

## Handout 2 – Profiles of Young Climate Activists



### Isra Hirsi

*“It’s a lot to be a Black, young person in the environmental movement, only because these spaces I’m in and the organizations that I work with don’t necessarily reflect me. I want to change how climate activism is viewed today. People that look like me and people in low income communities who are mostly impacted by this issue don’t get to see their voices being heard, don’t get to be represented in these movements.”*

The daughter of Somali-American refugees, Isra Hirsi is the co-founder and executive director of the US Youth Climate Strike, the U.S. arm of the global student climate strike. Hirsi’s environmental activism focuses particularly on the effects climate change will have of communities of color, which will be more effected by a warming planet. Her advocacy, coupled with the fact that she is the daughter of Congressperson Ilhan Omar, has drawn national attention. In addition to her advocacy for climate change, she also is involved in the #Blacklivesmatter and Fight for our Lives movements.

### Xiye Bastida

*“My generation is called Gen Z. We didn’t choose that name, you chose it for us. And Gen Z is the last letter of the alphabet. It symbolizes the end of something. My question is: do you want us to be the last generation? I don’t think it does. So we are reframing that and saying we are going to be the last generation dependent upon fossil fuels. That is it. We are going to be the last generation to be caught up in this system of selfishness. Because we need to be selfless to be part of the larger body of life.”*



Called “America’s Greta Thunberg” by PBS, Xiye Bastida was grew up in the small Mexican town of San Pedro Tultepec. After the town suffered from a long drought followed by great flooding, Bastida’s family moved to New York City, and she began being involved in fighting climate change. Inspired by her Otomi indigenous tradition of respecting the earth, Bastida has initiated school strikes and became one of the lead organizers of the September 2019 Global Climate Strike. In addition, she is a member of the administration committee of the Peoples Climate Movement, as well as the Sunrise Movement and Extinction Rebellion. She received the “Spirit of the UN” award in 2018.



## Kevin J. Patel

*“My community, the place that I call home, is being destroyed by the very thing that caused my issue. . .It is not the communities of the rich and affluent in Los Angeles that are effected by the climate crisis. It is the low income communities of color that are. Our voices and stories will mark the history books for years to come. We are the youth that took our pains and struggles and said that we refuse to be the last generation. We refuse to see our communities being destroyed for corporate profit.”*

Kevin Patel has an intimate understanding of the ways pollution affect health. At age 14, he was diagnosed with heart palpitations caused by pollution in the working class Los Angeles neighborhood where he grew up. In September 2019, he participated in the Global Climate Strikes, and spoke in front of a crowd of 250,000 people in New York City with fellow activist Isabella Fallahi. After graduating, Patel launched One Up Action, a organization developed to help youth become climate leaders.

## Alexandria Villaseñor

*“In the year 2030, I will be 25 years old. In that time, 11 years will have passed since scientists informed humanity that time was running out to avoid irreversible catastrophic effects of climate change. . . I want to tell you how frustrating it is to know that when I am an adult, it will be too late. I am frustrated because this is the moment that really matters, and there is no time for me to grow up and grasp the reigns of power. I am frustrated and terrified watching the adults around me move too slowly towards the solutions upon which my future depends. . .We children need you to urgently act on climate change.”*



In 2017, Alexandria Villaseñor visited family in Davis, California. While visiting, the Camp Fire broke out. Though Villaseñor was nearly a hundred miles away, the smoke affected her asthma, requiring her to visit pulmonologist. She returned to New York City devoted to researching the climate crisis, and after discovering the activism of Greta Thunberg, began to leave her school every Friday to protest in front of United Nations building for hours in protest over the lack of effort global governments have put into addressing the climate crisis. Since then, she became a head organizer for FridaysForFuture, an organization of students who are similarly striking every Friday around the world. She is also the founder of Earth Uprising, a nonprofit where youth around the world rise up against climate change together.



## Jeffrey Eduardo Torres Cortes

*“I fight for my home, for where I live, for the lands our ancestors have left us. I fight for the place my ancestors lived all their life. That’s because it’s something that’s mine, that belongs to me, that’s always belonged to my family. If I don’t fight for that, my kids one day won’t have anything. So I fight to ensure they have a future.”*

Part of the Cabécar people of Eastern Costa Rica, Cortes advocates for clean energy within indigenous communities. In 2019, he helped create a solar energy program to give sustainable energy to remote communities in Costa Rica.



## Zero Hour

*“No one gives you an organizing guide of how to raise thousands of dollars, how to get people on board, how to mobilize. There was no help. It was just me floundering around with Dory-like determination, like, ‘Just keep swimming.’ [Now] We flipped the scenario as the underdog. We’ve proven ourselves. We are on the verge of something amazing. We’re going to change history.” - Jamie Margolin*

At 16 years old, Jamie Margolin grew frustrated with the level of inaction taken by political leaders to address the climate crisis, and how little youth voices are represented in climate policy. In response, she worked with Nadia Nazar, Madelaine Tew, and Zangee Artis, fellow activists she met online, to develop the Zero Hour Movement. Largely organized over social media, the Zero Hour Movement initiates protests, presentations, global art projects, and meetings between youth and political figures, to educate and urge action in addressing the climate crisis. Made up of teenagers and young adults, the Zero Hour Movement has secured \$70,000 in grants, lobbied in Washington, D.C., and organized climate-themed art festivals.

## Quannah Chasinghorse

*“Some advice for youth who want to get more involved is to reach out to your local community and start there. Reach out to whatever cause or movement in your area and get involved. It’s super fun and easy. We are standing to keep our earth pretty, clean, and green. Listen to each other, learn from each other, and fight [alongside] each other.”*

Quannah Chasinghorse is a member of the Han Gwich’in and Lakota Sioux Nations. She is heavily involved in advocating for the rights of indigenous people of Alaska – a state that is warming at twice the rate as the rest of the United States. In 2019, Chasinghorse and Nanieezh Peter (Neetsaii Gwich’in and Diné) stood before the Alaska Federation of Natives and advocated a resolution urging the federation to take action on climate change. By the end of the session, the convention voted to declare a climate emergency. This advocacy reached the Halls of Congress: in December 2019, the House of Representatives passed the The Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act, which would restore protections that were stripped when the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act mandated oil and gas leasing, development and production on the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge.



## Daphne Frias

*“I don’t see many activists out there with physical disabilities. It’s really important that people with physical disabilities can get involved with climate justice and activism in general. I hope that I can inspire them. I don’t think the color of my skin should impact the importance of my voice.”*

A resident of Harlem, New York City, Daphne Frias experienced environmental racism first hand. “There is a waste treatment plant that has been creating pollution in my community for a long time,” she told *Vice*, “I didn’t realize that wasn’t normal until I went to a predominantly affluent neighborhood and saw that they don’t have that.” Just because we are poor doesn’t mean we deserve to have our environment destroyed in our community.” Frias was born with cerebral palsy, making her particularly susceptible to bad air quality. In advocated for environmental justice, Frias has joined the youth-led climate group Zero Hour, where she educates people on the many scientific solutions to the Climate Crisis.





## Feliquan Charlemagne

*“Every big structural change in this country and globally has only come because of grassroots insurgence. The Civil Rights Movement, the Women’s Suffrage Movement, that didn’t happen because people sat around. They stood up for their rights and demanded it.”*

Feliquan Charlemagne was born in the Caribbean island of St. Thomas. Due to the increasing number and severity of hurricanes affecting the Caribbean islands due to the climate crisis, Feliquan moved to Florida when he was two months old. Charlemagne is the national creative director of the U.S. Youth

Climate Strike, a grassroots movement of students striking from school to demand action taking on climate change.

## Vic Barrett

*“I am Garifuna. My people are an Afro-Indigenous community from the island of Saint Vincent in the Caribbean. We are being pushed from the lands that my family has inhabited for generations. That land will be underwater in a few decades if we continue on the path we are on. We’re here to write a new story, a story in which our country is doing everything in its power to address not only the climate crisis, but the systemic injustices at its roots, a story in which our constitutional right to a safe climate is recognized by the highest courts.”*



Vic Barrett is one of 21 young people suing the U.S. government for its failure to respond to the global climate crisis. Barrett is part of Our Children’s Trust, a group creating lawsuits and petitions against multiple areas of the U.S. government. They argue “that approval of fossil fuel development has violated the fundamental right of citizens to be free from government actions that harm life, liberty and property.” Barrett sees climate change intimately connected with other social justice issues, from police violence to the treatment of immigrants to Indigenous land dispossession.



## Amira Odeh Quiñones

*“The coastal communities or mountain towns still have thousands of homes destroyed. Not only is there still broken infrastructure but also broken families. There is a collective PTSD—the recovery of the minds and hearts haven’t happened at all. [Frontline] communities should be in this conversation because whatever policy is decided will be key for us to be able to survive.”*

“When I was 6,” Amira Odeh Quiñones recalls, “I used to snorkel in a coral reef here [in Puerto Rico]. It no longer existed when I was 12.”

Quiñones is currently a regional organizer at the international climate organization 350.org, focusing on recovery and justice after Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico. In her work, she makes sure the policy makers hear the voices of local communities.