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Young People as a Boundary Object for Non-Consensus Community Organizing Toward Transformative Climate Justice

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Abstract

Considering the widening social and political divide and the heterogeneous entities needed to effect systems change, a non-consensus approach to climate action is needed to connect and leverage the efforts of disparate groups. This article explores how young people might be a boundary object, or bridge, for community organizing and synergetic work to thwart the climate crisis. Young people embody and, at times, act on behalf of future generations, and they represent a democratic impulse to challenge authoritarian and concentrated power structures that cause and perpetuate climate change. As the term boundary object is often applied improperly to any object used in a collaborative space, the idea that young people might be a boundary object for community organizing and systemic reform to address climate change is held up to the concept's key criteria: interpretive flexibility, distinct material and organizational structure, and multiple scales and granularities. The idea is then further developed using an example of the youth-led lawsuit *Juliana v. United States*, which sought to compel the government to preserve a livable climate and established significant legal precedent for national climate action despite the Supreme Court denying a petition to review the case in March 2025. A model is used to illustrate how differentiated groups understand and work toward and with the boundary object young people, and to identify opportunities for community organizing and synergetic work toward transformative climate justice, which draws upon diverse knowledge and worldviews and is inherently democratic and intergenerational.

Keywords: transformative climate justice, environmental justice, youth engagement, youth climate activism, boundary object, *Juliana v. United States*, non-consensus organizing, post-qualitative inquiry, new materialism

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Introduction

Scientists overwhelmingly recognize the immediate and long-term threat of anthropogenic climate change, and almost all nations accept that significant action is warranted (Basseches 2022; UNFCCC 2015). However, high-level endorsement has not resulted in mitigation of the anthropogenic sources of climate change, in part because action is required across widespread and heterogeneous entities, many of which are shielded from the dire impacts and costs of the crisis (Franco-Torres et al. 2020). In this context, climate change is not only an ecological and economic issue, but also a democratic problem stemming from unequal political power and influence, disenfranchised citizens, and the delegitimizing of science and institutions tasked with upholding constitutional rights. Due to the ongoing social fracture and political upheaval, a consensus approach and streamlined action appear unattainable in the United States and other countries most responsible for the crisis, and there is disagreement even within the activist community about the goals and vision for climate action (Eisenhauer 2021; Franco-Torres et al. 2020).

The disintegration of consensus action is exemplified by disagreement on intergenerational discounting, or the weight given to future entities in today's decisions about how to respond to climate change. United States citizens across political affiliations and other socioeconomic indicators name responsibility to future generations as the greatest motivator for addressing climate change (Kennedy and Tyson 2024). In practice, however, climate policy and program decisions reflect great discounting of the impact on future entities, thus stymying meaningful action and further compounding the crisis by reinforcing the advantages of entities that already profit from intragenerational inequality and environmental degradation (Yamaguchi 2019).

This article explores how community organizers might use a boundary object to leverage the human sense of responsibility for future generations to effect system change, without requiring agreement across heterogeneous entities and in an exertion of grassroots democracy. A boundary object is defined as a bridge for synergetic action by disparate and diffuse groups, "without imposing unity or restricting the expanding cognitive, ideological, scientific and political diversity" (Franco-Torres et al. 2020, 365). A boundary object could promote work toward transformative climate justice, which addresses the institutions and structures that cause climate change and promotes inclusion of entities that have historically been excluded, diverse knowledge and worldviews, and healing and restoration for more-than-human entities—a term that includes humans, as well as all other matter and ecological systems—and is inherently intergenerational (Newell et al. 2021; See et al. 2024).

The idea that young people—specifically the array of human conceptualizations of young people—could be a bridge for more coordinated, democratic action toward transformative climate justice is held up to the baseline definition, key criteria, and concept model of boundary objects to consider the potential for facilitating non-consensus, shared work. The idea is then further developed through the example of *Juliana v. United States*, a civil lawsuit and community movement organized by young people attempting to preserve a livable climate for future generations (*Juliana v. United States* 2023). The question guiding this research is: how might community organizers and other entities operationalize humans' sense of responsibility toward young people, who embody and at times act on behalf of future generations, as a boundary object for democratic action toward transformative climate justice?

The Juliana 21

In 2015, 21 young people, along with “future generations” through their guardian Dr. James Hansen and the legal team at Our Children’s Trust, sued the United States government for knowingly allowing and contributing to the harm caused by the production and combustion of fossil fuels (*Juliana v. United States* 2023). As the United States Constitution contains no explicit safeguard for the environment, the plaintiffs (known as the Juliana 21) asserted that their individual rights to life, liberty, and property had been violated and that the government had failed to hold a livable climate in trust for future generations (*Juliana v. United States* 2023). In a test of democratized access to government and governance, the Juliana 21 demonstrated that their experiences with floods, wildfires, extreme weather, loss of family livelihood, and ongoing health issues were directly related to a climate crisis caused largely by the government meant to protect them (Grossman 2018, Our Children’s Trust n.d.). The U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon agreed, and wrote in a decision that,

young people—too young to vote and effect change through the political process—are exercising the institutional procedure available to plead with their government to change course. While facts remain to be proved, lawsuits like this highlight young people’s despair with the drawn-out pace of the unhurried, inchmeal, bureaucratic response to our most dire Emergency. (Juliana v. United States 2023).

The Court’s response to the case goes further than others to date in obligating the federal government to prevent climate change for the purpose of protecting human health and safety (Meyer and Gravet 2020). It was also the first case to establish that there “might be a constitutional right to a sound environment,” opening up potential for action toward transformative climate justice (Melrose 2022, 193). The case—and the movement organized around it—grabbed and maintained the public’s attention, drawing crowds to the courthouse to await decisions with the Juliana 21 and helping educate viewers with a popular documentary that highlighted how young people were experiencing not only bodily and property damage but also the loss of trees, glaciers, ancestral homelands, and traditional ecological and cultural practices (Cooper 2020; Neacșu 2022). The case has since inspired similar legal action by and in the name of young people, and it is expected to influence court decisions across the United States and globally, including Colombia, where it was determined that a healthy environment and climate are a constitutional right and that the government must enact a plan to prevent Amazonian deforestation, as well as in other youth-led cases in the United States, Canada, Pakistan, Uganda, and India (Harvard Law Review 2021; Moore et al. 2020).

Identifying Boundary Objects

Boundary objects are flexible and adaptable tools that bridge social and epistemic divides, allowing for diverse sets of actors to retain their own understandings and conduct their own work while contributing to a common pursuit (Star and Griesemer 1989). Boundary objects were introduced by Star and Griesemer (1989) to describe how cooperative work by amateur and professional scientists across disciplines and in a diversity of settings might occur without them first (or ever) reaching consensus. The concept countered the Latour-Callon-Law actor-network theory of translations and interment, in which differentiated groups of actors form networks around a prevailing understanding of an issue, a shared set of values, beliefs, and goals, and acceptance of the work needed to address it; in contrast, boundary objects allowed for groups with differing

understandings of necessary work to act toward a common pursuit while retaining their own values, beliefs, and goals (Star and Griesemer 1989). The boundary object framework was later applied across other fields and movements, and it was expanded upon by Bowker and Star (1999) to describe boundary infrastructures or defined, yet heterogeneous, networks of boundary objects.

Boundary objects and boundary infrastructure have been used previously to coalesce disparate groups around environmental issues, recognizing the need for systemic change to sustain a planet that is interconnected by constantly moving air, water, land, soil, and species across place and over time. Eisenhauer (2021) examined the concept of resilience as a boundary object enabling community organizers to address climate change with municipal governments and other stakeholders in coastal New Jersey; Castree (2021) proposed that geographic environmental assessments as a boundary object could expand use of environmental humanities paradigms; Shaw (2021) explored the use of GIS maps as a boundary object for incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into forest management; Williams et al. (2023) considered storm water management models as a boundary object for adaptation; Idies and Mössner (2023) identified that activist groups used single-use plastic items as a boundary object for ocean and marine life protection in the UK; and Middha and Horne (2024) looked at household garbage as a boundary object for sustainable waste practices. In the following section, the application of two of these boundary objects related to community-organizing efforts—single-use plastics and the term resiliency—are held up to the widely accepted criteria for boundary objects, and the contribution to their respective civic movements is examined.

Key Criteria for Boundary Objects

Star (2010) cautioned that as use of the boundary object framework expanded beyond scientific disciplines, it was often applied inappropriately to any object used in collaborative spaces, warranting the article's title, "This is Not a Boundary Object." Star (2010) reiterated the criteria for something to be considered a boundary object, and observed that many applications met only the first of these three key criteria:

- Interpretive flexibility: the object has differentiated meaning or significance for individuals and differentiated groups (referring to a group's work and not necessarily its geographic location);
- Distinct material/organizational structure: work toward or with the object is more structured at the individual or differentiated group level and less structured at the network or common level; and
- Multiple scales and granularities: individuals tack between their differentiated groups' work toward and with the boundary object and the work done at the common level (Lundgren 2021).

As Bowker and Star (1999) described, "boundary objects are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites" (297). Idies and Mössner (2023) presented single-use plastic as an object with interpretive flexibility because a single, disposable item can also represent the infiltration of microplastics into water, soil, and food; the increasing reach of consumerism, an entire industry; or a changing culture, the UK campaign, "let's free where we live from single use," connected politicians, civil society, and environmental protestors, and quickly grabbed media

attention, even though the groups held different interpretations of its larger significance. Similarly, Eisenhauer (2021) noted that the concept of resilience helped community organizers secure buy-in for collaboration because it has positive yet differing meanings (e.g., resiliency can be assessed in ecological systems, communities, built infrastructure, and economies).

Star and Griesemer (1989) noted that the differentiated structure of boundary objects promotes communication and information sharing across heterogeneous groups that might otherwise not cooperate or share the same vision for related and overlapping work. Each group might provide its perspective or add information specific to its own needs, resulting in a more robust common infrastructure for all. Idies and Mössner (2023) attributed the success of single use plastic as a boundary object for organizing environmental action because it reduced the complexity associated with the behavioral, political, and scientific systems of the global plastics problem leading to increased awareness and action by individuals, activists, and local governments—this in turn promoted additional research and support to address the larger issues by scientists, industry, and national government. Eisenhauer (2021) identified a similar structure where stakeholders were willing to collaborate on resiliency efforts because, in doing so, they also met needs related to their own work (e.g., existing planning and policy objectives for municipal governments), which led to a richer database of information and more robust tools from which all collaborators might work.

Bowker and Star (1999) found that, as individuals and differentiated groups tacked between work toward and with the boundary object at the differentiated group and common levels, some boundary objects became standards within and across the groups. Idies and Mössner (2023) highlighted that stakeholders took a range of actions toward single-use plastics, including refusing, substituting, organizing around, creating rules for, and collecting data about them that related to their own groups' agential relationship with single-use plastics, as well as to the larger environmental movement, which included addressing microplastics from items beyond single-use plastics—a message community organizers were not previously successful in conveying. Eisenhauer (2021) described how the tacking between the stakeholder group's individual work and the cooperative work on resiliency led to a common working definition of resiliency, but emphasized that this was assisted by introducing scaffolded boundary objects of local sea-level-rise maps and flood-surge models that established parameters for the shared work, helped connect "the social worlds of climate science and municipal government policy and planning," and led to greater respect for the differences in stakeholders' expertise and perspectives (628).

Young People as a Boundary Object

In addition to the three key criteria, researchers have proposed types of objects that might be used as boundary objects. Star and Griesemer (1989) initially limited boundary objects to repositories, ideal types (e.g., diagrams and atlases), coincident boundaries (e.g., maps with the same boundary but different contents), and standardized forms (e.g., methods). Subsequent works, including Star and Bowker (2006) and Star (2010), expanded the definition, which was summarized by Lundgren (2021): "a boundary object need not be a physical object, or "thing", it is sufficient that the object is acted toward and with" (95). Although it might feel uncomfortable to use the term "object" for a group of people, particularly for a group not afforded the same rights as adults, young people meet this expanded definition. In the context of the climate crisis, young people are acted toward and with by governments through action and inaction, by the adult public in the transmission of

hegemonic and alternative information and beliefs, by other young people and intergenerational activists, and by rising global temperatures and the cascading effects (Sheldon 2016).

Sheldon (2016) presented the modern configuration of young people in the context of capitalist, anthropocentric upbringings amidst a climate crisis, the intricacy and anxiety of which are summarized and expanded upon by Rousell et al. (2017) as:

figurations of childhood and youth in contemporary Western societies are intricately bound up with aspirations for a future humanity expected to redeem the ethical transgressions, pathologies, and climatological failures of past and present generations. While children and young people are among the least responsible for perpetuating the current climate crisis, they are positioned as future resources in whom the public invests to secure the reproduction of social life according to particular political regimes (Lee 2013). Contemporary figurations of youth are gridded between neoliberal investments in young people as speculative commodity for future capitalist expansion (Massumi 2018), and the protection of youth innocence against perpetration from outside humanist regimes of normative subjectivity and social ordering (Murriss, 2016; Sheldon, 2016; Taylor, 2013). This gridlocked figuration of youth in contemporary Western societies effectively works to block systemic actions on climate change by prohibiting the social reproduction of young people's alternative sensibilities, ideas, and actions that deviate from normative standards of the liberal humanist subject (Rolnik 2017). (Rousell et al. 2017, 35)

Three groups of actors emerge in this description: parties in power, which could include governments, researchers, technology developers, and fossil fuel companies; the adult public, which could include parents and guardians, educators and coaches, and community and worship members; and young people, which might refer broadly to all humans of a certain age range, to youth climate activists, and to representations of future generations. Building from Sheldon (2016) and Rousell et al. (2017), Figure 1 depicts the individual and shared ways these groups might understand or perceive their "work" toward and with young people in the context of climate change.

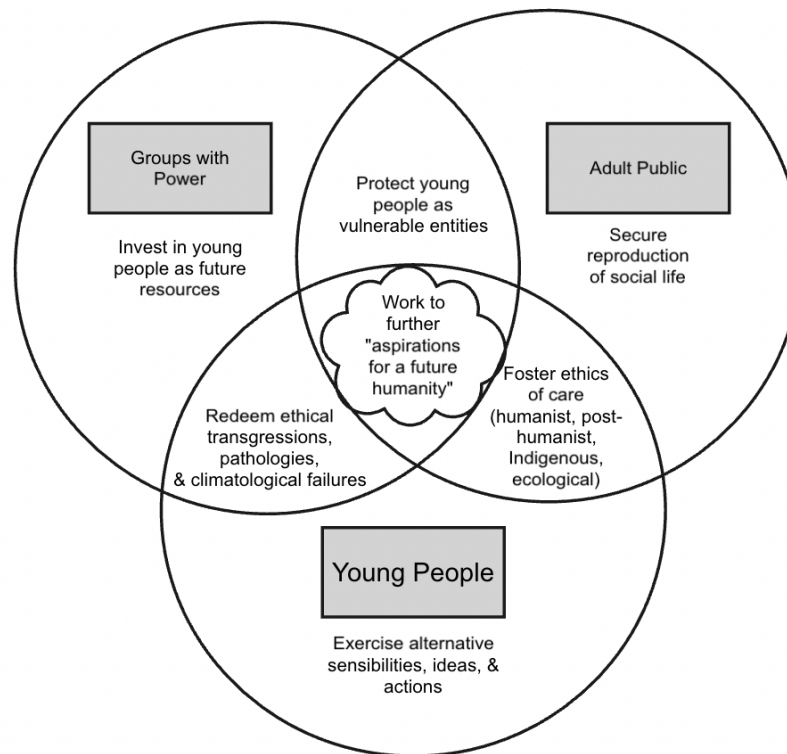


Figure 1: Groups acting toward and with young people in the context of climate change

Considering the groups identified in Figure 1, the concept of young people meets the three criteria for boundary objects. There is interpretive flexibility as groups with power, the adult public, and young people have their own perspectives on necessary work toward and with young people. The individual groups have specific work at the local level (e.g., making laws and allocating funding to protect young people, educating young people in schools, parenting, and organizing youth activism events), as well as work that is less structured at the common level (e.g., policymakers meeting with youth organizers, adults voting for politicians who prioritize protecting young people, and young people challenging societal norms) that contributes to shaping a future humanity. Groups might tack between their local work toward the boundary object and their contribution to the common-level work in ways that evolve over time and begin to work toward addressing the climate crisis for future generations in ways explored in the following sections.

Local and Common Work Toward and With Young People

In response to the Latour-Callon-Law model of translation and interestment, where groups have a shared understanding of the common work, Star and Griesemer (1989) presented an alternative, nonhierarchical model to show how groups might retain their own values, beliefs, goals, and differentiated work while also working toward, but not necessarily in the name of, a common goal. Figure 2 builds from the Star and Griesemer (1989) model to consider how the groups in Figure 1 work separately and in tandem toward and with the boundary object.

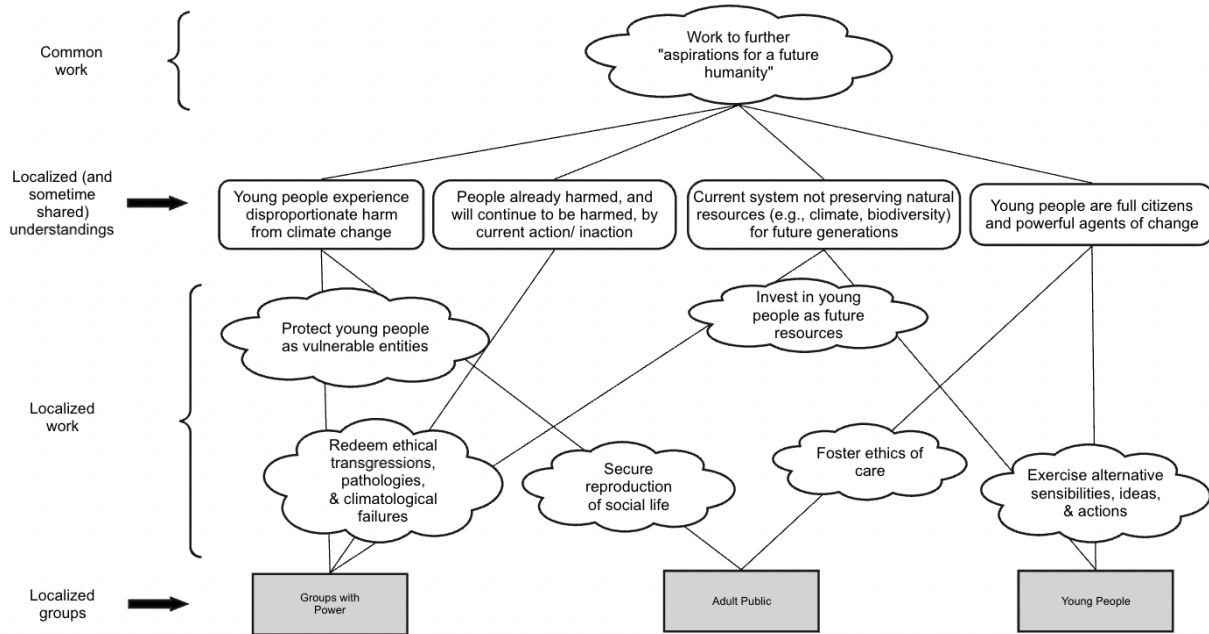


Figure 2: Considering young people as a boundary object for transformative climate justice

Figure 2 depicts how community organizers might leverage young people as a boundary object to connect work across disparate groups in a democratic society, even in the absence of consensus about the urgency of climate action or a shared vision for transformative climate justice. In a vacuum, each group's work might make progress on climate action, but these gains are prone to overshadowing by other influences and are unlikely to bring about the transformation needed for climate justice. Community organizing that enacts young people as a boundary object to increase civic engagement, force government attention, and expose systemic issues, however, might bring together disparate groups and generate collaborative work, even in the absence of consensus, to protect young people and future generations from the looming climate crisis. This idea is explored in the following case study of the *Juliana v. United States* case.

Applying the Concept of Young People as a Boundary Object

The *Juliana v. United States* case is well suited for examining how community organizers, including youth and other climate activists, might leverage the idea of young people as a potential boundary object to induce government and industry action toward transformative climate justice. In a review of fifty climate cases brought by young people, Daly and Muller (2025) conclude that these cases are "a new form of child participation in society, and that child participation has moved from (1) being something primarily aimed at benefiting children to (2) a phenomenon that can benefit the human rights of all" (abstract).

When the Juliana 21 sued the Office of the President and other executive branch offices for knowing about the damage caused by fossil fuels for more than 50 years and continuing to promote, control, facilitate, and subsidize them, three fossil fuel industry groups—the American Petroleum Institute, American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers, and the National Association of Manufacturers—voluntarily joined the case as defendants to argue that young people did not have standing. The court disagreed, and the fossil fuel industry groups asked to be removed from

the case, choosing not to submit evidence that would likely show they also had decades-old knowledge about the harms of fossil fuels and trusting that the new administration taking office would take a stronger stance against climate action (Harvey 2017). The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals agreed that the young people had been harmed by the government's actions, and the Court stated in *Juliana v. United States* (2020) that it was undeniable that "climate change was occurring at an increasingly rapid pace" (4), "that the unprecedented rise in atmospheric carbon dioxide levels stemmed from fossil fuel combustion and will wreak havoc on the Earth's climate if unchecked" (4), and that "absent some action, the destabilizing climate will bury cities, spawn life-threatening natural disasters, and jeopardize critical food and water supplies" (15). Despite this, the Ninth Circuit Court dismissed the case, ruling that the federal government was only part of a larger system that would require transformation to meet the Juliana 21's requested remedies, which included phasing out fossil fuels and protecting natural resources for future generations (*Juliana v. United States* 2020). The plaintiffs filed a motion for the Supreme Court to review the case, which was denied in March 2025 (*Juliana v. United States* 2024; *Juliana v. United States* 2025).

In addition to court documents, press releases, news articles, blog posts, legal reviews, academic articles, artwork, and at least three books, the independent film *Youth v. Gov* followed the first five years of the case and documented the experiences of the Juliana 21. The extensive coverage allows for examination of how the Juliana 21, their parents, guardians, local communities, and the courts worked in differentiated and interconnected ways, leading to movement toward transformative climate justice. Quotes from the groups identified in Figures 1 and 2 are presented in Table 1 to consider each group's work with and toward young people as a boundary object for transformative climate justice.

Table 1: Considering local groups' work toward and with young people in *Juliana v. United States*

Group	Description	Quote
Young People	Youth plaintiff Vic Barrett addressed a public rally outside the courthouse where community members gathered to support the Juliana 21.	"We are learning every day that we are the ones who must secure our future. We must do the work. We must take to the streets. Being young is being an activist today." (Our Children's Trust 2019)
Young People	Youth plaintiff Kelsey Juliana's statement included on a portrait of her in the Americans Who Tell the Truth collection	"As courageous, creative change-makers we have the opportunity and moral authority to change the social, political, and economic structures that cause injustice and climate chaos." (Shetterly n.d.)
Parents/ Guardians & Other Adults	Excerpt from a profile piece on Julia Olson, Our Children's Trust founder and lead attorney for the Juliana 21.	"It's such a human instinct to bring life into the world and raise children," she added, "and now there's this added responsibility of 'I'm bringing them into the world and I'm also leaving them with this planet that may not be safe for them.' It's a big responsibility for a parent... I really want our presidents and our politicians and our leaders, people within the departments of the federal

Group	Description	Quote
		government – and judges – to feel that weight.” (Sutter, 2016)
Parents/ Guardians & Other Adults	Excerpt from an interview with Filmmaker Christi Cooper.	“I think it’s very impactful to hear what these young people are saying, and what they stand for, and what feels hurtful to them... I can’t imagine my daughter telling me that something is the most important thing in the world to her and that I wouldn’t care about that.” (Lines 2020)
Courts & Legislature	Court decision written by District Judge Ann Aiken to deny the government’s request to dismiss the case and move forward the plaintiff’s case.	“The judiciary is capable and duty-bound to provide redress for the irreparable harm government fossil fuel promotion has caused... The legal approach must ‘rise to the emergency rather than repeat a failed past paradigm.’” ¹¹ “[The judge in an Australian case] wrote that failure to curb climate change is ‘what might fairly be described as the greatest intergenerational injustice ever inflicted by one generation of humans upon the next.’” ¹² (<i>Juliana v. United States</i> 2023, 6)
Courts & Legislature	Senator Sheldon Whitehouse addressed the media outside the inaugural hearing of the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis with the <i>Juliana</i> 21.	“This lawsuit is so important, because when you get to court, spin and industry nonsense can be cross examined. When you get to court, conflicts of interest can be exposed. When you get to court, facts matter. The green generation standing behind me is going to win, and these are the people leading the charge.” (Cooper 2020)

Figure 3 presents the *Juliana v. United States* case and movement in terms of these three groups—the 21 youth plaintiffs, their parents/guardians and other adults in the community, and the courts and legislature—toward and with the boundary object young people as expressed in Table 1. While the local work of the young people in Figure 3 is specifically for protection from the climate crisis, the adult group contributes to this effort in their roles of caretakers of and support people for the plaintiffs, and the courts and legislature contribute as adjudicators and lawmakers in the case against the executive branch of the government (and, temporarily, fossil fuel companies).

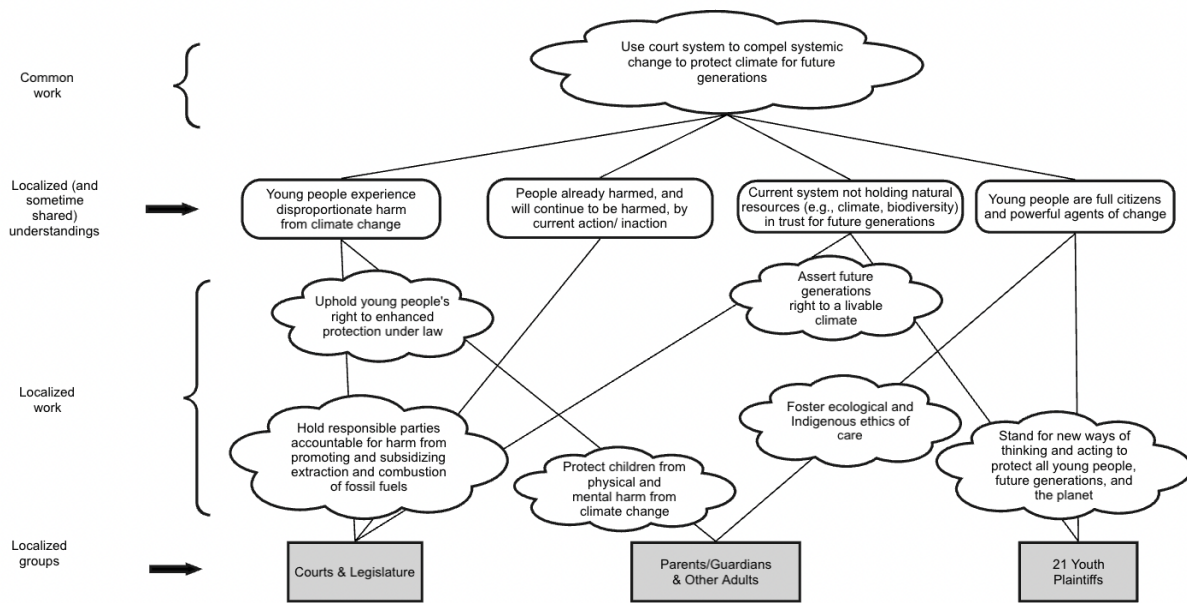


Figure 3: Young people as boundary object for transformative climate justice *Juliana v. U.S*

In this example, the concept of young people has interpretive flexibility as a boundary object because the Juliana 21 consider young people to be important actors in fixing the systems creating and continuing climate change, adults view young people as entities in need of protection and moral development, and the courts and legislature regard young people as entities with enhanced rights under the Constitution for whom they have respective legal and legislative duties. The work of each group is more structured at the local level: the Juliana 21 represent themselves, other young people, and future generations in their role as plaintiffs; their parents, guardians, and the adults at Our Children’s Trust seek to guide the Juliana 21 through the case to protect them and other young people from the physical and mental harms of climate change; the courts and legislature review the case filings and testimony from the young people and adjudicate their accusation that the government and fossil fuel companies knew about and perpetuated the climate crisis. The work is less structured but connects at the common level to produce a collection of public briefs, testimony, evidence, reports, and court decisions, in particular decisions establishing legal precedent that could move the United States closer to transformative system change.

The groups operate at multiple scales and granularities as they develop strategies and materials at the local level (e.g., the Juliana 21 agreeing to be in a documentary, Our Children’s Trust soliciting reports and testimony from pediatric public health experts, judges reviewing and discussing other cases to make their rulings, and members of the legislature co-sponsoring a bill to force action) and then also operate within the context of the established judicial system. The tacking between the local and common work made this a powerful movement—over 100 members of congress signed a resolution to begin the climate repair work requested by the Juliana 21, more than 400 environmental organizations endorsed them, and over 350,000 citizens signed petitions to show their support (Our Children’s Trust, 2025).

It is important to note that there were also efforts to diminish the work of the youth plaintiffs and stall action toward transformative climate justice, examples of which include:

- When the case was first filed, a left-leaning media organization published an article that put quotations around “youth plaintiffs,” and described it as an “unusual case,” that was, “an unlikely winner, long on symbolism and short on precedent” (Dokoupil 2015).
- American Parents Trust (n.d.) put out a “parental alert,” stating that Our Children’s Trust was, “emotionally manipulating children by promoting climate hysteria to convince them to sign their names to lawsuits that push radical environmental mandates...”
- Following the refusal of the US Supreme Court to reopen *Juliana v. United States*, the US Department of Justice released a statement that described the case as a “long saga” and accused the Juliana 21’s lawyers of tying up the court system and the work of the Environmental Protection Agency (USDOJ, 2025).

Even these groups, however, have potential to contribute to non-consensus work toward transformative climate justice. In the *Youth v. Gov* documentary, youth plaintiff Vic Barrett was shown talking to his father, who supported his child but did not share the view that climate change is an existential, human-caused crisis. He advised his son that doing the work to convince him will help when making the case to conservative government leaders—an example of non-consensus work at the local level that might help move forward more specific work at the common level. This example, as well as the examples of opposition listed above, highlight the role scaffolded boundary objects, as identified in Eisenhauer (2021), might play. The court records, including the decisions that established that young people experience disproportionate harm from climate change and that future generations have a right to a livable climate, could be used as scaffolded boundary objects to support legal and community organizing work over the long-term for transformative climate justice.

This is not to ignore the potential limitations of community organizers embracing young people as a boundary object for transformative climate justice. The American Parents Trust (n.d.) example shows how adults’ protective instincts might be exploited to undermine the urgency of addressing climate change, or even its legitimacy. Centering young people might also invite political and corporate actors and institutions to co-opt youth imagery or narratives without meaningfully altering their policies or practices. Finally, boundary objects have diminishing effectiveness when they rely on deteriorating democratic institutions, as illustrated in the politicization of the judicial branch in the USDOJ (2025) example.

Considerations for Community Organizers and Climate Activists

The application of the boundary object model to the *Juliana v. United States* case serves as an example of how community organizers might design a campaign using a boundary object. This approach could bring together disparate groups in a democratic society. While the Juliana 21 and Our Children’s Trust likely did not use the term boundary object, the choice to file a case led by young people and future generations to address the systemic causes of climate change was strategic. The initial requirements in the case were to demonstrate that the plaintiffs had experienced and would continue to experience harm and that the government was violating their constitutional rights. The courts determined that the Juliana 21 had met these conditions given the enhanced protections for young people in established case law, and a large number of legislators, environmental groups, and members of the public endorsed their work in ways not seen in previous climate litigation. Considering the important legal precedents that were established, the strategy to

coalesce work around young people was successful in moving, at least marginally, toward action for transformative climate justice (Moore et al. 2020).

This work, however, underscores the importance of maintaining a democracy with both a judiciary that works in good faith to uphold the constitution and respect established case law, and a legislative branch that fulfills its duty to represent historically marginalized constituents rather than only those with money and power. Boundary objects, particularly scaffolded boundary objects, offer community organizers a tool to coalesce disparate groups, including the federal government. However, their potency may be limited when democratic norms and rights—such as following the science and granting equal access to justice—are ignored. Ninth Circuit Judge Josephine Staton addressed this need to protect democratic practices and work across groups even when consensus cannot be reached; in her dissent of the court's decision to dismiss *Juliana v. United States* without hearing the merits of the case, she wrote:

Where is the hope in today's decision? Plaintiffs' claims are based on science, specifically, an impending point of no return. If plaintiffs' fears, backed by the government's own studies, prove true, history will not judge us kindly. When the seas envelop our coastal cities, fires and droughts haunt our interiors, and storms ravage everything between, those remaining will ask: Why did so many do so little? (Juliana v. United States 2020, Staton dissent)

Community organizers will play a crucial role in restoring hope and compelling the United States to recommit to democratic institutions capable of addressing the climate crisis and other societal challenges. Community organizing exposes the erosions of democratic norms such as those revealed in *Juliana v. United States*: the influence of industry over the executive and legislative branches, politicization of the judicial system, silencing of long-term public interest, and the failure to protect constitutional rights. Boundary objects offer a way forward for community organizers to approach this enormous challenge while navigating power imbalances and without waiting for consensus on the end vision or the specific work required. Centering young people as a boundary object for this synergetic and transformative work is an assertion of democratic ideals in community organizing—young people reinvigorate the sense of moral responsibility that could compel government institutions, adults, and other young people to demand action to protect today's youth and provide a just and livable climate for future generations.

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