

Movement Generation: **Cultivating Home**

**Love With Power:
Practicing Transformation for Social Justice**

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**MOVEMENT
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Movement Generation: Cultivating Home

The night before returning to Oakland, Quinton Sankofa sat with new friends under the stars, soaking in the serenity of Occidental Arts and Ecology Center. For the past week they had been immersed in Permaculture for the People, an intensive course organized by Movement Generation Justice and Ecology Project in 2015. Surrounded by the beauty of rural northern California, the activists practiced linking the theory and concepts of permaculture with justice. In the morning Sankofa and the other organizers would return to Oakland for the second half of the training and begin hands-on projects to apply their new knowledge and skills in community-controlled settings. The organizers would also create site-specific maps for six to twelve month projects to start when they returned home.

Sitting under the night sky, the friends worried what would happen when they transitioned back to the urban environment. “We were 28 mostly urban folks who had bonded deeply and built community away from home. Oakland is so busy; we feared we would lose community in the transition,” said Sankofa. Without explicitly naming it, they resolved to carry the energy, commitment and relationships they had cultivated back to Oakland.

Permaculture for the People, and the practitioners and communities it cultivates, is a cornerstone of Movement Generation. Movement Generation began teaching permaculture and complementary “earth skills” to organizers of color as a strategy to foster deep resilience and traditional ecological knowledge in communities on the frontlines of the climate crisis. It was also a way for organizers cultivate new relationships to land, labor and local economies.

Lots of organizers understand the commodification of land as a fundamental problem. What is missing is the understanding of how to have a relationship with land. Permaculture is the cutting edge of a 10 thousand year old tradition. It teaches us we are part of the living world and living systems. This traditional knowledge can help us adapt to crisis and move through it.

— Quinton Sankofa, Movement Generation Staff Collective Member and Earth Skills Program Coordinator

Collective Practice: Cultivating Home

In the practice of Cultivating Home, individuals in a group intentionally cultivate their personal and collective relationship to place and people for a robust, dynamic and healthy ecosystem.

“We are cultivating the midwives of the transition. At every level, these midwives are helping our peoples birth a new world we know is possible and that we long for.”

— Michelle Mascarenhas-Swan,
Movement Generation Staff
Collective Member



Movement Generation has grown and developed like an ecosystem over the years – intentionally nurturing diversity, relationships and the practice of Cultivating Home. The physical space, people, strategy, and programs reflect this commitment. Located in the middle of a sprawling garden that spans the yards of two homes, the Movement Generation office exudes a buzz of symbiotic activity that extends beyond its walls and into the natural environment. Organizers often sit at tables in the garden strategizing while three generations of family members live in the adjacent houses. The people here consider Movement Generation to be more than an organization or a job: it is their life’s work and their extended family.

In this garden it is easy to forget the crisis at hand. Earlier this year the California drought and other extreme weather prompted the *New York Times* to ask: Is our illusion of endless growth and endless supply finally coming head to head with natural limits?¹ As the nation was finally waking up from its collective denial about climate disruption and its economic roots, Movement Generation was nurturing a space for organizers to tackle questions like: What does a future with a drastically changing ecology look like? How do we restore our right relationship to place and build the muscles of sharing and interdependence? How do we strengthen community resilience in the face of changes we cannot anticipate? What would a just transition look and feel like? What movement strategies do we need to navigate this transition together?

1. California Drought Tests History of Endless Growth. www.nytimes.com/2015/04/05/us/california-drought-tests-history-of-endless-growth.html?_r=0

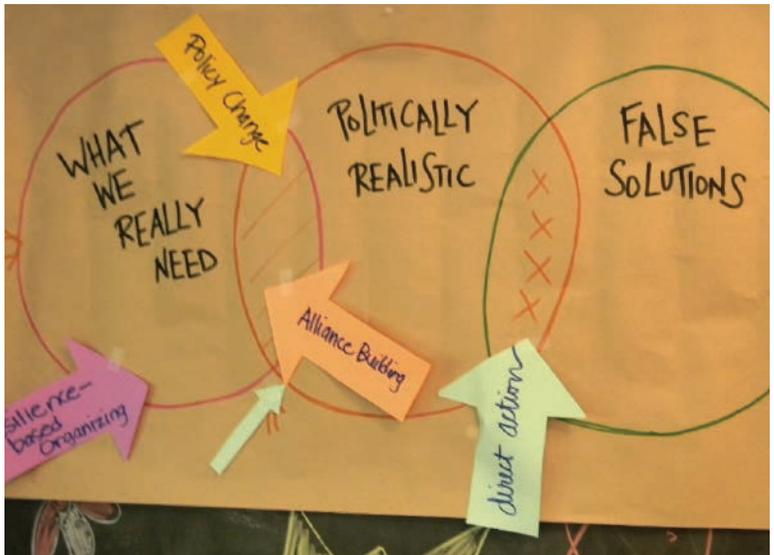


First Steps: Confronting Crisis with Hope

Movement Generation started as a gathering of activists who were ready to face big ecological questions and the accompanying unknown territory. The group initially came together for a one-time retreat and soon discovered a shared bigger purpose.

Most of these activists were racial and economic justice organizers with only a basic grasp of climate change and how it would impact poor communities of color. “We had to confront that the scale of the crisis was unfolding at a rate and in ways that we hadn’t really grasped,” says Mateo Nube, Movement Generation Staff Collective Member.

The experience pushed us all to face the full picture and to show up fully. Our message was we need YOU to be part of this. Asking people to show up fully and wholly in strategy spaces is part of the healing we all need to take on. These intensive retreats later became a core element of our larger strategy.
—Carla Maria Pérez, Movement Generation Staff Collective Member



The first retreat, at the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center, blended the latest science with visioning, story circles with analysis, ceremony with strategy, and helped to develop a strong core of people committed to working together. Although the science was clear and devastating, the practices enabled the group to generate a powerful vision and connection with each other. They were able to look at the reality of ecological disruption clearly while still imagining a just transition for the future.

Ecological disruption impacts everyone in extreme and unknowable ways, and it hits the poor and communities of color the hardest. Is it also an opportunity to transform our culture and economy to be just and generative for everyone?

About Movement Generation

“Movement Generation Justice and Ecology Project inspires and engages in transformative action towards the liberation and restoration of land, labor and culture. We are rooted in vibrant social movements led by low-income communities and communities of color committed to a Just Transition away from profit and pollution and towards healthy, resilient and life-affirming local economies.

Since our launch in 2007, we have engaged over 250 organizations and thousands of community leaders, activists and organizers through intensive retreats, political education, hands-on skills workshops, peer exchange, campaign development,

alliance-building, and strategic support. In the last 12 months alone, we reached over 4,700 people through workshops, retreats, strategy sessions, and speaking events.

Our mission is to help build a vibrant and proactive movement for ecological justice in the United States. We define ecological justice as the state of balance between human communities and healthy ecosystems based on thriving, mutually beneficial relationships and participatory governance. We promote a holistic approach to solving the ‘eco-crisis’ (the crisis of home), as it has economic, ecological, interpersonal, and intrapersonal manifestations.”





Finding New Ways: Towards a Living, Loving Economy

Focusing on the poor and communities of color, the group began to explore what a just transition looks like and what is needed to catalyze it.

We had to ask ourselves: what does it mean that we are always playing within political boundaries that actually maintains an extractive economy? We don't just want things to be a 'little less horrible' for people. Our communities need vibrant local, living, loving economies. What do we actually need—culturally and materially—to make this transition? If we can assert what we really need, we can also begin to shift the political terrain and advance solutions that restore dignity and power to communities.

—Michelle Mascarenhas-Swan, Movement Generation Staff Collective Member

To Movement Generation it is clear that the climate crisis is actually an economic crisis, caused by economies that depend on extraction, domination and endless growth. What is needed is an entirely new experience and understanding of economy that is grounded in the word's original roots – the management of home. Says Gopal Dayaneni, Transformation requires that we build new social and economic systems that model living systems.”

Movement Generation developed a Just Transition vision to focus energy away from an extractive economy and towards creating interconnected local, living, linked, loving economies on a large scale.

For us, transformation means remaking the relationships of home at every level. Home is where we live. It's our bodies, our households, the place we wake up in every day. Remaking our relationships to home means becoming grassroots ecologists who are learning how our actions impact the ecosystem we live in, including all of the people, and then making new choices.

—Gopal Dayaneni

In order to catalyze transition they needed an “embodied politic” and a practice of Cultivating Home themselves. As a community Movement Generation experimented with ways of working and organizing that reflected their vision and commitments. They began to develop an intersecting web of strategies and projects to support organizers to lead a Just Transition with open eyes, a sharp lens and a commitment to action. They committed to developing a web of relationships that would take root and resonate outwards in unpredictable and magical ways. Through these experiments the practice of Cultivating Home emerged, taking multiple shapes and forms.



The Meaning of Home

ECO means **HOME**: 'Eco' comes from the greek word 'oikos' meaning 'home'

ECO SYSTEM = HOME + SYSTEM

Ecosystem means all the relationships in a home – from microorganisms, plants, animals and people, to water soil and air.

ECO LOGY = HOME + KNOWLEDGE

Ecology means knowing, reading and understanding home – and by definition, the relationships of home.

ECO NOMY = HOME+ MANAGEMENT

Economy means management of home – how we organize our relationships in a place, ideally, to take care of the place and each other.

"Management of Home" can be good or bad, depending on what you do and to what ends. The purpose of our economy could be turning land, life and labor into the property for a few, or returning land life and labor into a balanced web of relationships.

ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE = HOME + JUSTICE

Ecological justice is the state of balance between human communities and healthy ecosystems based on thriving, mutually beneficial relationships and participatory self-governance.



Internal Transformation: Planting the Seeds for a Land Based Movement

The earth is a whole system made up of multiple systems. A certain number of fractals change and it changes everything up.

—Gopal Dayaneni

As Movement Generation's commitment intensified they were confronted by a crisis of another kind: many of them were coming to the work as "wounded warriors" carrying unresolved, challenging, even traumatic, experiences. This personal, generational and historic trauma often created patterns of behavior and thinking that prevented them and their movements from actualizing big goals and visions. If they wanted to do anything about the ecological crisis, they needed to shift the movement habits that kept them guarded and fragmented, towards practices that could rebuild the fabric of community and their relationship to land. This was true inside the core group anchoring Movement Generation but also for their allies and the movement at large.



Permaculture for the People, and its companion earth skills trainings, emerged as one of the powerful vehicles that Movement Generation uses to help people Cultivate Home, heal wounds and generate real solutions. The two week intensive brings together leaders of color from communities on the frontlines of the climate crisis. Together they build and explore practical land-based skills through a design process that reflects natural patterns and mutually beneficial relationships.

My ancestors had an adversarial and often tumultuous relationship with the land because they were enslaved. Through this work I can come as a free person and reconnect to land in a way that is healing and beneficial. It's helping me break down barriers.

—Quinton Sankofa

At Occidental Arts and Ecology Center, Sankofa and other organizers in Permaculture for the People learned to connect the ideas and skills of permaculture, like rainwater catchment or harvesting, compost and building with cobb, with justice principles. Returning to the Bay Area they went deep into hands-on application, building a rainwater system, a compost bin and a cobb oven in community-controlled land spaces like Full Harvest Farm and The Urban Tilth Garden at Richmond High. "The first day we were back in Oakland we did a project on animal husbandry at Full Harvest Farm and harvested a duck together. That was a key moment. We had to confront life, and how we relate to life, together." After working in the community all day, the teams devoted their evenings to designing maps for specific community land projects they would lead over the next six to twelve months in partnership with Urban Tilth, Full Harvest Farm, PODER, and Acta Non-Verba. The hand drawn maps included specific elements to meet ecological and community needs. "There was a buzz at the

end of day as people shared their maps.” At night, in the dormitory, they easefully found roles to support each other as a community.

Organizers began to shift from seeing their projects as primarily solving problems to seeing design as a way to systematize and cultivate diversity, resilience, and relationship within their communities. By alternating cycles of Permaculture for the People courses, where activists “go deep”, with earth skills training, that teach a specific skill in a specific setting, Movement Generation has been “planting the seeds for a land-based movement.” This network of frontline organizers now has experience with alternative ways to generate value in their communities and cultivate home in the deepest sense.

Creating alternatives in an urban environment is radical and important work. If we are not generating our own alternatives while resisting the system then we are falling into a trap of spending our lives just resisting and fighting.
—Antonio, Permaculture for the People participant

This has direct implications for organizing:

We like to think about the political home we are cultivating as a rhizome.² It has a strong, networked infrastructure and a bold purpose that people relate to. In this organism, each person can pop up and implement the things that make sense to them. This opens up new ways to organize, vision and help our movements come to scale. It supports us to transform our organizations, our neighborhoods, our economies.
—Michelle Mascarenhas-Swan

Our organizing has to take on an ecological approach and see diversity as our best defense. The purpose of White supremacy is to destroy diversity. But to survive and thrive within the ecosystems we are part of, diversity is a must.
—Quinton Sankofa

2. Rhizome networks can regenerate themselves by sending up new shoots from a network of roots. The poplar is an example of a tree that propagates using rhizomes. The Pando colony of quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) in Utah is a famous rhizomatous tree that has been living for about 80,000 years. The rhizome of a poplar colony is the key to its longevity: foragers, insects, fungus, and forest fires may destroy the tree aboveground but the underground rhizome is somewhat protected against these threats.





Within the leadership collective of Movement Generation the principles of cultivating home, while practiced differently, helped the team shed ideas, ideologies and projects in order to focus on something much larger.

In Movement Generation, we come from very different political traditions. Centering our work around big questions shifted our relationships and enabled us to push past our edges and make bolder leaps.

— Gopal Dayaneni

This means Movement Generation functions more like a networked ecosystem than a traditional nonprofit organization, with each person and project bringing unique personality, gifts, strengths, and relationships to the whole.

Our basic principle is that this work is integrated into all parts of ourselves and vice versa. We are close friends and family and care for each other in that way. This integration has ultimately enabled us to be more innovative in our thinking and our actions.

—Ellen Choy

The commitment to wholeness embedded in Cultivating Home has led Movement Generation to develop movement strategies that build on and strengthen the core, then reverberate out, connecting and integrating social justice issues.

External Impact: **Leading a Just Transition**

Our work is 60 percent intentional strategy, 40 percent organic opportunity.
—Michelle Mascarenhas-Swan

Over the last two years, grounded in their practice of Cultivating Home, Movement Generation focused on investing in community resilience and resilience-based organizing. Movement Generation also steadily focused on building movement leadership and campaigns that can take the vision of just transition to scale within different sectors of society. Along with Permaculture for the People and earth skills training, Movement Generation’s just transition retreats, writing workshops and cultural productions support organizers and cultural workers to build local community resilience. Intensive Justice and Ecology Retreats continue to strengthen and deepen a cross-sector movement network. Collaborations with grassroots groups in the Indigenous Environmental Network, Grassroots Global Justice, and Right to the City gave birth to the Climate Justice Alliance and generated a translocal organizing approach to build power and scale in new ways. All of this is to support people taking leadership for a just transition in their own communities as parents or engineers, fast food workers or healers, artists, faith leaders or teachers.

One specific example of this is their growing partnership with workers and the labor movement.





Movement Generation knows this moment at its root is not a climate crisis; it's an economic crisis. We focus on the economic roots of climate crisis and a belief that ecological resilience will come from supporting worker power.
—Brooke Anderson, Movement Generation Staff Collective member and Climate Workers Director

Climate Workers, an independent, worker-led movement for climate justice, began two years ago as Movement Generation identified and engaged rank and file workers and labor leaders ready to work within labor to lead a just transition. Many of them had friends or family who had become sick from environmental conditions. By steadily training labor movement leaders

through Movement Generation's intensive retreats, Climate Workers is developing the relationships and strategies to position workers on the forefront of just transitions. This local-to-state approach may also be fostering a new ecological constituency and culture in labor.

Historically, there has been a labor movement agreement that members only speak on issues in their own sector. If you are a nurse, you are not allowed to speak about the chemical industry or the regulation of chemicals; you leave that to chemical workers. But climate disruption is a different ball of wax. We are at a moment when workers across the movement need to unite and be part of a larger strategy. And building relationships and the leadership of workers across sectors is key to a just transition.

—Michelle Mascarenhas-Swan

In 2012 Movement Generation supported Alameda County recycling workers to expand compost services from single to multi-family buildings. Skeptics downplayed the expansion with racist assumptions that low-income communities "don't care" about composting. Recycling workers, from the same low-income communities, proved the skeptics wrong as they went door to door to connect with local residents making the program a success and emerging as "climate heroes."³

In another campaign, Climate Workers connected striking fast food workers with organizers working to preserve urban farmland from development; this supported workers in an industry of the "old economy" with those creating alternatives to that industry. As the fast food workers went on strike the urban farmers made 200 burritos sourced from their land to feed them. Later that day the fast food workers helped to boycott and blockade the grocery chain behind the development.⁴

3. Oakland Council Backs Higher Wages for Recycling Workers and Pushes for Bulk-Waste Pickup for Apartment Dwellers <http://www.eastbayexpress.com/SevenDays/archives/2014/03/21/oakland-council-backs-higher-wages-for-recycling-workers-and-pushes-for-bulk-waste-pickup-for-apartment-dwellers>

4. Fight for \$15 and Defend the Gill Tract! <http://movementgeneration.org/fight-for-15-and-defend-the-gill-tract>

In December 2014, Climate Workers took its boldest step towards supporting a movement for climate justice within organized labor by organizing a tour of the Central Valley for union leaders to see the impacts of fracking on farm-worker communities. As a result of the tour, union members began to step out and oppose fracking⁵. In February 2015, eight thousand people marched in Oakland for real climate leadership in California, building on the momentum of the global People’s Climate Marches . In collaboration with 35 key labor organizations, Movement Generation organized a climate workers’ contingent that was the largest contingent in the march. The march shifted the trajectory of fracking in California. Movement Generation believes these actions are building new labor alliances that are ready to proactively seek a just transition rather than false solutions. As local unions endorse action, national and state labor organizations will need to take action as well.

Through a web of strategies, Movement Generation is defining what it means to Cultivate Home at the root of a just transition and they are generating a tangible and powerful community that embodies this transition. It is this element —of actually creating a new world while transforming the old—that is so powerful. It is what might make the impossible possible.

5. See #WhatTheFrack video series.

