

# Resistance

*The voices of everyday Iowans are left out.*



*Nature's Death*  
Iowa and Tennessee Earth  
Heavyweight Paper Mounted on Masonite  
Size 48 X 48 Board  
Date 2014

In the most representational image in this series, the painting shows a landscape in decay. The windswept view of bare and fallen trees creates an ominous and foreboding landscape. In addition to environmental violence, the trees imply racialized violence, a sense of trees having been used as instruments for human inequity. Like an antique photographic, the sepia tone creates an historical quality, ensuring that the viewer is aware of the specter of the past, as it shapes present realities and possible futures.

**W**e live in a world of constant transition. In 2019, Iowa, especially southwest Iowa, dealt with widespread flooding. Ever since then, our state has been in a near constant state of drought.

Since the summer of 2020 and the murder of George Floyd, our awareness of issues of justice, in particular racial justice, has grown – and in not significant ways, lead to the creation of this book.

In this world of transition, how do we continue to make sure we transition to a world that is more just? Or, as the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to make sure that, “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice”?

The voices you will find in this chapter will help keep this at the forefront of the conversation. They will remind us of the transitions that we all, and our world, are going through. They will remind us of injustices that have been committed over centuries. And they will point us toward a future focused on justice.

Oftentimes, these kinds of stories are uncomfortable to read. But the point of moving toward justice and through transition is not to remain comfortable. We have, as a society and a state, not always transitioned in the most just of ways. We have made mistakes. And we need to sit with those.

But now we can make different choices, and choose a different future in the midst of our current transitions. As we combat climate change, will we do it with an eye toward justice? Iowa’s landscape is among the most transformed in the country. What transformation do we want it to make next?

The invitation in this chapter is to sit with these stories. To listen to them, and let them impact you. And then join them in building a more just Iowa as we move through our transitions.

I'm just done. White supremacy, yeah, can't tolerate that shit anymore. We tolerated it for a long time for the sake of the movement, for the sake of stopping the pipelines. But there comes a point when the anti-racism work has to come first, because really, if you really wanna know what environmental justice work is, it's recognizing that the whole problem that we're facing with the climate emergency, and the social injustice around this whole entire planet is the result of colonial capitalism.

*Christine Nobiss*

I see an awful lot of barriers to progress. We installed EV charging stations in my town, Elkader, Iowa, which is not necessarily popular in a rural county with a lot of corn growers, right? Elkader is known for the annual Sweet Corn Days festival. So, on the Sweet Corn Days in 2022, organizers made a point to park their grain wagon right in front of our charging station at the festival. There's a real rub among the corn growers of Iowa. There's this idea that agriculture's mission is not only to feed the world but, now, to fuel the world, as well. Electric vehicles don't need corn ethanol, so now you have a problem. There's significant backlash. That's just scratching the surface, honestly.

*Joleen Jansen, Elkader*

I used to be a longtime member of the Iowa Environmental Council, but one day I dropped my membership and leveled some criticism at the organization. I said, "Agriculture has the biggest footprint in the state of any industry. You want to affect Iowa but you have no farmers on your council." And so that landed me on the council! It's not easy to get farmers to participate in the Iowa Environmental Council. It's a big commitment, as is farming. Farming can be all-encompassing so you're not left with a lot of time just to wander around and volunteer.

*Kurt Johnson, Unknown Location*



20230303\_133353.jpg



A pasture in Audubon County, from  
*Kurt Johnson*

Using the word "environmental" right now is a tricky thing because it tends to shut off people's ears. I don't believe people are open to hearing about the issues when you use that term. I do have a platform at the moment because of my book. I talk with people about a lot of topics, but environmental issues are rarely my

focus. I prefer to talk to people about soil, crop diversity, and opportunities for farmers, especially in a changing climate like California, which faces recurring droughts and wildfires as the state that supplies 90% of the country's fruit and vegetables. I like to talk about the potential for farmers to explore different approaches. For example, goats are good for keeping down the invasive weeds that everybody in this state is fighting with. Getting meat from weeds sounds like a promising economic venture. However, if I were to frame it in terms of restoring the environment, fostering healthier forests, and promoting a diversity of plants, people might not be as willing to listen. So I avoid discussing environmental issues; it's not in my nature to incite debate.

*Beth Hoffman, Lovilia*

*White folks have to be okay with organizing their own communities, stepping into those conversations, and moving people towards centering racial equity and, ultimately, racial justice.*

*Ahna Kruzic, Centerville*

An environmentalist might, during a meeting, refer to us as thugs. Do I look like a thug to you? It may seem silly, but it perpetuates stereotypes associated with these groups. We're not all a bunch of MAGA, hard hat-wearing factory workers. Not everybody fits these stereotypes by any stretch of the imagination. Are all environmentalists the same? No, of course not. It's essential to recognize

that our preconceived notions about different groups are not grounded in reality. The only way to move past these misconceptions is to sit down and have conversations with people. Engaging in these discussions allows us to better understand where people come from and how they perceive the world. It's always a good place to start.

*Charles Wishman, Des Moines*

When I started the climate change conversation in my Iowa forecast, an influx of cruel emails came in. In the broadcast news industry, you get a thick skin. Most of the complaints are about how you look, sound, or act, but this took offense with what I put out on the air. It reached a peak, a breaking point. In the summer of last year, I received a threat from an individual in Lenox, Iowa, who said: “I’m going to try to carry out what the libtards tried to do to Justice Kavanaugh.” That was when someone was found with zip ties and weapons for going and killing the justice. I got the email on my phone; I quickly tried to contact my wife. I said, ‘Please get home when you can.’ I had received harassing emails from this individual before and ignored them. And then the emails just kept coming. There were messages where

he would say, “I stopped watching, but my friends say that you’re still talking about this bullshit.” So the police intervened. They did an investigation and made contact with the individual. He pled guilty to harassment in the third degree and paid a whopping \$105 fine. It left us rattled. And honestly, I think that was the catalyst for my desire to leave this position at KCCI. I need to look out for my wife and myself. I didn’t stop talking about it, but I needed to start coming up with a plan that was long-term, because I honestly feared for our safety.

*Chris Gloninger, Des Moines*

Evelyn K Davis Park is a large, beautiful place. But a lot of times people will say, “I’m not going out there. That’s where the bad things happen at.” Well, because over the years it’s been reported as a place of violence, people who don’t live in that community have been taught to fear the park. They won’t even drive past it because they think it’s not a safe place.

So I think presentation matters. You know, I did Juneteenth down at Evelyn K Davis for over 30 years without one issue at that park. That’s why I think we need to have more dialogue. What’s the deeper issue here? Why can’t we be together in those spaces? It’s a city park, just like Gray’s Lake is, just like Greenwood Park is. So what makes us look at that one and say, “Oh no, I don’t think we should take our kids there”? I think that only comes with dialogue. People are afraid to speak up.

*Dwana Bradley, Des Moines*

We must work on more conflict-resolution techniques, or conflict will destroy us. The environmental movement is being torn apart by conflict, and we don’t have good mechanisms to resolve it. I grieve about that.

*Carolyn Raffensperger, Ames*

*When we think about the environment, a lot of times we think of the hog industry. If you didn’t smell the hogs, most of the time, you wouldn’t even know they were there, especially in the fall when manure is being applied. If we could find a way to get rid of that smell, I think everybody would get along.*

*CHAD INGELS, Randalia?*

We’re number one in corn, we’re often number one in soybeans, and we’re top five in beef. The result, especially from the chickens, the pigs, and the cows, is too much shit. In southern Iowa, we say, “That’s two tons of shit in a one ton truck.” Well, it’s not just two tons of shit, it’s more like five, ten, or even fifteen tons of shit! There’s a guy at the University of Iowa who did a map of Iowa on his blog showing our major watersheds and comparing them to

whole countries around the world on the equivalency of the manure produced in that watershed from all the animals. It was a very grim, very striking graphic. The result is just the failure of the DNR to regulate this. Even though the Clean Water Act has been on the books as a federal law since 1972, the year I graduated from high school, it’s not enforced here. The nutrient

reduction strategy doesn’t have any standards, either. There’s no monitoring. There are goals but no sustainable funding stream. We’ve had a sequence of Republican governors, administrations, and now legislatures that refuse to do anything about it.

*(KENT NEWMAN, Des Moines)*

Protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline at the Des Moines River, from Carolyn Raffensperger



Our voices, the voices of everyday Iowans, are left out. Nobody’s listening to us on a level where policy changes could be made, not really. Right now, our legislature – the people who can make policy – they’re not listening to anybody but themselves. I know Waterloo and Cedar Falls have a pretty high percentage of African Americans who live there. I’m a member of the NAACP, which is involved with a lot of Black people in the community. Their voices are being left out. I’m White, and the biggest thing I’ve learned from being White and working with the

NAACP is to ask questions. The main question I usually ask is, “How can I help?” I’m really glad that I can be a good listener for other people in the NAACP. I can’t always help; sometimes there’s just no role for me. But I can be a White ally. I hope to speak for only myself. Maybe I’m able to help draw attention to some of the things that need to be done.

*Carole Yates, Cedar Falls*

Carole Yates, an environmental and social justice advocate from Cedar Falls, IA.



*I care about treating people well, but you can't treat people well if you don't care about the environment. They're interconnected.*

*Justyn Lewis, Des Moines*

How do you tell a 55-year-old worker who's just trying to get to retirement that their plant is being shut down when that's all they've ever known? Politicians, and even some environmental activists, will give the very tone-deaf answer, "Oh well, go to the community college and learn coding." It's not that simple. If you think it is, you really don't care about these people. There are complex issues that aren't just about the workers. How do we work with the environmentalists, along with other stakeholders in a town with coal-fired power plants, to make sure that you don't lose the tax base of the entire community when closures happen? How do you ensure people don't leave en masse and affect the school quality, the population — the entire economics of the town?

*Charles Wishman, Des Moines*

We're grappling with an environmental justice issue right now. A weapons munition factory, Chamberlain, was placed in a predominantly African American neighborhood. The city wants to develop that area as part of an extended park system, but folks of course have concerns. What's in that area? What's under the soil? So because this site was on the EPA's list, the city council has been having conversations with our partners in D.C. about any information they might have. We want to connect folks who live there with the city resources that will allow us to expand our parks and offer amazing recreational activities. Fixing the mistakes of the past creates justice.

*Johnathan Grieder, Waterloo*

Planting a cover crop that covers the soil all winter is one of the most helpful things a corn-soybean farmer can do. A cereal rye cover crop in the fall prior to planting soybeans is a huge benefit to the corn-soybean system. That's been my life's work for ten years, talking with farmers, providing programming for farmers to learn from others who have figured it out, answering their questions or text messaging with them when they don't know what they're doing, and of course seeking the funding to do it all. I'll even fight with crop insurance agents who say, "Can't

They told me to avoid using the term climate change in my weather forecasts. Maybe say "a warming planet" they suggested. I pushed back. I said, essentially, you're allowing the loud minority, the people who showed up on January 6, to have a louder voice than the viewers who maybe aren't writing in, who appreciate this knowledge, who want to hear about the impacts of climate change. Imagine going through the entire

do it, I'm gonna kick them off the crop insurance." I show them data proving that cover crops reduce the loss of soil, nitrates, and phosphorus, and farmers can use them to curb at least some of their herbicide use and still control weeds and grow soybeans normally. All field soybeans should be grown like that. It should be standard practice.

*Sarah Carlson, Des Moines*

pandemic and saying: "We can't use the term COVID-19, because the term has been politicized and polarized." That's ridiculous. But I was essentially told to eliminate using the term. I could talk about trends, I could show the science, but it wouldn't have a place in every newscast. I haven't been out since, really, to cover anything climate-related.

*(CHRIS GLONINGER, Des Moines)*

The commodity groups, especially the livestock guys, are always a little wary of environmentalists. It was funny because I got to sit on the other side of the table with these livestock guys when I was working at the EPA. I didn't know they hated me so much until then.

*John Askew, Thurman*



Group viewing former railroad neighborhood.jpg

Farmland is being sucked up for only two things: corn and soybeans. A lot of money is made, but only a few people gain from that. Sure, we have a food supply chain, but food shocks in the fruit and vegetable industry are always possible because of the extreme weather out west, and Iowa is heavily dependent on fruits and vegetables grown outside of the state. That's why I got really serious about growing more stuff locally. I heard the price of good food will continue to increase. That's when communities will struggle. Take where my husband comes from. Everyone he works with has diabetes. And it's no wonder. Food stamp food is not good food. Or, even

when it is, people who work 16-hour days don't actually have time to cook a meal when they get home. So my fear is that we will continue on this path of growing commodity crops for ethanol and livestock, not food people can eat. I'm a little bit hopeful, though, because sometimes I see federal government funding go towards getting local produce into schools and food banks.

*Sarah Carlson, Des Moines*