



Tishman Environment  
and Design Center



TISHMAN CENTER · OCTOBER 5, 2022

# Five Years After Landfall

*Blog post by Tian-Tian He*



## Poet Outspoken Bean, Photo Courtesy of Tian-Tian He

With many of the Tishman Center's research assistants scattered across the country for summer break, we wanted to highlight some of the environmental justice activism happening in our hometowns. On August 26 in my hometown of Houston, [Air Alliance Houston](#), the [Climate Justice Museum](#), and [One Breath Partnership](#) collaborated to hold "[5 Years After Landfall](#)," a collective reflection on the catastrophic events of Hurricane Harvey in 2017.

We enjoyed taquitos and quesadillas in a packed house, where community leaders recounted how they had been impacted by Harvey and how they'd seen Houstonians come together in response to its aftermath. Among the speakers were Felix Kapoor ([West Street Recovery](#)), [Lacy M. Johnson](#) (Houston Flood Museum, Rice University), Harris County Attorney [Christian Menefee](#), Houston poet laureate [Outspoken Bean](#), Harris County policy advisor (and The New School alum) Zoe Middleton, and high school senior/poet Ariana Lee.

Some common threads ran through their stories: one was the importance of ongoing remembering, which is

essential to piece together a larger community narrative that serves as the basis for action. In the words of Zoe Middleton, “if you want to have hope, you first have to have memory.”



**Zoe Middleton - Photo Courtesy of Tian-Tian He**

Another thread was the woeful lack of both preparation for and response to environmental crises by the city, state, and federal governments. Lacy Johnson emphasized that flooding is “not an accident” - it is neither new nor neutral; its unequal impacts have been consciously determined over decades by governments’ decisions on who gets flood protection.

*Christian Menefee stated that this*



long-term lack of planning could also be seen when the state “did nothing” to prepare for 2021’s Winter Storm Uri, despite similar storms in 2011. And Outspoken Bean pointed out in his poetry that another Harvey is not just possible but sure to happen - and the city must act now to prepare.



***Christian Menefee, Photo Courtesy of Tian-Tian He***

Afterward, the crowd migrated down the block to the [Climate Justice Museum](#), where we chatted with local environmental organizations at booths and walked through exhibits specially curated for the event.

This event was a much-needed reminder that the unequal effects of Hurricane Harvey, in particular, the structural inequalities that made the hurricane so devastating for some and not others, are still alive today. I was incredibly lucky that for me, Harvey was no more than a couple of weeks of canceled classes and wearing rain boots, and going for walks to watch the bayou rise to incredible heights. It was humbling to hear of its deadly, life-altering impacts firsthand, and inspiring to be in a room full of people still remembering and working to prevent such a disaster from happening again.



***Picture from the Climate Justice Museum, Photo Courtesy of Tian-Tian He***

EJ movements are growing everywhere - we encourage you to check out local EJ activities wherever you are. Meeting like-minded activists in person makes a world of difference to your sense of purpose and provides a deeper, more concrete understanding of environmental issues. Though it can be intimidating to walk into a room full of new people, remember that half of the work is just showing up!

P.S. Check out Ariana Lee's full poem  
here!

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