



Transcript of Speech by
Van Jones, President, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights
at Full Circle Fund's annual event

Forum 2007: You've Got the Power!

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Watch the video online at <http://www.fullcirclefund.org/event.php?id=106#VanJones>
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Photo | Daniel Lunghi

I make the point that in this country - 5% of the world's population - our country that has 25% of the greenhouse gas pollution also has 25% of the world's prisoners, you see. One out of every four people locked up in the world is locked up in the United States. Mostly low-income, mostly people of color, mostly for non-violent offenses, mostly drug offenses.

And so you ask yourself, "What's the connection? Is there a connection between a country that has 25% of the world's pollution, 25% of the world's [prison] population?"

And what we say is: The connection is a sense of disposability. That we have throwaway stuff and throwaway people. And what we're trying to do at the Ella Baker Center, what we're so proud to be doing in partnership with [Full Circle Fund] now, is to birth a new movement that says: "We don't have any throwaway resources. We don't have any throwaway species and we don't have any throwaway children or neighborhoods either. It's all precious. It's all precious. It's all precious."

I just wanted to say, you know, that you are the people that we have been talking about. We've been talking about y'all. We've been bragging on you a little bit....some of you. *[laughter]* But you know who you are.

We've been able to say it - and we've been able to say it and mean it - that there are people now who are investing money and genius and time and technology in doing business the *right way*. In creating the technologies that will help to clean up and green up the whole world. And your hope and your faith and your determination and your innovation has licensed ours.

Because what we're saying is - about your dream about creating a green economy - is that we want to create a green economy along side you. A green economy that's strong enough to lift millions of people out of poverty. We want to create green pathways out of poverty for our young people.

We know, that when you come up with the technologies, and when the President signs the laws to make it right, that that President - who ever he, or she, is - is not gonna put up one solar panel. The President is not gonna weatherize one building. But we're gonna have to weatherize millions and millions of buildings so they don't leak so much energy. We've got to put up millions of solar panels. That's millions of jobs.

We say, “Give the people that most need the work the opportunity to do the work that most needs to be done.” Take these young people in the neighborhood who are going to funerals every other weekend. They’re going to schools, classrooms, 36 kids in the classroom, 6 books, no chalk, no toilet paper - these young people who’ve been thrown away, let’s go to them! And say to them:

“We need you! We have a place for you. We want to put the tools and the training and the technology in your hands.” We have to retrofit a nation. We have to reboot and retrofit a nation. We want you to put those solar panels up on your gramamma’s house. We want you to be the one that brings her energy bill down. Because when YOU learn how to put up solar panels, you’re on your way to becoming, sister, an electrical engineer. You can join a union as a green pathway out of poverty. If you want to weatherize a building, when you double pane that glass, your on your way to becoming a glazer. You can join a union, that’s a green pathway out of poverty. And the good thing about it is we gotta get you in on the ground floor, it’s a growing industry. You might start off right now putting up the solar panels but in two years, they’re gonna hire some people under you and you can become a manager. You can help other people do this. You can become your own business person someday.



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You see, that’s what this green economy is all about. It’s gonna be able to give us the opportunity to rebuild and reinvest in America, and guess who gets to benefit the most? The people who have been the most locked down and left out of the pollution-based economy. Those are the ones who get to be locked in now, to the clean and green economy.

And so, when we bring these movements together - the best of the business community, the best of the technology community, and the best of our racial justice, anti-poverty forces - and we stand shoulder to shoulder, we get the coalition that we’ve always wanted.

I was born in 1968 when Bobby Kennedy was killed and Martin Luther King was killed. And I remember being a small child and whenever somebody would ask somebody “Who was Bobby Kennedy?,” people would get sad, we’d miss him to this day. Because they brought us together and they let us stand shoulder to shoulder, black and white, Mexican, low-income people, rich people, students. We were able to stand together and be one country. And we could imagine a better country. That we could get there together!

We decide that we want to build a green economy, that’s strong enough to lift people out of poverty, end forever the need for oil wars and resource wars, and bring this country together. We don’t just get the coalition we’ve always wanted, we get the country we’ve always wanted. We get the country we’ve always wanted.

And I just want to say to all of you, that I’ve heard for the past 7 years how we need to take America back, and take America back, and take America back. I tell you what, when I look at these numbers, these statistics - what’s going on with the Arctic, what’s going on in the neighborhood, I think it’s time for us to come together and build a movement that can do more than take this country back. It’s time for us to build a movement that can take America forward, together.

Thank you very much.