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Black Literature vs. The Climate Emergency, New Conference via UC Berkeley April 5, 2022

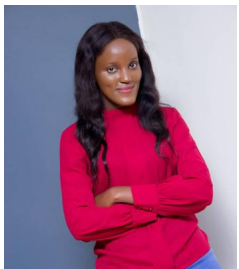
PARTICIPANT BIOS



Aya de León teaches creative writing in the African American Studies Department at UC Berkeley. Kensington Books publishes her award-winning "Justice Hustlers" feminist heist series, which includes *SIDE CHICK NATION*, the first novel published about Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico. Aya has continued to write climate fiction for a popular audience with *A SPY IN THE STRUGGLE*, about FBI infiltration of an African American organization fighting for climate justice and Black Lives (2020) and *QUEEN OF URBAN PROPHECY*—a novel about a female rap artist that addresses misogyny in hip hop, police violence, and climate justice (2021). Also in 2021, Aya published her first young adult novel, *THE MYSTERY WOMAN IN ROOM THREE*, about two undocumented Afro-Latina teens who uncover a senate kidnapping plot to stop the Green New Deal, which is currently available for free in serialized format on Orion Magazine. Later this year, Kensington will publish *THAT DANGEROUS ENERGY*, about a woman caught in a love triangle between a fossil fuel billionaire and a climate activist who begins to spy for the movement. An alumna of Harvard College, Cave Canem, Bread Loaf and VONA, Aya is currently working on a memoir tentatively titled *REFORESTATION: A MEMOIR OF RACE, GENDER, FOOD, BODY, WAR, AND ECOLOGY*. Other current projects include a spy girl middle-grade series for Candlewick Books, a work-for-hire with a major entertainment franchise, and the pilot of her Justice Hustlers series, which has been optioned for television. She is also an organizer with the Black Hive, the climate justice formation of the Movement for Black Lives.



Emily Raboteau is an essayist whose work is at the intersection of social and environmental justice. Since the publication of the 2018 IPCC report, she has been writing exclusively about the climate crisis. A contributing editor at *Orion Magazine*, and a regular contributor to the *New York Review of Books*, her bylines also include *New York Magazine's The Cut*, *LitHub*, *Zora Magazine*, and Greenpeace's website. Her work has recently been anthologized in *Best American Science Writing* and *Best American Travel Writing* and is forthcoming in the climate-themed anthology, *The World As We Knew It*. For the *Kenyon Review*, she is guest-editing a climate-themed issue titled, "Angry Mamas," out this summer. Her third book, *Lessons for Survival*, is forthcoming from Holt in 2023. Raboteau resides in New York City and teaches creative writing in Harlem at City College, once known as "the poor man's Harvard."



Vanessa Nakate is a Ugandan climate justice activist. She grew up in Kampala and started her activism in December 2018 after becoming concerned about the unusually high temperatures in her country. Inspired by Greta Thunberg to start her own climate movement in Uganda, Vanessa began a solitary strike against inaction on the climate crisis in January 2019. Vanessa founded the Youth for Future Africa and the likewise Africa-based Rise Up Movement. In January 2020, the Associated Press (AP) news agency cropped Vanessa out of a photo she appeared in featuring Greta Thunberg and other white European climate activists after they attended the World Economic Forum in Davos. This caused a controversy which drew attention to the issue of Africans and other climate activists of color being ignored on the world stage. Vanessa's first book *A Bigger Picture* was published by Pan Macmillan in 2021.



Bernard Ferguson is a Bahamian poet, essayist and MFA candidate at New York University. They are currently working on a book of nonfiction, *The Climate Sirens* (Graywolf, 2023), about Hurricane Dorian and the effects of climate change on Small-Island Developing States across the world. These days they are thinking mostly about wonder, climate trauma, migrations of all kind, and Bahamian/Caribbean history. Bernard is the winner of the 2019 Hurston/Wright College Writers Award, a winner of the 2019 92Y Discovery Contest, winner of *The Cincinnati Review's* 2019 Robert and Adele Schiff Poetry Prize, winner of The 2019 *Breakwater* Peseroff Poetry Prize, winner of the 2019 Nâzım Hikmet Poetry Prize, and an *Adroit Journal* Gregory Djanikian Scholar. They have served as Assistant Editor at *Washington Square Review* and has received fellowships from the Atlantic Center for the Arts, NYU's Global Research Initiative, and New York City's Writers in the Public Schools. They and their writing have been featured, published or forthcoming in The National Art Gallery of The Bahamas, *The New York Times Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *VICE News*, *The Paris Review*, *The Southampton Review* and *Winter Tangerine*, as well as the *Best New Poets 2017* anthology, among others. They hope you tell them all about your wonder.



Maya Lilly is a film and tv producer and longtime environmental /climate activist. She holds a B.A in Environmental Studies and an M.A. in Environmental Security, but moved to Hollywood back in 2003 to illuminate the environmental crisis, and has been saddened by how slow the Hollywood film community has been to come to the climate conversation. She is the producer of *The Big Fix*, about the BP Gulf oil spill (Lionsgate); *Resist*, about Black Lives Matter and prison economy in LA (Vice/Pulse Films); *Finding Justice*, about black communities fighting injustice around the country (Seven Bucks Productions/BET); and recently *Generation Wealth*, about how wealth has shifted our morality around the world (Amazon). *Generation Wealth* was the opening film at Sundance in 2018. She is also the Executive Producer of *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, the beloved environmental cult classic, currently in development. Maya is a Producer for *The Years Project*, the Emmy-winning team behind the climate change show, *Years of Living Dangerously* (James Cameron/NatGeo/Showtime). They spent most of 2019 following the youth climate leaders like Greta Thunberg in their quest to take on seemingly inexorable adults.



Ashia Ajani is a Black storyteller soulchild of Denver, CO, Queen City of the Plains and unceded territory of the Cheyenne, Ute, Comanche and Arapahoe peoples. Ashia is an environmental justice educator with Mycelium Youth Network and co-poetry editor of *The Hopper Literary Magazine*. Writing as a queer Black femme, they work to preserve, interrogate and imagine how the Black diaspora has shaped and continues to shape land stewardship in the Western hemisphere. They are a 2021 Watering Hole Fellow and doula-in-training. She is a 2020 Tin House Fall Environmental Writing Residency Recipient and daydreams often about the sun. Their words have been featured in *Hennepin Review*, *Exposition Review*, *Frontier Poetry*, *Them.us* and *Sierra Magazine*, among others, and have forthcoming work in *Apogee Journal* and *Barrelhouse Magazine*. Their forthcoming poetry collection *HEIRLOOM* (2023), which explores making home under the threat of constant ecological and cultural erosion, will be published with Write Bloody Publishing.



Valencia Gunder or as most recognize her, "Vee", has been called the "Modern Day Fannie Lou Hamer." A Miami native, Valencia is the Founder and Co- Director of the Smile Trust Inc., and is also the National Organizing lead of the Black Hive and the Red Black and Green New Deal, the climate justice formation of the M4BL. Valencia has led nationally on issues of sea level rise, emergency preparedness, climate gentrification, housing, and food safety. She founded the Community Emergency Outreach Center that assisted over 23,000 residents after Hurricane Irma. After Hurricane Dorian, Valencia and the Smile Team expanded their emergency response outreach to the global south with their "One Bahamas" programs, providing rapid emergency response in the islands, and assisting Bahamians seeking refuge in South Florida. After tragically losing her goddaughter Jada Page to gun violence, Valencia transformed her grief into action. Through a Soros Justice Fellowship, Valencia created a Rapid Response toolkit "LIFT" to help decrease Police and inter community violence in Miami. Valencia, who is a returning citizen, played a leadership role in passing Amendment 4 in Florida which restored the right to vote to 1.4 million Floridians and she works alongside over 80 Formerly incarcerated Black Women (Dignity Florida) to change legislation to assist with de-carcerating women in the State of Florida.



Tory Stephens lives in a small railroad town in Massachusetts. From there he creates opportunities that transform organizations and shift culture. He is a resource generator and community builder for social justice issues, people, and movements. Tory worked in individual giving campaigns and major donor relationship management for 13 years before joining Fix, Grist's solutions lab, as their network weaver and climate fiction creative manager. Tory has used storytelling in the past to raise awareness around HIV/AIDS, to defend medicaid and medicare, and to protect the Affordable Care Act. Now, as the creative manager of Imagine 2200, Fix's climate-fiction initiative, he uses storytelling to champion climate justice, and imagine green, clean and just futures. Tory also owned a kick-butt streetwear company in another life and he would have gotten away with eating the last cookie too, if it weren't for his three meddling kids.



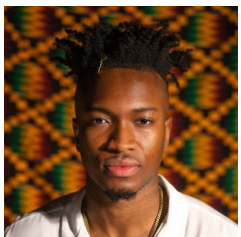
Kevin Lionga Aipopo is a community advocate, storyteller, and student leader based in traditional Kalupuya, Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, and Atfalati lands (Beaverton, Oregon). Their work centers around the intersections between their ethnic identity as a Black American and Samoan person and their gender fluidity. Kevin uses their platforms to interrogate systems of power, challenge normalcy, and uplift voices within their communities. Through interpersonal connection, community organizing, poetry, and education, they have found space as an emerging voice for Black, Indigenous, Queer, Trans, and Climate liberation.



Fifteen-year-old **Aniya Butler** of Oakland, California, started writing poems about racism and police brutality when she was just eight years old. She currently works with Youth Vs. Apocalypse, a climate activism group that brings together young people in the Bay Area to uplift the voices of people of color and to stand up for environmental justice.



Coco Peila is a Hip Hop & Alt-R&B/Soul performing and recording artist and Cultural Organizer. She served as the Director of Hip Hop & Climate Justice at Youth Vs. Apocalypse (YVA), a youth-driven Bay Area Climate Justice organization. Her project BlackGold Movement were selected by WEA (Women's Earth Alliance) to join their Fall 2021 U.S. Women's Accelerator program for Women Environmental Leaders. Her most recent release 'Pretty Girls,' is part of an Audio-Visual media campaign which aims to redistribute the wealth and power of beauty throughout the Black Girl Magic diaspora. She is currently working on her solo project set to drop in 2022.



Kweku Abimbola is a post-graduate Zell Fellow at the University of Michigan's Helen Zell Writers' Program. He is of Gambian, Ghanaian, and Sierra Leonean descent. He is a finalist for the 2021 Brunel International African Poetry Prize, the second-place winner of Furious Flower's 2020 poetry contest, and has work published and forthcoming in Shade Literary Arts, 20.35 Africa, The Common, Obsidian, Sunu Journal, and elsewhere. Kweku is presently working on his first full-length poetry manuscript entitled Saltwater Demands a Psalm, where he investigates colonization, black mourning, black boyhood, gender politics, and especially, the spiritual consequences of climate change in West Africa. His chapbook, Birth Elegies, is forthcoming in May 2022.



Conrad Loyer is a writer and undergraduate student at the University of California, Berkeley. His work has been published in *Berkeley Fiction Review* and *cul-de-sac*. He writes about magic on the margins and queer, Black adventure.