TO BIRTH A just and green economy, our society needs the government to act as an effective midwife. And to get the public sector to play that role, champions of the green economy need a powerful political movement—one that is grounded in the kind of principles discussed in the last chapter.

Yet principles alone do not generate successful movements. Movements for political and social change also need a strategy—with long-term goals, enduring coalitions, and an effective mode of operating. (They also need a concrete policy agenda, which we will lay out in Chapter 7.)

In this case, the transition to an inclusive, green economy must be supported by a political movement that aims to create a "Green New Deal" in the United States and other industrialized nations; forges a "Green Growth Alliance" to unite the best of business, labor, social justice advocates, youth, people of faith, and environmentalists (while paying special attention to the challenges of working across old divisions of race and class); and advances a positive, solution-oriented "politics of hope."
GOVERNMENT AS PARTNER

The time has come to reimagine and re-create the New Deal. The last time a serious economic crisis gripped the country was during the Great Depression. Early in that crisis, President Franklin D. Roosevelt took office and ended a generation of Darwinist social policy—in his first hundred days. With the support of a broad coalition, FDR used the government’s power to help the people, stimulate the economy, and restore the environment. His so-called New Deal represented a new arrangement in society with a more balanced division of authority between government, business, and civil society. Up until the mid 1930s, unregulated financial interests had been running amok—to the detriment of all (including, ultimately, much of the business community itself).¹

Economists still debate the ultimate effectiveness of the New Deal’s many programs. But for those who received a warm meal, signed up for Social Security, had their spirits lifted by murals and theater, or formed lifelong friendships while creating our national parks as Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) members—there was not much debate. There was only gratitude for the sense of solidarity and common purpose in the face of national calamity—and a renewed sense of confidence in the future.

Today, we are entering a new period of national and global challenge; already, our society is being impacted by ecological, social, spiritual, and economic crises. To resolve them, the federal government must act boldly and comprehensively. A temporary tax credit here or there, briefly benefiting one or another clean-energy industry, is not enough to deal with the energy crisis. And a patchwork of job-training programs haphazardly assembled and rarely aligned with actual job opportunities is not going to move the needle on the jobs crisis.

We need an entire suite of programs—intelligently coordinated. We need a complete set of policies and programs that would accelerate a market-led transition to a cleaner, greener, and more just economy—creating jobs, renewing hope, and strengthening community in the process. In other words, the time has come for a “new” New Deal. And this time it should be a green one.

This, however, is not the only difference that we can imagine, as we fashion the New Deal 2.0. This time, we can also imagine a much wiser, smarter role for government overall. After all, despite its positive features, no one can deny the shortcomings of the last century’s “welfare state,” which the New Deal helped create in the United States. At the same time, no one can argue that this century’s “warfare state” has been a vast improvement either. We need a new model, a new role for government in helping society to meet its defining and fundamental challenges.

For too long, political debate has been stale because it has been premised on a false choice. The left—in effect—has argued for big, clunky, compassionate government à la that of Lyndon Baines Johnson. The right—in effect—has argued for big, clunky, warmongering government à la that of George W. Bush. But most of us do not want government as a nanny. Nor do we want the government as a big RoboCop bully. We do not want the government to create a new bureaucracy to fix every problem. We are happy to place our faith in the power of ordinary people to do extraordinary things. We just want government to be a smart, supportive, reliable partner to the forces that are working for good in this country.

We know that society is going to have to meet some huge challenges in the coming period. The individuals, entrepreneurs, and community leaders who will step up to make the repairs and changes are going to need help. As they strive to meet world-class challenges, they will require and deserve a world-class partner in our government.

And that central insight—the idea of “government as partner” to the innovators, the scientists, the eco-entrepreneurs, the neighborhood heroes, the ones who are close to both the problems and
the solutions—is the key to understanding how a Green New Deal might function. It would be born out of the knowledge that government can’t do everything, but that government can play a key role as a partner to those who are trying to do the right things—namely, the entrepreneurs and community leaders who are trying to solve the problems we face.

Government can become a much better partner to the eco-entrepreneurs who are trying to bring world-saving innovations to market by giving them permanent and reliable tax breaks, putting exponentially more research money on the table, making polluters pay for carbon emissions, and providing green employers with a well-trained, green-collar workforce. Government can be a better partner to civic leaders and community groups trying to solve neighborhood problems by helping to finance money-saving weatherization and solarization for low-income homes, reinvesting in science and math programs in public schools, supporting vocational and technical training in the green trades, and shifting money from the failed incarceration industry to smarter, cheaper programs that get better results by focusing on emotional healing, economic opportunity, and rehabilitation.

The time has come for a public-private community partnership to fix this country and put it back to work. In the framework of a Green New Deal, the government would become a powerful partner to the problem solvers of the world—and not the problem makers. Were government to play such a role, it would represent a dramatic turnaround. That’s because right now the public sector gives most of its love, respect, and money to the problem makers in our economy: the war makers, polluters, and incarcerators. They all get billions and billions of dollars in tax breaks and direct subsidies, while the renewable sectors—the job creators of the future—still get pennies.

And yet our problems keep getting worse, not better. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have cost nearly a trillion dollars—and the government says we are still not much safer. The economic gain from those industries that pollute the air and savage the land will be more than erased by the costly consequences of our destroying our ecological life-support systems and superheating the atmosphere. And evidence is beginning to show that the prison industry (which has more than doubled in size and cost over the past twenty years) is actually making neighborhoods less safe—both by failing to rehabilitate the people it locks up and by diverting money from the community-based programs that could.

For too long, the government has been a partner to the problem makers—and all we have to show for it is more problems. By advancing the idea of “government as a partner to the problem solvers,” we can break through some of the stale debates and false dilemmas of the last century, and we can finally move our society from the present raw deal to a Green New Deal.

THE NEW COALITION

We cannot achieve the goal of a Green New Deal just by wishing for it. There is an existing power structure—call it the “military-petroleum complex”—that holds sway over our national economic, energy, and foreign policies. It is unlikely that the present high lords of oil, coal, and armaments will reverse course or give up their power without a struggle. A new force must emerge to realign American politics, transform the political landscape, and supplant the Texas/Pentagon axis.

Therefore “step one” in getting the government to support an inclusive, green economy is to build a durable political coalition—one that aspires, ultimately, to govern. Again, the New Deal period offers an important example. It was the broad, electoral, pro-New Deal coalition that moved the government onto the side of ordinary people, not FDR alone. Farmers, workers, ethnic minorities,
students, intellectuals, progressive bankers, and forward-thinking business leaders all joined forces at the ballot box to support FDR and his congressional backers as they worked to revive the economy.

To accomplish our tasks today, we need a similar force: an electoral “New Deal coalition” for our time. Let’s call it the “Green Growth Alliance.” A Green Growth Alliance would be a broad, coalitional effort—fusing wise, compassionate forces in civil society with the enlightened self-interest of the rising green business community.

Its aim would be to put the government on the side of the people and the planet. The goal would be straightforward: to win government policy that promotes the interests of green capital and green technology over the interests of gray capital (extractive industries, fossil-fuel companies) in a way that spreads the benefits as widely as possible. The idea would be to resolve the economic, ecological, and social crises on terms that maximally favor both green capital and ordinary people.

Some in the environmental and social justice worlds may wince at our explicit inclusion—and even prioritization—of the needs and interests of green businesses. Many activists of all stripes are suspicious of any corporation; they have become hostile to the entire business community without distinction or exception. They say, “Big, greedy businesses led us into this global mess; we can’t trust them to lead us out.” They eye with deep suspicion a lot of the green advertising being paid for by companies that have historically been big polluters.

Much of their concern is understandable. Abuses of power by many big corporations—both directly against workers and the environment and indirectly through what amounts to legalized bribery in the political system—continue to have profoundly negative consequences.

But there is another side to the business community, rarely seen or celebrated. In recent years, organizations like the Social Venture Network, Business Alliance for Local Living Economies, Co-Op America, Green Business Alliance, Ceres, and the Investors’ Circle have been gaining members and momentum. These are groups of financiers, investors, entrepreneurs, and business leaders who are committed—even in advance of any legislation or comprehensive federal support—to conducting their business in a manner that better respects both people and the environment. They have been inspired by visionary entrepreneurs like Paul Hawken and Ray Anderson. Joel Makower’s GreenBiz.com has been cheerleading for them and chronicling their efforts for years.

As for how the government will separate the truly green companies from the pretenders—fortunately, the most trustworthy and socially conscious business leaders (not to mention investors, who don’t want to be hoodwinked) are already far along in the process of defining tough criteria themselves. We can use their initial standards and definitions as starting points—and springboards.

The numbers are small right now, but the emergence of true “triple-bottom-line” businesses (which balance “profit, planet, and people” in their operations) is a potentially significant development. And it is just beginning. “Green” MBA programs like the Bainbridge Institute and Presidio School of Management are cranking out young business leaders with a different view about how to make money while making a difference. At the same time, increasing numbers of minority-owned enterprises (MBEs) and women-owned enterprises (WBEs) are expressing interest in “going green” and becoming part of the eco-revolution.

These businesses—plus renewable-energy companies, firms selling conservation services, community-based cooperatives, nonprofit social enterprises, organic food companies, recyclers, and others—constitute business sectors with whom people of conscience can
and should cooperate. Ordinary citizens and community members should actively help them win maximum support from the government—so that they can displace the despoilers and replace the polluters. And the faster we change the rules to aid the emerging sectors, the faster the old dinosaur companies will retool and get on board.

There will surely be an important role for nonprofit, voluntary, cooperative, and community-based solutions. But the reality is that we are entering an era during which our very survival will demand invention and innovation on a scale never before seen in the history of human civilization. Only the business community has the requisite skills, experience, and capital to meet that need. On that score, neither government nor the nonprofit and voluntary sectors can compete, not even remotely.

So in the end, our success and survival as a species are largely and directly tied to the new eco-entrepreneurs—and the success and survival of their enterprises. Since almost all of the needed eco-technologies are likely to come from the private sector, civic leaders and voters should do all that can be done to help green business leaders succeed. That means, in large part, electing leaders who will pass bills to aid them. We cannot realistically proceed without a strong alliance between the best of the business world—and everyone else.

That said, again, no business should be considered "green" just because it says it is. We need strong standards and clear criteria to weed out those companies that will seek out support while merely "green-washing" their same old bad practices. And society's support should not be unconditional. All legislation to boost green industry should also be strong on labor rights and civil rights. The captains of green enterprises should go beyond the letter of any law, enthusiastically seeking out the full diversity of the country in their hiring, promotions, and contracting. And, without undermining their need to stay profitable, they also should seek to locate their operations in places that need new infusions of jobs and capital. Only companies that work to meet those tough standards should be considered truly "triple bottom line."

On the civil society side, five main partners should make up the Green Growth Alliance:

1. **Labor.** Organized labor has been in steep decline over the past few decades, but it remains the best and most stalwart defender of working people's interests—in the workplace and beyond. Policies that lead to the retrofitting and rebuilding of the nation will give unions a tremendous opportunity to both expand and diversify their ranks. If the unions and green business leaders can identify win-win compromises on wages and other issues, they can work together to pass legislation that will help both sides.

2. **Social justice activists.** Legions of people have committed themselves to broadly shared opportunity for those who were left out of the old economy. They should be on the front lines working to create the new one. Advocates for economic justice, civil rights, immigrant rights, women's rights, disability rights, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered rights, veterans' rights, and other causes should seize the opportunity to ensure that the new, green economy has the principles of diversity and inclusion baked in from the beginning.

3. **Environmentalists.** With their large organizations, broad networks, Beltway savvy, and large budgets, the mainstream environmental organizations have tremendous assets to bring to bear in the effort to green the country. They have a chance
to turn the page on decades of perceived elitism by working as better collaborators with other sectors of society. An exchange of knowledge, experience, and even personnel between the mainstream environmentalists and social justice groups would be healthy and invigorating for everyone.

4. **Students.** Students' energy and enthusiasm have already turned up the heat in the movement to prevent catastrophic climate change. Just a year ago, it was considered outlandish for anyone to call for an aggressive target like an 80 percent reduction in carbon emissions by the year 2050. But student-centered efforts like Step It Up, Focus the Nation, and the Energy Action Coalition have already made “80 by 50” a mainstream demand—accepted by presidential candidates and even energy-company CEOs. As more racially diverse groups like the League of Young Voters, the Hip Hop Caucus, the Environmental Justice and Climate Change Initiative, and Young People For (YP4) join the movement, the sky is the limit for the next generation’s leadership role.

5. **Faith organizations.** The moral framework suggested by the three principles of social-uplift environmentalism (equal protection, equal opportunity, and reverence for all creation) should attract faith leaders and congregants. Many are looking for alternatives to some of the divisive fundamentalism that has taken up a great deal of airtime lately. The idea of “creation care” is a positive, alternative frame that can help faith communities move into action as a part of the Green Growth Alliance.

These five forces, in alliance with green business, can change the face of politics in this country.

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**The Importance of Including People of Faith**

Just as some may recoil at the prospect of warmly embracing the business community, others may raise their eyebrows at the idea that religious organizations should play a strong and leading role in the greening of the country. Many environmental and social change activists say, “Well, I’m all for spirituality, but I reject religion.” This is a perfectly reasonable and respectable personal choice. Yet it can often mask a deep resentment or even a hatred of the totality of organized worship—and a stereotyping of all religious people as stupid, dogmatic simpletons.

Too often those working for change quietly see religion itself as the enemy. They tend to reduce the great faiths of the world to their worst elements, constituents, and crimes—and then dismiss all other facts and features. Nothing pains me more than to hear so-called progressives snarl the word “Christian” as if it were an insult or the name of a disease. I grew up in the black churches of the rural South, listening to the civil rights stories of my elders. As children, we heard about the good and brave people who had poured their blood out on the ground so that we could be free. We learned how police officers had clubbed and jailed them. We learned how Klansmen had shot and lynched them. And how the G-men from Washington just stood by and doodled on their notepads.

We learned of marches and mayhem, freedom songs and funerals. We saw images of black women on their hands and knees, searching for their teeth on Mississippi sidewalks—crawling while still clutching their little American flags. We felt pity for the children who spent long nights in frigid jail cells, wearing clothing soaked by fire hoses, while their untended bones began to mend at odd angles. We saw pictures of black men like our fathers hanging by their necks, their faces twisted, their bodies rigid, their clothes burned off—and their skin too. And we saw photos of carefree killers sauntering...
home out of Alabama courtrooms—their white faces sneering and proud.

We learned how the very best of humanity had faced off with the very worst of humanity—each circling the other, under the same summer sun. Their epic struggle had elevated Southern backwaters onto the great world stage. And the fate of a people—and the destiny of a nation—hung in the balance, for all to see.

In the end, we cheered, for the righteous did prevail. Our parents and grandparents overcame—and then some. They performed one of the great miracles in human history; they transformed a U.S. apartheid into a fledgling democracy, tender and delicate and new. And today’s social change activists proudly and eagerly celebrate the achievements of the civil rights movement. Rightfully so.

But one key fact seems to escape their notice. The champions of the civil rights struggle didn’t come marching out of shopping centers in the South. Or libraries. Or high-school gymnasiums. They came marching out of churches, singing church songs. These people, these unimpeachable examples of audacity and accomplishment, were people of deep, deep religious faith. And when they prayed, it was through a long-dead Nazarene carpenter named Jesus Christ.

When progressives dismiss and disdain religious people, they are spitting directly in the faces of their greatest champions. This is why smug activists who treat the word “Christian” as a useful synonym for “dumb, mean bigot” do so much damage. They offend people of faith within our ranks. They needlessly cut themselves off from their own elders, families, and neighbors. And they deny the truth of how meaningful social change has most often come about in this country.

Worse, they leave powerful symbolism in the hands of dangerous practitioners of a less noble politics. It makes no sense to those seeking change to willingly surrender the language of the great faiths. In the end, it is nearly impossible to shrink our message of abundant love, hope, and faith into the tiny straitjacket of a sterile secularism anyway. Many activists are already turning, in the quiet of their own lives, to yoga and meditation, to self-help books, to alcohol and drug recovery programs that invoke a higher power, and even to the organized religions of their childhoods. Of course, no movement should force any particular brand of religious observance or spirituality on anyone else. But even secular activists sometimes seek for a power that is greater than our familiar “power to the people.” And it should be okay to acknowledge that.

We do a great disservice to the cause of justice when we pretend that only the hateful represent the faithful. We can oppose theocracy without opposing all theology. We can denounce bias in the Christian church—whether the bigotry appears as sexism, homophobia, racism, or anti-Semitism—without pretending that all Christians are bigots. We can separate fundamentalism from faith in any of the great religions.

The United States is one of the most religious countries in the world. People of faith here have powered much of the social change in our nation’s history—from the abolitionists up to the present peace movement. Imagine how powerful the Green Growth Alliance will be when it can claim as one of its pillars the millions of Christians, Jews, Muslims, and others who acknowledge and worship a justice-loving God.

Green Growth Alliance Seeds Already Sprouting

Fortunately, the Green Growth Alliance is not just a theoretical necessity. It is already becoming a practical reality. National organizations such as the Apollo Alliance and the Blue Green Alliance have already come on the scene, promoting good jobs in the clean-energy sector. The Apollo Alliance is an alliance of labor unions, environmental organizations, community-based groups, and businesses;
the Blue Green Alliance is a partnership between the Sierra Club and the United Steelworkers.

Former U.S. vice president Al Gore’s Alliance for Climate Protection is also reaching out broadly to engage new sectors in the battle to avert catastrophic climate change. And the new kids on the block—1Sky and Green For All—are engaging important new constituencies like PTA moms and African American ministers. (I serve on the Apollo Alliance board, and I am a co-founder of both 1Sky and Green For All.) The bottom line is that the raw materials for a Green Growth Alliance already exist.

Of course, the very idea of “growth” itself will be challenged over time—whether it is green growth or any other kind. On a crowded planet, the very notion of economic growth itself—with automatic assumptions of increasing resource consumption and consumerism—is something that human society will someday be forced to abandon.

In the future, resource constraints and a growing population will force human society to adopt an even more sustainable model: a closed-loop, “steady state” economy premised on nearly 100 percent recycling of materials and 100 percent renewable energy. This economy will be designed to maximize well-being—not necessarily wealth. The growth we seek will be in steadily improving the quality of life, not steadily increasing the quantity of goods consumed.

However, at this stage, a quick leap to this kind of postgrowth, postconsumerist “eco-topia” is not possible. Let’s take a lesson from history on this one point. The day after Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat, civil rights leaders could have demanded reparations for slavery, legalization of interracial marriages, and a massive redistribution of wealth. Such demands would have been justifiable—but foolish. “Maximum demands” like those would have created more resistance than support.

Thus early civil rights champions instead pressed “minimum demands”—for integrated buses, kindergartens, and lunch count-
MORE ECO-POPULISM, LESS ECO-ELITISM

Although the movement for social-uplift environmentalism is on its way to forging an eventually powerful Green Growth Alliance, the very notion that a politics centered on green solutions could build a muscular, governing majority in the United States seems laughable at the moment. That is because the “green movement” itself seems to be the cushy home of such a thin and unrepresentative slice of the U.S. public.

When most people think of “green solutions,” they are not thinking about a massive people’s movement that can pick up the Capitol building in D.C., turn it upside down, and dump out all the legislators who are holding back a green economic renaissance. They are not thinking about the next best thing to a full-employment program, led by the private sector, that could put millions of Americans back to work retrofitting the country. They certainly are not thinking about the incredible pioneers—like Winona LaDuke, Majora Carter, and Omar Freilla—who are daily bringing hope and opportunity to people of modest means.

Rather, they perhaps imagine a few Hollywood celebrities eating tofu, doing yoga, and driving hybrid cars. They envision affluent white people who care about nothing but polar bears and can afford to shop at health-food stores and put solar panels on their second home. Their minds leap to a high-priced market niche serving individual consumers who are willing to pay a premium for green goods and services so they can feel better about themselves and their many purchases.

Many of these caricatures are grossly unfair. Many lifestyle greens are actually just health-conscious, community-minded folks who earn middle-class wages. As for the rich ones, it is actually a good thing that wealthier people are now spending their dollars in ways that are healthier for the planet. They have helped to jump-

start the market for the products and technologies that may help save the Earth.

Nonetheless, when many ordinary people hear the term “green” today, they still automatically think the message is probably for a fancy, elite set—and not for themselves. And as long as that remains true, the green movement will remain too anemic politically and too alien culturally to rescue the country. Enlightened, affluent people who embrace green values do a great deal of good for the country and the Earth—and they are making an importance difference every day. But nobody should make the mistake of believing that a small circle of highly educated, upper-income enviros can unite America and lead it all by themselves. Eco-elite politics can’t even unite California.

If you doubt me, let’s examine a recent statewide election in California to see how eco-elitism can actually set back environmental initiatives—even very thoughtful and well-financed ones, even in places where the overall support for environmentalism is relatively high. Everyone loves to praise GOP governor Arnold Schwarzenegger for signing global-warming legislation in 2007. Yet few discuss the fact that just a few months earlier, the majority of California voters rejected a clean-energy ballot measure called Proposition 87. That’s right. Elected officialdom might be willing to dictate major green steps—or at least hold major green press conferences. But when Californians got the chance to speak up in the ballot booth in 2006, ordinary people said no.

This defeat holds many lessons for us, going forward. The idea for Prop 87 was brilliant in its simplicity: California would start taxing the oil and gas that oil companies extract from our soil and shores. This state-level oil tax would generate revenues of $225 to $485 million annually. And those dollars would go into a huge “clean-energy” research and technology fund—totaling $4 billion over ten years. Many states and nations have similar extraction taxes.
California, however, would have been essentially alone in dedicating the revenues to inventing alternatives to carbon-based energy sources. Had the measure passed, California would have used money from oil to find a replacement for oil.

It was a brilliant idea. And at first, the measure was polling off the charts. Silicon Valley and Hollywood put $40 million on the table to ensure the measure passed. Al Gore and Bill Clinton campaigned for it. Victory was certain. But in the end, Californians voted the measure down 45 percent to 55 percent. Why? Mainly because big oil convinced ordinary Californians that the price tag would be too high for them to bear. The oil and gas industry spent $100 million warning that the tax would be passed along to consumers. They suggested that it would push gas and home-energy costs through the roof and hurt the poorest Californians.

It was a predictable line of attack. It was also a false argument. Gas prices in California are not determined by oil extraction taxes in any one region or state; they are set mainly by the huge global energy market. Numerous other states and countries already have a similar tax, including Texas, Alaska, and Venezuela. One more teeny levy, in one state, in one country, would have had a minuscule or negligible impact on the overall world price of oil—or on California consumers.

And to the contrary, the benefits of a shift to cleaner energy would have helped the poorest in the state—significantly improving both their health and their chances for wealth. For one thing, disproportionate numbers of low-income people live near oil refineries and other sources of dirty-energy pollution. As a result, they suffer from higher rates of cancer, asthma, and other illnesses. Largely uninsured, they then pay through the nose for inferior medical care. In other words, the dirty-energy economy is literally killing poor people. A switch to cleaner energy could save untold lives.

Beyond that, a clean-energy economy actually is more labor-intensive than the status quo, creating millions of new jobs. A clean-energy economy would install and maintain all those solar panels, build all the wind farms, construct the wave farms, weatherize those millions of homes and office buildings. A green economy begins to replace some of the clunking and chugging of ugly machines with the wise effort of beautiful, skilled people. That means more jobs.

So there was a strong, eco-populist argument to be made for Prop 87. Switching to clean energy would have cost individual Californians little—but given working people better health and better jobs. Yet the campaign—led almost exclusively by well-intentioned do-gooders with few financial problems themselves—did not make these eco-populist arguments with any force. Instead, Prop 87 commercials yammered on about “energy independence”—which polling firms said was the most important. Maybe so. But in some demographics, people needed that message to be bolstered by a great deal of reassurance on the kitchen-table issues, and it never was.

Seeing the obvious opening, the polluters pounced. Big oil ran full-page ads in practically every African American newspaper in the state. The ads showed a black mom looking aghast at fuel prices while she tried to fill up her car. An NAACP official vocally opposed the measure, fearing economic damage to her constituency. And the scare tactics didn’t alarm only black Californians. Across the state, the initially sky-high poll numbers for the initiative proved surprisingly fragile. The support for the measure was completely hollow. The Prop 87 proponents were not just outspent by the polluters; they were outmaneuvered.

And in the end, the biggest clean-energy ballot measure in the country went down to defeat—in California. That setback didn’t just hurt the backers of Prop 87 or the Golden State. It set back the entire world’s ability to invent new, clean-tech technologies and beat global warming.
The Eco-Elite Cannot Win by Itself

The defeat of Prop 87 should sound a clear warning for all of us as we work to birth a green, postcarbon economy. We all must recognize and celebrate the fact that well-off champions of the environment will be indispensable to any coalition effort. In fact, it is their business smarts, monetary resources, social standing, and political savvy that have propelled the green wave to this point. But at the same time, the eco-elite cannot win major change alone, not even in the Golden State. After all, if a Prop 87-style collapse is possible in California, what do you think will happen in the other forty-nine states?

To change our laws and culture, the green movement must attract and include the majority of all people, not just the majority of affluent people. The time has come to move beyond eco-elitism to eco-populism. Eco-populism would always foreground those green solutions that can improve ordinary people's standard of living—and decrease their cost of living.

The messaging must make it plain to the country that we envision a clean-energy future in which everyone has a place—and a stake. One way to do that is to speak to the economic and health opportunities that "ecological" solutions will also provide. Another way is to always show the many, many people of color and working-class Americans who are actively engaged in environmental struggles. If nearly every "green" initiative, TV program, or magazine cover excludes them, we are essentially handing millions and millions of people over to the polluters. We are essentially saying to big coal and big oil: "Please organize all of these people against everything green. Thanks!"

The nation has already passed a certain tipping point in eco-consciousness. But we should never underestimate the danger of rapid progress actually fueling a major backlash. Handled badly, green proposals can create the opposite of our much needed Green Growth Alliance. They can actually produce a backlash alliance—between polluters and poor people. The polluters are afraid of losing their immense profits and privileges. And low-income folks are just afraid of losing even more ground. Together they can derail the movement to green this country. We can, however, easily head that off, just by making sure that "green" includes all classes and colors.

NOT JUST HYBRID CARS—A HYBRID MOVEMENT

Bringing people of different races and classes and backgrounds together under a single banner is tougher than it sounds. The affluent have blind spots. The disadvantaged have sore spots. And both pose barriers to cooperation.

For instance, large and powerful constituencies of white, affluent, and college-educated progressives exist and are active in the United States. They are passionate about the environment, fair trade, economic justice, and global peace. Unfortunately, many do not yet work in concert with people of color in their own country to pursue this agenda; they champion "alternative economic development strategies" across the globe, but not across town. These people could be great allies in uplifting our inner cities, if they are given encouragement and a clear opportunity to do so.

On the other hand, the truth is that many groups of people of color do not want to work in coalition with majority white organizations and white leaders. Many fear betrayal; others resent chronic white arrogance. Cultural differences and power imbalances create tensions; some organizations are actually committed to a racially exclusivist ideology. Even though such organizations could benefit from additional allies and outside assistance, the very folks who could most benefit from a green opportunity agenda are loath to get involved.
Taken altogether, this means that the various U.S. social change movements today are still nearly as racially segregated as the rest of U.S. society. This is a moral tragedy. And it is a tremendous barrier to building sufficient power to move forward a positive social change agenda for anyone and everyone. Breaking through this standoff is a critical first step toward building a “New Deal coalition” for the new century—which would be the only thing dynamic, diverse, and powerful enough to overcome the shared obstacles to progress.

I have been trying to bridge this divide for nearly a decade. And I have learned a few things along the way. What I have found is that leaders from impoverished areas like Oakland, California, tended to focus on three areas: social justice, political solutions, and social change. They cared primarily about “the people.” They focused their efforts on fixing schools, improving health care, defending civil rights, and reducing the prison population. Their studies centered on “social change” work like lobbying, campaigning, and protesting. They were wary of businesses; instead, they turned to the political system and government to help solve the problems of the community.

The leaders I met from affluent places like Marin County (just north of San Francisco), San Francisco, and Silicon Valley had what seemed to be the opposite approach. Their three focus areas were ecology, business solutions, and inner change. They were champions of the environment who cared primarily about “the planet.” They worked to save the rain forests and important species like whales and polar bears. Also, they were usually dedicated to “inner change” work, including meditation and yoga. And they put a great deal of stress on making wise, Earth-honoring consumer choices. In fact, many were either green entrepreneurs or investors in eco-friendly businesses in the first place.

Every effort I made to get the two groups together initially was a disaster—sometimes ending in tears, anger, and slammed doors.

Trying to make sense of the differences, I wrote out three binaries on a napkin:

1. Ecology vs. Social Justice
2. Business Solutions (Entrepreneurship) vs. Political Solutions (Activism)
3. Spiritual/Inner Change vs. Social/Outer Change

The Marin County leaders tended to focus on the left side of the list; the Oakland leaders usually focused on the right side. And for some reason the people on both sides tended to think that their preferences precluded any serious embrace of the options presented on the opposite side of the ledger.

Increasingly, I saw the value and importance of both approaches. I thought to myself: What would we have if we replaced those “versus” symbols with “plus” signs? What if we built a movement at the intersection of the social justice and ecology movements, of entrepreneurship and activism, of inner change and social change? What if we didn’t just have hybrid cars—what if we had a hybrid movement?

I came to believe that at the precise place where all these countercurrents converged was where we would find enough power to generate a Green Growth Alliance, displace the military-petroleum complex, and initiate a Green New Deal. But first I had to figure out how to engage African Americans, Latinos, and others from the urban environment who were resistant even to the idea of being a part of something calling itself “green.”

I had two main breakthroughs in finding a way to move urban leaders. I call these breakthroughs “The Amistad Meets the Titanic” and “Crisis vs. Opportunity.”
The Amistad Meets the Titanic

Most people who are committed to racial justice activism see themselves as rebels against racism. Perhaps they would most deeply resonate with Cinque, the hero of the slave-revolt movie Amistad. In that film, based on a true story, the righteous, enslaved Africans fight back and take over the slave ship.

The people at the bottom rise up and take over the ship—taking their destiny into their own hands. It’s really a metaphor for the last century’s version of racial politics. The slave ship is Earth, the white slavers are the world’s oppressors, and the African captives are the world’s oppressed. The point is for the oppressed to confront and defeat their oppressors. I took that as my mission.

But what if those rebel Africans, while still in chains, had looked out and noticed the name of their ship was not the Amistad, but the Titanic? How would that fact have impacted their mission? What would change if they knew the entire ship was imperiled, that everyone on it—the slavers and enslaved—could all die if the ship continued on its course, unchanged.

The rebels would suddenly have had a very different set of leadership challenges. They would have had the obligation not just to liberate the captives, but also to save the entire ship. In fact, the hero would be the one who found a way to save all life on board—including the slavers. And the urgency of freeing the captives would have been that much greater—because the smarts and the effort of everyone aboard the ship would have been needed to save everyone.

“Amistad meets the Titanic” has been an important bridge metaphor to help people who have been committed to an earlier model of racial justice activism understand their expanded leadership role and responsibilities—as the entire planetary ship is threatened with going down.

Crisis vs. Opportunity

A lot of environmental rhetoric remains rooted in “crisis” language. It is evident that people who already have a lot of opportunity are sometimes powerfully motivated to act by tales of a planetary crisis. But people who already live in a constant state of personal crisis are not so moved. In fact, they often have the opposite reaction to hearing about things like global warming. They will shrug, shake their heads, and say: “Well, it’s just the end times, I guess. That means Jesus is coming back.” And then they will change the subject or walk away.

But if you tell people who are living in a state of constant personal crisis about the economic solutions inherent in the green economy, then they get excited. Nowhere is an eco-populist, opportunity-based message more important than in engaging people of color.

As pointed out above, we should advance more popular slogans that present green solutions to real-life, kitchen-table problems. I have discovered some with real appeal and resonance: “Green the Ghetto” and “Green-Collar Jobs for All” (or “Green Homes for All,” or “Solar for All,” or “Organic Food for All”). I think we should explore a clean-energy call framed as the desire for “Asthma-free Cities.”

One urban eco-populist slogan stands out above the rest, with a power all its own. It speaks to the full range of urban concerns, addressing simultaneously issues of economic justice, criminal justice, and environmental justice. That slogan is “Green Jobs, Not Jails.” My hope is that it will someday be adopted and embraced by the entire green movement as the central goal guiding our efforts.

The point is that these eco-populist slogans—and programs to back them up—will be key to engaging people of color and other disadvantaged communities in the struggle for a green-collar economy. To those who have plenty of personal opportunity, speak first
about the environmental crisis. But to those who have plenty of personal crises, speak first about the environmental opportunities—and how solutions for the Earth’s woes can be solutions for their problems too.

THE NOAH PRINCIPLES

So the direction is set. We seek a social-uplift strategy that creates green jobs, not jails; a politics anchored in a Green Growth Alliance for this century; and a moral framework based on reverence for each other and the planet. It can be done. However, there are many habits of mind and unconscious assumptions that stand in the way, even for those of us who have been lifelong change makers. We need some new distinctions and ways of seeing our work, or we are likely to reproduce some of the same negative patterns in this movement that we have seen in others.

For instance, when I was a young activist, the role model I subconsciously had for making a difference was David confronting Goliath. And that image or archetype served me well—for a while. After all, the David and Goliath story is a beautiful tale, one that foregrounds courage and allows for the possibility of miraculous outcomes, of defeating the bully against all odds. I have come to believe now that there is also a shadow side to the myth. It requires that the protagonist always be small and marginalized, and it requires a politics of confrontation and opposition. Such a politics may serve us poorly as we confront the dangers that will demand cooperation on a massive scale.

So I raise the possibility that we need a new guiding narrative, a new myth, for the new challenges that face us. Our leaders need a different yet familiar story that defines the kind of leadership we need.

With violent storms, rising seas, and financial chaos darkening the horizon, perhaps the best models for the new century will prove to be Noah and his wife. Theirs is a story of leaders who must make plans for a difficult future while trying to save as many people and fellow species as possible. It's also a story about honoring and managing diversity, about making space for everyone from the tiniest termites to the lions and the elephants. Instead of preparing to protest against a giant, as David did, perhaps it is better to prepare to lead a community through a crisis and into the future beyond that crisis, as Noah did.

Of course, there are good people on the other side of important disputes who will not be won over; they will have to be run over. There will be times when we have to fight—in the old “us versus them” mode. But when we do, we want the biggest possible “us”—and the smallest possible “them.” I mean, when all life everywhere is threatened, we might even need Goliath to help us build the ark.

A politics in keeping with Noah’s principles would focus on creating something new rather than confronting something old. It would be more about “proposition” and less about “opposition.” As guideposts to creating that kind of politics, we could advance the following five points. Call them the Noah principles:

1. Fewer “issues,” more solutions
2. Fewer “demands,” more goals
3. Fewer “targets,” more partners
4. Less “accusation,” more confession
5. Less “cheap patriotism,” more deep patriotism

Fewer “Issues,” More Solutions

Organizations working for change usually place themselves into one of two categories: single-issue groups (e.g., fighting against
homelessness) or multi-issue groups (e.g., fighting against police abuse, prison expansion, and youth violence). I propose a different distinction: issue-based groups and solution-oriented groups. After all, the word “issue” is just another word for “problem.” If you have an “issue-based” group or coalition, you essentially have a “problem-based” organization. And defining any cause based on a negative can lead to a great deal of negativity.

If you doubt me, try this experiment. Approach almost any hard-working activist committed to a cause and say: “Tell me what issue you are working on.” The activist will talk to you for an hour, pouring out all the horror stories, pet anecdotes, and shocking statistics that animate and inform her or his work. The minute the activist runs out of breath and you see a chance to get a word in—seize it. Say, “Okay, so tell me what solution you are working for.” Most of the time the person will fall silent and then perhaps start yammering and stammering. But I can almost guarantee you that the problem statement will be much sharper and generate much more passion than the solution statement.

Eco-heroine Julia Butterfly Hill has an explanation for this phenomenon. She says of people who have committed themselves to important causes: “Many of us have gotten so good at defining what we are against, that what we are against has started to define us.”

And it is true. Many individuals and organizations define themselves solely by what they are against. They are anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-homophobia, anti-globalization, anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, anti-corporation, or anti-war. Many of us on the left define ourselves in wholly negative terms, and then we wonder why people run the other way when they see us coming.

As we build new organizations and networks, it is not enough to know what we are against. Saving the Earth and its peoples requires that we also know—and know with specificity—what it is that we are for.

Fewer “Demands,” More Goals

Some people who want to use their talents to make change, rather than money, decide to become community organizers. They sign up with a community-based organization or an environmental campaigning group. And then they go to workshops or even training camps to learn how to do their jobs right.

Invariably, they are taught some version of a three-step process. The organizer is supposed to help aggrieved people come up with a list of “demands,” help pick a “target” who can meet those demands, and go with others to “pressure the target” into meeting their demands. This approach constitutes the basic, underlying “operating system” for activism in the United States. It is the literal codification of the David and Goliath approach to social change: the little “we” versus the big “them.”

The truth is sometimes that formula works. And sometimes there is no obvious alternative. And yet the problem with always formulating our desires as “demands” is that the word itself assumes (and may reinforce) an adversarial relationship. As the Titanic sinks, one has to wonder whether multiplying adversaries is a very good idea—especially for those trapped at the bottom of the ship, who may need more allies than enemies.

One simple option is to reimagine and reformulate our desires as “goals.” Goals can be shared—even by people who disagree on many points. Demands can never be shared. One party makes them; the other party must either deny them or capitulate. A victory under those circumstances can feel quite hollow. Sometimes we can win the short-term battle, but lose the long-term aims.

I have often wondered how far I would get if I marched into the offices of some social change groups and made “demands.” I don’t think they would be very receptive. Sometimes a mere change of language can change the mind-set—on both sides—and possibly
yield a much greater outcome. Given the threats we face, it should be worth a try.

Fewer “Targets,” More Partners

The other problem with the standard “organizer’s” formulation is the constant seeking out of “targets” to pressure. Again, sometimes there is a person in a position of authority who is so obstinate, so biased, and so recalcitrant that one has no choice but to declare him or her an opponent. Also, there are institutions that have acted in bad faith for so long that trust is almost impossible to regenerate. Under those circumstances, the advocates of a righteous cause do need a battle-hardened cadre of well-trained organizers who know how to twist pinkies and otherwise force an adversary into submission. The protectors of the status quo use power tactics all the time. The champions of a better tomorrow should not unilaterally disarm.

Yet this approach can be overdone, overplayed, and overused. Too often activists just assume that any change worth making will always require a big battle with someone. They start preparing for Armageddon every time any issue comes up—even before they have taken the first steps to resolve it using less confrontational means.

Some organizations are like countries run by generals who have an army but no diplomatic corps. Therefore, they spend all their time drilling their troops and scanning the horizon, hoping for an opportunity to declare war on someone or something. Again, sometimes this is justifiable.

However, it comes down to a question of balance. When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. If all you have is “direct-action organizing,” everyone with power looks like a target. It does take real skill, talent, and training to identify targets, challenge them, and get them to do what you want. The time has come for social change and environmental organizations to add another set of skills: the ability to turn would-be “targets” into real, long-term partners for change. And that can be a tougher challenge.

For one thing, it requires that organizers move beyond assumptions, stereotypes, and past hurts. It requires that organizers (and those they organize) invest time in relationship building and trust building across lines of race, class, and authority—trying to surface points of shared interest and concern. Not every grassroots group has the time, capacity, or organizational strength to function in this way. Sometimes it is easier for marginalized activists to just call a press conference and start painting protest signs. I understand that. Yet over the long term, the accumulated results often are not worth all the expended effort.

Here’s the truth. If you rush into a situation looking for enemies, you will always find plenty. At the same time, if you go into a situation trying to find friends and allies, you will almost always find at least one. Sometimes they are in surprisingly powerful places—like behind the receptionist’s desk in your opponent’s front office.

In this age, our main job is to seek out friends wherever we can, not just to defeat enemies. What if, rather than mainly looking for opponents to punish, those of us who are committed to social change spent our time seeking out potential allies to encourage, befriend, and reward. After all, for every scofflaw polluter, there may be dozens of local businesses out there trying to do the right thing ecologically—but getting little support or recognition. What if environmentalists did more to partner with them, celebrate them, and help them? For every racist employer or bigoted beat cop, there are tens of thousands of white people who absolutely abhor racism. And yet civil rights activists like myself rarely ask them to do anything—except to feel guilty. Why not focus on finding better ways to access their time and talent for the good of all?

Our cause needs fewer enemies and more friends. To get through the coming crises, we are going to need each other. Let’s start laying
are the hidden struggles that define our days. Cumulatively, these inner tumults determine and limit the impact of our work itself, but nobody talks about them much.

Instead, we engage in the old politics, naming, blaming, and shaming somebody else while concealing our own faults, flaws, and hypocrisies. However, the cause of pursuing eco-equity does not easily lend itself to that approach. The change we are seeking is too monumental, and our own capacities are too modest.

We would be better off confessing our own weaknesses, our fears, our needs. Doing so will let others see the gaps more quickly, find their rightful places around the growing circle—and come to the campfire with fewer pretenses themselves. If we confess our own struggles to realign our own lives and change our own behavior, we may seem less alien to those we are trying to convince.

Also, the change we seek is so complex that no one person can understand everything that must be done. In that regard, we are all equally ignorant about how to get where we are going. This weakness actually is our strength. If we confess our own uncertainty, we are much more likely to listen attentively to others—and pull others into speaking more honestly and fully. As we move forward, our motto should be: accuse less, confess more.

Less “Cheap Patriotism,” More Deep Patriotism

We have gone through a period during which people waving American flags have done great damage to the country, to the people of Iraq, to America’s prestige in the world, to the national treasury, to the U.S. Constitution, and to the international rule of law. While force-feeding the country a brand of cheap and mindless patriotism, the “leaders” waving the biggest flags have steered the nation into a ditch. People of conscience should embrace Old Glory—and use the flag to help guide the public back in the direction of sanity.
One begins to fear that this accident was not very accidental. After all, GOP anti-tax operative Grover Norquist had declared openly: “I don’t want to abolish government. I simply want to reduce it to the size where I can drag it into the bathroom and drown it in the bathtub.” That is not a patriotic statement.

We have an obligation to tell the ultraconservatives who are so rabidly antigovernment: “If you don’t love this government, then let it go and hand it over to people who do.” Those who would hijack the government and crash it with deficits pose a bigger threat than the terrorists.

And while we are at it, we could make do with a lot less knee-jerk antipatriotism from the left. I know it is hard to make peace with the country’s original sins of stolen land and stolen labor. It is hard to forgive its repeated entanglement in unjust wars, up to the present moment. However, the far left’s strategy of trying to fix the country by putting it down all the time has been an utter failure.

To paraphrase scholar Cornel West, you can’t save a country you don’t serve, and you can’t lead a country you don’t love. And there is much to love in this country. After all, we are talking about the nation that gave the world basketball, iPods, and Beyonce Knowles. (If those three won’t get you up stomping and cheering for the red, white, and blue, I don’t know what will.)

The United States has the power to be a huge obstacle to planetary survival—or giant springboard to planetary salvation. A better America is the best gift that we can offer the world. Yet caring Americans will never give the world that gift if they are holding their noses and handling the flag like a used tissue.

If we do our work right, the United States will lead the world, again, someday. This next time—not in war. Not in per capita greenhouse-gas emissions. Not in incarceration rates. The United States will lead the world in green economic development, in world-saving technologies, in human rights. We will lead by showing a multiracial, multifaith, rainbow-colored planet how our multiracial, multifaith, rainbow-colored country pulled together to solve tough problems. The United States will go from being the world leader in ecological pollution to the world leader in ecological solutions.

Bruce Springsteen put it best in 2004 when he said: “America is not always right. That’s a fairy tale for children. . . . But one thing America should always be is true. And it’s in seeking her truth, both the good and the bad, that we find a deeper patriotism, that we find a more authentic experience as citizens, that we find the power that is embedded only in truth to change our world for the better.”

It’s time for the deeply patriotic to take back the flag from the cheaply patriotic, because, despite the pain of old crimes and recent disappointments, some of us still believe in America. Some of us still believe in “a more perfect union”—and in making it more perfect every day. Some of us still believe in “America the beautiful”—and in defending its beauty from the clear-cutters and despilers. Some of us still believe in “one nation, indivisible”—and in opposing those who profit by keeping us needlessly divided. Some of us still believe in “liberty and justice for all,” and we won’t stop until that classroom pledge is honored from shore to shore.

Some of us still believe in America—and in all of those things we learned about it as children. Of course, we know now that America is not the place we live, but a destination to which we all are headed. So we keep faith on the journey. No, some of us haven’t given up on Dr. King’s dream. There are those of us who yet believe we are going to win.

And when we do, we’ll be doing more than just “taking America back.” We will be taking America—forward.