



Tishman Environment
and Design Center



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RECAP: Earth Week Keynote Speech with Drs. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson & Mia Charlene White



Dr. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson (left) & Dr. Mia White (right)

The 2021 Earth Week Keynote was presented by Dr. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, a marine biologist, policy expert, and writer. Her work has been featured The New York Times, Washington Post, and Scientific American. Most recently she has co-edited an anthology with Dr. Katherine K. Wilkinson, “[All We Can Save](#)”. Dr. Mia White, assistant professor of Environmental Studies at the New School, tuned in with Dr. Johnson to see how the project came about.

Dr. Johnson describes her anthology as a “kaleidoscopic perspective” of climate work, emphasizing the collective perspective over the

individual one and intentionally amplifying the voices of women of color. Dr. Johnson and her co-editor made certain that this book is not about things falling apart but it is also not about false hope. Instead, “All We Can Save” focuses on solutions and the truth of the current situation, as grounded by science.

The anthology is only a small portion of Dr. Johnson’s work. She has worked on the Blue New Deal, an ocean-centric addendum to the Green New Deal. She also founded the [Urban Ocean Lab](#) which is an ocean and climate policy think tank. In addition, she hosts a podcast [How to Save a Planet](#). With all of her impactful projects, it is no surprise that she was named one of the Time 100 leaders for 2021, and one of Elle’s 27 Women Leading on Climate.

Dr. Mia White from the New School checked in with Ayana on a personal level, asking how she manages to address burnout and critics. Although Ayana acknowledges her privilege that allows her time to work on her many projects, she also knows the power of rest and often takes time off at her mother’s farm upstate. In response to her critics, she values constructive criticism but has also learned to shut out people with bad

intentions. Ayana has had to navigate through her new public persona even though she's naturally an introvert. Despite her increasing public presence, it was never her intention to be in the public spotlight but she felt it was time to speak out since people seemed ready to listen: "When the doors open for change, you have to just walk through."

The Tishman Center applauds both Dr. Johnson's and Dr. White's work in the environmental field and was honored to have them engage with each other as inspirational keynote speakers for our community.



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