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The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) has been working since 1915 to unite women worldwide who oppose oppression and exploitation. WILPF stands for equality of all people in a world free of racism, sexism, and homophobia; the building of a constructive peace through world disarmament; and the changing of government priorities to meet human needs.

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Kiley Knowles rides her horse through the Shell River during a women water protectors event, held during the Anishinaabe-led fight against the Line 3 tar sands oil pipeline.

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Earning Democracy Through Lifelong Activism

By Darien Elyse De Lu

Past president, WILPF US

January is the month named after Janus, the Roman god of doorways and thresholds, who faces both directions. Writing in January, post-inauguration, I look back at Carter's post-presidency good works and behavior, even as a door opens – with a whoosh! – on the horrors of Project 2025.

Calling on the country to look *back* to a false, mythical 'America the Great,' this President stomps on once-honored institutions – the Constitution, Advice and Consent, freedom of the press. By turning the clock back and back, he proclaims, he'll lead us forward.

We look back for lessons and positive models, but we must also face without illusions what is ahead the next few years. If we doubted the seriousness of our times, the drastic nature of the hundred-plus executive orders is *clarifying*. In response to this presidency, I hear that some people are separating themselves from "politics," even cocooning. I suppose they might say – to paraphrase the old bumper sticker about civil rights – "I wasn't able to access our democracy anyway!"

Are we *earning* our democracy? More than ever before, I'm *planning* my life for activism, rather than fitting it in here and there. Thinking in terms of life-long planning helps me build the space to stand up to those who would *commodify* every aspect of life, replacing *community* with a *marketplace* and a moral or ethical scale with a monetary one.

Our planning is not likely to be so sweeping as Project 2025's, but we can be as effective. We greatly outnumber the oligarchs and political schemers. As more and more people see what is at stake, we have to prepare to mobilize them. As 2024 vice presidential candidate, Melina Abdullah, says: "Don't be scared: Be prepared!"

Preparing and planning for activism involves many aspects: seeking out constructive groups to work with (both for ourselves and for WILPF) and reliable sources of information; involving children in what we do, so that they understand that activism is part of citizenship; and working the unending challenges of a balanced life. Build up your community, your health, and even yourself – let those around you see that you have a full life. And keep in mind that, for our kids to embrace activism, we have to embrace kids!



These days it can be especially hard for lifelong activists to afford to live. It's difficult to make time for activism (*and* community, health, and family) and still work the extra jobs required for more than the basics. What rewards can we offer activists, in place of the small luxuries we're told are the signs of our freedom?

Activism has been hit hard by the pandemic. For most activism, being effective means getting beyond residual negative "PP" (post pandemic) behaviors. We've nearly all felt those changes. Older folks don't go out so much anymore. It can't just be COVID concerns, since so many folks aren't wearing masks at the grocery store nor are they avoiding eating/drinking indoors at the local coffee house or restaurant.

In the PP world, the young folks are increasingly communicating via apps, with many reluctant to engage in actual conversations in person. Their lives have been deeply shaped by years of disrupted youthful socializing and schooling, leaving generational scars. And almost all of us are less available in "real time" for phone calls.

The seclusion and disruption of COVID broke down many long-standing cultural practices of sociability. Additionally, many of us are suffering from the effects of insufficiently mourned personal losses during the pandemic.

As we cross the threshold into a political era of brazen white Christian supremacy, it's time for frank conversations about how we organize, given the pros and cons of the ways we now meet and work together. Meeting virtually *is* convenient, and likely saves fossil fuels by eliminating driving (but look up the carbon footprint of a Zoom meeting; turn off your video *sometimes!*). If your WILPF branch is mostly meeting virtually, how will you include more of the in-person activities that enliven a group?

Use the impetus of in-person energy and get past PP behaviors to make connections with the new people who come to actions and events you organize. Open wide the door to our movement, our community, and a life of activism. *We won't go back.*

2024 Triennial Congress Highlights



Finding Connections, Broadening Perspectives

By Tina Shelton

Every Congress involves thorough planning and implementation. What follows is the true fruit of the gathering. Just as with the campaigns that were voted on and then developed in the past, the true measure of the 2024 Triennial Congress's success lies in the connections and relationships forged during our time together in the Zoom room. Like our inaugural virtual Congress in 2021, this meeting will live on in the digital realm as no previous Congresses ever could, with its videos preserved on our WILPF YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/@WILPFUStoday>.

The groundwork for Water on the Frontlines for Peace began with learning how challenges related to water scarcity and security impact our peacemaking efforts. By amplifying the voices of our Indigenous sisters, and seeking to view our work through the lens of those at the margins (who are most affected by these challenges), this Congress elevated the leadership of women whose voices are essential to the conversation. With planning guidance from WILPF member and Women's United Nations Report Network (WUNRN) Founder Lois Herman, the preparation phase was also grounded in global and feminist perspectives.

The welcome message from UN Special Rapporteur Pedro Arrojo-Agudo set the stage for us to see our work in a global perspective. The leadership of Nancy Price was also crucial in keeping us focused on the connections between environmental impacts and conflicts, bringing in voices of those who are leaders in forging the secure and safe world we aspire to create. Our Congress coordinator held the vision intact, despite the switch from in-person to virtual that drastically changed how the Congress was managed and run.

Attendees of the Congress recognized the clear commit-

ment and infectious enthusiasm of the presenters, who came both from within and outside of WILPF. Hearing from these knowledgeable folks and sharing their expertise and wisdom will create ripple effects as our attendees continue to integrate these insights with their own experience and activism. These experiences provide encouragement for our own efforts as we recognize that people in other sectors are working alongside us, even if we may not always be aware of their contributions.

This broadening of perspectives is exactly what both Chara Armon and Osprey Orielle Lake urged us to consider. Each little bit of "seeing the good" not only helps us find connections but enables us to become better at fostering a healthy web of networked symbiosis as we build cooperative, change-making systems that do not depend on hierarchical structures of domination. These old systems of domination—men over women, people over nature, and white supremacy—are failed concepts and it is our job to transcend them.

The 2024 Congress' collection of stories and people is a testament to moving beyond the current systems and understanding how people in various sectors—environmental and economic transformation, Palestinian and human rights, agriculture, eliminating sanctions, and women's empowerment—are all working for the same end. There can be no climate solution without human rights; there can be no peace without justice.

By grounding ourselves in knowledge and history and understanding our role in past and present transformations, WILPF members are prepared to embrace a new world, progressing like water, shaping pathways for change.

Our Diversity Is Our Strength

Sylvie Ndongmo

President, WILPF International

Water on the frontlines for peace... is a timely topic. As you all know, water is a fundamental resource which lies at the heart of the planet's sustainability and collective human security.

Water is a vital necessity for life and a powerful connector that transcends borders and cultures. We all know that water sustains ecosystems, supports livelihoods, and fosters social cohesion. However, water is also a source of conflict, exacerbated by climate change, pollution, and inequitable access.

As we confront the challenges posed by water scarcity and contamination, we must also recognize the profound oppor-

tunity to promote peace and justice through equitable water governance and stewardship. We must also address...the gendered impact of scarcity, contamination, and exploitation, as well as the...histories of colonial conquest that followed water resources abused in its exploitative industries, instead of the welfare of the occupied and deprived indigenous and colonized nation of the choice about their land resources. The theme that you have chosen for this Congress speaks volumes to us at WILPF.

Our movement is dedicated to promoting peace, equality, and environmental sustainability. Our collective goal is to advocate for policies that respect human rights, the human right to water, and encourage sustainable practices in our communities, as well as address root causes behind the scarcity, contamination, and exploitation. Today, as we come together on this very important topic, let us also reflect on our organization WILPF and the movement at large....

I am also happy...to talk briefly about my work within WILPF.... [T]his year, 2024, marks ten years since I set up the Cameroon branch of WILPF. For ten years, I've seen the organization grow, change, and learn, as the world around us also changed.

Being part of the WILPF International Board, first as Africa regional representative and later as international president, was not an easy choice. Taking part in the governance bodies of an organization like WILPF, with its complex structure and long legacy, is demanding...and a very big responsibility. I joined with a mission in mind.

I want to contribute to the great effort of my African sisters in bringing our knowledge and understanding of the peace movement in Africa to the global movement. This will strengthen WILPF and make it relevant and truly universal. I have worked hard for the past ten years to expand WILPF membership in Africa and set up new sections, and every section comes with knowledge and expertise that are helping WILPF grow and learn.

I also aim to lead the effort of making our movement strong and accountable. I want this Congress to reflect on the aspiration of our membership and our international board to take up its duties in ways that strengthen the movement and expand our membership. I also want us to have a strong and accountable international secretariat.

The international board...has been working very hard since the last congress. The new board members met in person in December 2022 in Geneva with key staff from the international secretariat alongside members of the previous board. The idea was to ensure a seamless handover and transition.

In that meeting, we started several initiatives...includ[ing] the accountability framework and also the support to the young WILPF mobilization. We developed an IB oversight implementation plan for 2022-25 to guide...the international board as we work to achieve the goals and vision of the WILPF international program....

Support[ing] the young WILPF coordination group...is a priority in the international program. Empowering the youth to take initiative and an active role in advocating for peace, gender equality, ensures the continuity and sustainability of our organization's effort....

We need to come to an understanding that supporting the youth means making space and giving up spaces and power and authority to this youth....

Let's all give up some of our space, privilege, and access to others so that we balance the structural inequalities, and let's do that systematically and engrave it in our structures and guiding documents....

[Let's] address our personal, interpersonal, and structural conflicts and deal with a legacy of power disparity. [Let's] build a future for WILPF where we build on our collective strength and power to grow and flourish together.

Our diversity should always be our strength...and this Congress is an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment for unity and mutual support as we navigate through this challenging time.

Tackling the Global Water Crisis

Pedro Arrojo-Agudo

UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation

Humanity faces a global crisis that is particularly paradoxical: The global water crisis on planet water, the blue planet, with some 2 billion people without guaranteed access to safe drinking water, and more than 4 billion without basic sanitation. Billions of people who are not, for the most part,...without water in their living environments, but extremely impoverished people who live next to rivers or on contaminated aquifers, or whose waters have been grabbed by powerful productive interests. A crisis in which women and girls bear the hardest jobs and the greatest risks. They devote most of their lives to fetching clean water for their families and communities.

Continued on page 10.

Anishinaabe Women Are Water Protectors

By Dawn Goodwin, Debra Topping, Karen Durfee, and Sherry Couture (with Joshua Preston)

R.I.S.E. Co-Founders



Anishinaabe treaty rights are inherently tied to our religious life and people's history, and the respect paid to these rights is a reflection of our treaty partners' respect for us. While Americans seem to have forgotten their history, Native people live it every day, whether they are members of a "federally recognized tribe" or just part of the long line of mixed people who claim descent from Turtle Island, *i.e.* the indigenous people whose ancestors were seen as something "endemic" to the land (and still are). Like something growing from the land or water. Like the food and wild rice we depend on, the latter such a staple of Anishinaabe life it's said to be the first and last meal we eat. What Treaty Partners may see as a plant or part of a recipe is to us a living reminder of where and why our prophets sent us to live in the Great Lakes region.¹

As we write this in 2025, the planet's climate is breaking down and indigenous peoples are entering a new chapter in our relationship to the United States and American people. We are living through an inflection point in human history and our Treaty Partners – *i.e.*, the non-indigenous people whose ancestors entered into agreement to be on this land – must understand that Anishinaabeg have a long history of being stewards of our life giver, Mother Earth. It's who we are and what we do, and R.I.S.E. Coalition is committed to fulfilling our traditional obligations of Anishinaabe women as water protectors while speaking for the Seven Generations at this time of environmental crisis and climate emergency.

We are calling on you, as a Treaty Partner, to RISE and protect all that is sacred too.

In order to understand the Anishinaabe relationship to *manoomin*, one must understand our people's migration story. Long ago Anishinaabeg used to live on the east coast of Turtle Island until one day a prophet warned us we must go west or else our people would get sick. If we did not go, we would perish. Those who followed the prophet's directions went to where *the food grows on the water*, eventually arriving at Madeline Island in Lake Superior. That is why the Anishinaabe are in the Great Lakes region.

We lived in peace while awaiting contact from white people² and made *wampum* (treaties) with other nations like the Haudenosaunee and Dakota. It was not until the 1764 *Treaty of Niagara* that the Anishinaabe people, as the Three Fires Confederacy, engaged with the Anglo-Saxon – and proto-American – legal system. We continued to sign treaties ceding land in return for annuities, but the discovery of copper on the shores of Lakes Superior in 1848 coupled with the recent admission of Wisconsin into the Union made business interests greedy for our lands.³

We now call the attempt to remove the Anishinaabe from the region the Sandy Lake Tragedy. This was the consequence of Minnesota Territorial Governor Alexander Ramsey and Indian Affairs agents changing the location of promised annuity payments from Madeline Island to Sandy Lake located hundreds of miles away. The families who made the trip in the fall of 1850 arrived to find nothing there, and when it got cold the annuities that did arrive were spoiled and made people sick. Some left and went back home while others stayed. More than 400 people perished that winter.



When Chief Buffalo found out what was happening, he wanted to make sure his people would never be forced from their lands again. So in 1852 he traveled to Washington, DC, where his persistence led to the *1854 Treaty of*

La Pointe, which traded mineral and timber rights while retaining the right to hunt, fish, travel, and gather on ceded lands. Even more, it ensured a permanent place for the Anishinaabe in the Great Lakes by creating reservations across three states. (Within six months a sister treaty was signed, called the *1855 Treaty of Washington*, which to this day remains unratified).⁴

Despite the 1854 and 1855 treaties being good law that

is the Supreme Law of the Land per our treaty partners' own Constitution, it is sometimes mistakenly believed these treaties gave the Anishinaabe the right to hunt, travel, and gather on our lands. But these are and always have been rights given to us by Creator *Gichi Manidoo* and held in community, the basic right to make basic use of the land being fundamental to who we are. These are rights that cannot be traded, surrendered, or sold without the consent of the Anishinaabeg, as a People, and not only as we are seen through our respective tribal governments. Until these are clearly relinquished, the right for Anishinaabe to be Anishinaabe is the Supreme Law of the Land.



Women are the traditional water protectors of the Anishinaabe, and I, Debra Topping, am a member of the Fond du Lac Band of Ojibwe and grew up on one of the reservations secured by Chief Buffalo in the *1854 Treaty*. I have four grandchildren – with a great-grandchild on the way – and while each R.I.S.E. co-founder came into this role in their own way I became engaged after attending public comment periods and realizing no one was going to speak for my grandchildren but me. What unites us – and all R.I.S.E. sisters – is the belief something must be done to wake up the public to what is happening around us. Everyone reading this is living through the energy and climate crisis.



One day Winona LaDuke called me and suggested I attend a certain public meeting because it involved *manoomin*. I had no idea what to expect but when I arrived I learned it was about Enbridge and its tar sands pipelines. I was expecting one of my brothers to attend, expecting them to speak up since surely they'd have something to say. But when I looked around the room I realized I was the only Anishinaabe there and there was no one I saw who I thought would speak up for my people. I heard many middle-aged white men talk about economics and jobs but not how this would affect all of our water. I was nervous, scared, and anxiety-riddled as I knew this meant recording my voice for posterity. While holding *asemaa* (tobacco from nature) I took a deep breath and told Enbridge "that poisoning our food and poisoning our water is genocide." Someone had to tell these people no.

Then in spring 2018, the Husky Energy oil refinery in Superior, WI, exploded sending black toxic smoke miles in each direction and forcing an evacuation of the area, five schools within a two-mile radius. This occurred within 26 miles of my home on Fond du Lac Reservation. Knowing no one would be taking water samples – and if they did could I trust them? – Sherry and I went all around the lake and its

connecting waterways. It was while doing this we found a monument that read:

Fond Du Lac - Minnesota

Site of Ojibway Village from Earliest Known Period

Daniel Greysolon, Sieur Du Luth was Here in 1679

Astor's American Fur Company established a trading post on this spot about 1817

First Ojibway Treaty in Minnesota made here in 1826⁵

With *asemaa* in hand, I thought to myself: *My god, I'm on holy ground!* It's said there were over 600 families there at that signing. Can you imagine? A whole community gathering at this spot. I wondered how long it must have taken them to travel – the movement of whole families, including elders and babies. Not far from this I saw a sign reading NO TRESPASSING.

Then another with a FISH ADVISORY:

Fish in this section of the St. Louis River are contaminated.

MN Dept. of Health recommends limiting meals of these fish.

Call MN Dept of Health for more info.

612-627-5047

So that's what I did, I took out my cell phone and called them up. The line was disconnected.

Standing in the shadow of a refinery explosion, doing my duties as an Anishinaabe woman, I was grieving. I knew something had to be done, but what? With my *asemaa* still in my hand – *my direct line to Creator* – I asked what needs to be done to fix this? I thought: If the people knew what was happening, would the oil companies be stopped? Maybe people don't know the pipeline is just right there, five miles away. Maybe they don't grasp that the Husky Energy refinery explosion could have destroyed Duluth and Superior. There were people who lived 50 miles away who couldn't eat the food in their garden because of this.

I turned around and saw Highway 23 where the Minnesota Department of Transportation was building another "improvement." I remembered how often these projects dig up our ancestors. They know we're here and yet continue to build right over us.

Following my experience on the banks of the St. Louis River, I reached out to the women I met along the way and organically co-founded Resilient Indigenous Sisters Engaging (R.I.S.E.) Coalition on January 19, 2019, at a cabin deep in the woods of Northern Wisconsin.



III

As new organizers and reluctant activists who didn't know where to start, R.I.S.E. Coalition & Rights of Mississippi River group began by asking, *Why not start by feeling, seeing, hearing, and touching what we want to protect?* So we planned a trip starting at the Headwaters of the Mississippi River. What we saw firsthand were the low waters anticipating the years of drought ahead. Then when construction began on the Enbridge Line 3 replacement pipeline we did everything we could to draw public attention to the risks it posed to our waterways and aquifers.

R.I.S.E. attended dozens of public meetings and hearings by the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, all so we could make it clear that these projects threaten the rights reserved in Treaties with the United States. Along the way we have been threatened, harassed, as well as arrested, for teaching our Treaties and to protect our way of life. Unfortunately these rights must continue to be asserted, we also know this is part of what it means to be Anishinaabe. The four of us are old enough to remember the "Wisconsin Walleye War" of the 1980s, when treaty deniers opposed tribal members exercising their treaty right to fish (as well as the sight of bumper stickers reading "Spear an Indian, Save a Walleye", "Save 2 Walleyes Spear a Pregnant Indian.") We know that if we don't speak up for our treaty rights, who will?

Over the last six years R.I.S.E. Coalition has been an impactful voice in educating our Treaty Partners and next generation. Among the many protests and events we spoke at, we helped organize the 2021 Treaty People Gathering, which resulted in an eight-day occupation of an Enbridge easement over the Headwaters. That same year Sherry walked 286 miles with the Treaty People Walkers from the Headwaters to the Minnesota State Capitol, where unfortunately no one from the state government bothered to meet with them. In one climactic event, Dawn's own experiences became a part of legal history when she was cited for trespassing while engaged in ceremony; but in the end, after three years of filings, the state court district judge dismissed the cases against her and her co-defendants,

Winona LaDuke and Tania Aubid, "in the interest of justice." As the court concluded following a thoughtful reflection of what it means to be part of a dominant culture administering justice: "To criminalize their behavior would be the crime."⁶

We do this work because as Anishinaabe women, if we do not protect *nibi* (water), we would be giving up on ourselves and our people. For too long Native people have let others be stewards of the environment, expecting them to be true to their word, but it's clear the United States' modern energy policy is on a collision course with our right to hunt, fish, and gather. The mineral and timber rights ceded in the 1854 Treaty are being exercised in a way that undermines and erodes our right to quiet enjoyment. It is breaching the peace and destroying the planet as well as our relationship to Mother Earth. R.I.S.E. will continue this work because it's what we do, but now is the time for Treaty Partners to RISE and protect the sacred.

Notes

- ¹ It's for this reason that when the local land grant university sequenced its genome without consent our leaders condemned it as theft from our ceded territories. See, e.g., Nancy Averett, "The future of wild rice may depend on an unlikely alliance," Food & Environment Reporting Network (FERN), February 15, 2023.
- ² While a colloquial telling of Anishinaabeg migration may use the phrase "white people," it is intended to reference people who are light-skinned. One has to remember Turtle Islanders have a history distinct from Europe and what is customarily referred to as "The Old World." Because of this literal meeting of cultures, there are individuals like George Bonga (1802-1874) who was of Ojibwe and African-descent—a natural mixed-blood interpreter—who despite being Black is nonetheless viewed as one of the "first" white children born in Minnesota (as it's now called). The reason for this confusion of identities to a modern audience is because the Natives believed all foreigners "were" White. This racialization of people through language and in relationship to geography might similarly be seen in the cultural assimilation of German-American immigrants during World War I.
- ³ For an insightful overview of Anishinaabeg treaty and wampum history, see Professor Martin Reinhardt, "Treaty Relationships between the Anishinaabe Three Fires Confederacy and the Other Nations of the Great Lakes Region." Reinhardt is a Professor at Northern Michigan University's Center for Native American Studies. Lecture available here: <https://youtu.be/8nDpjS4XEv?si=nl7Va6AxoZBxA5pa>.
- ⁴ While the 1855 Treaty wasn't ratified by the U.S. Congress, it nonetheless included the same signatories and was signed with a war and peace pipe. This meant the parties agreed to live in peace and allow outsiders onto their lands while retaining the right to hunt and gather. Regardless of whether it was ratified, Treaty Partners (and residents) are breaking the peace by making us worry about our usufructuary rights being violated.
- ⁵ The monument goes on to note it was erected by the Daughters of the American Revolution on September 21, 1922.
- ⁶ See, e.g., Randy Furst, "Judge dismisses charges against activists accused of disrupting Enbridge line 3," *The Minnesota Star Tribune*, September 18, 2023.

The Way of Water and My WILPF Year

A Model for Human-Balanced, Nature-Centered Social Transformation

By Kim Poole

DC-MD-VA Branch

In an era defined by environmental degradation, social inequities, and urgent calls for reparatory justice, “The Way of Water” offers a paradigm for organizing glocal movements grounded in nature-centered approaches to transformation. This model draws deeply from the teachings of Indigenous knowledge systems, African spirituality, and Afro-futurism, blending these traditions into a powerful framework for reparative action. It is a best practice that honors the wisdom of ancient cultures, particularly their understanding of the Earth’s elements and water’s essential role in the balance of life. The Way of Water encourages movement builders and organizers to embody the characteristics of water—fluidity, adaptability, persistence—and to reflect on the profound interconnectedness between human beings and the natural world. It reminds us that we are nature.

At the heart of this model is the acknowledgment that water is both life and a guiding metaphor for organizing. As the legendary Nigerian musician and activist Fela Kuti proclaimed in his song “Water No Get Enemy,” water is indispensable, it is both gentle and powerful. It cannot be owned or opposed because it flows in every living thing and is essential to survival. Water teaches us adaptability, as it moves effortlessly between forms—rain, rivers, oceans, and mist—shaping the land and carving paths. It reminds us that effective movements, too, must be adaptable, resilient, and flexible. Like water, which occupies the space it is given, social movements must learn to expand into the spaces where they are needed, filling gaps in advocacy and justice.

This fluidity resonates with the spiritual understanding of water in African traditions. In Yoruba cosmology, water deities like Oshun and Yemayá embody the nurturing, creative, and life-giving properties of water. Oshun, the goddess of fresh water and fertility, represents abundance, beauty, and the flow of life, while Yemayá, the mother of the oceans, symbolizes maternal care, protection, and healing. These deities remind us that water’s force is generative and transformative, offering sustenance to both the body and the spirit. In movements for justice, we must channel this same energy—nurturing communities, protecting the vulnerable, and fostering growth in ways that honor both human dignity and the planet’s integrity.

In the Christian tradition, water is also seen as cleansing and restorative, with baptism symbolizing rebirth and a new



beginning. Water permeates both the physical and spiritual worlds, representing life and transformation. Like baptism, our work in the flow of water brings renewal, allowing for the healing of past wrongs and the restoration of balance.

The Way of Water model is Sankofa at work, drawing from the past but also incorporating the wisdom of Afro-futurism. The vision of Octavia Butler enriches The Way of Water. Butler’s book, *Parable of the Sower*, envisions a future where humanity’s survival depends on adaptability and a deep, spiritual connection to the Earth. From this, we understand that we, ourselves, are Earthseed—star dust from the universe, made of the same elements that make up the planet. As Earthseed, we are interconnected with all life forms and carry the responsibility to nurture and protect the planet as a vital part of our existence. Butler’s vision calls us to become stewards of the Earth, crafting a future rooted in balance, equity, and respect for all forms of life.

This understanding is mirrored in the Anishinaabe teachings of the Water Walkers and the Grandmother Water Keepers, who hold sacred the duty to protect the waters of the Earth. Their rituals of water prayer and reverence remind us of water’s centrality in life and the responsibility we all share in safeguarding it. Water is a living entity with its own spirit, deserving of respect, protection, and partnership. These teachings inspire organizers to not only seek justice for people but also to restore balance between humanity and nature. The water prayers of these Grandmothers symbolize a deep spiritual recognition of water’s role in maintaining peace and equilibrium, both in the environment and in society.

The Way of Water also teaches us that water has the ability to swell, sometimes crashing with force to restore balance, and at other times quietly trickling into the smallest cracks, filling the spaces where it is needed most. In social movements, this translates to recognizing when to exert

pressure for change, and when to simply occupy space, asserting presence and persistence. Water finds its way into the most fortified structures, seeping into the cracks and slowly transforming landscapes over time. Similarly, justice movements must recognize the power of quiet, persistent action—steadily undermining oppressive systems until they can no longer stand.

As we explore this model for reparative justice organizing, we learn that water shows us how to move with purpose, humility, and strength. It reveals the cracks in our infrastructure, allowing us to identify weaknesses in unjust systems and persist in our restitution. The Way of Water seeks true rehabilitation, asking us to honor the cycles of nature, recognize our role as caretakers, and work collectively to heal both the wounds of history and the Earth itself.



Sculptures of Orixas in Dique do Tororo, a lake in Salvador, Brazil.

The Way of Water is a call to embody all the elements of Earth in our organizing work, particularly water, the source of all life. In doing so, we create movements that are adaptive, resilient, and deeply connected to both human and environmental justice. As we honor earth wisdom, the deities of water, and the lessons of Afro-futurism, we craft a path forward that recognizes the sacred balance of life in our blue-water world, striving for a future that is just, equitable, and sustainable for all.

We Are the Flow

Our water work is glocal and embraces the understanding that water as a system connects all living things. Moving through the world without boundaries, flowing across land, nourishing ecosystems, and linking all forms of life, it is interconnected

and interdependence. Just as water is never separate from the system that sustains it, we too are part of a larger web of relationships and responsibilities. We are part of a system of people, ecosystems, and spiritual forces working together for balance.

“We are the flow, let the floodgates open.” This phrase encapsulates the power of collective action. Just as water in motion—whether a trickling stream or a powerful flood—brings life and change, so too does unified, focused action. In the flow, we find our strength and get our work done.

Water holds memory, embodying the stories of all that it touches. In its endless cycle of evaporation, condensation, and precipitation, water carries traces of its journey across the planet—from ancient rivers to the womb, from ocean to rain.

As we navigate the landscape of reparations and justice, water’s memory can remind us of the long and often difficult journeys taken by my ancestors, Black and Indigenous communities who continually fight for dignity and restoration. Water connects us to the past while flowing toward the future, guiding us to restore balance. In this way, the memory held by water is the mirror of society. It reflects the scars of history but also draws the path forward, offering a blueprint for how we move through our struggles toward healing and transformation.

WILPF, as a “watering system,” can hold the memory of struggles and victories, guiding future generations through the blueprint left by past actions. By adopting the qualities of water—its flow, memory, and transformative power—WILPF can be a force that guides the journey toward reparations and justice.

In this framework, WILPF could play a role as the watering system that nourishes the seeds of reparatory justice. WILPF, with its global reach and history of advocacy, can provide the resources and support needed to nurture movements seeking justice for African American and Indigenous communities.

Steps in the Way of Water:

1. Acknowledge Ancestors and Spiritual Foundations: Begin by honoring the ancestors, Indigenous wisdom, and spiritual figures. In African traditions, deities like Oshun and Yemayá symbolize the nurturing and cleansing properties of water, while in Christianity, baptism represents spiritual purification and new beginnings. This initial acknowledgment connects us to the deeper, sacred aspects of water that unite many cultures and belief systems.

2. Set Intentions for Cleansing and Restoration: In the same

way that baptism represents the washing away of sin, we must set intentions to “cleanse” unjust systems and restore balance. Just as water can heal and nurture, we too should aim to purify our movements by centering equity, sustainability, and justice.

3. Embody the Qualities of Water: Like water, we must be fluid, adaptable, and persistent. As water moves through and around obstacles, shaping the land over time, our movements must embrace flexibility. Water’s ability to flow and adapt reminds us to remain open to change while maintaining focus on our ultimate goals of justice and restoration.

4. Organize Collectively and Flow Together: Water in community—whether as a river, lake, or ocean—represents the strength of collective action. Just as small streams combine into powerful currents, individuals working together become an unstoppable force for change. Drawing on the Christian symbolism of water uniting the body of believers, we too should unite in our mission, supporting one another.

5. Restore Balance through Reparatory Justice: The ultimate goal of The Way of Water is the restoration of balance, just as water restores ecosystems. Reparatory justice demands the cleansing of historical wrongs done to Indigenous and Black communities, seeking to heal generational wounds and restore harmony.

My WILPF Year



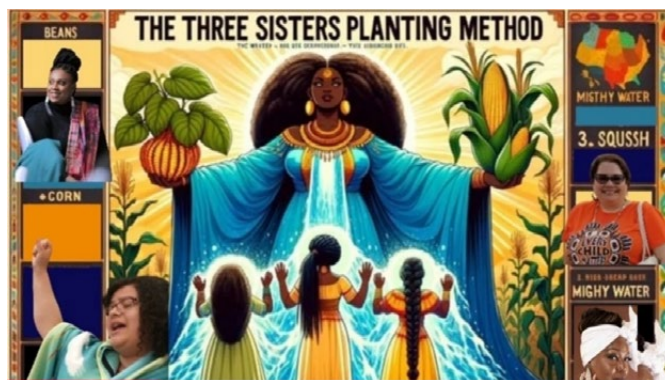
Since joining the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in February 2024, I have had the privilege of applying the Way of Water methodology to my work in art for social transformation and reparatory justice. I have attempted to model ways that WILPF can serve as the “watering system” which has guided my approach to organizing and peacebuilding within WILPF.

Throughout this journey, I participated in events and initiatives that illustrate how the Way of Water moves from concept to practice, demonstrating the power of intentional, collective action in real time.

In March 2024, I took part in the UN Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSD68), engaging with the theme “We Are Stronger Together.” This event exemplified the Way of Water’s focus on collaboration and interconnectedness, show-

ing how collective strength can reshape movements. Later that month, I was invited to the WILPF Cameroon 10-Year Anniversary Peace Conference, hosted by International President Sylvie Ndongmo. Here, I witnessed how WILPF connects global communities, much like water flows across borders, linking our efforts for peace.

In April 2024, I hosted the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent in Geneva, under the theme “Preserving Identity: Advocating Against Cultural Genocide.” This gathering aligned with the Way of Water’s principle of adaptability, as we discussed preserving identity in the face of systemic erasure. Concurrently, I contributed to the WILPF International 109th Birthday Campaign, helping celebrate a legacy that has continuously flowed toward justice.



At the WILPF US Triennial Congress in May 2024, themed “Water on the Frontlines for Peace,” I was invited by Mama Theresa El-Amin of the Fannie Lou Hamer Branch to deliver a presentation about the “The Way of Water” as a part of the Advancing Human Rights Panel discussion. Tina Shelton, who served on the planning committee, also asked that I talk about my work as an artist at the Teaching Artist Institute and I presented “Sawubona Balm.” These presentations highlighted how the principles of water—resilience, transformation, and nurturing—can inform peacebuilding and restorative justice.

In June 2024, I curated the first International WILPF Juneteenth Commemoration and Reparatory Justice Webinar, advancing discussions on reparations while celebrating African American resilience. This event honored the legacy of Juneteenth and aligned with the Way of Water’s call to honor history while fostering healing and new growth.

My water journey continued in July 2024, when I helped share the UN Summit of the Future Parallel Event Submission, embodying the ebb and flow.

At the WILPF US Vermont Gathering in August 2024, with Mama Shelah Harper from the Greater Philadelphia

Branch, Angie and Tara of DMV, and others, I participated in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and Restorative Healing sessions. The event also included a Mock Summit of the Future Presentation alongside my water sibling Tara Vassefi. Robin Lloyd, who initiated the invitation and hosted the gathering, requested that I also share a presentation entitled “Taking the Pulse of Pan Africa” focusing on how the Way of Water can be applied to reparatory justice efforts.

In September 2024, I co-hosted the UN Summit of the Future Parallel Event and was honored with an invitation to the WILPF Togo 9th Pan-African Congress. For this congress, I developed the Amniotic Series for Parallel Events with the support of Sofi Antonellini and WILPF Togo, focusing on African women’s leadership in peace movements, a direct reflection of the nurturing, transformative power of water. Even though the event was ultimately canceled, water never regrets the flow.

By the end of October 2024, alongside Tina Shelton and Jeneve Brooks, I supported the submission of a three-year grant for Annual Juneteenth Commemorations and Reparatory Justice Training, still flowing and pushing.

Of course my WILPF Year ended by inviting WILPF members to attend my yearly “Heal, Glow, Grow” retreat, learning the Way of Water November 9-16, 2024.

Through these activities, I have embodied the Way of Water, demonstrating how its principles guide everything from international advocacy to grassroots organizing. Just as water connects all life, our work within WILPF connects us to one another, ensuring that our collective efforts for peace and justice flow with purpose, strength, and resilience.

In the African worldview, water is inherently feminine. We are the flow, and the Way of Water allows us to open the floodgates of transformative change. Keep peace like a river and stay in the flow.

Tackling the Global Water Crisis

Continued from page 3.

There are three challenges that I propose to tackle this global water crisis:

First, promote democratic water governance, understood as a common good and not as a commodity, and guaranteeing the equal participation of women. Second, make peace with our rivers and aquatic ecosystems as the key to making drinking water available to those 2 billion impoverished people. And third, make water, the blue soul of life, an argument for peace and cooperation.

Last year, I devoted one of my two annual thematic reports to the Human Rights Council plenary in Geneva, and to the UN General Assembly in New York, to this third challenge, making water an argument for peace and collaboration among peoples sharing transboundary river basins and aquifers.

We are talking about 153 countries, 286 river basins, and 592 transboundary aquifers, where nature manages 60% of the fresh water available to us on islands and continents. Rivers have traditionally united riparian peoples, regardless of cultural, religious, or ethnic differences. On the other hand, water in all ancestral worldviews, from the sacred respect for Mother Nature, and in particular for rivers, lakes, and springs, has been managed as a common good, accessible to all, and leaving no one behind.

Unfortunately, to the extent that we prioritize the use of water as a productive resource over its life-sustaining functions

and values, we will be called upon to compete and confront each other to appropriate the resource. However, to the extent that we move from a resource-based approach to an ecosystem approach, understanding that the river is not a simple H₂O channel, just as a forest cannot be managed as a simple timber store, we will be called upon to collaborate in the sustainable management of the river as a living ecosystem for the benefit of all. Such a transition is more urgent and necessary than ever, if we are to face the growing risks of drought and floods that climate change generates.

In the face of the dogmatic and senseless application of the principle of national sovereignty of the waters of river draining transboundary basins, we must remember that just as storms and hurricanes do not respect areas of national sovereignty, rivers do not recognize borders when it comes to the risks generated by droughts and floods for riparian populations. Unfortunately, there is no shortage of those who use water as a weapon of war against the population. In Ukraine, in Syria, and particularly in Gaza, we see this on a daily basis...

The necessary collaboration in water management is therefore key to peace, cooperation, and progress among the peoples bordering transboundary basins, lakes, and aquifers. Ensuring human rights to safe drinking water for all and the sustainability of shared rivers and aquifers by promoting equitable management of available resources may not guarantee peace, but it certainly helps to prevent conflicts and provides a substantive basis for developing cooperation between peoples and countries.

Saving Gaza Begins with Its Water

By Pat Hynes

In late 2020, a report titled “Saving Gaza Begins with Its Water” stated:

“The water crisis in Gaza is a problem of daunting proportions, with grave implications for the more than 2 million inhabitants of the besieged Palestinian enclave. The people of Gaza are almost completely dependent on the underlying groundwater from the Coastal Aquifer as their principal water resource. The aquifer from which it pumps water is diminishing; but more dangerously, it is experiencing significant deterioration from seawater and highly saline groundwater intrusion, as well as sewage pollution. Despite having other natural water resources, Israel has consistently drawn 75 percent of the sustainable groundwater amount each year from the Coastal Aquifer, likely exceeding its fair share under international water law. As Gaza runs out of potable water, there is a real likelihood of a large-scale humanitarian disaster that will make the territory’s current tribulations—grave as they already are—much worse.”¹

These predictions from 2020 have come true with almost no safe drinking water in Gaza and extreme contamination of groundwater and nearby coastal waters. Gaza’s water scarcity is worsened by its forced closure of water and wastewater treatment plants because of Israel’s blockade of fuel to Gaza to run the treatment plants in its ongoing omniscidal war that began in 2023, intent on obliterating all life and cultural memory in Gaza.

The authors of “Saving Gaza Begins with Its Water” end on a cautiously positive note. “The crisis of water in Gaza also holds promise,” they wrote, “because Gaza’s water problem will require cooperation between antagonists, to their mutual benefit. There is no solution that can be achieved by Gaza or Israel in isolation.”

But this affirmative conclusion presumes that the people of Gaza have not been annihilated by:

- the current now 18-month-long Israeli blitzkrieg inflicting a daily death rate greater than any major war of the 21st century;
- the most extreme scorched earth to make Gaza [unlivable](#) forever for Palestinians;



People gather to receive meals from the Rafah charitable kitchen (Tekka) as Palestinians face famine amid a severe shortage of flour, aid, and the ongoing closure of crossings under the Gaza siege. Photo by: Abed Rahim Khatib/picture-alliance/dpa/AP Images

- the loss of healthcare, with most of Gaza’s 36 hospitals now rubble and their existing medical supplies and medicine exhausted.

Given Israel’s [war-induced famine](#) in Gaza, together with extreme dehydration and rampant disease from sewage-contaminated drinking water, how can any negotiations over the mutually shared aquifer possibly take place without a permanent ceasefire and the commencement of peace negotiations?

Water Shortages and Contamination

Prior to the current war, Gaza had 150 small-scale desalination plants to produce potable water for a small percent of the population. By mid-October 2023, Israeli missile attacks destroyed the drinking water desalination plants; and its almost total blockade cut off fuel to run the water treatment plants, as well as metal parts to repair them. Gaza’s drinking water production capacity dropped to just 5 percent of typical levels, [according to UNICEF](#).²

Israel’s military has been injecting “high-flow seawater into Hamas-built tunnels beneath the Gaza Strip, while researchers have warned that flooding tunnels with seawater could have a devastating effect on Gaza’s already scarce freshwater supplies and might destabilize buildings. One of the biggest concerns is that seawater used to flood the tunnels will contaminate the coastal aquifer irreparably, which supplies nearly 80% of Gaza’s already inadequate water and will impact all aspects of life in Gaza, agriculture and soil infrastructure.

Compounding this, all [five of Gaza’s wastewater treatment plants lost power](#) within the first few weeks of the current conflict.³ As a result, sewage has flowed freely through the

street, causing a record increase in cases of diarrheal illnesses. By December 2023, cases of diarrhea among children under five in Gaza jumped 2000%, according to [UNICEF](#), which children under five are over [20 times more likely to die](#) from than from violence.⁴

Before the 2023 war, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza had access to 80 liters of water per day, 20% below the international standard of 100 liters set by the World Health Organization. Since the start of the war, the average consumption of water for all purposes in Gaza has fallen to between two and three liters a day per person for drinking, cooking, and bathing (by contrast, the average American family uses more than 1,130 liters of water per day at home, [according to the EPA](#)). Three liters is the bare minimum amount of water a person needs to drink in order to avoid health crises related to dehydration, including organ damage and failure.

More than three quarters of Gaza's 2.2 million people are internally displaced and continually forced to move. More than a million are crammed into Rafah, a tiny sliver of land with a population that is now five times larger than it was before the war.

Communicable diseases are on the rise not only due to water contamination but also intense overcrowding, and the healthcare sector is on the brink of collapse. In some of the most overcrowded shelters in southern Gaza there is one toilet per 600 internally displaced persons and little to no running water.

The Grave Suffering of Women and Children

Every human being in Gaza suffers excruciating, soul-shattering existence from this war of annihilation, variably described as genocide, ecocide, domicide (destruction of homes) and [scholasticide](#) (destruction of schools and universities). Indeed, two American trauma surgeons who have volunteered for surgical missions in crisis situations all over the world, stated that they have [never seen cruelty](#) like Israel's genocide in Gaza.⁵ And women and their children are its gravest victims: 70% of those killed are women and children.

In January 2024, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which works closely with women and new mothers, reported that since the start of the war in October 2023 they've distributed more than 41,000 hygiene kits in Gaza, which include menstrual pads and other items like soap, wipes, toilet paper, detergent and diapers. Yet it's a tiny frac-

tion of what's needed. UNICEF reported nearly 70 trucks with more of these kits and other essential items, like tents and winter clothes, were at border crossings for weeks, waiting for Israeli checks to enter. This deprivation has continued throughout 2024 and into 2025.

The UN has estimated that some 700,000 women and girls in Gaza experience menstrual cycles but don't have adequate access now to basic hygiene products like pads, toilet paper, running water and toilets because of the war. These conditions put women and girls in Gaza [at risk](#) of reproductive and urinary tract infections.

A spokesperson for UNICEF told NPR: "This situation is particularly challenging for women and adolescent girls, who lack safe, private and dignified places to manage menstrual hygiene. There are reports this is exacerbating mental health issues."⁶

Many Gazans are living in overcrowded UN-run schools. Others are living in tents and on the streets as Israeli evacuation orders push people further and further south and as the Israeli military expands deeper into Gaza. Women wake early and line up at hospitals to shower before water runs out for the day; others just to use the bathroom.

The challenge of trying to find an available bathroom is especially difficult for pregnant women who have pressure on their bladder, and for women who've just given birth and are going through weeks of postpartum bleeding.

Marie-Aure Perreaut Reval, emergency coordinator for Doctors Without Borders, has reported women were coming to one of the main health centers where their group was operating from to request birth control pills in order to block their periods because of the lack of available pads and water. "They were asking for family planning methods so that they would not be faced with situations where they had to find water and have to choose water either to clean their children or clean themselves," she says.

Some mothers have resorted to washing clothes and bathing their children in the sea, itself polluted with sewage, and risking their lives under Israeli bombing.

In early March 2024 [Relief/Web](#) reported there has been a steep rise in malnutrition among the more than 155,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women.⁷ Every day about 180 women give birth in unimaginable conditions. Most no longer have the health-care facilities they need to deliver their babies safely. Many mothers who have given birth since the beginning of Israel's war are too malnourished to produce milk for their newborns; but there is no powdered milk in the markets and next to no clean water with which to mix it.

A UN Women rapid assessment of 120 women, conducted last month, revealed that the majority, 84 percent, said their family eats half or less than what they did before the war began.

Although mothers and adult women are tasked with sourcing food, they are the ones who eat *last, less, and least*, skipping at least one meal to feed their children. Some women are now resorting to scavenging for food under rubble or in dumpsters.

The world's top group tracking food emergencies [reported](#) on March 17, 2024, that famine "is now projected and imminent" in northern Gaza within six weeks, and that "half of the population of the Gaza Strip (1 million 100 hundred people) is expected to face catastrophic conditions," with starvation and death expected to be widespread.

Jumana Shahin, a women's rights activist in Gaza, says women's needs are being neglected because of the scale of the humanitarian crisis gripping Gaza. "This situation does not have a solution. You ask if there are alternatives. There are none."

Cooperation, Coordination, and Courage: Rebuilding Gaza

What can be done? **Nothing** without Israel and the United States agreeing to end their totalistic war. Dima Nazzal, a systems engineer at the Georgia Institute of Technology believes that while rebuilding Gaza is "[a daunting prospect](#)," with "cooperation, coordination and courage, it is achievable." But first "the war must be ended."

Only then can international cooperation and support begin to rebuild Gaza. The UN and World Bank, NGOs, and neighboring and other sympathetic countries can then provide financial, technical and humanitarian assistance. Infrastructure development will be vital.

Reconstructing Palestine means:

- 1. Investing in the development and improvement of water infrastructure** including sewage and wastewater treatment plants, desalination plants, and distribution networks.
- 2. Promoting water recycling and reuse.**
- 3. Negotiating water-sharing agreements** with neighboring regions and countries.
- 4. Conducting immense environmental cleanup and de-contamination** for the land and soil to be viable for agriculture and olive groves.

5. Rebuilding, on the scale of Dresden, Nagasaki and Hiroshima, of housing, hospitals and health centers, schools, energy, transportation, telecommunications, cultural institutions and economy.

A coalition of UN agencies and caring nations must find a way.

But first *there must be a political solution*: The only way for Israel to live in security is through a political compromise that respects the human rights of the Palestinians, who have lived on the land of Palestine for thousands of years. Israel has sought security through militaristic means: expelling Palestinians (the Nakba), encroaching on their land, apartheid, colonizing settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and now omnicide in Gaza. Without justice – the UN recognizing Palestine as a state and organizing the rebuilding of Gaza – there can be no peace.

Water has long been used as a tactical weapon in war for political and military objectives: bombing dams to drown downstream enemy villages; intentional polluting and/or cutting off an enemy's water supply. In this context, *water is death*.

But since the first life on Earth emerged almost four billion years ago, water has sustained life. That is what Gaza needs and has a human right to – in order to live again.⁸

NOTES:

- ¹ Rebby El-Sheikh and Fuad Bateh, "Saving Gaza Begins with Its Water," The Century Foundation, December 14, 2020.
- ² "First deliveries of life-saving supplies for children enter Gaza," UNICEF, October 21, 2023.
- ³ Laura Paddison and Rene Marsh, "Gazans forced to drink dirty, salty water as the fuel needed to run water systems runs out," CNN, October 24, 2023.
- ⁴ Leslie Morris-Iveson, Ernesto Granillo and Sofie Grundin, *Water Under Fire Volume 3: Attacks on water and sanitation services in armed conflict and the impacts on children*, UNICEF, New York, 2021.
- ⁵ Feroze Sidhwa and Mark Perlmutter, "As Surgeons, We Have Never Seen Cruelty Like Israel's Genocide in Gaza," *Common Dreams*, April 11, 2024.
- ⁶ Aya Batrawy and Abu Bakr Bashir, "Another layer of misery: Women in Gaza struggle to find menstrual pads, running water," NPR, January 11, 2024.
- ⁷ From an Islamic Relief statement posted on [reliefweb](#): "Gaza. Pregnant Women in Gaza "Face Conditions 'Like a Hundred Years Ago,'" originally published March 6, 2024.
- ⁸ Other sources include the Applied Research Institute, *Scientific American*, *Inside Climate News*, the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and *Yale Review of International Studies*.

Public Water Faces New Threats



In Baltimore, the community came together to resist water privatization efforts. In November 2018, 77 percent of voters approved a ballot question banning water privatization.

By Mary Grant

Director, Public Water For All Campaign at Food & Water Watch

Food & Water Watch is an environmental organization in the United States that mobilizes regular people to build power to move bold and uncompromised solutions to the most pressing food, water, and climate problems of our time. I work with organizers on our campaigns to support safe, affordable, publicly controlled water across the country.

Here I'm going to discuss corporate violence through water privatization with a focus on water access in the United States.

First, let's start with a definition. Water privatization can be used broadly to talk about the various ways corporations control water resources – through bottled water or water right markets. But, for the purposes of this conversation, when I say water privatization, I mean the transfer of control of public water and sewer systems – the utility systems – to for-profit corporations.

Public Water Prevails

Sometimes when we talk about water privatization, people are shocked. They are unaware that private water utilities even exist. That's because most people in the United States receive their water service from a publicly owned system – usually their local government.

Nearly 90 percent of people who are on a water system get their water service from a publicly owned system and

more than 95 percent of people get their wastewater treatment service from a publicly owned treatment system.

There are a lot of reasons why public water prevails nationally – from control of decision making and investments to lower costs and better regional coordination.

But, historically, many of our nation's water systems – from New York City to San Francisco - were actually privately controlled. And it was a disaster.

For example the predecessor of the bank JPMorgan Chase used to control the water supply in New York City. The city took it over in the 1800s after a cholera epidemic killed 3,500 people and huge fires caused massive property destruction. The company

was blamed because it refused to extend water service to low-income areas of the city where it didn't think it could make money.

In the 1800s through the early 1900s, thousands of cities took control of their water systems from private entities to improve water quality, lower costs, and provide equitable service.

Overall, public water has led to better access and improved water quality, helping to prevent the spread of diseases. Local governments extended water lines to low-income and Black communities in particular that had been historically excluded by private companies. One analysis found that public ownership of water systems cut typhoid rates in Black communities in the South by as much as 42 percent.



BENEFITS OF PUBLIC CONTROL

- Control of water investments and programs
- Smart growth & regional stormwater planning
- Watershed protection and conservation
- Long-term water resource management
- Transparency
- Ballot-box accountability

Austerity Has Starved Our Public Water Systems

Today, public water faces new threats. Large corporations are targeting many water and sewer systems for takeover. The drivers of privatization are twofold – the historical federal disinvestment in water and the skyrocketing costs of providing safe water.

Decades of federal austerity are colliding with the growing costs due to corporate and military pollution and the fossil-fuel driven climate crisis. Overall, federal funding for water and wastewater infrastructure plummeted since its peak in the 1970s. After Ronald Reagan phased out the construction grants program, federal support dropped 77 percent from its peak in 1977 to 2017 in real terms. That's a per capita decrease in funding of 84 percent over those 40 years

The 2021 bipartisan infrastructure law was a step in the right direction and a down payment on what we need, but it still met only 7% of the water needs identified by the EPA at that time. And those needs are skyrocketing. Earlier this year, EPA released updated estimates and found that now our water and wastewater systems need more than \$1.3 TRILLION – that's trillion with a T – dollars just to comply with existing federal law and address water contamination and climate change.

Our public water systems have been starved of the resources they need, they have been poisoned by corporate and military polluters, and now corporate vultures are circling them for takeover.

There are regional differences in private control of water systems. The privatizers are most aggressive in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana. Some states already have a lot of privately owned water systems, such as NJ, where 40 percent of people get their water from a corporate provider. There is very little private ownership in the South, and in the plains states, and in Michigan.

The Harms of Water Privatization

What's at risk when you privatize your water system? What is the danger or harm of corporate control of water? This isn't just an ideological debate. There are material impacts and consequences of privatization.

The heart of the issue is about who controls the system. Who makes the big decisions about where to extend lines, what investments to prioritize and where, who gets their lead pipes replaced first, how do we get charged for service, and so much more.

It's about accountability and transparency in those decisions. Where there is public control, you have access to meetings where the decisions are being made and direct communication with the decision makers. You can email the mayor or the city council.

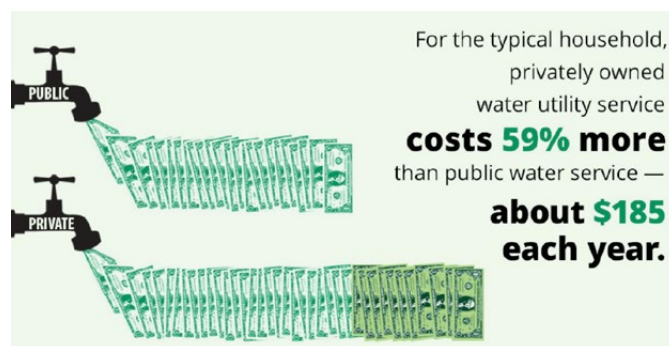
But with private control, the public is cut out. It's the black box of a corporate board room, which is exempt from state transparency laws. You can't FOIA a water corporation CEO. The water prices are approved not by city council but usually by appointed officials at the Public Utility Commissions, and the process is very difficult for regular folks to engage in.

Often you need a lawyer to actually intervene.

And in terms of water prices, we found – as has every other academic study I've seen – that private water is much more expensive than local government service. We compiled data for the 500 largest community water systems and found that, on average, private water charges 59% more than local governments for the same amount of water.

Researchers from Cornell University not only found that privately owned systems charge statistically higher rates, but they also found that private ownership was the single biggest factor driving higher rates – even more than drought or aging infrastructure.

The key reason is corporate profit. Big water corporations earn a rate of return on their investment of about 10 to 11

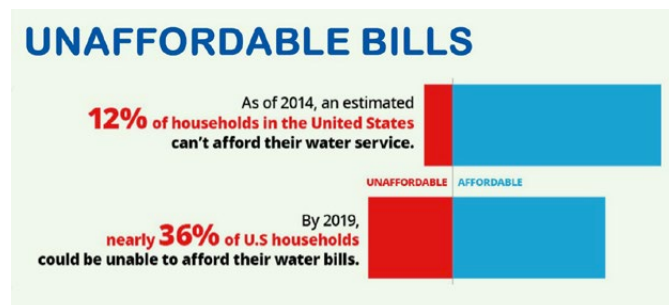


percent. State regulators allow them to add that markup onto the cost of every single improvement project and new acquisition. They pass this plus all taxes – income and property – on to customers through higher rates.

What that mean does mean for households? It means higher and higher water bills.

More than 90 percent of water projects are financed by local governments and repaid through water bills.

Already under public control, water rates are increasing nationally by about 5 percent a year, but median household income is increasing at half that rate. This is creating a water affordability gap. Localities are grappling with water service costs that are increasingly unaffordable for more and more of their residents. And as many as one-third of the country could have already been experiencing unaffordable water bills as of five years ago.



Privatization deepens our nation's water affordability crisis. It also jeopardizes access to safe water.

Shutoffs and Human Health

When households receive unaffordable water bills, they may cut back on medicine, groceries, or other essentials or they do not pay for their water service. It is a simple reality that unaffordable bills are often unpaid bills. The main collection practice used by utilities, especially private utilities, for unpaid water bills is service shutoffs.

We conducted the nationwide first water shutoff survey in 2016. That year, an estimated 15 million people in the United States experienced a shutoff for nonpayment of water bills. That's one in every twenty households.

Water shutoffs pose a real threat to human health. Without water service, people cannot flush their toilets or wash their hands. Lack of adequate sanitation can cause diseases to spread and allow people to become sick. The elderly, people who pregnant, children and people with diabetes and other illnesses are especially vulnerable.

Water shutoffs can make homes uninhabitable, forcing families to move. This can negatively impact children's education. Water shutoffs can also tear families apart. Lack of water access in the home may be considered child neglect in 21 states, and water shutoffs have led to children being taken from their homes under child protection laws.

While both public and private systems use this violent collection practice, with public control, you can get involved and pass the laws necessary to stop it. It matters who controls your water, so that you can organize, agitate, and advocate for water affordability, bans on water shutoffs, and policies that put people before profits.

Aggressive Corporate Strategies and Legislation

The big corporate water players are very aggressive right now. They are targeting cash-strapped communities. Often they offer large sums of money to entice a city to privatize. But all that money plus profit will be recovered through hikes in customer water bills.

Emergency management or state or federal oversight can force systems into privatization. Investor owned utilities are particularly targeting sewer systems in their water service area – we're seeing a lot of sewer sales in New Jersey and Pennsylvania in particular.

They also seek what are known as "Tuck in acquisitions" – in which they are buying up water and sewer systems in wealthier suburban areas right next to their existing service area.

These companies are focused on states where they have successfully passed corporate friendly laws and regulations. Legislation is a big factor driving water privatization. The big water companies have been very successful lobbying for changes that make it easier and more profitable to buy systems and hike rates after privatization. They are focused mostly on the state level but they have a couple of federal priorities. Quite a few of these laws have been proposed or passed – often with titles that include flowery language that obscures what the legislation actually does.

At the federal level, their big piece of legislation is called the Clean Water SRF Parity Act – from Rep. Garamendi and Rep. Bost – to open up federal wastewater funding to investor owned utilities. Historically, since the beginning of the wastewater construction grant program in the mid-1900s, these funds have all been dedicated for publicly owned treatment works. The companies want access to this money, which would take limited funds away from our local government providers. It would put the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Fund dollars up for private grabs.

At the state level, the corporate water players are pursuing four main legislative priorities:

1. Fair market value legislation – which inflates the value of the system allowing companies to offer even higher purchase prices to entice cities to sell and leading to higher profits for the company – all on the backs of ratepayers who see even larger and larger water bills.
2. Water Quality Accountability Act – Again, it sounds like a good name. It was passed in NJ first. This imposes an onerous and unnecessary paperwork burden in order to strong-arm small systems into privatization without actually requiring improvements in water quality.
3. Consolidated rates between drinking water and wastewater services – basically charging their drinking water customers the cost of buying up the sewer systems that they're targeting.
4. And lastly, they want to remove referendum requirements – cutting the public out of decision-making and stripping away democracy in these big decisions.

These warning signs are what you should be on the lookout for at the state level. What should you look out for in your local community?

These companies often track infrastructure issues and make pitches based on local news stories. Some corporations are speculating that the new PFAS regulations, in particular, will drive more communities to privatize. However, remember that privatization is the most expensive way to make an improvement

project. Not only because private financing is more expensive but also because you'll have to repay the purchase price that the company gives the city for the system – and all of that comes with a 10 percent after tax mark-up for corporate profits.

The companies also can target cities with well-run water systems if the city itself has budget concerns, outstanding unrelated or related water debts, or they can generally take advantage of an anti-tax sentiment. Most communities we see that privatize do not do so because of water system issues but because the mayor wants to avoid raising taxes for unrelated projects or wants to fund a pet redevelopment project with that one-time infusion of cash from the sale of the utility. This is what we call taxing through the tap – it is a non-transparent and fiscally irresponsible way to raise general fund money.

Watch out for your mayor's politics, including an antitax or prodeveloper position, as well as the mayor's activities. These big companies can fund conferences like the mayor's water council to pitch privatization.

Solutions and Examples of Resistance

What are the solutions? These are large corporations. What can we do to resist them?

First, know that you and your neighbors have the power to stop water privatization. Despite the millions of dollars that these companies have spent lobbying for pro-privatization legislation and trying to sway public officials. Hundreds of communities have won and defeated privatization efforts. They've used various strategies to help guard against water privatization, including strengthening local laws to require a public vote or outright banning water privatization.

One example is the City of Baltimore, which has been working to address its own issues with water affordability and water quality. Before a new water affordability program launched in the fall of 2017, Suez (which is now owned by Veolia) and the Wall Street firm KKR targeted Baltimore for a long-term lease concession of its water and sewer systems. Privatization would have deepened Baltimore's affordability crisis. KKR and Suez were clear when they approached Baltimore – that rates would go up, and would go up proportionately to the amount of money that the city wanted to get in exchange for the deal.

So, the community came together to ban water privatization. In 2018, the then-mayor drafted a charter amendment to declare the water system to be an inalienable asset of the city. The city council unanimously approved it and sent to the voters. That November, 77 percent of voters approved Ballot Question E to make Baltimore the first major US city to ban water privatization. To be clear, this was not a vote that the water system was perfect, it was a commitment to work together to find public solutions.

Another example is Atlantic City. In 2017, by a nearly unanimous vote (8-0, with one abstention), the City Council of Atlantic City passed an ordinance demanding a public vote on any sale of their municipal water system. This was a direct challenge to the state takeover of Atlantic City engineered by then-Governor Chris Christie. The takeover gave the state broad powers, including the ability to sell off the well-run water system to private water corporations with deep political connections to leaders in both major political parties.

AC Citizens Against the State Takeover came together to ensure that any sale of the water system was put up to a public vote. The campaign went door to door, and neighbor to neighbor, to collect the petitions necessary to make sure that Atlantic City residents were given a voice in controlling resources that belong to them. Even Chris Christie backed off after that display of power.

Overall, we know many of our water and sewer systems are old and need major updates.

We see it every day as water mains break flooding roads and homes, as sewage spills contaminate our precious waterways and back up into homes. But the real solution is to stop austerity and commit to public funding.

That's why we support the WATER Act – the Water Affordability, Transparency, Equity and Reliability Act in Congress to create a trust fund to provide dedicated federal funding at the level that is necessary based on the latest needs assessment from EPA. It would provide billions in funding each and every year to public drinking water systems, wastewater systems, household wells, septic, and school water infrastructure.

A 3.5 percentage point increase in corporate income taxes could meet the needs of our water systems. This is just a small roll back of those corporate tax cuts, too, and it really centers the question of priorities for United States.

Importantly, the Water Act will also counter corporate control of water by providing resources so communities can improve their systems on their own, removing corporate subsidies, and supporting community-led efforts to exit privatization deals and buy their water systems from corporations.

Fundamentally, we need to change how we fund water to center safe, affordable, and publicly controlled water for all.

Act here to tell Congress no public funds to sewer privatizers:

<https://secure.foodandwaterwatch.org/act/No-Public-Funds-to-Sewer-Privatizers>

Act here to support the WATER Act:

<https://secure.foodandwaterwatch.org/act/congress-fund-our-water-systems>

What PFAS Contamination Costs Us

By Marguerite Adelman

Vermont PFAS Military Poisons Coalition

The irony is that the semiconductor industry has a really poor track record on lots of things. Global Foundries...received \$125 million in federal funding...just in the last year and a half, \$4.5 million in state funding, and from the Department of Defense – and here you get your military connection – a multi-year contract for \$3.1 billion.

When I looked at the PFAS analytical tools for Global Foundries,...they have a huge amount of air emissions, but what really interested me...was their EPA permit for releasing PFAS into the Winooski River, which flows into Lake Champlain, and Lake Champlain flows up to Canada because it's an international lake. The discharges have increased from 218 pounds in 2021 to 486 pounds in 2023, which means that to remediate that will cost Vermonters \$6.2 million just to clean up the waste for one year. That pretty much exceeds what we're giving in grants and contracts, which for me is frightening.

But that's not the only cost that we should be talking about when we talk about PFAS. We should also be looking at the cost for health. Because PFAS is toxic at such low levels, it causes birth defects and chronic diseases. The toxicity studies are showing that virtually every type of those 15,000 types of PFAS that were examined can be correlated to these horrible health outcomes. Cancer rates and infertility are increasing across the country, especially in women, and the Center for Disease Control is now recommending that people discuss getting PFAS blood tests with their doctors, which of course are not covered by insurance.

A recent analysis of the impact of PFAS exposure on annual direct healthcare expenses just for the United States is \$37 to \$59 billion annually. These costs are not paid by the polluter, they're paid by us and by our healthcare companies.

And finally, a really sad thing is that there is emerging evidence that PFAS exposure confers heritable effects on later generations....

What about water, soil, and air costs? Removing PFAS from water could cost us \$3.2 to \$7 billion annually, and these are costs that are probably going to end up...being paid by community members. There are going to be substantial increases in our costs to get clean water without PFAS in it.

PFAS in our soil is ruining farms and farmers, and the cost to remove PFAS from soil is out of reach of most of us and home farmers. Texas and Maine are experiencing horrible situations with PFAS. Indoor air contains a lot of PFAS because of all the products in our home that have PFAS.

The annual emissions from f-gases, which are a form of PFAS, account for 63% of all PFAS pollution each year. We have PFAS in our food, fish and shellfish, and [other foods]. And the global cost of removing PFAS is going to exceed the global GDP.

So there is absolutely no way we can remediate or take PFAS out of everything that it's in.



n Vermont, we've been working for about five years now on the issue of PFAS and focusing specifically on education, which is so important for this complex topic, as well as advocacy and legislation....

PFAS is rampant in our society...despite the fact that...the chemical industries that created it—3M, DuPont, etc.—have known about the dangers of PFAS for decades....

What I really want to focus on is the cost of PFAS. I got interested in this because I learned about Global Foundries (GF), a semiconductor facility plant here in Essex Junction, Vermont.... I started doing some research because I got upset about some of the things that I read....

PFAS is relatively cheap to buy. It only costs \$50 to \$1,000 per pound, depending on the type of PFAS you're buying.... [But] it costs between \$2.7 million to \$18 million per pound to remove PFAS from municipal wastewater. Once again, you're not destroying it,...you're just moving it somewhere else, like to a landfill.

I decided to look just at one of the multitude of industries that use PFAS. I chose semiconductors for a lot of reasons, mostly because of Global Foundries. I found that PFAS is used in so many applications. When Biden did his CHIPS and Science Act, he directed that all this federal money, \$280 billion over 10 years, [would] go to compete against China in making semiconductors so that we don't have to get them from overseas. That money [will] go to semiconductor plants, and \$25,000 investment in tax credits so they don't have to pay taxes.

How Does Your Garden Grow?

Banning Toxic Sewage Sludge 'Fertilizer'

By Nancy Price

Co-chair, Earth Democracy Committee

Hiroko Tabuchi's front-page *New York Times* article, "Despite Risks, E.P.A. Backs Toxic Fertilizer: Alerted About 'Forever Chemicals' in 2003" must have alarmed readers when it appeared on December 29, 2024.

Discovered in the late 1930s, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a group of 16,000 compounds that add specific properties to consumer and industrial products among which are the familiar nonstick cookware, stain-resistant carpets, waterproof clothing, fire-fighting foam used at military bases and commercial airports, cosmetics, personal care products, food wrappers, and pizza boxes.

These man-made, toxic, "forever chemicals" are in our bodies and most everyone's blood, in the placenta, umbilical cord, breast milk, and drinking water. They bio-accumulate and are widespread in the food chain from contaminated water and land. PFAS chemicals are linked to birth defects, problems in early childhood development, cancers including testicular and breast cancer, decreased fertility, hormone and immune system disruption, and thyroid, liver, and kidney disease. As yet, there are no effective ways to clean up PFAS contamination.

By the 1990s, millions of tons of potentially toxic sewage sludge was applied to millions of acres of farmland as a food crop fertilizer, estimated by the fertilizer industry to be about a fifth of U.S. farmland. According to the *Times* article, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, scientists at the 3M chemical company made a startling discovery – high levels of these the virtually indestructible "forever chemicals" were turning up in the nation's sewage" and "fast becoming ubiquitous in the environment."

During this same time period, the movie-going public was becoming critically aware of the deadly consequences of chemical contamination from watching legal thrillers such as *Poisoned Ground: The Tragedy at Love Canal* (Documentary, 1978, Niagara Falls, NY); *A Civil Action* (1998, Woburn, MA); *Erin Brockovich* (2000, Hinkley, CA); and *The Devil We Know* (2018) and *Dark Waters* (2019), both about Parkersburg, West Virginia, where DuPont had been aware since the 1960s that PFOA of the PFAS group was in the blood of its factory workers and in the early 1990s, the company was aware of links to cancerous tumors. But company executives informed neither the EPA nor the public.



3M Settlements and EPA Failings

The *Times* article, based on tens of thousands of pages of internal documents 3M released as part of settlements in the early 2000s, reveals how 3M and the EPA not only kept their PFAS research from the public, but continued to encourage farmers to use sludge as fertilizer even though they knew it contained a dangerous "slew of chemicals." Kris Hansen, a former 3M chemist interviewed recently by Hiroko Tabuchi, warned that PFAS in sewer sludge meant that it was not getting broken down at the wastewater treatment plants, rather it was entering the groundwater where it goes back into the people.

In 2010 Minnesota filed a lawsuit against 3M for damages to the environment and residents in the Minneapolis east metro area from PFAS-contaminated groundwater. In 2018 the case settled for \$850 million and installation of state-of-the-art water filtration systems. Now 3M says it will stop manufacturing PFAS globally by the end of 2025, but of course extensive, health-destroying damage has already been done.

Meanwhile, those at the EPA who pushed on with their research or spoke up about the dire risks were either starved of resources or had their jobs eliminated. Judge Anthony Alaimo of the 11th Circuit Court was emphatic in his February 2008 ruling stating that "Senior EPA officials took extraordinary steps to quash scientific dissent and any questioning of EPA's biosolids program," and a 2018 report by the EPA's Inspector General accused the EPA of "failing to properly regulate biosolids."

State Actions and Next Steps

On January 14, 2025, the EPA finally admitted "forever chemicals" are contaminating U.S. farmland because of the EPA's own long-standing policy of promoting toxic sewage sludge "fertilizer" as the way to dispose of waste from water-treatment

Continued on page 28.

Women's Waterways vs. Financialization



Saraswati statue in Tanah Lot temple, Bali, Indonesia.

By Rickey Gard Diamond

An Economy of Our Own, Inc.

*Water is soft, fluid, and yielding
But water will wear away the hardest stone.*

—Lao Tzu

This 2,600-year-old philosophical poem tells us that power can be expressed in different ways. Women and water have long been associated, and on all continents. Maybe because of our inner amniotic ocean when pregnant, or our flowing menstrual blood, or our tears—because goddesses of water are even older than this poem.

There's *Saraswati*, Vedic goddess of rivers and speech, art, and learning; *Atabey* of the Caribbean Indigenous Taino people, goddess of rivers and fertility; *Sirona*, a Celtic goddess of springs from Central Gaul and *Brigid* in Eireland; *Yemoja*, a major water spirit from the Yoruba religion in Africa; the Slavic water nymphs called "villies" who danced at night but might drown you—the reason we say, "oh that gives me *the villies*"; Japan's *Benzaiten*, Goddess of All That Flows, not only water but music, art, language, and all while riding a dragon—a very good omen; *Thetis*, Gaia's granddaughter, a very early Greek goddess of the sea; and *Mama Watam*, a water spirit venerated in West, Central, and South Africa.

So, what do I mean by "women's waterways?" The patriarchy has traditionally considered women's ways of thinking as weak or "watery" or "diluted," and often even as "deluded." Why? Western civilization's academic tradition, like its justice system, was created by men, who conducted verbal warfare to prove who's the most powerful, the smartest, the winner. This gendered power's intent is competitive, exclusive, and hierarchical.

Challenging Patriarchy's Rocky Thinking

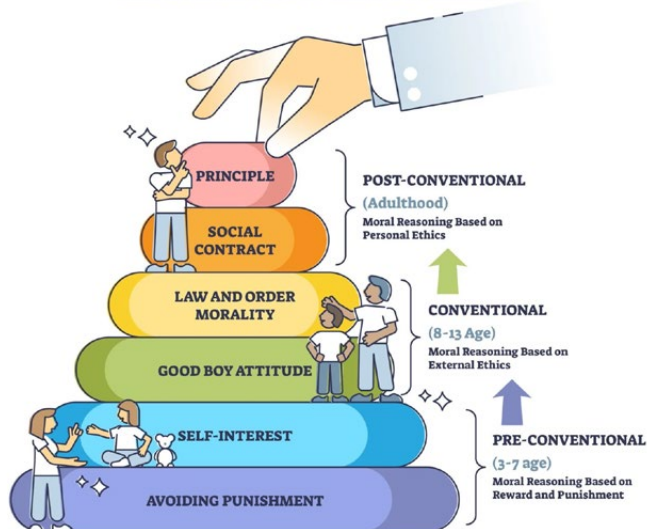
In the late 60s, Harvard professor Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development was widely accepted. His hierarchy of development is pictured as a pyramid of colorful rocks. I call them rocks because Kohlberg's psychology forefathers were Freud, Ericson, and Piaget, all of whom unbendingly claimed that women were somehow deficient in their moral development.

In this model, you see girls at the lowest moral level of self-interest and avoiding punishment, and only males appear at the Conventional Moral Reasoning stage, and at the top, only a white man with stars above his head reaches "adulthood," concerned with large concepts like logic, justice, and a social contract. It's annoying. But remember, this was the 60s.

Kohlberg's assistant at Harvard, Carol Gilligan, published her own theory in 1982 arguing that her boss's research was biased. Moral decisions could also be female, her research revealed. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* showed the validity of women's and girls' concern about relationships and how their decisions affect others. Gilligan didn't crow about being "right." She didn't argue for a "win" to top a hierarchy. She sought a more fluid inclusion of "female" ethics, involving relationships as well as logic. And this needn't be gendered, she said. An ethics of care, including the morality of nonviolence, was sometimes taken by men, as well as women, because both approaches were equally valid.

In 1986, another important academic book challenged patriarchy's rocky thinking about "epistemology," the study of how we know what we know. *Women's Ways of Knowing* was published by five researchers, Mary Belenky et al.,

STAGES OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT



and it held that women's development of identity, voice, and intellect came from many contexts outside the formal education system—which in fact, was sometimes predatory or a conflicted space for young women. Their new research mapped five stages of learning. We recognize at our events at An Economy of Our Own that these stages need not be limited to females.

We start in **Silence**, move on to **Received Knowledge** from experts, develop a **Subjective** inner voice, still anxious and sometimes defensive. Ideally, we develop **Procedural Knowledge**, curious about different perspectives, owning our own, and finally recognize **Constructed Knowledge**, understanding that all knowledge is built, not born, and can be remodeled with passion and pleasure over a lifetime.

I call new springs of thought that lead to surprisingly wider channels “women's waterways.”

Feminist Economics and Financialization

In 1988 Marilyn Waring published a book now considered the “founding document” of something called “feminist economics.” Waring, who was one of the first women elected in 1975 to New Zealand's parliament and worked on the national budget, explained how The United Nations System of National Accounts (UNSNA) forms the basic national account statistics. These are the basis of state statistics and used in annual reports from governments and international agencies like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

She noticed the erasure and discounting of women in these accounts. By focusing solely on market production and consumption, they rendered reproduction, unpaid care, and provisioning work invisible. Only money counted. Likewise, nature's reproduction, like trees growing in a forest, or life in the ocean, didn't count until they were cut down and made into lumber, or hooked and sold in a market. She called for new, more inclusive measures, which some peer nations have since developed.

But when I talked about the technical issues Waring named, people's eyes would glaze over. It took me ten years of reading, research, and writing about the feminist economics she inspired to publish a very different and more personal book called *Screwnomics**—a word I coined to describe the widely applied economic “theory” that women should always work for less, or better, for free. Its subtitle is *How the Economy Works Against Women and Real Ways to Make Change*.

My publisher's first proposed cover pictured a defiant hand holding up a fistful of dollars, a picture of an economy no woman ever created. It's what today's “financialization” embodies—a tough, lone libertarian grabbing and holding on to her money. But that's *not* what my research told me about women's economic ideas and practices. As Gilligan and Belenky et al. had shown, women rarely think only of them-

selves. We value connections. We're ingenious at stretching our few dollars to meet real needs.

Financialization is the latest version of an economy waged as war—the last bastion of the patriarchy, dominated by alpha males. It's a sector of the economy that educated young women are newly joining, climbing its sharp, angled graphs that look like rocky mountain ranges. Anyone working there must adopt EconoMan-splaining ways, rooted in libertarian Lone Ranger traditions of being “right,” certain, and purely logical. There's no room for nuance or emotion in its narrow lines and numbered columns.

Harvard Business School says in 1950, the finance sector was 2.8% of the economy; by 1980 it had doubled and by 2006 it was nearly tripled. The World Bank now collects GDP data from 189 countries. They likewise report that the financial services sector now stands at 20-25% of the economy. The fees and lawyers and interest charges of finance are imposing growing overhead costs on the productive economy.

The productive economy is where real goods to meet real needs create real value for our survival and happiness. It's where most of us live and earn our livelihoods. We can't eat money or use it to thatch a roof. Our wisest stories tell us that even large amounts of it cannot quench people's deepest desires and thirsts.

“Nature Markets” and Water Commodified

In a 2022 report, McKinsey, Inc., the trusted brand name for an army of experts advising big business and Wall Street money-makers, stated: “Nature markets make up \$9.8 Trillion in goods and services.... equivalent to 11% of global GDP. But the explicit value of nature in markets represents a fraction of nature's true value.” In other words, there's a lot more money to be made.

McKinsey names four types of nature markets: 1.) **Intrinsic Markets**, where commodities and cultural or ecosystem services are provided, regulated or traded. 2.) **Credit Markets** including carbon credits and biodiversity credits in response to climate or ecosystem policies. 3.) **Asset Markets** that trade in ecosystem assets, requiring enforceable property rights. And 4.) **Derivative Markets** that “derive from” and supposedly reflect the value of ecosystem services of assets, traded in types called options, futures, swaps, and forwards.

Clear? Of course not. All four markets are essentially trading pieces of paper and private contracts that are bought, sold, and bet upon by the richest globalist forces, creating projects “protecting” nature, while ensuring they and the wealthiest nations will not have to change bad habits of overconsumption and fossil fuels. Carbon credits have proved nearly worthless, enabling polluters to keep on polluting while making billions. If you're Indigenous, sitting on undeveloped

land with ambiguous property rights, Nature Assets markets are a “new” form of violent and racist colonialism.

In a book by McKenzie Funk called *Windfall: The Booming Business of Global Warming*, he describes how John Dickerson began Summit Global Management’s first water hedge fund in 2005 by picking stocks within the \$400 billion hydro commerce sector—the business of storing, treating, and delivering water for use in households, manufacturing, and agriculture. But he also wanted the real thing, called “wet water.” So, in 2008, Dickerson opened “a second hedge fund, the Summit Water Development Group, buying up water rights to billions of gallons of water in Australia and the American West.”

In late 2020, The Chicago Mercantile Exchange launched the first water futures market, a California Water Index market, which allows financial speculators to literally gamble on the *price* of water. It’s all about paper contracts—not the wet water all life needs to survive.

Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, responded to the creation of the world’s first futures market in water by saying, “I’m very concerned that water is now being treated as gold, oil, and other commodities that are traded on Wall Street futures markets.”

Futures are the oldest derivative, trading for about 100 years in prices for farmers’ delivery of agricultural commodities. But never before has water or water rights been seen as a *commodity*. Commodities are part of McKinsey’s “Intrinsic Markets,” but no market can fairly be considered “natural” or “inborn.”

Markets were invented by people, traditionally male, buying and selling excess tangible goods. But in today’s financialized casino markets, capitalists are buying and selling bets on prices, interest rates, and indexes in private contracts so complicated no one can claim to understand them all. Using money to make more money creates nothing of inborn value.

Pedro Arrojo-Aguda stated in 2020: “Water belongs to everyone and is a public good. It is closely tied to all of our lives and livelihoods, and is an essential component to public health.” All of nature’s assets needed for life are part of a shared planet, a shared commons, he says. You probably think so too.

Harnessing the Power of Our Relationships

At the 2024 WILPF Congress, the wonderful Mary Grant of Food and Water Watch, founded by the great Maude Barlow, and Osprey Orielle Lake of WECAN, Women’s Earth and Climate Action Network, all urged collaboration among local, diverse groups. We learned of US Senator Elizabeth Warren and US Representative Ro Khanna’s bill “The Future of Water Act,” prompted by the Greenstone Resource Partners private



sale. Backed by global investors, GRP purchased 2,000-acre-feet of water tied to 500 acres of agriculture land, in the middle of a drought, and without environmental review. Experts say this will become more common as towns and nations seek scarce water. The Future of Water Act is backed by more than 275 advocacy groups, like the Sunrise Movement and Food and Water Watch—collaborating to protect water!

In 1990, the magnificent Elinor Ostrom, a political scientist and the first woman ever to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics (in 2009) published *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. In this book, she examined how ordinary people created rules and institutions that allowed for sustainable and equitable management of the commons, like water for instance, and she documented methods enabling self-governance of common resources. Trust, the basis for any successful economic enterprise, is at the center of her eight principles, which can be learned and maintained without hierarchies. There will be problems, like stubborn insistence on one right way, or un-involvement or inattention. But she described methods that helped build engagement at every level of learning, giving voice and honoring identity from different perspectives. It’s all about the power of our relationships.

Ela Bhatt, founder of SEWA (Self-Employed Women’s Association) of India, often said, “We are poor, but we are so many!” That’s our advantage. We’re drops but we’re part of an ocean. When SEWA’s self-employed union expanded, women didn’t imagine their intelligent self-organizing as a pyramid hierarchy built of stone with a president/CEO up at the top. They imagined themselves a living Banyan tree, with millions of leaves, each producing life, connected to many deep roots, even dropping down aerial roots to form new connections.

Banyans need moisture to begin but become very resilient. They’re even said to “walk” toward water over time on their newly formed trunks. All life is intelligent and moving, and so are you and so is WILPF’s movement toward world peace and freedom—with women transforming an economy waged as war to one that values life!

Excerpt from *The Story is in Our Bones*

By Osprey Orielle Lake

Founder and Executive Director of Women's Earth & Climate Action Network, International (WECAN)

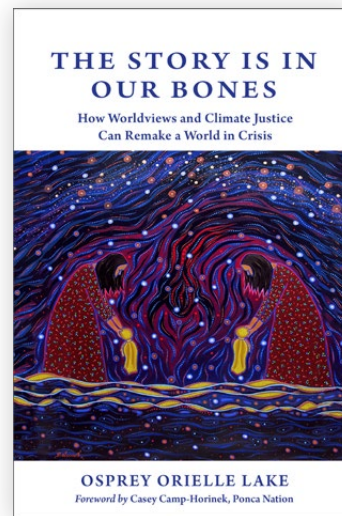
For us to attempt to hold the full gendered and racial story, an intersectional approach is needed. Intersectionality refers to the way multiple kinds of discrimination overlap to create complex webs of compounded marginalization. Black feminist scholar Kimberle Williams Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” in her 1989 work “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” in which she argues that Black women are often erased in discussions of race, which focus on Black men, and discussions of gender, which focus on white women.

Non-white women experience both racism and sexism, and the oppressions multiply when combined. The gendered experiences of disabled women, poor women, trans and gender-nonconforming women, and queer women are different from those of abled middle-class women who are straight and cisgender, and they are often left behind in feminist discourses that lack an intersectional approach. As so many women of color have asserted, feminism is only valuable if it serves, empowers, liberates, and seeks solutions for all.

Due to the lack of an intersectional lens, and, unfortunately, due to racism and prejudices among white feminist leaders and organizers, the first and second waves of feminism left multitudes of women behind, tarnished the word “feminism” in many circles, and created initiatives that mainly benefited white, straight, cis, abled, middle-class women. This occurred despite the fact that marginalized women were involved at all stages. But their contributions were, and often can continue to be, ignored.

...Few people know of Dorothy Pitman Hughes, the Black activist who co-founded Ms. magazine with [Gloria] Steinem, or Florynce Kennedy, a Black feminist who often shared the stage with Steinem and advocated for rights for Indigenous Peoples, disabled people, the poor, gays and lesbians, the elderly, sex workers, former inmates, and People of Color.

Because the first and second waves of feminism did not serve Black, Brown, and Indigenous women, many rightly saw no point in joining or staying in a movement that dismissed their life experiences as invisible, unimportant, or inconvenient—a movement that therefore furthered white supremacy. Many Black women did, however, start their own movements and organizations that supported their needs by focusing on issues of race, gender, and class together, such as



the womanism movement and the Combahee River Collective organization....

The fact is that many white feminists were (and some continue to be) completely ignorant of—or chose out of privilege to ignore—the unique lived experiences their Indigenous, Black, and Brown sisters endure every day. Most

had no Black, Brown, or Indigenous friends and spent their lives in all-white neighborhoods, and their white middle-class privilege influenced their responses to the reality of racism; consequently, white, primarily middle-class feminism was the result.

Even worse, there are white feminists who did—and do—see the discrimination faced by their sisters of color, but knew that incorporating a racial lens to their feminist activism would threaten their white privilege. White women would have to share space, attention, and resources with Black, Brown, and Indigenous women. As Black American author and activist Rachel Elizabeth Cargle remarks, “If there is not the intentional and action-based inclusion of women of color, then feminism is simply white supremacy in heels.”

Certainly, feminist movements have become more inclusive and transformational over the years, but like all growth, it is a work in progress, and white women still have critical labor to do to deeply reflect inwardly on racism, and to truly listen to, center, and amplify the voices and work of Black, Brown, and Indigenous women.

The third wave of feminism was led by a more diverse group of women, including bell hooks, Rebecca Walker (who coined the phrase “third wave feminism”), Kimberle Crenshaw, and Judith Butler, and it took a more intersectional approach, bringing LGBTQ+ rights and Black rights under its umbrella. While some in these movements say we are still in the third wave, others point to a fourth wave, beginning in 2012 or 2014 and using the internet as its stage. It is intersectional and is strengthening a growing global feminist movement. Some of the most potent, just, and brilliant analyses and solutions to current social and ecological crises are being generated in this vibrant global space of feminist movements.

Reprinted with permission from *The Story is In Our Bones: How Worldviews and Climate Justice Can Remake a World in Crisis* (2024), published by New Society Publishers.

Pressuring the Profiteers

September Actions Are Just the Beginning



Members of WILPF Peninsula/Palo Alto and San Jose branches and Pacific Life Catholic Workers from Redwood City, demonstrate outside the Lockheed Martin facility in Sunnyvale, CA on September 20th, 2024 as an action for Pressuring the Profiteers. Photo by Cherrill Spencer and used with her permission.

By Timmon Wallis

Executive Director, NuclearBan.US

In September 2024, WILPF-US members took part in some of the nearly fifty actions taking place across the country during the Global Weeks of Action on Nuclear Weapons (Sept 16-22) and Climate (Sept 23-29).

The theme of the first week was “no money for nuclear weapons” and was coordinated globally by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), of which WILPF is a key partner. The theme of the second week was “divest from war – invest in climate justice,” just one of many climate-related calls to action for that week, coordinated globally by the International Working Group on Climate and Militarism, of which WILPF-Canada is a key partner.

In the United States, it was the Warheads to Windmills Coalition that brought these two calls to action together as one, in order to highlight the links between nuclear weapons and climate and the need to focus our attention on the corporations that are preventing the US Congress from adequately addressing these two existential threats to our planet.

The W2W Coalition was started by NuclearBan.US, with which WILPF-US has had a long-standing relationship, and now includes over 60 national, state, and local organizations committed to working together on these two crucially important issues. The Coalition has been going for just over a year now, and has been focused primarily on building support for the Norton Bill, H.R. 2775, which calls for the US to eliminate

its nuclear weapons and put all those human and financial resources into addressing the climate crisis and other pressing social needs.

Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton of DC has been submitting this bill to the Congress every year since 1994 as a result of a successful DC ballot initiative that was spearheaded at the time by WILPF member Ellen Thomas. There are currently 13 members of Congress who have signed on to this bill, including most recently Rep. Chellie Pingree of Maine.

Thirteen supporters in Congress is better than one, but this bill still has a very long way to go before it has any chance of becoming law. Up to now, the Norton Bill has not yet made it even to the stage of being discussed in a committee. The Warheads to Windmills Coalition is working on strategies to get this bill to be taken more seriously in the next session of Congress.

Following the Money to Military Contractors

Meanwhile, however, the burning question is: why is the abolition of nuclear weapons so far down on the list of priorities, even for some of the most progressive members of Congress? After all, the United States is not just morally, but legally committed to this goal already.

When the US Senate ratified the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1970, they committed the US, in Article VI of that treaty, to negotiate “in good faith” and “at an early date” the complete elimination of nuclear arsenals. That was the essence of the “grand bargain” that led to the NPT: 190 coun-

tries agreed not to acquire nuclear weapons in exchange for five countries agreeing to give up the ones they already had.

The 1970 US commitment to eliminate its nuclear weapons was not just some diplomatic, unenforceable commitment under international treaty law. According to the Article 6, paragraph 2 of the US Constitution, such commitments become the “supreme law of the land” within the United States and enforceable by the courts here. So when members of Congress are afraid to even talk about eliminating nuclear weapons, what is going on?

Well, there’s one sure way to find out what’s going on: “follow the money.” And when we do, it’s not hard to identify who benefits from the trillions of taxpayer dollars going into the development, production, and maintenance of our nuclear weapons.

A relatively small handful of military contractors are making enormous profits from the nuclear weapons business. These include corporations like Lockheed Martin, L3Harris and General Dynamics, whose products are almost exclusively for the military. They also include corporations like Boeing and Honeywell, whose main line of business is not military but are nonetheless key players in the nuclear weapons business.

But here’s the thing: these companies don’t just reap enormous profits from making nuclear weapons. They also spend a small portion of those profits to ensure that the US never stops making nuclear weapons. These corporations spend millions lobbying Congress, contributing to re-election campaigns, producing glossy think-tank reports that explain why the country needs more nuclear weapons, and even writing the laws and producing the budgets that will ensure those weapons keep getting produced.

In exchange for spending millions on these activities, these corporations get nuclear weapons contracts worth billions. That’s a return on their initial “investment,” in some cases, of more than 99,900% (spending \$1 million to get \$1,000 million). That is just plain bribery and corruption, but it’s perfectly legal in this country.

These corporations control the nuclear weapons agenda. They have enormous power and influence over what gets voted into law and what gets discussed by a committee. They have enormous influence over how this issue even gets framed in the media, in academia and among nongovernmental organizations and think tanks.

Members of Congress, who are supposedly there to represent us, are largely there representing the interests of these big military contractors. So unless we can somehow influence these powerful corporations, we have very little chance of influencing Congress. That is the challenge the Coalition took on during these two Weeks of Action in September.

Pressuring Powerful Companies Is Possible!

Luckily, we can influence these powerful corporations. It’s been done many times before and we can do it again! Boycotts and divestment campaigns helped to end apartheid in South Africa, they helped to reduce deaths from Nestlé’s dangerous promotion of infant formula, they helped end the genocide in Darfur, they helped win labor rights for farm workers in California, and they have helped to put the climate issue right at the top of the political agenda.

In the 1980s, boycotts and divestment campaigns had a major impact on reducing the nuclear danger and getting Ronald Reagan to the negotiating table with Mikhail Gorbachev. In all these cases, there were other important factors involved and none of them can be claimed as a total success. Nevertheless, we know that these companies do not like being shamed or stigmatized. It damages their reputation and that directly affects their bottom line. They do not like divestment because that too impacts other investors and the overall value of the company.

In the case of nuclear weapons, we now have an additional and very powerful tool with which to pressure the profiteers. These companies do not just operate in the United States. They sell goods and services all over the world. They have investors, suppliers, contracts, projects, factories, and offices all over the world. And as more and more of those other countries sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW or “Nuclear Ban Treaty”), these companies are facing the prospect of operating illegally in those countries and running into all kinds of difficulties.

By adding boycotts, divestment campaigns, and public shaming of these companies here inside the US, we can build on the pressure these companies are getting from countries around the world, and together we can force them to change direction if they want to stay in business. Our message to these companies: “Use your enormous power and influence on Congress and the White House to end this country’s addiction to fossil fuels and nuclear weapons!” And to our communities: “Until these companies stop threatening all life on this planet with their lobbying activities, don’t buy from them, don’t use their products, don’t let your money be invested in them, don’t let them think you’re okay with what they are doing!”

These two weeks of action were just the start of what needs to become a national campaign to pressure the profiteers – both the nuclear weapons and the fossil fuel companies. It will take sustained pressure and ongoing boycotts, divestment campaigns, and public shaming to have any chance of success. For the sake of the planet, we have to keep going until we succeed.

Meeting Branches Where They Are

A Q&A with WILPF US Field Organizer Shelby Young

P **Peace & Freedom Editor Wendy McDowell** held a Zoom conversation with WILPF US Field Organizer Shelby Young in January 2025 to find out what kind of initiatives and ideas are underway to build membership in WILPF US.



Can you share an overview of your role and responsibilities as a field organizer for WILPF US?

My role as the field organizer for WILPF is to recruit new members to the different branches across the United States and to help branch chairs figure out best techniques and tips to retain current members as well as to recruit new members. I'm working with a couple of branches on an individualized level in the southern part of California and also Arizona. I am currently based in Phoenix, Arizona.

My primary responsibilities include one-on-ones with those chairs, supporting them with upcoming events and finding new ways to bring different audiences into the fold and recruit them to become official WILPF members. Each branch is totally different, so part of my job is to figure out what a branch needs that's within their comfort level and that's not asking too much of them. Because a lot of folks have jobs, they have other responsibilities outside their branch, and it's important that whatever I'm asking chairs to do is within their actual reach. This includes encouraging them to develop roles among their branch members that are interdependent.

What inspired you to take on the challenge of building and activating WILPF's national membership base?

Honestly, I didn't know that WILPF existed before I saw this job posting. I thought, "How did I not even know about such an incredible organization that's been around for 115 years?"

I've been an organizer for the past seven years, since I moved to Arizona, so when I saw this job description I felt like it aligned with my experience. But also, what was explained to me in the interview process was that this was going to be a challenge. The role not only includes creating new techniques for folks, but also building them up again, because a lot of branches have kind of lost their mojo. I was going to need

to provide both emotional and physical support for folks to become reengaged and to activate their membership base.

Probably the main thing that inspired me to take the position was that I really loved the mission of WILPF. I loved the visions branches have created for themselves, and within the first month, I found that WILPF was full of really good people that wanted to make the world a better place. I took the role because of how cool the organization was, but what has inspired me to stay is how kind and wonderful the people are.

Do you have any specific goals or priorities for 2025?

I do have some metrics that I'm meant to accomplish. One of those includes increasing membership by 3% across the branches that I'm working with on a closer level, and also encouraging the other members of WILPF to increase their membership, too.

There was a WILPF US program a few years ago called "One by One We Grow," which was a relational organizing program. Relational organizing is still so important, because people sometimes don't realize how big their network is, but there are other things I also want folks to explore, especially around technology, that could be really helpful for them, for example to have hybrid meetings.

We have created a new initiative using relational organizing plus other different techniques and we've called it the "Catalyst for Peace and Justice Program." We want all of the branch chairs and members to feel like they are catalysts for peace and justice in their own local communities and across the world.

We're going to accomplish this by offering technology trainings to branch leaders and members. I also want to explore engagement ideas for the Jane Addams branch and all of the branches, to offer techniques for branches to get out reminders to their members so they're not missing meetings and are all on the same page, and to develop leaders within their ranks.

Again, every branch is different, but for a lot of the branches, there are typically one to two people who are taking on a majority of the roles. As an organizer, I know it's important for there to be more members taking on some of the leadership responsibilities, so I want to help branches explore what it would look like to have a five-member or six-member team that is dedicated to different parts of the work. This serves to improve membership engagement, increases renewals, and leads to higher recruitment rates.

How will you be able to share these important strategies with all WILPF US branches?

Once a month, on the second Wednesday from 5-6:30 pm PT, we are holding an all-branch meeting open to all of the branches. Those meetings are the avenue or path for members to learn about some of the tips and techniques I can provide to increase membership for their own branches. Some of that includes calling out to past inactive members. Have they done that in a while? I've been doing this for the Sacramento branch, and we've found a couple of people interested in rejoining just because of that personalized call. Then there are ways to cut corners, not in a bad way, but to find ways to make event planning easier for the entire team. How do we simplify that?

Anyone can come to the all-branch meetings and learn ways they can build out their leadership and their branch through different techniques. Jan Corderman and Eileen Kurkoski did a great job of setting the ground for me to do all this work, so I've definitely thought about it for a very long time.

As you've done this work what have you discovered about WILPF branches?

The main thing is that each branch has such different needs, so they need varying levels of support. Even branches in the same state, from San Diego to Sacramento, can need totally different things. So, I've been finding that individualized plans are needed for each branch to achieve their goals. Things can get super specific and individualized for each branch. I think that's the key strategy, not using a one-size-fits-all model for each one.

What's the most rewarding part of working with WILPF members to advance peace and social justice?

One of the most rewarding parts of working with WILPF members is that I feel as if I'm laughing a lot. Laughter is one of the few things that helps get me through this world. I think for a lot of folks, things are feeling pretty bleak right now, but one of the things I've been shocked by is each branch's ability to laugh at the end of the day. And they find common ground in spaces and times where it's difficult to agree. I'm learning a lot from the other branch members on ways to compartmentalize the work that we're doing and finding ways to work on the big issues, accomplish things, and still get things done while leading with a heart of laughter and love.

Where do you see WILPF in the next few years, and how does your work contribute to that vision?

I would love to see branches adopting a shared leadership model that enhances their outreach strategies, but also has more interdependent roles among the team. Of course I also envision seeing an uptick in membership across all of the branches. The goal is 5%, that's exactly what we would like to accomplish.

Through the all-branch meetings, it is possible. And there are a few other things I really hope to accomplish, like allowing members to become more technology savvy, and building community across the members. I love what the Southeast branches are doing with their conference coming up soon. That is something I would love to see for the Southwest branches as well. Also, we would love to see more young branches across universities.

In addition to the all-branch meetings, I support this vision through my individualized one-on-ones and the offer to branch chairs to meet with me at any time if they are looking to make changes. Some folks are starting from ground zero. Some folks aren't even a branch yet. I know that some branches have lost so many members that they've lost their branch title. So my work as a field organizer is to meet branches where they are at this moment. And I hope that contributes to the vision to get them back in, in a way.

What kind of things do you say when you are trying to inspire someone to get involved with WILPF?

I always give folks the blanket statement of us being a member driven organization. And I stress that we focus on creating peace and justice in the United States, but also across the entire world, through a plethora of avenues. I mention the issue committees that we have, and I find a lot of folks are interested in one, two, or three of them that really speak to what they envision for the world as well.

Maybe the biggest hook, and what can get people to cross the line to becoming a WILPF member, is letting them know about the kind of community created in WILPF. The ability to agree to disagree, the ability to work on localized issues. Sometimes things that you might not even know are happening in your community are things WILPF will bring up. For instance, the Tucson Branch does a great job at identifying local issues within their community. And so many branches are good at creating a space where folks can join in wherever

and however they feel comfortable. There's no wrong way to be an activist.

If I am trying to recruit someone, I explain that there is an avenue for them to participate in WILPF in any way, whether they want to focus on being out there with signs on the streets, or working to ensure that something is happening in the community. They can work on tabling events or provide food for meetings or work on agenda items. There are so many ways to get active and I think WILPF does an amazing job of providing all of those avenues.

Last but not least, can you share a little bit about your own background? What put you on the path of activism?

I was born in Washington, DC, but I grew up in Pennsylvania. I came out here to go to the University of Arizona because my mom was born in Nogales, Arizona, on the border. From a very young age, my mom always told me bits and stories of immigrant related issues of folks along the border and what that life was like for her, especially having a group of friends that were documented, but with undocumented family. That is a tough line to walk.

So I've always known about social justice related issues from her. But I never thought you can get paid for this until I got to college. Originally I pursued a degree in microbiology, thinking I was going to do some research related work around viruses or cancer. And then I thought about teaching for a

moment as I was preparing for my master's. I ended up teaching at a Tucson school in reducing, reusing, and recycling. This was for third graders learning about the groundwater system, and it really changed my perspective on policy. I didn't know how intertwined our education system was with policy work or how policy decisions by people above me affect education and the way we teach.

This opened the door for me to policy issues. I became really interested in the way those policies impact our daily lives. And as I continued down that rabbit hole, I encountered a lot of policies that I didn't enjoy around peace, around policing, around the prison system, around a plethora of issues that I knew existed but didn't know why. That is really what inspired me to think more about social justice and what part I wanted to play.

I ended up starting a job with the Arizona Coalition for Change, working in Tucson to increase the Black voter turnout for the upcoming 2020 election. I've had other jobs that have revolved around different policy issues: Queer rights, fighting against anti-LGBTQ+ bills at the capitol, and abolition work, running some campaigns for abolitionists in the state in the county attorney's race in Maricopa. I really enjoyed all of these experiences, and I never wanted to leave the space. When I saw this job, I applied, and I'm grateful because I've been learning so much about international law from the WILPF members. In some way, shape, or form, all of the work I've done has aligned for peace so it is really wonderful to be here with WILPF now.

Welcome New WILPF US Leaders

Thank you to all who ran for office and to all members who cast ballots in the recent WILPF US election.

Welcome to the new officers who were voted in and who began serving in their roles on January 25, 2025:

Co-Presidents: Shilpa Pandey and Martha Collins
Development Committee: Chair Marybeth Gardam
Nominating Committee Chair: Julie Kabukanyi
Membership Committee Chair: Eileen Kurkoski
At-Large Board Member: Julie Leak

The following officers are continuing their service on the WILPF US Board:

Treasurer: Barbara Nielsen
Secretary: Ginger Harris
Past President: Darien De Lu
Program Committee Chair: George Friday
Personnel Committee Chair: Cee' Cee' Anderson
At-Large Board Member: Tina Shelton

How Does Your Garden Grow

Continued from page 19

plants. But will the EPA under President Trump follow up and ban sewage sludge from farmland? Or will states have to take action instead?

After the state found more than 70 contaminated farms, in 2022 Maine banned sewage sludge on farmland and the sale of compost containing sludge. Now other states are doing the same.

The Sierra Club has the [PFAS Contamination From Waste Water on Farms and Gardens](#) campaign. Their testing found PFAS in all nine fertilizer products tested by the Ecology Center of Michigan and Sierra Club and marketed as "eco" or "natural." Eight of the nine exceeded screening guidelines set by the State of Maine. PFAS in fertilizers could cause garden crops to be a source of exposure for home gardeners.

The Earth Democracy Committee plans to develop our own campaign to complement our militarypoisons.org project.

Thank You WILPF US Donors!

WILPF US deeply appreciates financial donations, large and small, from our members, friends, and sponsors. Your gifts help us to raise women's voices for peace and justice. On this page, we thank by name those who made generous donations and bequests in 2023; 2024 donors will be listed in the next print issue.

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May Takayanagi Transformed Pain Into Action

By Virginia Pratt, Ellen Mass, and Eileen Kurkoski

Boston Branch

May Takayanagi, longtime activist and member of the Boston WILPF branch who resided in Newton, Massachusetts, passed away on March 13, 2024, at the age of 99. Bryan Marquard of *The Boston Globe* wrote her obituary, titled “May Takayanagi, peace activist, whose family was interned in World War II camps, dies,” but her fellow WILPF members wanted to share their firsthand memories of May with the WILPF community.

The third-oldest of seven siblings, Kyoko Oshima was born in Oakland, California, on May 16, 1924. Living in California as the United States entered World War II, May and her family were sent to internment camps for the crime of being Japanese; a shameful practice of collective punishment in US history. She never forgot the experience of being forced to live “like animals” in flimsy horse stalls in a large camp in Utah.

When the camps closed, her family followed May to Minneapolis, and she ran into Tetsuo Takayanagi. They married in 1949 and went on to have three children.

It was a difficult time to be Japanese. May recalled that she got the American name ‘May’ when her school teacher could not remember her Japanese birth name and told her it was too difficult. The discrimination against Japanese immigrants continued well into her early adulthood. She and husband had a hard time finding an apartment to rent in Cambridge, MA, while he was a student at Harvard University. As a result of her experiences, May was a lifelong champion for fair housing.

May became a peace and justice activist with numerous groups, including the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), the American Friends Service Committee, a democratic organization in Newton, METCO (a program for equal education), and Japanese cultural organizations. She applied her practical talents as a bookkeeper for the AFSC and the WILPF Boston branch.

According to the *Globe* obituary, “Along with serving on the board and as a past president of the New England Japanese American Citizens League, she and her husband... were founding benefactors of the Institute for Asian American Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston.”

“May was highly dedicated to WILPF,” Ellen Mass remembers. “For many years in Boston (about 30 years when



I helped run the office), and especially during the era of Nell Elperin, Pauline Solomon, and Sophie Pann, she was our dutiful treasurer and came to every meeting. She was always very, very personable to each of us.”

“Many deeply admired May’s independence and her closeness with her husband, who always picked her up from the meetings,” Ellen continued. “Her impeccable note taking and memory of WILPF’s work was uncanny. She was a very fashionable dresser as well.”

“I remember how independent and confident she was about herself, and she used that confidence to bring others along and keep up with intricate politics around Vietnam,” Ellen said. “I never perceived her as someone who saw herself as oppressed, but as someone who was always up for righteous justice. May was very close to Pauline Solomon, Joan Ecklein, and Nell Elperin. Together they hosted women from Russia and other countries for WILPF, and organized many conferences and meetings. May came to them all.”

“May Takayanagi was a woman who lived her values — not only talking the talk, but walking the walk,” Virginia Pratt of the Boston Branch shared. “Her life was a life well lived. May became a lifelong advocate for justice because of the discrimination that she faced in her life. She transformed the pain of her past, from what could have been bitterness, into empathy and action aimed at making the world a better place for us all.”

Virginia echoed Ellen’s praise about May’s important work and example for the Boston Branch: “Her records were meticulous. She was a very generous financial donor to the organization and other causes she cared deeply for. Despite all of the discrimination she faced, May was typically confident, cheerful, friendly, approachable, practical, and very down-to-earth. She leaves an excellent example of how we can use pain in positive ways to help make the world around us more beautiful.”

Libby Frank, Founder of the WILPF US Middle East Committee

By Dolores Taller and Heather Shafter

Libby Frank passed away on December 12, 2023, just before her 96th birthday. She is celebrated and remembered by her WILPF friends for her savvy leadership and her keen sense of humor.

Libby was born on December 30, 1927. After many moves during her childhood due to her father's difficulty finding work during the Great Depression, Libby's family finally settled down in Cleveland, Ohio. She began teaching Hebrew school in her teens and held many roles as a Hebrew School teacher and administrator throughout her career.

She completed the college track in high school and received a scholarship to Cleveland College, but also took typing and shorthand at her father's insistence, which enabled her to earn money as a secretary. Libby married Morton Frank in 1956 and they went on to have two sons: Alan and Reuben.



Libby Frank began her activism for peace and justice in the 1940s. She participated in public swimming pool desegregation actions, actions to end the war in Vietnam, and she supported farm and factory worker strikes. During the Vietnam War, Libby was the director of the Bergen County, New Jersey Peace Center (1969-1973), her first paid job in peace work. The Peace Center provided draft counseling and hosted Jane Fonda and others to speak against the Vietnam War.

Libby first volunteered with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) on the Childhood Education Committee. There she helped coordinate the "Around the World in Art & Song" program for children and launched a campaign to change the way *My Weekly Reader* reported on race and the Vietnam War.

As a former Zionist, Libby's interest in the Middle East conflict led her to found and chair the WILPF US National Middle East Committee (1973-1981), and she led the WILPF Middle East Delegation in 1978. Libby later became the executive director of the US section of WILPF (1981-1986).

As a result of her peace and justice work, Libby Frank has been the subject of television, radio, and news articles over her decades of activism. She has delivered countless speeches around the country and globally on the topics of peace, justice, and the Middle East. Libby's autobiographical book, co-written with Heather Shafter, was published posthumously in March 2024 titled, *Life of Libby: Chasing Peace & Justice with Humor, Guts, & Passion*.

Dolores Taller met Libby in the early years of her Middle East peace organizing for the WILPF US Section, around 1970. Libby asked Dolores to work with her on organizing a Middle East Workshop at the International Congress about to meet in Birmingham, England, in the mid-70s. "This was a groundbreaking workshop, with members from the Lebanese Section (with Palestinian members) and Israeli sections attending, as well as folks from other WILPF Sections around the world," Dolores said. "It was a challenging experience with heated discussions. It kicked off organizing for Israel-Palestine peace."

That was the beginning of a more than 50-year friendship between the two women and long periods of doing peace activism together. Another groundbreaking action they accomplished was to bring a US Section women's delegation to Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel, and the West Bank.

"Libby loved people," Dolores said. "Though we lived on opposite coasts, she always kept us in touch, with regular calls to find out how I and my family were doing; and telling me about hers. She was especially drawn to children, and on one of her rare visits to Berkeley, she met my three-year-old grandson. They hit it off immediately."

"Libby was a terrific activist/organizer with a savvy political sense," Dolores stressed. "She urged us always to focus on the role of the United States in our Middle East work. When something needed to be done, she was ready to take the initiative. She had a creative mind, coming up with effective actions, which drew active support. She had a big vision of the future for peace and justice. She had a keen sense of humor and an easy laugh. I also admired her ability to remember details of our many trips."

"She spoke often of Mort as her close friend and political partner, and how proud she was of her family," Dolores added. "I miss my dear friend Libby."

Branches Act 'Glocally'



On December 6, 2024, the **Greater Philadelphia Branch** joined an anniversary vigil recognizing one year of advocating for a ceasefire in Gaza outside of their junior Senator's Philadelphia office. Tina Shelton and Pam Albright reported, "Although we have since realized that Senator Fetterman's stance is considerably more entrenched than we anticipated, we continue to sponsor and be a part of the only weekly vigil against the war in Philadelphia." The vigil included a poet, a singer, Quaker peace activist George Lakey, Medea Benjamin from Code Pink, a Fetterman puppet (complements of Spiral Q) and others who stood in the cold to mark the anniversary. Participants then walked to a nearby location where they shared bread and soup.

The **Detroit Branch** continued its annual donation of Jane Addams Peace Association award-winning books to the Children's Department of the Detroit Main Library. Four titles, including [A Song for the Unsung celebrating the life of Bayard Rustin, by Carole Beston Weatherford and Rob Sanders](#), will be displayed and available for check-out on January 15, 2025, in celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday. Other titles are *The Lost Year*, *The Artist*, and *The Flag*. Peace education books are given in honor of [Helga Herz](#) (1912–2010), an activist with the Detroit Branch of WILPF, a volunteer at the Wayne State University Center for Peace and Conflict Studies, and a librarian at the Detroit Library for 30 years.

The **Humboldt County (CA) Branch** held their almost-annual July 4 used book sale with their partners from Centro del Pueblo (a local immigrant rights group). The book sale raises money



for the Edilith Eckert/Jene McCovey scholarship, which gives small grants to local groups for projects promoting peace and justice, locally to globally. The branch stayed busy selling tickets for their annual quilt raffle, which also supports the Edilith Eckert/Jean McCovey Scholarship and took place on December 21. Humboldt WILPF has also been actively engaging with the readings provided by Program Committee Chair George Friday during the June training, and they plan to continue these discussions.

The WILPF **Peace Pentagon Virginia Branch** is focused on the Founding Mothers Movement (FMM) – a global coalition to attain "Planetary Partnership and Peace." FMM stewards the reimagined global Women's Congress, which meets on the first Saturday of every month at 11 am EST. To kick off the Weekly Worldwide Wakeup campaign, FMM held a virtual Launch Rally on January 1, 2025, featuring notable speakers and performers. To date, three WILPF branches have joined FMM: the **Peace Pentagon Branch** in Virginia, the virtual **Jane Addams Branch**, and the **WILPF International Branch** in Ghana, Africa.



On May 17, 2024, the restarted **Chicago Branch** leaders who had been meeting virtually for a year came together in person for a pop up event at a restaurant in Chicago's South Side. Rev. Zenobia Sowell, co-pastor of the Bethel Mennonite Church, was joined by her congregants Gloria Pierce and Clarence Beals, along with Carron Little of the Chicago Women's History Center. Representing WILPF US was Marybeth Gardam of the **Iowa Branch**, Martha Collins of the **Milwaukee Branch**, and Dianne Blais of the virtual **Jane Addams Branch**. Meeting locations for the newly relaunched branch were discussed. Earlier in the day, part of the group toured the nearby Jane Addams Hull House Museum, the perfect prompt for the Chicago Branch Relaunch gathering.

The **Jane Addams Branch** holds meetings on the third Wednesday of each month. Highlights from the branch's 2024 meetings include presentations by Laura George and Judith Hand (March and October), who shared their new initiatives, the [Founding Mothers Movement \(FMM\)](#) and [Project Enduring Peace \(PEP\)](#). Their January 15, 2025 meeting will feature Korea Peace Now and on February 19, 2025, they will welcome Carron Little, artist and director of the Chicago Women's History Center, presenting her project on unpaid labor in America.

Gloria McMillian and the **Tuscon Branch** organized a University of Arizona campus WILPF gathering in the Women and Gender Resources Center. Just days before Halloween, they watched a video about Jane Addams and her role as Chicago's Haunted Sapphic Icon. The video showcases Jane's defiance towards gender norms, her intersectional identities, and the rich, potentially haunted, history of Hull House. Attendees were invited to reflect on new insights they learned and several shared that the video offered fresh perspectives on Jane



Addams' life beyond her work in women's suffrage, especially regarding her queer and asexual identities. The event closed out with a group picture of the students who attended with Deb Livingston, who helped support the event.

In anticipation of the 2024 election, WILPF **San Jose Branch** member Rev. Rowan Fairgrove offered a two-part talk about the history of women's suffrage in America: [The History of Votes for Women in America](#) and [The Women Who Fought for Women's Suffrage](#). The branch's monthly meeting videos are posted to their YouTube channel. The PowerPoint presentations for these talks are available to WILPF chapters if they wish to use them as a basis for their own programming.

Hiroshima/Nagasaki Commemorations

On Nagasaki Day, members of the organizing committee for the **Atlanta Branch** of WILPF US sent a [WILPF petition](#) to the US President and Vice President calling for support for the [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#). They met at the newly installed Peace Bell on the grounds of the Jimmy Carter Presidential Museum and



Library where Nuclear Watch South has organized the observance for the last 30 years.

On August 4, 2024, Watertown Citizens for Peace, Justice and the Environment held their annual remembrance of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki cosponsored by American Friends Service Committee and Mass Peace Action. Eileen Kurkoski and Virginia Pratt were in attendance to represent the **Boston Branch**. The event is both a memorial remembrance of the horrible nuclear attack and bombing as well as a call to action to prevent any future nuclear attack.



The **Burlington Branch** held a Hiroshima commemorative event on August 6, 2024, in the BCA Center in Burlington, VT. It featured several eloquent speakers and a taped recording of hibakusha Hideko Tamura. In front of City Hall, artist and activist Jim Geier displayed his 'Dot Chart,' first made in 1981. The one dot in the center represents all the megatonnage used by both warring sides in WW2. The surrounding dots represent the amount of nuclear 'fire power' the world has built up since then to demolish each other. Later, a few participants went to Lake Champlain to float candle boats and a lantern, and they read parts of resolution HR 77 that they are hoping Congresswoman Becca Balint will sign.

The **Fresno Branch** was one of the cosponsors of two events in the area taking place in early August commemorating the lives lost and victims of the two atomic bombings 79 years ago. They shared the statement they prepared supporting nuclear abolition to be passed out after each event which starts: "We teeter on a precipice no human has ever experienced before. It is a precipice of great evil."

The Annual Hiroshima Commemoration at Livermore Lab in California happened on August 6, 2024, and was livestreamed. It was attended

by several WILPF members. Read [this detailed article](#) with photos and quotes from the many speakers.

At Lovers Point Beach Cove in Pacific Grove, CA, on August 3, 2024, the **Monterey County Branch** of WILPF invited the public to gather for a peace-lantern floating ceremony to honor those who suffered and still suffer from the 1945 bombings by the United States on the people of Japan.

DISARM Committee co-chair Cherrill Spencer, a member of the **Peninsula/Palo Alto Branch**, gave the [keynote speech](#) at the Hiroshima and Nagasaki Remembrance event on August 4, 2024, at the Clock Tower in downtown Santa Cruz. Spencer's main point was that commemoration is not enough and, as a start towards the necessary nuclear abolition, we must get rid of the ICBMs sitting in the middle of the US.



Members of the WILPF **Tucson Branch**, Veterans For Peace, The Tucson Peace Center, Tucson Raging Grannies, and some local churches demonstrated against nuclear weapons at the entrance to the Davis Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, AZ, on August 6, 2024.

On August 8, to remember Nagasaki, members of the WILPF **DC, MD, VA Branch** joined the Hiroshima/Nagasaki Peace Committee of the National Capital Region in Lafayette Park for the annual candlelight vigil beside the 43-year White House Antinuclear Vigil. This is where Ellen Thomas vigiled for the abolition of nuclear weapons and conversion of the war industries for 18 years.

Also from Washington, DC, the 43rd annual National Capital Area Hiroshima Nagasaki Commemoration held a virtual commemoration on August 5, 2025, organized by DISARM co-chair Ellen Thomas, among others. One of the speakers was **Oregon Branch** member Hideko Tamura, a survivor of Hiroshima.



Honoring Life Members

Mares Hirschert Why I keep giving to WILPF US

Decades ago, the WILPF US Board decided to offer ‘a deal’ to members. They could donate one-lump sum of money to become a Life Member, and they would “never have to send any money to WILPF again.” However, we were encouraged to give free-will donations; although the memberships are no longer offered, I continue to donate.

Frankly, I didn’t expect to be looking at a “real” ceasefire when I started to write about my LIFE with WILPF US. But I’ll take it, with a cautious and fragile hope. I joined WILPF US and the Detroit Branch because they offer such a hope — locally, nationally, and internationally. Our organization is unique in that we deal with multiple issues as the ‘root causes for war’— an old-fashioned phrase but still powerful — and offer United Nations connections to women from all corners of the world. I depend on experts like Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian Territories, and her 2024 report “Genocide as Colonial Erasure” to make my decisions. We must shout out to our US Congress members against those still threatening to dismantle the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).

Most importantly, even with a ceasefire, we must focus on the children. War not only destroys families, but whole lineages. And war breeds hatred. Leaning into my background as a social worker and working for



From left, Stephanie Hirschert-Walton (daughter), Mares Hirschert, Audrey Hirschert-Walton (granddaughter)

peace with my husband, Chuck, as partners in activism until he passed away in 2017, we raised two daughters and now there is a generational passion for peace in our grandchildren.

I encourage all Life Members (and other members, too) to once again join together in pushing back on US-driven policy of war mongering or whatever social justice issue is your passion. We can do this through increased financial support and in honor of WILPF’s commitment to women around the world. Join with me to make that happen! Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom!

How to donate: Go to www.wilpfus.org and click on the donate button in the upper right or mail your check or money order to our national office at: WILPF US, PO Box 13075, Des Moines, IA 50310