



A 10-Point Platform (and *Anti*-Platform) on Climate Change



Brooke C. White, *End of New Road*, Forest Heights (Gulfport), Mississippi, 2021, Archival Digital Print.

As leaders of an environmental justice organization called Anthropocene Alliance, we've seen the consequences of climate change close-up. Our organization assists low-income and marginalized communities all over the country impacted by global warming by providing them organizing help, pro bono professional services, and money. We also help them meet in order to better support each other and teach us. From time to time, members or prospective members ask us where A2 stands on issues of particular interest to them. For example: "What's your position on nuclear power?" "How do you feel about carbon capture and storage?" "Do you support a "de-growth" agenda?" "How does racial justice intersect with climate change?" "What's the role of local communities in the struggle?"

These are all good questions, and we have been asked many more. So rather than reply ad hoc, we decided to assemble our answers in a carefully written but succinct document. That's what follows.

We have no illusions that our platform is going to turn the tide of battle in Gulfport, MS, Port Arthur Texas, Klamath County, Oregon, or Washington D.C. But it might be useful for activists, organizers, and anybody else trying to sort through the multiple proposals and counterproposals swirling around the [most momentous issue](#) of this or any other time.

Here's what we're FOR --

1. A phased-in (but rapid) federal prohibition of the extraction, refinement, sale, and use of fossil fuels.

From its inception in the early [19th Century](#), fossil-fuel based capitalism destroyed vast swaths of formerly verdant forests, meadows and hills, and polluted rivers, lakes, marshes, and seas. Today it's murderous; [smog and smoke](#) from oil and coal kill at least 200,000 people per year in the U.S. due to heart disease, cancer, emphysema, and asthma. Million more die abroad from the same causes, as well as from civil and colonial wars waged for control of the fuels.

Soon, because of global warming, fossil capital will become genocidal, destroying whole national populations from flooding, heat, drought, and hunger. In fact, its brutal impacts are already apparent in impoverished regions of the world as well as the wealthiest nations: coastal Bangladesh has experienced unprecedented flooding, leading to the forced migration of hundreds of thousands; heat and drought has sent [Central Americans](#) fleeing to the U.S. Mexican border; the "heat-dome" over Oregon, Washington and British Columbia in early July 2021 killed nearly 1,000 people, and just a few weeks later, cataclysmic floods in Europe killed hundreds more.

Technology for a transition to non-carbon-based [renewable energy](#) already exists. What's required is the political will to strand the assets of the fossil fuel companies: That means keeping coal, oil, and gas in the ground. The ethics are clear: The oil companies have already earned trillions in profits by externalizing the costs (environmental and human) of hydrocarbon extraction. ([\\$2 trillion](#) in profits since 1990 alone.) Now these companies must forgo further enrichment from fossil fuels, for the sake of the survival of present and future generations.

People who lose their jobs because of the transition to renewable energy should receive compensation in the form of money, retraining, and relocation expenses. Small and mid-sized businesses too will need help. The costs should be paid by the fossil fuel

companies themselves and from taxes on high incomes, accumulated wealth, and large corporations. (Every current millionaire and billionaire, and every large corporation has profited from fossil fuels and their associated infrastructure.) To limit the global temperature-rise to [1.5 C. degrees](#) or less, the phase-out period should be no longer than 10-15 years.

2. *Abundant, cheap, clean energy:* The provision of regional, local, and hyper-local supplies derived from photovoltaic (solar), wind, wave, geothermal and other low-cost, clean, and renewable sources.

Until recently, publicly owned electric utilities were the rule rather than the exception. [Today, investor-owned utilities](#) dominate the market for energy; that must change if the transition to renewable energy is to be accomplished. Electricity is too important to be left to the electric companies; its production and distribution should be controlled by individuals, community-based organizations, and local, regional, or national governments.

We don't need a vastly expanded, expensive and environmentally destructive electricity grid, or a phalanx of windmills off every coast and rimming every canyon and bluff. Rooftop solar energy with battery storage, small solar farms, geothermal, and home and neighborhood-based wind turbines can satisfy [energy needs](#) in most parts of the country. Whenever possible, small-scale distributed energy systems (microgrids) should take the place of big ones. Where that is impossible, for example where sunlight and wind is limited, a regional, targeted power grid will suffice. To keep renewables clean, the minerals and metals needed for their manufacture should be – to the maximum extent – derived from [recycled](#) materials rather than newly mined products.

3. *Energy savings!* Energy efficiency and energy conservation are essential steps in the transition to a sustainable energy regime.

Greater energy efficiency in homes and businesses (same demand, less fuel), is among the best ways to [reduce greenhouse](#) gas emissions, that is, before the fossil fuel prohibition kicks in. It's easy, and with government support, affordable too: insulating homes, driving more fuel-efficient cars (as we phase-in an all-electric fleet), and buying energy-star household appliances, will save money as well as reduce energy use. But efficiency gains are self-limiting because buying new, energy efficient products 1) expends a great deal of energy and 2) leads to greater use of fuel. (If your new car gets

better gas mileage than your old one, you are likely to drive it more.) This latter phenomenon goes by the name of “[Jevon’s Paradox](#).”

That’s why energy *conservation* (reducing demand) is even more important than efficiency; it results in permanent cuts in energy use. Effective conservation will require more use of public transit (using renewable energy), fewer airplane flights, a steep carbon tax (with rebates to low-income individuals), and generally lower levels of commodity production and consumption. It will also require big cuts in the [U.S. military](#), currently the world’s largest institutional emitter of greenhouse gases. Conservation is more politically difficult than efficiency because it brushes against the grain of economic and political orthodoxy.

Capitalist enterprises profit by growing their markets and making more stuff – it’s how they beat out competitors. That’s why there is resistance among businesspeople and their political allies to anything that might [limit growth](#). But the masses of people impacted by climate change – essentially everyone on the planet -- need to remember that the economy exists to [serve them](#), not the other way around. The national and global economic order has undergone many changes in the last several centuries, and it [needs to do so again](#). A constantly rising GDP (gross domestic product) may no longer be a valid measure of public well-being.

Nevertheless, there are ways to achieve conservation without the immediate overthrow of capitalism. (Whether desired or feared, such a revolution does not appear to be in the cards.) For example: regulations that limit the manufacture or use of climate hazardous goods, like Bitcoin and single-use paper and plastics; and taxes or tariffs to reduce long-haul air flights, cruises, and the [importation](#) of carbon-dense products, such as steel and cement. In addition, the measure of [GDP](#) could be adjusted to better factor-in growth in non-capitalized human services and activities like child-rearing, housekeeping, poetry, art, music, hiking, swimming, and other forms of cultural expression or play.

4. A smaller U.S. and global economy. Our material surroundings should be filled with joy, not junk.

China uses 25% more energy than the U.S. and [produces twice as much](#) CO₂ (10.4 gigatons) as the U.S. But it also has four times the population. So, we are still arguably the world’s champion consumer of energy, the world’s leading polluter, and the world’s largest consumer of commodities.

As noted above, we need to reduce our energy use – that means making and using less stuff. In his *Special Theory of Relativity*, Albert Einstein proved that mass (or matter) and energy are the same ($E=mc^2$). Genuine energy conservation must be accompanied by reduced manufactures. We really don't have much of a choice in the matter – nature imposes limits.

The United States exceeds its [biocapacity](#) (the ability of a nation to provide for itself) by more than 150%. Therefore, to meet demand (driven by corporate advertising), we must either plunder our own ecological assets, or else consume somebody else's resources. Either way, our current productive model is not sustainable.

And renewable energy alone won't save us. The increased production of renewables has not so far led to any decrease in non-renewable energy. [Since 2009](#), fossil fuel use has expanded (not declined) to meet growing world demand, while renewables still account for only 11% of global final energy expenditure, up slightly from 9% a decade ago. So, economic growth as it has traditionally been conceived must be reined in even as we transition away from fossil fuels. That can be called "[de-growth](#)," "[eco-socialism](#)," "[the ecological state](#)," or simply "conservatism" in its original sense: "the tendency to resist great or sudden change" (*OED*, 3rd Edition, 2010). There's nothing more radical than the possible extinction of human civilization due to global warming.

5. *Carbon storage.* Not pumped into caves or underground tanks, (expensive, impractical, and leaky), but naturally contained in soils, forests, mangrove swamps, [tidal marshes](#), seagrass meadows, and sea mammals.

[Soils](#) are significant carbon sinks, however poor farming practices return carbon and nitrogen dioxide (a potent greenhouse gas) to the atmosphere. [Conservation agriculture](#) could protect carbon sequestered in the soil while reducing the use of [fertilizers](#), [herbicides](#) and pesticides, themselves significant sources of global greenhouse gases.

Protection of [existing forests](#), replanting forests where they have been cut down (reforestation) and [planting new forests](#) where they currently don't exist (afforestation) can increase the absorption of planet warming CO₂. [Old growth forests](#) are important carbon stores and deserve global protection. [Logging, thinning, or burning](#) our forests to save them from fires makes [no sense](#).

Wetlands, marshes, lakes, and seas are also essential carbon sinks. Even whales, which are majestic and intelligent in life, are valuable as carbon sinks after death. When

the largest, baleen whales die, their bodies fall to the ocean floor and remain there for centuries, [sequestering an average](#) of 33 tons of CO2 per animal. Whale waste is also valuable, encouraging the growth of ocean [phytoplankton](#) which sequesters 40% of all global CO2 produced by industry.

6. Supporting a [plant-based food system](#). Agriculture can be a carbon sink instead of a huge, carbon and methane emitter.

Animal agriculture is responsible for [about 15%](#) of global greenhouse gas emissions. The percentage may be lower in the U.S., but data is incomplete. What is certain is that animal agriculture is responsible for a high percentage of methane pollution, one of the most potent, greenhouse gasses, and that [public understanding](#) of the issue is low. Any plausible scenario for limiting global warming to 1.5 C degrees must include reform of our wasteful and unhealthy food system, especially its emphasis on the consumption of animals. Veganism isn't only good for protecting animals; it's good for the earth.

As a whole, food systems are responsible for [one third](#) of global greenhouse gas emissions. Fortunately, there are many ways to [reduce](#) this number and to make food systems [sustainable](#). Agriculture can even become a means for carbon [sequestration](#).

7. An anti-racist national plan for managing The Great Climate Migration: The likely resettlement of some [30 million](#) Americans over the next half-century due to climate change. We need a cabinet level Department of Climate Migration

It is already the case that hundreds of thousands of Americans experience extreme heat, floods, and fires due to climate change. Black, Latinx and Native American communities in the U.S. [are more likely](#) than white ones to experience these climate exacerbated disasters, but less likely to receive [government support](#) for recovery. Many have been forced to migrate from their homes and communities, and the numbers will grow exponentially in coming decades. They must, therefore, be first in line for government support.

[Climate migrants](#) are not, however, exclusively people of color. Anyone who lives in a floodplain (or near one), or in a region impacted by high heat and wildfires is liable to becoming a migrant. Anyone living on the [Gulf, Atlantic or Pacific coasts](#) may be forced to abandon their home. A2 supports state and national plans and protocols for a fair and effective disaster relocation system. Even if we manage to halt production of fossil fuels tomorrow, [climate change is baked-in](#) to our climate forecast for decades and centuries

to come, and we'll need a comprehensive plan to manage the displacement of people and communities.

A U.S. Department of Climate Migration can assist in the process of matchmaking – bringing together communities that need to move due to climate change, and municipalities that have seen their population decline and economies collapse. The increased ability to work remotely means that climate migrants may be able to find good work far from their former homes or from large cities.

8. The preservation of nature and the protection of animals.

By nature, we mean the space formerly outside of human control in which earth systems (geosphere, biosphere, cryosphere, hydrosphere, and atmosphere), vegetation, and non-human animals held dominion. Yes, it's true that since the arrival on the planet of modern homo-sapiens some 130,000 years ago, there have been few completely unpeopled places. But until about 10,000 years ago, human cultures were mostly nature-friendly – they took what they needed to live and little more. And even now, amid a capitalist society that disavows its debt to nature, there are Indigenous communities in the U.S. as well as many associations, families and individuals who hold in their hearts a deeply felt sense of love, protection, and awe for non-human nature.

[Human-caused climate change](#), however, has melted glaciers and ice caps and killed or threatened the animals that depend upon them. It has burned forests with thousand-year-old trees, destroyed coral and other oceanic ecosystems, decimated insect and bird populations, and initiated a [mass extinction event](#) that, if unchecked, may rival the one that occurred during the Permian-Triassic period, when over 90% of species disappeared. Any sound climate protection policy must aim to protect nature and all the plant and animal species that populate it.

The environmental and climate justice movement has paid too little attention to securing [rights](#) for non-human animals. And when animals are considered by them, it's mostly at the species level. Though they may be grouped into species, animals are still individuals, and the latter need protection just as much as the former. Indeed, they require greater protection because while a species doesn't suffer or experience pain, loss, anguish, or fear, an individual animal does.

What that means is that A2 won't pursue any policy initiative or promote any program, remediation or mitigation that would harm or endanger animals. Rather, we seek solutions to climate exacerbated floods, fires, heat, and drought that will support non-

human as well as human animals and allow everyone to live in greater safety and comfort.

9. Frontline communities.

Frontline communities, and especially ones that are predominantly Black, Latinx, and Indigenous, have experienced the greatest climate impacts and therefore possess the greatest first-hand experience about how to deal with them. They are subject-matter experts who need to be listened to and strongly supported with federal, state and foundation dollars.

But popular knowledge without the buttress of science, history, politics, and other fields of inquiry is liable to error. That's why we believe so strongly in [community-science](#), a process whereby community members and researchers come together to share their experience and insights and come up with solutions. In that scenario, scientists don't impose their research projects top-down upon passive subjects; nor do residents of an impacted community make assertions or demands without first gaining a detailed understanding about the benefits and risks of a potential course of action.

Wherever possible, federal, state, and local authorities should provide communities with the resources and expertise needed for survivors to understand climate exacerbated disasters and identify the best possible solutions for mitigation.

10. “Non-reformist reform” or structural change.

With any crisis, there are multiple paths to resolution. Some are narrowly tailored to alleviate the worst of the impacts, while leaving the fundamental causes unaddressed. Other proposed solutions are thoroughgoing and far reaching, but because of their very comprehensiveness, are unlikely to be embraced by those that wield power and possess the greatest wealth in a society.

That's why we generally endorse what has been called, after the Swiss activist and philosopher, Andre Gorz, “[non-reformist](#)” reform: changes in environmental regulation, economic development, and social practice that both alleviate immediate suffering and promote more profound, or structural change. Building a new sea wall to protect part of a city from tidal surges may appear to be sound investment. But upon closer inspection, it's clear that the vast sums of money required could have been used to re-build naturally occurring barrier island and restoring forests or wetlands. The former is reformist-reform; the latter a non-reformist reform.

Carbon capture and storage as well as geo-engineering are reformist-reforms that may (or may not) reduce global warming for a period of time; but by allowing the continued emission of greenhouse gasses, they ensure an even bigger crisis later. A better, non-reformist reform would be prohibition of the production and sale of fossil fuels and their substitution by renewable energy. Helping a community migrate from a climate-threatened area is a reformist-reform. A non-reformist reform would be to ensure that evacuated lands become essential green infrastructure (wetlands, forests, or meadows) that then become part of a wider network of natural, carbon sinks that reduce global warming.

The idea here is that the best climate solutions should both reduce suffering in the short term and reduce the possibility of more suffering in the medium and long term. If an action might tend to empower or embolden those who are responsible for an irresponsible climate policy -- even if it offers short-term benefits -- it should be rejected. If it promotes structural change that enhances ecosystem protection, it should be embraced.

Here's what we're AGAINST:

1. ***Direct air carbon capture and carbon capture and storage*** – an experimental technology that is [expensive](#) and [highly energy intensive](#).
2. ***Geo-engineering to reduce global warming*** – [Impractical](#), [dangerous](#) (it might kill the oceans), and a subterfuge to allow the petrochemical industry to continue business as usual and even profit from catastrophe.
3. ***Natural gas (aka methane) as a “bridge” fuel*** – There is nothing “natural” about [burning methane gas](#), (or leaking vast quantities of it during extraction). It increases global warming.
4. ***Nuclear power plants*** – The manufacture of these plants burns [vast amounts](#) of greenhouse gases. Their operation is [uneconomical](#) and their wastes endanger future life on earth.
5. ***Cap and trade or a modest carbon tax*** – these are ruses to allow low carbon businesses to profit from high carbon ones. They have [little impact](#) on overall carbon emissions.

6. **Hydropower (new dams)** – Release [surprisingly large](#) amounts of greenhouse gasses, and are both expensive and environmentally destructive.
7. **So-called “renewable” biofuels with carbon storage** – These are not [really carbon](#) neutral and may devastate global agriculture and water reserves.
8. **More efficient cows, for example fed with seaweed** – No matter how much [seaweed](#) cows are fed, the dairy industry will still be a big emitter of greenhouse gases.
9. **Carbon offsets by planting trees** – This is currently [a scam](#). There is no effective system to ensure that the offsets (if they are even created) are maintained or protected.
10. **“De-coupling” economic growth from carbon growth.** It’s a nice idea. [In practice](#), it just means exporting carbon-based production from rich countries to poor ones.

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