

## **A Reader's Guide**

Jones, Van. (2008). *The Green Collar Economy: How One Solution Can Fix Our Two Biggest Problems*. New York: Harper One.

### **Forward by Robert Kennedy Jr.**

Principally, Kennedy discussed the U.S.'s potential renewable energy wealth, obstacles to developing those resources, and policy steps that need to be taken by the next president. These obstacles include:

- Annual coal and oil subsidies provide the carbon industry with an advantage and creates a barrier to the renewable industry,
- The current national electrical grid is incapable of handling new kinds of power,
- Local rules impede innovators' access to national markets, and
- State and federal governments haven't provided efficiency standards and market incentives for green buildings and machines.

Immediate steps to be taken are:

- Implement a cap and trade system
- Revamp the electrical grid
- Streamline state and federal regulation
- Improve efficiency of buildings and machines

### **Introduction – Reality Check**

Jones explores the book's main thesis in the introduction: The development of renewable energy sources and sustainable production can solve environmental issues and revitalize and revolutionize our economy. Our current economy is tied to the use of an infrastructure depended on non-renewable sources of energy (oil, natural gas, coal). As these sources become scarce, their cost will rise, affecting every aspect of the economy. Renewable resources (solar, wind, geothermal) are abundant and can be utilized to stimulate a lagging economy. Developing the infrastructure to support the transition to renewable energy will require the creation of many new jobs. These include retrofitting and weatherizing buildings, conducting energy audits, manufacturing and installing solar panels and wind turbines, building new vehicles, recycling, managing water systems, and producing food.

The development of a green collar economy can also advance social and economic justice. Jones' definition of a green collar job is "a family-supporting, career-track job that directly contributes to preserving or enhancing environmental quality" (p. 12). Many green collar jobs will require minimal training, so will be accessible by lower-skill and income workers, giving them an entry point into a career with opportunities for advancement and growth.

## **Chapter 1 – The Dual Crisis**

This chapter opens with the story of one New Orleans couple's experience in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and a discussion of the environmental and social inequities illuminated by the hurricane. Climate change contributed to the temperature of the waters of the Gulf of Mexico being elevated, which supercharged Katrina. The levees of New Orleans were allowed to decay, while funds that could have been used to rebuild the aging infrastructures of many American cities were spent on the Iraq war, which is linked to our nation's dependency on foreign oil.

Jones discusses two crises facing the nation: radical socioeconomic inequality and rampant environmental destruction. There is currently a great economic disparity in wealth distribution in the U.S., with a great deal of wealth concentrated in the hands of a small portion of the population. The country is also plagued by inequity in terms of gender and race with respect to wages, education, and health. African-American males are also more likely to be incarcerated than their white counterparts. Urban areas aren't the only locations to suffer from socioeconomic inequality. Rural areas also are experiencing economic distress.

Jones accepts climate change as a phenomenon drastically impacted by human activity. We have already experienced destructive weather changes as a result, such as flooding, drought, and tornadoes. Future expected impacts of climate change include potable water shortages, famines, mass species extinctions, and increased viral diseases due to growing populations of insects. These impacts will likely impact poor people more harshly than the wealthy.

## **Chapter 2 – The Fourth Quadrant**

Jones reviews the history of environmentalism in the U.S. The environmental movement can be viewed in three historic waves: Conservation, Regulation, and Investment. Jones credits the indigenous nations of North America as being the originators of conservation on the continent. The U.S. conservation movement began in the late 1800s and resulted in the creation of National Parks and wilderness areas. Conservation thinker and activists were divided in to two main camps: those who wanted to preserve nature as a space devoid of humans and those who wanted to nurture human ability to live in harmony with nature.

The 1960s and 70s were the wave of regulation. Several regulations to protect the environment were developed and enacted during this time period and the Environmental Protection Agency was established. These developments were largely due to public pressure following severe environmental issues, such as the Cuyahoga river fires and Love Canal. While these regulatory solutions often improved the environment for some people in some areas, for others they stayed the same or worsened. They did not address the toxic nature of several communities of color, where landfills, polluting industry, and hazardous wastes are likely to be located. As a response to this, the environmental justice movement emerged during the 1980s, calling for equity in regulatory implementation.

We are currently in the third wave of environmentalism: Investment. Environmental protection is seen as an economic opportunity. The challenge for this wave is to do what the past two didn't and open the process and benefits to everyone. Jones calls for eco-equity – equal protection and equal opportunity in an economy that respects the earth. In order to reverse the environment damaging path the U.S. is currently traveling, the economy will have to be drastically restructured. In order to gain the momentum and political will to make this happen, new coalitions will have to be formed. These coalitions must include environmental and social justice advocates and the populations they serve. These coalitions must not only address environmental issues, but the issues of social and economic equity.

### **Chapter 3 – Eco-equity**

The support of government will be a key factor in transitioning to a green economy, especially an economy based on eco-equity. To facilitate this process, a new system must be grounded in moral principles, rapidly reinvent and realign politics, and pursue and implement smart policies. Clear, unchanging principles have been the bedrock of most successful social change movements from the U.S struggle for independence from the British, organized labor, civil rights, women's equality, gay liberation, immigration reform, and the anti-apartheid movement. The social-uplift environmental movement envisioned by Jones must also develop, embrace, and adhere to its own principles. Jones discusses three: Equal Protection for All, Equal Opportunity for All, and Reverence for All Creation.

The principal Equal Protection for All refers to the need to protect and take care of all people affected by environmental crisis or disaster and represents a cultural shift toward community and collective care. Equal Opportunity for All refers to equal opportunity and access to the potential bounty and positive opportunities that a green economy could provide. Reverence for All Creation refers to valuing all species, resources, people, neighborhoods, and nations.

### **Chapter 4 - The Green New Deal**

Jones calls for the creation of a “Green Growth Alliance” that consists of business, labor, social justice advocates, youth, people of faith, and environmentalists. Jones discusses the role of government as an integral partner in developing and uniting the members of a Green Growth Alliance. He identifies the Apollo Alliance and the Blue Green Initiative as coalitions that are already forming.

There is a need for more eco-populism and less eco-elitism. The green movement itself is not large enough to move the country to evolve into a green economy. It will take the involvement of a broader coalition of Americans to make this happen. Eco-populism should always foreground the green solutions that can improve ordinary people's standard of living and decrease their cost of living. In his work with affluent, white communities and low-income communities of color, Jones noted the following differences in approaches taken respectively by these groups: Ecology

vs. Social Justice; Business Solutions (entrepreneurship) vs. Political Solutions (activism); and Spiritual/Inner Change vs. Social/Outer Change.

Jones advocates changing the “vs” to “+” and creating a movement that draws from each of these approaches. He discusses two breakthroughs for bringing communities of color into the green movement: The Amistad Meets the Titanic and Crisis Vs. Opportunity. In the first breakthrough the ships, Amistad and Titanic, are metaphors for planet Earth. In this metaphor, the rebelling slaves that seize control of the Amistad realize that they are indeed on the Titanic as it is sinking, which changes their mission. They are not only seeking to free themselves, but to save the entire ship. Jones has found this a useful metaphor in helping social justice activists to rethink their leadership responsibilities.

The second breakthrough is in how environmental rhetoric is presented. It is often rooted in crisis language, which is effective in engaging and moving those with privilege and opportunity to act. When interacting with individuals and groups who live in a permanent state of crisis, crisis language isn't effective. Rooting the rhetoric in terms of opportunity (for jobs, better standard of living) serves to engage the disengaged.

Jones also discusses the strategies which should be employed by a Green Growth Alliance. They are:

1. Fewer issues, more solutions – we need to not only know what we are against, but what we are specifically for.
2. Fewer demands, more goals – goals can be shared, which helps to grow a coalition. Demands can't be shared.
3. Fewer targets, more partners – if we look for enemies, we can find plenty. If we look for friends, we can always find at least one. The green movement needs more friends and more enemies. Taking the time to invest in relationships is key.
4. Less accusation, more confession – even if we are seeking to change our current system, by living in it we are contributing to it. This is a complex task and no one of us has all the answers that we need. Admitting our own uncertainty makes us more likely to listen to others.
5. Less patriotism, more deep patriotism

## **Chapter 5 – The Future is Now**

This chapter is a series of mini case studies of projects around the country which are developing green jobs. Jones divides the green collar jobs into five subsystems of sustainability: energy, food, waste, water, and transportation. Energy case studies focus on energy efficiency, wind energy, and solar energy projects. Food case studies focus on local and organic foods. Waste case studies are focused on recycling computers and building materials. Water projects include

green roofs, water conservation and watershed management. Transportation projects focus on public transit.

## **Chapter 6 – The Government Question**

This chapter focuses on how government can help facilitate a transition to a green collar economy. According to Jones, top priorities for the next president include:

### 1. Executive branch leadership

- Use climate solutions to frame a positive domestic economic agenda
- Use the pulpit of the presidency to signal serious commitment
- Build a leadership structure within the White House to sustain this focus
- Enlist all federal agencies in building climate solutions
- Utilize the power of executive orders and presidential leadership
- Ensure that the federal government leads the way to economic transformation
- Launch a signature initiative, the Clean Energy Corps

### 2. A comprehensive legislative agenda

- Cap, collect, and invest
- Establish the clean-energy smart grid
- Support green jobs and worker training
- Improve efficiency in energy generation, transmission and consumption
- Increase production of renewable electricity
- Invest in low-carbon mass transportation and rail infrastructure
- Increase vehicle fuel economy
- Change the system for fueling our bodies
- Block new coal plants that can't safely capture and store emissions
- Provide sustainable, low-carbon fuels
- Eliminate federal tax breaks and subsidies for oil and gas
- Trade in hoopties for hybrids

### 3. Leadership in International Negotiations

- Rebuild international credibility through strong domestic action
- Reengage international negotiations
- Connect global warming and trade policy
- Promote adaptation and confront energy policy

### Local Policies

- Green existing buildings

- Create green assessment districts
- Establish a carbon budget
- Set targets for local food, zero waste, and renewable energy
- Use urban planning to create urban villages

How to fund it

- Create a federal revolving loan fund for energy efficiency
- Boost investment by backing loans and matching state funds
- Catalyze green businesses with green strings

## **Chapter 7 – Buoyancy and Hope**

We're facing a difficult challenge and success is no guarantee. However, the attempt to create a society with eco-equity as a foundation will only improve our ability to face the future, whatever that future may hold. Jones reminds us that we are much more technologically advanced than we were able to land on the moon. Creating a movement that includes more and more people increases the pool of talent working to develop new and innovative solutions.