



JUNE 2020

# BP 10 COMMEMORATION REPORT

*Amplifying frontline voices*



GULF SOUTH  
FOR A  
GREEN NEW DEAL

# Remembering 10 years since the BP Drilling Disaster

## INTRODUCTION

On April 20, 2010, the BP Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded, killing eleven men and unleashing over 120 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico for 87 days. This drilling disaster had a devastating impact on the natural environment and the communities that rely on healthy waters and biodiversity to put food on the table. Ten years later, we are still learning the extent of the damage. The oil spread further than initially reported and devastation of the Gulf is far worse than expected. Gulf Coast communities are no safer than we were 10 years ago. In fact, our circumstances are worse. The fishing and tourism industries have not fully recovered, putting a disproportionate financial impact on local businesses and fishing communities, particularly Vietnamese-American and African American fisherfolks. State governments and regulatory agencies have rolled back environmental and safety regulations, and the misuse of restoration funding leaves impacted communities questioning false promises by governments and BP to make communities whole. Meanwhile, toxic industries continue to expand in the midst of a worsening climate crisis.

Communities from across the Gulf South and the nation joined together on April 20, 2020 to commemorate 10 years since the BP Drilling Disaster standing in solidarity with the frontlines to remember and understand the impact of the BP Oil Drilling disaster. Together, we remembered the lives lost, discussed the impact on Mississippi fishing communities, and lifted up the role of art and culture in disaster. Speakers included a former Deepwater Horizon rig worker, local advocates, and recovery leaders, all offering first hand knowledge of impact and community solutions. The content of this report comes from their offerings. [Click here to watch the full recording.](#)

**#BP10 #GulfSouth4GND #SouthernSpring2020**

# “*We cannot afford a polluting economy*”

Communities living on the frontlines of climate change, of industrial disasters, and of pollution by the oil and gas industry came together to emphasize the key message: "We can no longer afford a polluting economy" a message we amplified across the nation as part of the BP 10 Commemoration.

The BP Oil Drilling Disaster changed our lives in the Gulf South forever. Reflecting on this catastrophe, it's impossible to ignore the false choice that we in the Gulf South still face between low wage work and a "living wage" that kills our people and destroys our environment. We have sacrificed enough for the fossil fuel industry. Our workers deserve a living wage and a safe environment. Our region deserves jobs that honor, value, and repair frontline communities' histories and connection to the Gulf. It's time we take action toward a just transition to a green economy and a better future for all. Gulf South communities have the solutions we need for our own recovery and for the transition to a healthier, more just economy.

Leo Lindner, a former worker on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Rig, explained that what happened on that tragic day on April 20, 2010 reflected a toxic value system that "started in the boardroom and ended on the oil rig." Oil and gas corporations like BP are only motivated by yearly profit gains, leading companies to take greater risks and threatening the health and safety of workers. The "Safety First" mantra Lindner heard on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Rig was in conflict with the inherently dangerous nature of work and, in practice, came second to the company's first priority to create profit for their investors and stockholders year after year. Deepwater drilling jobs are extremely unsafe and risky to workers even if every precaution and safety measure were taken. Unfortunately, for the eleven men that lost their lives that day and for Gulf Coast communities, more time and resources were spent ensuring what Lindner calls the "critical path to profit" than ensuring the safety of the workers and coastal communities. "How much death should it take to animate our way of life?," Leo Lindner asks. There is a better way. We no longer need to rely on dirty fossil fuels for energy.

We can transition to clean, safe, renewable energy. In the Gulf South, many of our family and friends are connected to the oil and gas industry. Most of the US oil and gas infrastructure is in the Gulf South. That is why a just transition cannot happen without us. The promise of green jobs must include fossil fuel industry workers and communities on the frontline of the extractive industry and the climate crisis.

# HONORING THE LIVES LOST

*Eleven men lost their lives during the Deepwater Horizon Drilling Rig explosion on April 20, 2010. Thousands more have died working in the dangerous oil and gas industry.*



**Jason C. Anderson, age 35**

**Aaron Dale Burkeen, 37**

**Donald Clark, 49**

**Stephen Ray Curtis, 39**

**Gordon L. Jones, 28**

**Roy Wyatt Kemp, 27**

**Karl D. Kleppinger, Jr., 38**

**Keith Blair Manuel, 56D**

**ewey A. Revette, 48**

**Shane M. Roshto, 22**

**Adam Weise, 24**

**More than 1,566  
workers died trying to  
extract oil and gas in  
America (2008-2017)**

**More than 431 oil and  
gas workers in the  
Gulf South died (2010-  
2018)**

*To all the people, families, friends, loved ones and co-workers of the Deepwater Horizon crew, we extend our deepest condolences and in particular, to Leo Linder, former crew member. Thank you, Leo, for being part of this commemoration and for sharing your knowledge and experience of what is needed for a safer and more sustainable economy.*



# DEVASTATING IMPACT OF BP DRILLING DISASTER

## HEALTH AND ECOSYSTEM IMPACTS

Scientists who study the spill described large swaths of the ocean floor around the wellhead as a toxic waste dump, devoid of the kinds of life that typically inhabit that ecosystem.

More than 100,000 people were involved in BP Deepwater Horizon response and cleanup efforts, and many were exposed to crude oil or chemical dispersants. Communities and workers were misinformed about the risks associated with the oil and dispersant.

## EXPLOITATION OF WORKERS

When companies hired to clean-up beaches were having a difficult time keeping workers due to the unsafe conditions and low wages, they turned to prison labor. Incarcerated people in work release programs had no choice but to work long hours, sometimes without proper safety gear. For example, the Lafourche Parish (Louisiana) Work Release in Louisiana made a practice of allowing the oil and gas industry to hire incarcerated workers as part of the clean-up efforts.

## RECOVERY & RESTORATION

The Gulf states will receive \$4.9 of the \$20.8 billion civil settlement for economic recovery. In addition, local governments were awarded nearly \$1 billion in criminal penalties. The remaining nearly 16 billion was slated to be spent on resource restoration projects. Each state has created its own process for selecting projects that BP penalty money will fund, none of which are structured in a way that is transparent and accountable to the people, particularly those communities most impacted by the BP Drilling disaster.

# AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF FISHERFOLKS

**"It is as devastating as if it happened yesterday. Local fisherfolks are still struggling." – Daniel Le, Boat People SOS, Biloxi, MS**

Daniel Le, Executive Director of Boat People SOS, explained that many refugees from Vietnam that settled along the Gulf South coastline started working in the seafood industry. Fishing enabled Vietnamese refugees to utilize their generational and cultural knowledge of fishing and did not require fluency in English. Black and Asian American fishing communities were the hardest hit after the BP Oil Drilling Disaster. These communities have since been less able to sustain their livelihoods in face of other environmental and climate related disasters. In the last three years, roughly 60 - 70% of the Vietnamese American fishing fleet along the Mississippi Gulf Coast have sat idle during peak season because there is not enough shrimp, crab, fish and oysters to be harvested. Le explained that 30% of the Vietnamese-American fishing community in Mississippi left after the BP oil spill because fishing is no longer economically viable.

There is much uncertainty about when and if the habitat will be fully restored. After the Exxon Valdez Oil Disaster in Alaska, some habitats took 20 years to recover. Fisherfolks have been frustrated with the recovery process because, despite all of the projects underway, there have not been any meaningful projects to restore habitats critical to their fisheries. Though the selection of the projects is supposed to be a public process, many Vietnamese-Americans are excluded because of language barriers. Additionally, the decision making process for recovery projects is not transparent.



8.3 million oysters died as a result of the BP Deepwater Drilling Disaster. Certain fish, shrimp and squid populations in the Gulf decreased by as much as 85%. Today, Gulf oyster production has not recovered and continues to decline across the region.

The psychological impact of the BP Drilling Disaster has been devastating for the Vietnamese American community along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, particularly in the fishing community. Many in this community attribute the core of mental health issues to arise from not having basic needs met, and, before the BP Drilling Disaster, had not had access to nor perceived the need for mental health resources. After the disaster, and the resulting economic devastation, many fishing communities were struggling. They could not provide for their most basic needs, and still have not been fairly compensated by BP for their financial losses.

To address the mental health needs of the Vietnamese American fishing community Boat People SOS in Biloxi Mississippi deployed bilingual clinical psychologists to the community to provide psychological first aid. Services included assessments, workshops, and focus groups educating the community about the signs of mental distress and depression and how to mitigate the symptoms. Based on the survey, 75% of the community felt a sense of hopelessness and 50% exhibited depression symptoms. The survey also found a rise in domestic violence and impacts on children.



Corexit is a chemical dispersant that was used to “clean-up” the oil. Studies have shown that spraying dispersants are not effective for cleaning up oil spills, particularly in deepwater drilling. Despite years of research documenting the harmful effects of dispersants, like Corexit, dispersants are still EPA approved for oil companies’ clean-up efforts.

As part of the clean-up efforts, the EPA authorized BP to spray two forms of Corexit, a chemical dispersant, on the oil in order to make the oil to break apart and sink to the bottom of the ocean floor. A review of oil spill response efforts shows that government authorities and industry tended to adopt technologies mainly because of their optics and not for their effectiveness. In reality the chemicals have been ineffective in cleaning the oil, and caused more harm to the ecosystem and posed significant health risks.

Oil combined with dispersants are more toxic than oil alone. Dispersants allow oil to deposit directly into the bloodstream and organs and can cause long-term damage. 10 years later, communities and clean-up workers are still suffering health impacts after being exposed to a combination of oil and Corexit.



Yolanda Ferguson's husband is one of many in the fishing community and clean-up crew that was exposed. Ferguson shared the story of how her husband nearly died after his exposure to the deadly cocktail of Corexit and oil. She explains she first noticed a difference in her husband when his demeanor changed. "He was not acting like the man I married. He was angry all the time." He lost over 100 pounds and began bleeding in strange places. As she reports, his body was shutting down and the doctors did not understand what was happening to him. Once she turned to the Fishing community and learned of their similar experiences, she was able to find the holistic medical treatment he needed.

"It is because of this community that my husband is alive today. Their support gave me hope and made me want to do something about this so that no one else would have to experience what my family went through." - Yolanda Ferguson



A review of oil spill response efforts shows that government authorities and industry tended to adopt technologies mainly because of their optics and not for their effectiveness. The technologies were ineffective in cleaning the oil spill and often caused further harm to the ecosystems.

Ferguson began speaking out, attending public hearings, rallies, and organizing alongside others to raise awareness about the health risks of chemical dispersants and demand the EPA ban its use. She explained that the staff at governmental agencies, OSHA, EPA, BOEM, would become defensive and angry when she told her story. They didn't want to believe her. "I realized that they were scared. This is a truly scary thing, Ferguson explains."

Ferguson's stories and concerns, as well as the multitude of similar stories from other impacted fisherfolk and community advocates made little if any at all impact on the restoration process or the rules regulating the oil/gas industry. Danny Le explained, efforts to include the Vietnamese American fishing community have been tokenizing. The agencies never responded or incorporated the comments and concerns of impacted fisherfolks. After repeatedly submitting their comments with no response or transparency, the community grew tired, and many are no longer participating in the on-going public processes for the RESTORE projects.



# AMPLIFYING THE SOLUTIONS OF FRONTLINE COMMUNITIES

Frontline communities know all too well that we cannot wait on corporations and governments to ensure our communities have what they need to recover from and be more resilient in the face of disaster. As we commemorate 10 years since the BP Deepwater Horizon Drilling Disaster, we lift up and amplify local grassroots organizing that pushes agencies to be more accountable to impacted communities in disaster recovery and redevelopment and local collectivized solutions for economic transformation that is rooted in our local culture and relationships within our communities.

Ya-Sin Shabaz, owner of Self-Operated Alternatives, explained that Hurricane Katrina brought to light the way long-standing racial and economic inequities within this country were baked into the design and implementation of government disaster recovery programs. Programs like the Mississippi Homeowners Assistance Program, Rental Assistance program, and the Road Home program were structured to exclude Black and poor households, exacerbating the conditions, such as gentrification, that lead to racial inequities.

This context is important for understanding the recovery process in the aftermath of the BP Drilling Disaster. Much like the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, processes have been problematic for those most impacted by the BP Drilling Disaster, despite some important policy wins such as the RESTORE Act, the Mississippi Jobs First Law, and Comprehensive Planning and Support requirements for meaningful community and stakeholder engagement in government agencies' decision making processes. Shabazz reminded us that despite its current and past shortcomings, the recovery process is ongoing and the funding of restoration and economic recovery projects will continue until 2032. There is time for communities to organize to ensure these policies and programs benefit people on the ground. "We need to continue to position and define ourselves as stakeholders and engage in the process," Shabazz explains.



Government disaster recovery programs are not accessible to everyone, too often leaving out Black, Brown, and poor communities. The programs are not designed with the realities of these communities in mind. Thus, whether intentional or not, their impact exacerbates racial and economic inequality.



## Mississippi Oyster Aquaculture

Wayne Goff, owner of MSG Marine Aquaculture, explained that in Mississippi, Black commercial fishermen and oystermen played a critical role in building the industry and providing for the community. Now too few are still working in the industry, but he wants to change that. The Mississippi Oyster Aquaculture program has positioned him to be the first Black owned commercial oyster aquaculture business. Goff explains that he is turned to aquaculture because of the uncertainty around if and when wild oyster habitats will be restored. . Like other recovery programs, it has its limitations. Goff explains that there are lots of problems with the program that make it inaccessible to the Black community, such as the high start-up costs. However, with support of nonprofits and advocacy, this aquaculture can become an opportunity for Black folks.



## Fishing to Farming: MQVN Veggie Co-op New Orleans

The Vietnamese-New Orleanian community in New Orleans East were left out of the city's plans for redevelopment in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The community came together and decided to form the MQVN Community Development Corporation to develop and implement their own re-development action plans. MQVN CDC hosted community meetings, focus groups, and interviews to establish a community plan based on what community members wanted in the redeveloping community. The plan included education, healthcare, workforce development, urban agriculture, and more.

In the aftermath of the BP Drilling Disaster, MQVN was well-positioned to create a workforce development program that could provide opportunities for fisherfolks who lost their jobs virtually overnight. The urban agriculture program they created made a lot of sense for this community because many of them were already growing food in their own yards and some of the older generation were farmers back in Vietnam. Twenty community members, many with decades of knowledge and experience with farming, came together to form a veggie co-operative. They started by providing training and building greenhouses at each of the cooperative members houses. Everyone involved pitched in to help others build their greenhouse until everyone in the cooperative had one. MQVN provided support to help farmers sell their harvest to local restaurants and the community. Within a couple of years, the cooperative expanded to include a 2 acre urban farm and have been able to provide fresh local produce to the community, even in the time of COVID-19 pandemic through the CSA box program.





*Artists as cultural bearers have a responsibility to tell stories and play a key role in social justice movements. Art and culture helps us all process crises and disasters and re-vision the transformations we need. We need artists to carry our message for social change to the masses.*

## COMMUNITY RECORD

Carlton Turner, co-founder of M.U.G.A.B.E.E, explained art is an opportunity to record what is going on in the world, bearing witness to what we see in our communities – the struggles, the beauty, and the medicine. Nick Slie, member of Mondo Bizzaro, explained that art can offer a counter narrative to the stories that are being told by the media. After Hurricane Katrina, the media responsibly reported looting without the context of the systemic injustices that created the conditions and led to the crisis. This kind of reporting perpetuates racism and inequality. In contrast, Slie created art that showcased the humanity and solidarity of communities post Katrina. [Check out M.U.G.A.B.E.E and Mondo Bizzaro collaborative project](#) documenting the story of the BP Deepwater Horizon BP Drilling disaster and its impact on Gulf South communities.

## RE-IMAGINE WHAT IS POSSIBLE

Art has the potential to help us imagine a world not yet built, to help shift our consciousness, and lay the groundwork for the paradigm shifts we need in this moment. Maurice Turner, M.U.G.A.B.E.E, explains that the focus of his work has been around sustainability. Too often, we talk about and make decisions based on the economics of an issue. We can alleviate so much suffering if we base our decisions on sustainability.

## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TOOL

Art can also be an effective tool for communication, facilitating public dialogue around tough issues, such as race. Carlton Turner explains that working with Mondo Bizzaro, they were able to use art and theatre to talk about race when other vocabulary and tools for talking about it didn't exist. Being able to have these tough conversations is critical for building the kind of understanding and political consciousness for social and cultural change, and art is key to making it possible.

# BP DRILLING DISASTER & THE GLOBAL CLIMATE CRISIS

Fossil fuel companies like BP are responsible for accelerating the global climate crisis. The industry has spent billions of dollars to conceal this fact. 75% of all carbon emissions in the US come from the burning of fossil fuels. The projected carbon emissions for the US alone will increase global temperatures catastrophic levels by 2036. According to the world's leading climate scientists, we have about ten years to make radical shifts in the global economy. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2018 report projects that by 2030, we will have to reduce CO2 emissions by 45% and be down to net zero emissions by 2050 to prevent catastrophic changes to the climate.

The existence and severity of climate change is no longer a question. The global climate crisis threatens humans and every other species on our planet. The first-hand experience of Gulf South communities further affirms calls from the global scientific data to address this global threat and make frontline communities more resilient in the process. The Green New Deal offers a vision to address the climate crisis, repair systemic harms, and invest in national infrastructure through the creation of millions of living wage jobs.

In response to the release of the [Green New Deal House Resolution](#), advocates, farmers, fisherfolk, and community civic leaders across the Gulf South gathered to develop our own uniquely Southern collectivized vision for advancing sustainability and ecological equity. The [Gulf South for a Green New Deal](#) offers a vision that strengthens the entire nation by starting with the US climate frontlines.

The ten year commemoration of the BP Drilling Disaster was a strategic opportunity to assert into the national dialogue that an equitable approach to the socio-economic transformation that builds wealth and sustainability for the nation and the world requires that we make deep and long-term investments in the Gulf South. To confront this global challenge, the US must incorporate values and solutions originating from the frontlines of climate change in the Gulf South.

**Learn more about the Gulf South for Green New Deal Initiative, visit [www.gcclp.org/gulf-south-for-a-green-new-deal](http://www.gcclp.org/gulf-south-for-a-green-new-deal)**



# COLLECTIVE NATIONAL COMMUNITY POEM

Art and culture is an important part of movement work and is an integral part of the Gulf South for Green New Deal Initiative to advance a uniquely Southern vision for a just transition. As part of the 10 year commemoration, we collectively created a poem for our frontline fighters, acknowledging and honoring their leadership, courage, and sacrifice.

To our Frontline Fighters,

*We stand with you!*

To our frontline fighters who are weary and fatigued,

*May our Ancestors give you the strength!*

To our frontline fighters who may lose hope,

*Another world IS possible!*

To our Frontline Fighters feeling alone,

*You are overlooked, but I see you. Thank you!*

To our Frontline Fighters, fighting for the next generation,

*The future is ours!*

To our Frontline Fighters, leaving their homelands to defend,

*We stand and fight with you!*

To our Frontline Fighters who may feel defeated,

*There is no progress without a struggle!*

To our Frontline Fighters, who feel there is no end,

*Be Resilient against Corporate Greed!*

To our Frontline Fighters who need a reminder of what we are fighting for,

*We are creating the world we need, honoring the land and her pain!*

To our Frontline Fighters who are trying to be silenced,

*Always Speak Truth to Power!*

To our Frontline Fighters looking for guidance,

*We must follow the leadership of the Gulf South!*

#BP10 #GulfSouth4GND #SouthernSpring2020





**Thanks to our speakers whose experiences, knowledge, and advocacy in service of their communities make up the content of this report. Thank you for your leadership and labor of love and resistance.**

Leo Lindner, Daniel Le, Yolanda Ferguson, Khai Nguyen, Wayne Goff, Ya-Sin Shabazz, Carlton Turner, Maurice Turner, Mel Cardona, and Nick Slie.

**Thank you to all the organizations that made the **Gulf South for Green New Deal: BP 10 Commemoration** possible.**

**34th St. Wholistic Gardens**, [www.34thstreetgardens.com](http://www.34thstreetgardens.com)

**Biloxi Islamic Center**, [www.facebook.com/biloxiislamiccenter](http://www.facebook.com/biloxiislamiccenter)

**Biloxi NAACP**, <http://biloxibranchnaacp.yolasite.com>

**Boat People SOS**, [www.bpsos.org/bpsos-gulf-coast](http://www.bpsos.org/bpsos-gulf-coast)

**Cosmic Poetry Sanctuary**, [www.instagram.com/cosmicpoetrysanctuaries](http://www.instagram.com/cosmicpoetrysanctuaries)

**EEEECHO**, [www.facebook.com/EEEECHO-391349767730212](http://www.facebook.com/EEEECHO-391349767730212)

**Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy**, [www.gcclp.org](http://www.gcclp.org)

**Healthy Gulf**, [www.healthygulf.org](http://www.healthygulf.org)

**Immaculate Heart Community Outreach, Inc.**, [immaculateheartcdc@gmail.com](mailto:immaculateheartcdc@gmail.com)

**Mississippi Rising Coalition**, [www.msrising.org](http://www.msrising.org)

**Mondo Bizarro**, [www.mondobizarro.org](http://www.mondobizarro.org)

**MSG Marine Aquaculture, LLC**, [goff.wayne@gmail.com](mailto:goff.wayne@gmail.com)

**MQVN Community Development Corporation**, <https://www.mqvncdc.org>

**M.U.G.A.B.E.E Oil Spill Video**, <https://youtu.be/96x3lq9SZOw>

**One Voice**, [www.onevoicems.org](http://www.onevoicems.org)

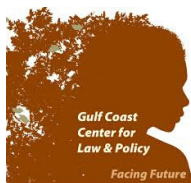
**People's Advocacy Institute**, <https://www.peoplesadvocacyinstitute.com>

**Self Operated Alternatives, Just Energy Initiative**, [soalternatives@msn.com](mailto:soalternatives@msn.com)

**Sipp Culture**, [sippculture.com](http://sippculture.com)

**Steps Coalition**, [www.stepscoalition.org](http://www.stepscoalition.org)

**Southern People's Movement Assembly**, [www.southtosouth.org](http://www.southtosouth.org)



Gulf South for a Green New Deal is a five-state formation anchored by the Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy and connects community organizing, frontline advocacy and policy development towards the creation of a Green New Deal that prioritizes the Gulf South and advances long-existing work towards climate, racial, and economic justice.



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