

# On Community Civil Disobedience in the Name of Sustainability

The Community Rights Movement in the United States

## Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund

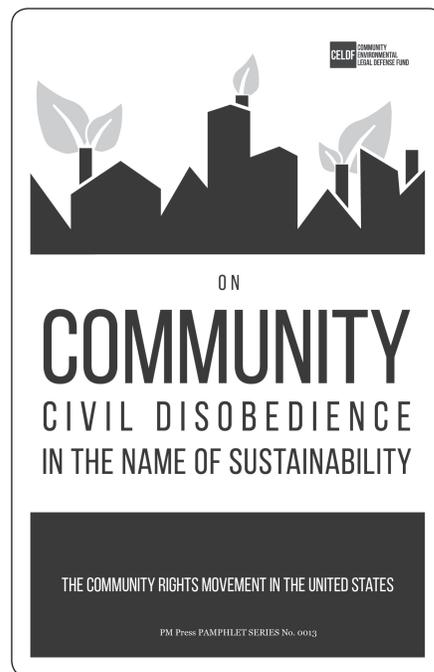
Humanity stands at the brink of global environmental and economic collapse. We have pinned our future to an economic system that centralizes power in fewer and fewer hands, and whose benefits increasingly flow to smaller and smaller numbers of people. Our system of government is similarly medieval—relying on a 1780s constitutional form of government written to guarantee the exploitation of the natural environment and elevate “the endless production of more” over the rights of people, nature, and their communities.

But right now, people within the community rights movement aren’t waiting for power brokers to fix the system. They’re beginning to envision a new sustainability constitution by adopting new laws at the local level that are forcing those ideas upward into the state and national ones. In doing so, they are directly challenging the basic operating system of this country—one which currently elevates corporate “rights” above the rights of people, nature, and their communities—and changing it into one which recognizes a right to local, community self-government that cannot be overridden by corporations, or by governments wielded by corporate interests.

This short primer from the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund explores and describes the philosophy and underpinnings of the community rights movement that has emerged in the United States—a movement of nonviolent civil disobedience based on municipal lawmaking.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Created in 1995, the **Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF)** has assisted over five hundred municipal governments and community organizations to draft and adopt new local laws that assert the right of the people of those communities to stop corporate factory farms, waste dumping, corporate water withdrawals, and fracking. As part of its legal defense of those laws, the Legal Defense Fund asserts that the right of local, community self-government is a constitutional right woven into the fabric of American law, and that legal doctrines, such as corporate constitutional “rights” must yield to the doctrine.



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