

## HIGHLIGHTS

For the first time, **PSC will be offering courses in renewable energies!**

Four new courses will give students the opportunity to pursue a certificate in Wind or Solar, and a career in the booming clean energy industry. You can register for Fall 2020 offerings of Alternative Energy (ELEC-221) and Solar Photovoltaic Systems (ELEC-222) now! [See the Fall 2020 course schedule here.](#)

PSC's Earth Week 2020 celebration included an essay competition which was won by Charles McGhee. His passionate essay outlined the importance of climate action, especially in light of the ongoing pandemic. Look for more on his essay soon on the Sustainability page of the PSC website.

The **campus beehive has been thriving** in the late spring and early summer months. Since the new batch of bees was installed this April, their population has been booming. A second brood box gave them more space in May, a honey "super" box was added in June, and the first honey harvest is expected sometime in July!

Even with a low on-campus population during the pandemic, the **Butterfly Garden is providing habitat** for local species and food for pollinators (like our bees). The growth during early summer has been huge! Check out these photos showing just six weeks of change.



May 27, 2020



July 2, 2020

## Sustainability (and Social Justice): What can I do to help?

Social equity/justice is an integral part of sustainability. Due in part to a whitewashing of history in the mandatory K-12 curriculum, too many live unaware of the systems working against people of color in our society. Check out the Library's [Anti-Racism and #BlackLivesMatter study guide](#) to educate yourself on issues that matter in the movement to deconstruct systemic racism.

## UPCOMING



Learn more about how **accessible and affordable going solar** can be at one of Solarize Chicagoland's "Solar Power Hours!" Find one of their many upcoming events [on their Facebook page.](#)

# FORWARD THINKING: Racism and Sustainability - A Summary

With the recent killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery sparking anti-racism demonstrations and calls for police reform around the country and the world, the connections that race, racism and social justice have with sustainability have been front of mind for many in this field. The general public often sees sustainability as a new-age rebranding of “environmentalism,” but that misses the bigger picture. Sustainability broken down is the ability to be sustained. And sustaining a given activity depends on a multitude of interconnected factors which are sometimes categorized into three realms: environment, society, and economy.

In the interest of keeping social justice issues at the front of our minds beyond the current moment, the Forward Thinking section of the next few issues of this newsletter will be dedicated to exploring how race intersects with each of these three realms of sustainability. But before these deeper dives, an overview.

## Economy

Anyone who has ever had a job and paid bills understands how important the economic realm of sustainability is. Living within one’s means is a matter of survival, whether that’s the survival of an individual, a family, a company, a country, or a planet. Without balancing the budget, in one way or another, none of these entities has the ability to sustain itself in the long run. But, importantly, not all entities start on a level playing field.

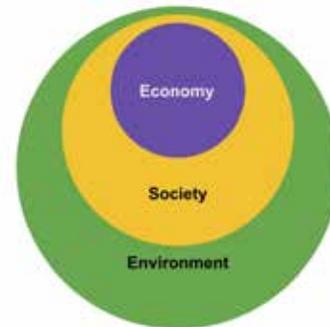
From our country’s inception, wealth has been built for White people by Indigenous and Black people (and often recent immigrants). White settlers claiming land from Indigenous people to be monetized through the uncompensated labor of chattel slaves was the engine that drove America’s early economic “success.”

In the 150 years since the institution of slavery was abolished, there have been countless efforts to [prevent the building of wealth in Black communities, and destroy wealth when prevention didn’t work](#). With racism embedded in our economic system from the start, it’s no wonder that Black families in 2016 had a [median net worth just one tenth that of White families](#).

Our country’s fixation on gross domestic product (GDP) and stock market indices as proxies for national well-being neglects and perpetuates the economic inequality seen between the rich and poor, White and Black, all while painting a grossly incomplete (and often perverse) picture of what well-being really means. History has shown, time and time again, the *inability* of systems that perpetuate (or exacerbate as ours does) economic inequality to be *sustained*.

## Environment

“Living within our means” is often interpreted in economic terms, but we depend much more fundamentally on our environment than the dollar. What does a dollar mean to a society without clean air, clean water, or a livable climate? How would an economy fare without pollinators, healthy oceans, fertile soils, or predictable weather patterns? For this reason, the three realms are most accurately visualized in a nested way, as opposed to the more traditional partially-overlapping Venn diagram.



At first glance, environmental activism does not seem especially closely related to social justice, but it doesn’t take much digging to see the deep relationship they have. [Our country, in general, and the Chicagoland area specifically](#), is still quite racially and [socioeconomically segregated](#) due to racist and anti-poor policies.

Having stark demographic differences in different neighborhoods enables the [exporting of pollution](#) to less privileged areas. For example, landfills, transportation hubs, hazardous waste facilities, and [polluting power plants](#) are [more likely to be located in communities of color](#) than in whiter communities. Along with the chronic health issues associated with [PM2.5 air pollution](#) exposure, [a recent Harvard University study](#) found that even “a small increase in long-term exposure to PM2.5 leads to a large increase in COVID-19 death rate.” This is likely one of the reasons we see such starkly worse outcomes in COVID-19 cases among [Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Indigenous populations](#).

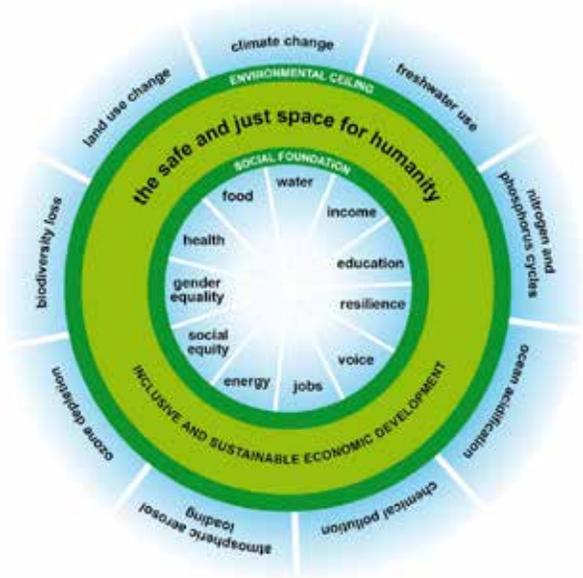
Other examples (to be explored in a future newsletter) similarly show that environmental degradation is disproportionately caused by the lifestyles of the affluent, and borne by those without the political, social, or financial clout to oppose it. Emitting and dumping of harmful byproducts of our industrial processes into the very environment [on which we rely for life](#) cannot be *sustained*, especially when it perpetuates a system intent on keeping communities of color from living prosperous and healthy lives.

## FORWARD THINKING: Racism and Sustainability - A Summary (cont'd.)

### Society

Societal sustainability is maybe the most ethereal of these three realms. In the economic and environmental realms there are clear paths that money and materials take, and transactions that describe and quantify the flow. In society, the capital is not dollars or materials, but trust, connection, self-worth, and well-being, none of which are easily quantifiable - but all of which, nonetheless, influence how sustainable our society is.

[Oxfam developed a helpful model](#) for thinking about the “environmental ceiling” (adapted from the [Stockholm Resilience Centre’s Planetary Boundaries](#)) and the “social foundation,” which define a “safe and just place for humanity.” The social foundation comprises food, water, income, education, resilience, voice, jobs, energy, social equity, gender equality, and health - all of which are necessary to keep people well, productive, and empowered.



In our racialized society, race is relevant in all of these elements, but focusing on just one (this is just an overview after all...), let's look at voice. With freedom of speech, voice may seem like a non-issue on its face. But just having the right to say something is not the same as having a voice.

In the [entire history of the United States](#), only about 0.5 percent of [U.S. Senators](#), and 1.3 percent of [U.S. Representatives](#) have been Black (those numbers are even smaller for American Indians/Alaskan Natives). These are the voices that have written laws, controlled federal funds, and represented the people of this country since it was founded. And this unrepresentative representation is not just in the public sector. There are only [4 Black CEOs](#) in the entire Fortune 500 (all of them are men). With so few of the most powerful voices in the United States belonging to people of color, it's not a surprise that communities of color are often denied other elements of Oxfam's social foundation (water in majority [Black Flint, Michigan](#); [Lead exposure in the Black community in Chicago](#); [education in predominantly Black school districts](#); [jobs](#); [health insurance coverage and health outcomes](#), to name a few). Without this social foundation in place, we have yet to reach this “just space for humanity.”

Many of today's common practices in the environmental, economic, and social realms are *unable* to be *sustained* in the long run. But while these practices affect us all, they disproportionately disadvantage communities of color in ways that poison, impoverish, and silence them. Until we dismantle structural racism, all of the reusable straws, Teslas, and sustainability newsletters in the world won't make our way of life sustainable.

## IN THE NEWS

The loss of butterfly habitat in the country is a major contributor to a decline in monarch butterfly populations of more than “80% over the past decade.” To combat this, “The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) have signed a historic **agreement that allows participant landholders to dedicate a percentage of their lands to monarch conservation management.**” [Read more here.](#)



If you've been reluctant to start driving electric due to cost or lack of available models, you'll be excited to hear that **things are looking up for the electric vehicle (EV) industry.** According to [BNEF's Electric Vehicle Outlook 2020](#), over 500 EV models will be available globally by 2022. By the mid-2020s, they will reach up-front cost parity with gas cars and new sales of EVs will have increased by a factor of 5 from their 2020 numbers. The ride-sharing service [Lyft also announced](#) that they plan for all of their rides to be completed by EVs by 2030.

## WORDS: Environmental Justice

[Census Bureau data](#) shows that a White person in America is expected to live about five years longer than a Black person and two years longer than an [American Indian/Alaskan Native](#). [Longevity is also strongly, and increasingly, correlated with income in the United States](#). While the factors contributing to these disparities are many, the outcomes are troubling and are part of the impetus for the environmental justice movement.

Environmental justice is a reaction to the fact that some communities tend to bear the brunt of environmental exposure risks while others are largely spared. Below are a few examples:

- [“Race is the single biggest factor that determines whether you live near a hazardous waste facility”](#) in the U.S.
- [“Nationwide, black and low-income people face the highest risk for death from power plants’ fine particle pollution.”](#) Long-term exposure to this [type of pollution can cause](#) reduced lung function, respiratory diseases in children, aggravation of heart diseases, and can result in premature death.
- Globally, [“people living in poverty suffer disproportionately more from the adverse effects of climate change than the rich.”](#)

The [Environmental Protection Agency defines environmental justice](#) as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.”

## SPOTLIGHT

The Facilities Department and the Sustainability Office have teamed up on the first two phases of replacing fluorescent tube lights with LEDs. PSC’s campus qualifies for a ComEd incentive program for [Public Buildings in Distressed Communities \(PBDC\)](#) that offers free LED lamps to aid in this conversion. With free LED lamps available and the campus being mostly empty, the Facilities Department has been replacing lamps in hard-to-reach areas, such as the high lights in the Prairie Center, Automotive Lab, and stairwells.

The first phase of this project tested the lamps’ light quality. It only included about 25 lamps, which will save the college about 1.8 megawatt hours (MWh) each year. The second phase included many areas in the Tech Wing and the bathrooms and stairwells of the Main building. This phase will save an estimated 60 MWh annually. In just these first two phases, the college will be saving the electric usage equivalent of over [five average U.S. homes](#).

Along with the energy savings, the LED lamps provide higher quality light to these spaces and last longer than the fluorescent tubes they are replacing.



### Got Ideas?

If you have ideas for helping our campus run more efficiently, produce less waste, offer sustainability-related courses or programs or generally be more sustainable, contact PSC’s Sustainability Coordinator Joel Nightingale at [jnightingale@prairiestate.edu](mailto:jnightingale@prairiestate.edu) or extension 3727.