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## Van Jones

By MICHAEL ELLIOTT

Oakland and Marin County, Calif., both look out onto San Francisco Bay. But that sublime body of water apart, the gritty port city and the New Age, crystal-gazing county, where (legend has it) the hot tub was invented, might be on different planets. Van Jones is trying to bring them together — and help the U.S. think about how to build a green economy in a new way.

Jones, 39, an African-American activist based in Oakland, started visiting Marin when he was burned out from years of running programs to find jobs for kids fresh out of jail. What he saw, he says, was a form of "eco-apartheid." In Oakland, his neighbors, working hardscrabble jobs when they could find them, had to deal with the sort of industrial pollution that brings asthma attacks. In pristine Marin, just a few miles away, a whole new economy was being built around organic food, solar-panel installation and the like. Jones' insight was to see that if the two sides of the Bay could be brought together, the economy of both would benefit. The result of that insight is Green For All, the pressure group that Jones leads. It's dedicated, as he puts it, to providing a "path to prosperity" for blue-collar workers, training them for jobs and skills that will be in demand when (or maybe if) the U.S. retrofits itself as a low-carbon economy. "We can beat pollution and poverty at the same time," Jones says. "Fighting climate change is the closest thing to a full-employment program we've ever seen in this country."

Green for All puts Jones in the vanguard of a necessary change in the green movement. In the past, environmentalism in the U.S. has been a mainly white and white-collar phenomenon, one that had little resonance among the working class and minorities. Timber workers thought that greens valued the spotted owl over their livelihoods; on car assembly lines, criticism of fossil fuels won you no favors. But Jones points out that recent environmental catastrophes in the U.S. have hit the poor hardest. It was African-Americans in New Orleans who suffered most from Hurricane Katrina, and it's Latino farmworkers in California who lose out when wildfires burn their homes.

It won't be easy to show members of America's working class that a green economy can benefit them too.

Old prejudices die hard. The symbol of environmental concern, says Jones, can't be a polar bear, fighting for its habitat — it has to be a Rosie the Riveter figure, making wind turbines in Detroit. But Jones has a rich legacy to draw on. He sees his fight for green jobs as being in the great tradition of the civil-rights movement of the '50s and '60s — while recognizing that times have changed. "You can't do black politics in the 21st century in the same way as you did in the 20th," Jones says. "This can't be about grievance; it has to be about opportunity." He's trying to convince America's minorities and working class that building a green economy is the opportunity of a lifetime.

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