these communities.



STUDENT POSTER COMPETITION WINNERS

GRADUATE GRAND PRIZE WINNER



Alex Nwosu, Morgan State University
Retrofitting Baltimore Row Homes: A Construction Engineering Framework for Equitable Climate Adaptation

UNDERGRADUATE FIRST PLACE



Caszhmere Chaison, Elizabeth City State University
Air Quality Assessment in the Sunnyside Houston Community

UNDERGRADUATE SECOND PLACE



Joseph Carter, Texas Southern University
Sick Homes, Silent Minds: Uncovering the Neuroimmune Impacts of Mold in Under-Resourced Communities

UNDERGRADUATE THIRD PLACE



Karter Alexander Woods, Alabama A&M University
Blight to Opportunity: Mapping Brownfields and Socio-Economic Disparities in Alabama Communities

GENERATION NEXT: CLIMATE JUSTICE SEEKERS WORKSHOP



We welcomed 35 high school students from Louisiana and Mississippi to our GenNext Climate Justice Seekers workshop. The GenNext Workshop, led by **Simone English** (DSCEJ) and **Dr. Joy Semien** (Bullard Center), brought together HBCU faculty, DSCEJ technical trainers and staff, CBO members, and Xavier University students to create a meaningful and engaging experience. Students learned about the legacy of environmental injustice and the impacts of climate change, air, water, and land pollution, and extreme heat on marginalized and disadvantaged communities. They also explored potential solutions through presentations, hands-on air monitoring activities, environmental games, and training on proper PPE use, including donning and doffing. Twelve DSCEJ Digital Storyteller Interns participated in the GenNext workshop.

CONFERENCE FEEDBACK

“The conference reinforces the fact that what we are doing is necessary for the future of everyone and that I must get more young people involved. I must continue to educate the community on climate change and Environmental Justice.”

DAMU SMITH POWER OF ONE AWARD



The 2026 Damu Smith, Power of One Award was presented to **Donele Wilkins**, the founding director of the **Green Door Initiative**, a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing environmental justice across Michigan. Wilkins has established herself as a leading voice in the EJ movement.

With over two decades of experience, Donele has been at the forefront of local and state efforts to ensure environmental stewardship remains a priority for community leaders, policymakers, and decision-makers. She was instrumental in the development of Michigan's Environmental Justice Policy and **launched Detroit's first green jobs training program**, empowering individuals to build careers in environmentally sustainable industries.

ABOUT THE 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.*

CONFERENCE FEEDBACK

One of the biggest lessons I can take back to my community is that climate action works best when it is locally grounded and people-centered. I learned that communities already have valuable knowledge and adaptive strategies, but they need stronger support, resources, and inclusion in climate decision making. I also learned more about the importance of climate education, advocacy, and partnerships.

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 the event. The conference was funded in part by the [Environmental Defense Fund](#), [The Engineering for One Planet](#) initiative powered by [The Lemelson Foundation](#), [Union of Concerned Scientists](#), [Alliance for Affordable Energy](#), [National Wildlife Federation](#), [Black in Marine Science](#), [The Kresge Foundation](#), [The Carnegie Foundation Elective Classification for Sustainability](#) hosted by [University of Colorado Boulder](#) and [Sharing the Power Foundation](#).

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CONFERENCE FEEDBACK

Thank you for all the effort that went into making this such a well-executed event. Everything ran so smoothly, and I loved networking and sharing ideas on Whova.

Explore our website for photo galleries and more 2026 conference highlights.

[VISIT WEBSITE](#)

