

WOULDN'T YOU SAY?

A Collection of Essays About
ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY

The Necessary & Natural Relationship

by Ben G. Price, CELDF

Foreword by Daniel Fischlin

The Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDf) is building sustainable communities by assisting people to assert their right to local self-government and the rights of nature.

To learn more, visit www.celdf.org or contact us directly at info@celdf.org or 717-498-0054

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Thank you



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ABOUT



Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF) has been engaged in building a decolonial movement for Community Rights and the Rights of Nature for nearly three decades. Our mission is to advance democratic, economic, social, and environmental rights – building upward from the grassroots to the state, federal, and international levels. Allowing communities to develop organically toward sustainability requires empowering people to assert and protect their collective community rights. Part of our mission therefore is to facilitate the devolution of state authority to the local level so that municipalities and tribal governments can protect the rights of their human and other-than-human residents who, together, comprise natural communities.



Ben G. Price is education director for the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund. In 2006, Ben organized the first community on Earth to

recognize legal rights for ecosystems. He collaborated in the drafting of this ground-breaking law and educated the community about the legal mechanisms available to open a new frontier in jurisprudence, now known globally as the Rights of Nature Movement. He is the author of “How Wealth Rules the World: Saving Our Freedoms and Communities from the Dictatorship of Property,” the novel “Ogden: A Tale for the End of Time,” as well as essays on environmentalism and local democracy that will be of interest to attorneys, activists, community organizers, and general audiences.

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FOREWORD

At the historical juncture of unprecedented biotic destruction, climate breakdown, overconsumption, unfettered militarism, corporate globalization, ongoing colonization, technological supremacism, hyper saturated media disinformation, and rampant disregard for sustainable practices across a range of human activity, Ben Price's essays gathered in this CELDF book, affirm that "there are things you can do to make things right," further asking what we are waiting for to take direct action.

After years of progressive forms of advocacy anchored around worn phrases that invite us to "hope" and dream that "another world is possible," Price eschews the inherent deferral and passive re-activism of these phrases. CELDF's work, and Price's book, advocate for directed, meaningful action rooted in critical thinking that undoes the mythos of individual self-interest centered in oligarchic elites. Price proposes instead, community practices that foster material outcomes expressive of the greater collective good through co-creative generativity. The distorted, extractive narratives of capital that exploits all things limitlessly, that turns the

commons into gated property, that dissociates the human from the broader biotic world without which the human could not / would not exist are a carcinogen metastasizing not only the body politic but also the fullness of biotic realities without which the "human" would be unthinkable.

Human activity is inseparable and wholly co-dependent on the biotic realities out of which it has emerged and with which it is in constant dialogue. As I have written elsewhere, a bullet travels forward to mete out death but also travels back into the communities from which it emerged, the corporate entities that manufacture it, the social practices that make it thinkable, the resources without which its production would be impossible. For every outcome that is tied to a culture that centers death and asymmetries of power as an expression of its dysfunction, there is a retrograde context that takes us back to the failed conditions that prioritize these outcomes over earth democracy. Under such circumstances co-creative generativity is the only way in which sustainable relations among all beings and all biotic realities are thinkable, let alone en-actable.

What might it mean to grasp and root all action in the full contextual understanding of our collective co-

dependence within a biotic reality from which we cannot be separated?

Destroyer culture, the culture that sublimates the greater good to the sociopathic, narcissistic self-interest of wealthy elites, is in a permanent state of war against the public commons. The latter is tied to what Price calls "*natural communities*." Or what seed activist, Vandana Shiva, calls earth democracy, "an ancient worldview and an emergent political movement for peace, justice, and sustainability," one that recognizes that the "earth community is a democracy of all life" (*Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace*). The hypocrisy of elites, which prioritize individual accumulation and wealth hoarding in oligarchic communion with each other, terrified at the prospect of communities of people exercising their rights in localized contexts is something that Price's book insists we understand: "our mantra at CELDF has been that community self-determination and Community Rights are best achieved when those who are affected directly by governing decisions are the ones who make them."

The issue of skewed legal systems' pretense to serve the public good while being tools of regulatory capture that unremittingly favor the interests of the few is well-

parsed by Price's analysis. The legal has evolved to constrain localized practices of self-interest and knowledge. These localized structures of community practice and knowing are themselves the basis of the biodiverse realities at profound odds with monocultures that propagate out of oligarchic self-interest following the logic of capital to control, centralize, hoard, accumulate, aggregate, homogenize, and metricize.

To the extent that perverse technologies are increasingly supplanting forms of biodiverse co-creation, aggregating and monetizing our collective submission to an illusion of connection and meaningful action, we are made less than human, less than capable of fulfilling our responsibilities to the biotic diversity that made/makes us possible. Price's work pays careful attention to the indigenous worldviews that offer us a way out of the "no way" of destroyer culture, and insists on the need to take action in ways that oppose the privatization of democracy and the performative politics that, for instance, dupe people into imagining that voting once every four years for candidates drawn from the same oligarchic elite is a meaningful form of civil engagement.

An event at my local university saw Noam Chomsky speak to a packed hall of people hanging on his every

word—an avalanche of disconcerting information and astute critique whose content was as unflinchingly realistic as it was devastating and profoundly demoralizing. Audience members in the Q&A that followed, some in tears, kept returning to their own incapacity in response to Chomsky's bleak analysis. Rather than trotting out a pat to-do list of actions he could envision from his place as a visiting speaker to a community he did not know, Chomsky instead invited the audience to enter into dialogue with itself at the grassroots level of local connection and to do the localized work of identifying community needs, challenges, and actions that could take their place in an array of such responses in communities wherever such actions were undertaken. The moment was clearly disconcerting for many as it inverted the hierarchy of top-down notions of problem solving. Perhaps even more importantly, Chomsky's blunt answer clearly stated that the active agency to enact change was already present in the here and now of the interchange, itself a call to unfulfilled solidarities—and that time was being wasted waiting for answers to come from elsewhere. We are reminded in Price's essays that the agency of community is not to be understood as an expression of homogenized and (usually) sanctioned institutional self-

affirmation. Rather, community agency is an active, always-to-be made anew process of negotiating difference and taking meaningful action to restore the balance among co-creative generative forms of humanity in all its richly diverse manifestations—and the biotic realities in which those forms make their lives. Price not only offers a hugely helpful array of case studies in which CELDF has played a role and from which it has gathered its learnings to share—the *Great Lakes Bill of Rights* introduced into the New York State Assembly by Member Patrick Burke, for instance—but offers concrete alternatives to overturn our collusion in what he identifies as an unfolding collective suicide.

Read this book. Take direct action. Connect with others, as Price and other members of CELDF have done, in solidarity and respect for the roles and responsibilities we must enact to each other and the natural communities on which we depend. Set aside hope and imagining another possible world as deferrals that deactivate your capacity to intervene.

Your agency matters—here and now—wouldn't you say?

Daniel Fischlin, co-author *The Community of Rights*
• *The Rights of Community*