



TRANSFORMING NARRATIVES ABOUT CLIMATE MIGRATION

CASE STUDY

Gulf Coast Center for Law and Policy



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Founded in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy (GCCLP) has a clear mission: to advance structural shifts toward climate justice and ecological equity in communities of color on the frontline of climate change. GCCLP plays a significant role in helping communities recover after disasters, particularly those that are often left out of federal responses. They are also a leader in building a broad network of organizations across the Gulf South that are addressing the climate crisis through the advancement of equity and justice.

All of GCCLP's work is critical, and impressive. But the aspect of their work that is especially remarkable—and pathbreaking—is their narrative development around climate and migration. Under the leadership of Founder and Executive Director Colette Pichon Battle, GCCLP has developed an affirmative narrative that positions climate migration as both a benefit, and a necessity for our global survival. This narrative is rooted in abundance, love,

and caring for one another and our planet. It abandons scarcity, fear, and a crisis orientation. It focuses on restructuring our social and economic systems and uplifting our collective resilience.

One of the ways GCCLP advances this narrative is by working with the media to ensure that immigrants, disaster migrants, communities of color, and the human impact are part of the coverage of climate disasters—and that this coverage portrays climate change, not impacted people, as the real threat.

GCCLP's new campaign, [We Choose Now](#), is also core to their narrative, communications, and advocacy work. In partnership with frontline networks and national allies, *We Choose Now* works to move forward multiple goals, including equitable rebuilding of impacted communities; having corporations pay their fair share of an equitable and transformative recovery; and ending investments in extractive economies.

“The reality is that immigrants and refugees can go to where they can afford to go, which is often a Black space, or a poor space, and then there's fighting over resources. How do we shift communities' mindsets about scarcity? It isn't going to help to say, 'We have more jobs.' The problem is a perception of scarcity, and a perception of domination.”

Colette Pichon Battle

Founder and Executive Director, GCCLP





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Equitable Disaster Recovery and Rebuilding

“After Hurricane Katrina, I saw a massive amount of people both being brought in, and being pushed out. If we don’t make that movement a natural flow, if we don’t create the systems that allow for this to be a natural flow, then it turns into a very unnatural river of tension. We need to be talking about racial tensions when we relocate people.”

Colette Pichon Battle
Founder and Executive Director, GCCLP



GCCLP envisions social, economic, and political systems throughout the Gulf South that promote equity and justice for all people. Their programs and services reflect a commitment to working at the intersections of climate, immigrant, and racial justice; land sovereignty; and economic opportunity.


Known in the region as a lead architect of community-governed methods for moving resources during disaster response, GCCLP regrants direct cash payments, connects community members to services and resources, and coordinates the deployment of sustainable supplies, such as solar-powered generators and water filtration systems (as opposed to bottled water).

With the goal of building community resilience and self-determination, GCCLP facilitates the growth of local leadership and builds movement infrastructure across its five target states – Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, and Texas – and on the colonized U.S. territory of Puerto Rico.



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The Human Toll of Climate Change in the Gulf South



We have seven years before we reach a point of no return, where the scientific and ecological feedback loops will advance migration. There will be no way to manage it. You've got to set something up now. This is about to get really extreme. We need visas. We need new ways of migrating across borders. We need a new understanding of heat zones. What does it mean to temporarily cross borders? And evolve the migration laws now."

Colette Pichon Battle
Founder and Executive Director, GCCLP

When Hurricane Katrina hit in the summer of 2005, an estimated 1.5 million people from Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi were forced to flee their homes. Roughly 40 percent of those who left, particularly from Louisiana, were unable to return. According to the Center for American Progress, the exodus in the wake of Katrina was the largest wave of climate-related migration in the United States since the Dust Bowl of the 1930s.

Many immigrants impacted by Hurricane Katrina lost access to legal paperwork, as their homes were destroyed and they were either temporarily or permanently displaced. Undocumented immigrants not only had little access to federal disaster assistance, but some were deported.

Beyond Katrina, the Southeast Asian community in Louisiana is losing their homes and livelihoods as fisherfolk due to rising seas and a reduction in water quality.



Climate change is the most horrible symptom of an economic system that has been built for a few to extract every precious value out of this planet and its people, from our natural resources to the fruits of our human labor.

To survive, we must restructure our social and economic systems to repair the earth, develop our collective resilience, build power in and make reparations to the communities that have been extracted from, criminalized, and targeted for generations. And we must establish a new social attitude to see migration as a benefit, a necessity for our global survival, not as a threat to our individual privilege.

These are the frontlines. This is where we start.”

Colette Pichon Battle

Founder and Executive Director, GCCLP, from her TED Talk, “Climate Change Will Displace Millions. Here’s How We Prepare,” (2019) viewed 3.5 million times.



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Solidarity Across Black, Immigrant, and Indigenous Communities



“It’s not too far off that people are no longer going to be able to live in their homes, whether that’s due to land loss, or due to continued fighting over limited resources like water. Migrants will be moving into communities that have never been set up to be inclusive, with their infrastructure, let alone culturally. We need to start to create avenues so that when people come in they are welcomed, not marginalized. I think we’re going to see these patterns happening at a faster pace than we’ve ever witnessed.”

Anthony Giancatarino
Co-Director, GCCLP

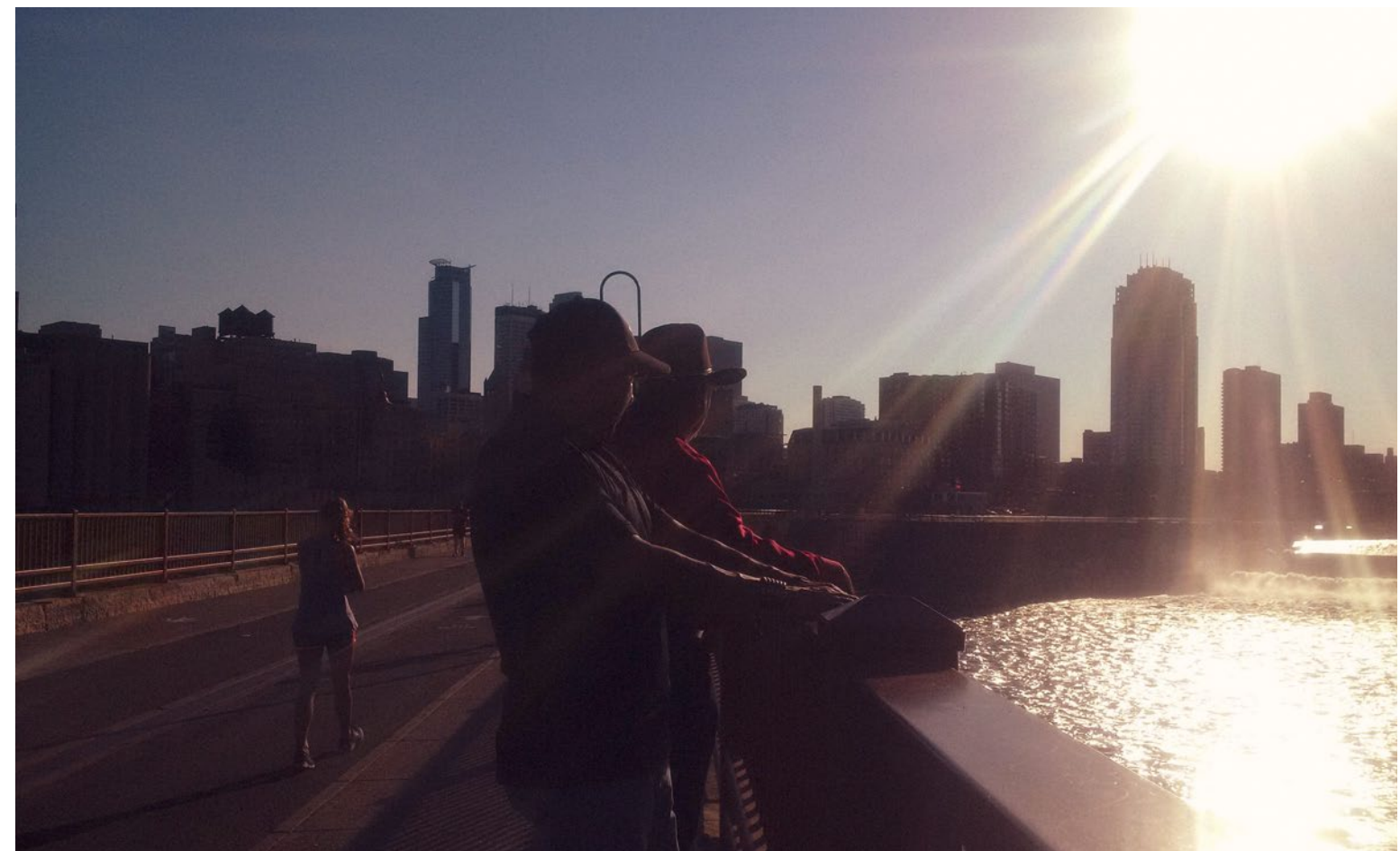
A significant bright spot of GCCLP’s work over the past 15 years has been the strengthening and nurturing of relationships across Black, immigrant, and Indigenous communities across the Gulf South. “These relationships...have remained steadfast since Katrina—and not only during times of disaster,” says Anthony Giancatarino, Co-Director at GCCLP. “These bonds did not exist 15 years ago. They’ve been built since and are at their strongest point right now.”

Building on these cross-community relationships, GCCLP in 2019 launched Gulf South for a Green New Deal (GSGND) in partnership with over 100 organizations across the region. Today, GSGND is a coalition of more than 250 organizations across Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, and Puerto Rico that are addressing the climate crisis through the advancement of equity and justice along with the creation of a living wage and ecologically sustainable jobs.

GSGND asserts that the Gulf South must be included in the development of a national policy, and seek to address what a Green New Deal must look like in the Gulf South to be successful. GSGND aims to: (1) Connect the Dots between climate change, economic justice, and politics in the region; (2) *Reimagine Our Collective Future* for the Gulf South region through tailored policy and action platforms; (3) *Build Power* from the ground up across the lines of race, class, gender, and generation.

Well-managed relationships have helped GCCLP support impacted communities in various extreme weather events. For example, when Mississippi and Texas were hit with an extreme ice storm in February 2021, GCCLP's partners that work primarily with immigrant communities there mobilized resources to all communities in need. And GCCLP helped make a connection to the Movement for Black Lives, which raised money for Black and immigrant communities in Dallas, Houston, and Jackson.

"When you form relationships out of abundance, not just scarcity and reaction," says Giancatarino, "you have a muscle memory of what is possible when a crisis happens."



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