

High School Essay

Leanne Schlegel First Prize Award:

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Attempting to Solve Climate and Social Justice

The connection between a human being and the planet they call home is quite literal. The living organisms and nonliving counterparts are intertwined to assemble a complex ecosystem. That connection is scientific, where photosynthesis, cellular respiration, and other processes support life on earth. Global warming has threatened this connection. In response, people around the globe are fighting to preserve this connection. However, there is another connection between a human and its planet that most people forget about. That is the moral connection, which influences all other aspects. To do something about global warming, to be a true activist, not simply an environmentalist, the world needs to consider social justice. People in developing countries are twenty times more likely to be affected by climate-related disasters. The poor do not have a chance to make a change and decide to indirectly cause the problem. Along with the challenge of climate justice, every person living on this planet should have the resources and the willpower to fight and save their lives from global warming. When this is achieved, the world has got social justice for everyone.

My connection to this planet is ordinary but complicated in the same way. We all have some connection to this planet. On one side, some non-environmentalists merely interact with Earth and do not believe in global warming. On the other side, some environmentalists organize rallies and protests to protect Earth. My connection falls somewhere in between. I strongly believe in the fact that it is our duty as inhabitants to protect our home, but the movement for

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“green earth” should not ask to rally and protest. A minor individual step towards the ultimate goal is enough to ensure a healthy future for generations to come.

From where I live, in San Ramon, California, there is no visible, major effect from climate change. Plants grow, humans breathe, and life seems to go on without an end. However, for the millions who do not have a chance to act or react, they get the real deal. An unemployed person in a developing country is likely to be offered one or two jobs by their local government. These jobs are usually not environment-friendly, but this person has no choice to join because they need to support their family. This choice, the only realistic one, comes back to bite them. Rising temperatures lead to drought and famine, leaving his or her family with minimal food. Higher sea levels could lead to a flood that decimates a poor village. I once heard LeBron James say, “Someone picked me up along the way. Now it is my job to pick someone up, someone who comes from a background of no choice and opportunity.” Everyone must be educated and have an opportunity to help combat global warming. If this social issue is solved, climate justice will be easier to solve.

The progress of developed and still developing nations has dwindled our resources. New technology has led to the invention of better technology. The world is urbanizing and trees are being cut down to make space for newer cities. The population is rising exponentially due to increased lifespans. The cost of everyday items is rising, increasing the difference between the rich and the poor. According to statistics, the rich use 80% of the resources used every day. This further degrades the quality of our earth.

Since the Cold War, the military-industrial complex has given exclusive power to some leaders and politicians. Countless countries put millions of dollars, sometimes billions, in

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funding for the military-industrial complex. Futuristic weapons are designed to protect a country when no war is evident. All this does is increase the pressure for a rival country to match it. Developed nations have used this pressure to influence their power over developing nations. After World War 2, the US and its Western allies introduced capitalism across the world to prevent the spread of communism and everyone believed it was the path to success. The success can be noticed economically, but not environmentally. Capitalism pushes people to be more competitive, and this damages our resources. Companies want to increase the quality and quantity of their products to get profit. They would not care if they destroyed important resources, if a few hundred were affected by that. Population booms, growing military powers, and economic influence of capitalism and other forms have pressured our planet's trees, water systems, and food supply.

When addressing climate and social justice, it must be taken into consideration that the world cannot be perfect. There are ways, however, to develop our world to be just and healthy. The list of tasks needed to achieve this is lengthy, but they can be summarized in broad terms. The public must be educated about global warming. Many people do not know how to help if they cannot understand how it works. People of all races, genders, and backgrounds must be held accountable for their actions. This works only if everyone gets an equal chance. Progress in technology must follow certain guidelines and take careful steps to not damage the quality of our precious resources. Local, state and national governments have to relocate millions of dollars of spending to fund new projects that are environmentally friendly. Businesses and factories must find efficient and eco-friendly to maintain their supply. The world does not need an automatic switch to renewable resources and recyclable water. Small steps can be sufficient enough to get

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our planet going in the right direction. The future effects of these changes have been visible in the last few months due to unintended behavioral changes.

Since COVID-19 has forced many people to lockdown at home, many businesses have shut down to do employee risk. With fewer businesses operating, the number of greenhouse gases being released into the air has diminished. Pictures taken in cities ranging from Los Angeles and New Delhi to Hong Kong and London show clear skies and a sunny environment. Only a few months ago, smog and other gases were so thick that a blue sky was not noticeable for days at a time. Our planet has gotten a chance to refilter and replenish our resources. We can use this as a foundation from an unlikely source (the pandemic). There is enough evidence that businesses and factories are releasing too many emissions. Everyone, as a group or individually, can give back to our planet. Finding social justice can give an equal chance for each community to achieve climate justice. After all, just one small step individually can lead to a better future collectively.