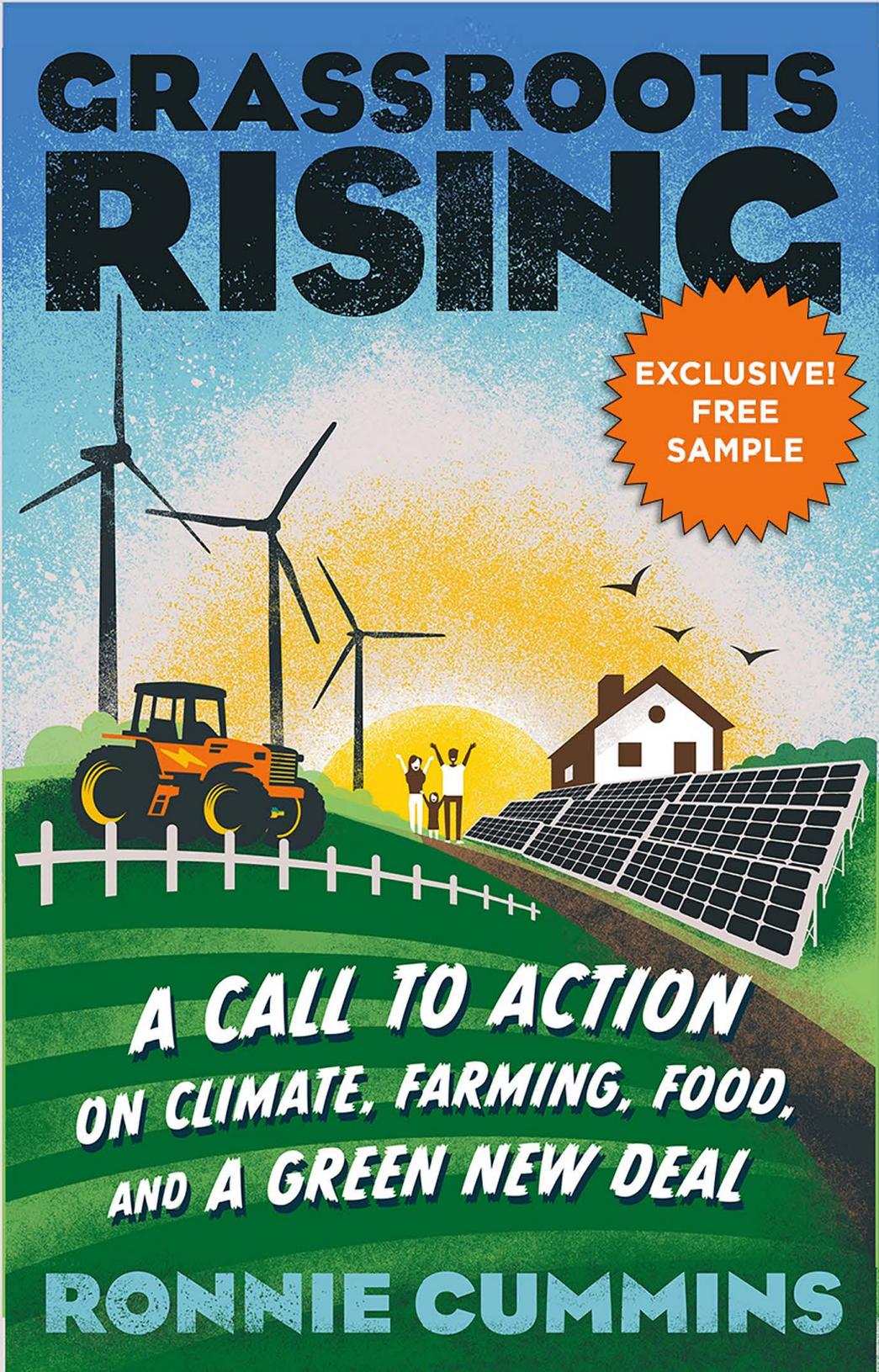


GRASSROOTS RISING



**EXCLUSIVE!
FREE
SAMPLE**

**A CALL TO ACTION
ON CLIMATE, FARMING, FOOD,
AND A GREEN NEW DEAL**

RONNIE CUMMINS

Grassroots Rising

**A Call to Action on Climate, Farming,
Food, and a Green New Deal**

Ronnie Cummins

Chelsea Green Publishing
White River Junction, Vermont
London, UK

Introduction

regeneration. 1: an act or the process of regenerating; the state of being regenerated. 2: spiritual renewal or revival. 3: renewal or restoration of a body, bodily part, or biological system (such as a forest) after injury or as a normal process.

MERRIAM-WEBSTER'S COLLEGIATE DICTIONARY, 11th ed.

This is a book about how we—the United States and a global grassroots movement—can rise up together and overcome the most serious threat that humans have ever confronted: global warming and severe climate change. According to scientific consensus, unless we can begin to rapidly turn things around, within one to two decades, our current climate crisis will likely morph into catastrophic climate change, unraveling the life-support systems of our planet.

The driving force that informs and inspires our new grassroots revolution is Regeneration, a rapidly spreading, carbon-sequestering, ecologically restorative, technologically innovative, forward-thinking worldview that takes us well beyond the now unfortunately outdated twentieth-century notions of sustainability.¹ Regeneration calls for a transition from degenerative, climate-disrupting fossil fuels to renewable energy and from industrial food, farming, and land use to regenerative practices. In this way, through the miracle of plant photosynthesis, we can draw down billions of tons of excess carbon from the atmosphere into our soils, forests, and plants over the next few decades and thereby avert climate catastrophe. By mobilizing the grassroots power of a united body politic for survival and revival, we can head off climate chaos and build a new nation along the lines of a Green New Deal. At the same time, as our Regeneration revolution spreads across borders, we can build a new global commonwealth of peace and justice.

A properly organized and executed Regeneration revolution, led by global youth and a revitalized US and global grassroots not only has the awesome capacity to draw down massive amounts of excess atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) and reverse global warming but, at the same time,

2 | Grassroots Rising

has the power to clean up pollution, restore water quality, increase biodiversity, and rejuvenate soils, forests, pasturelands, croplands, wetlands, and watersheds. Moreover, this revolution in our relationship to Mother Earth and one another, scaled up nationally and internationally, has the potential to revitalize public health, both mental and physical, by providing a bountiful harvest of healthy, organic foods for everyone, while transforming our currently degenerative urban and rural landscapes into regenerative environments and bringing us all together in a common mission. Coupled with a green and equitable energy economy, regenerative agricultural and land use policies and practices hold out the promise of a better life and standard of living for all of the world's 7.5 billion people, rural and urban, including the most impoverished and exploited communities.

You're holding in your hands an international declaration of emergency, a "bad news" chronicle of the near-terminal damage that fossil fuels, out-of-control commerce and greed, corrupt politics, and degenerative food, agricultural, and land use practices have inflicted on Mother Earth and society. But you're also holding in your hands a "good news" instructional book for Regeneration, a practical, shovel-ready plan of action for the United States and the world to transition to climate stability, peace, justice, health, prosperity, cooperation, and participatory democracy.

My motivation for delivering the "bad news" portion of this book comes from my rage and alarm at the steady deterioration of the United States and the world, now teetering on the brink of catastrophe. But what inspires me more nowadays is the emerging "good news," the heretofore lesser-known but positive and redemptive message that we, the global grassroots, can regenerate Earth and put an end to "business as usual": the climate chaos, poverty, forced migration, deteriorating human health, environmental destruction, and endless wars that are no longer tolerable. Properly launched and scaled up, from Main Street to the Middle East and beyond, the Regeneration revolution we are proposing has the potential to cure our depression, revitalize our moribund politics, and restore our sense of global solidarity.

I, like so many Americans, unfortunately, am somewhat of an expert on *degeneration*. I grew up in southeast Texas on the edge of the Gulf of Mexico, in a hot and humid coastal wetland, rich with birds and wildlife,

mosquitoes, snakes, and alligators, teeming with fish, crabs, and shrimp, where few Europeans, indigenous people, and African Americans had settled before the “Spindletop gusher,” the largest oil deposit in the United States, was discovered in 1901.

By the time I was born, just after World War II, the Golden Triangle, as the oil industry and local chamber of commerce liked to call the area that included Port Arthur, Orange, and Beaumont, Texas, had become the largest complex of petrochemical plants in the world, employing thousands of workers, many of whom belonged to the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers (OCAW) trade union. My dad was one of them. After returning from World War II, he worked at Gulf Oil for almost fifty years, punching the clock at the same refinery where his father had worked for forty years.

My mom’s parents, on the other hand, were decidedly more rural folk. After working city jobs in the Golden Triangle for a number of years, they moved back to the land in the mid-1950s, operating a diverse and old-fashioned family farm—an organic farm in reality, although they didn’t use that word to describe the traditional practices that they had learned from their Cajun parents and grandparents in southwestern Louisiana. I spent idyllic weekends and summers on my grandparents’ farm in East Texas, taking care of the farm animals (I can still remember the names of my favorite milk cows, January and Bossie, and our pet pig, Cliff), gathering eggs from the chicken house, helping out in the vegetable gardens, roaming the piney woods with my border collie, and diving off the railroad trestle with my brother, sisters, and cousins into the sandy spring-fed creek nearby, where the water flowed clear and cold.

But the post-World War II America of my childhood now seems like a fairy tale, an old TV episode of *Leave It to Beaver*, *Bonanza*, or *Ozzie and Harriet*. As I grew older, the nearby Gulf of Mexico and our bayous and rivers became more and more polluted. At the jetty where my brother and I had once caught fish, crabs by the bushel basket, and shrimp, the water became fouled with oil, green algae, and a nasty collection of floating plastic and garbage. After a while my brother and I stopped fishing and crabbing. More and more sticky black tar began washing up on the sands of McFaddin Beach, our favorite swimming spot. To get the tar off the soles of our feet, we’d have to dip a rag in gasoline or paint thinner and use it to rub our skin until it turned bright red.

4 | Grassroots Rising

At dusk and throughout the night, the sky throughout the Golden Triangle glowed fluorescent orange, eerily tinted by the methane and toxic gases being flared off 24/7 by the oil refineries. The air in my neighborhood, in the schoolyard, at the Little League baseball diamond, and even downtown smelled worse and worse. In high school I finally stopped going outside for lunch with my friends because the air was so foul. The chemical plant down the road was later classified as one of the most toxic industrial facilities in the nation.

Having spent most of their lives surrounded by oil refineries and chemical plants, most of my high school classmates died prematurely, many from cancers associated with environmental toxins, polluted drinking water, and low-grade, highly-processed poison food. Today, the memory of those who died too soon fuels my passion as an organic food and environmental campaigner against the Poison Cartel—Bayer/Monsanto, Dow, DuPont, Syngenta/ChemChina, ExxonMobil, BP, Koch Industries, Halliburton, and all the rest—a cartel that, as you probably know, has polluted not only my hometown but the entire world.

The degeneration zone of my youth, which the media has aptly dubbed “Cancer Alley” (denoting the corridor between Houston, Texas, the Golden Triangle, and New Orleans), has been ravaged not just by industrial pollution but also by political corruption, economic disparities, and racial strife. That combination comes together with devastating results in the face of one of the biggest, most threatening forces along the Gulf Coast: hurricanes. Several years ago I watched the TV news coverage of Hurricane Harvey. Among the clips were shots of my hometown, under water, including astounding footage of several elderly nursing home residents in wheelchairs, filthy floodwater rising up to their laps. Hapless Houston and Gulf Coast residents, typically working-class whites, Latinos, and African Americans, complained to the news media during and after Hurricane Harvey of refinery explosions, toxic chemical releases, and poisonous floodwater, but oil company spokespersons and elected public officials said more or less the same thing they’ve been saying since DDT’s developer was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1948, since Hurricane Katrina swamped New Orleans in 2005, and since the BP Deepwater oil spill in 2010 ravaged the Gulf: “No need to worry.”

In 2016 I helped raise money and recruit volunteers for Standing Rock, the Native-led protest and encampment in North Dakota mobilizing to

stop the infamous Keystone XL pipeline. Part of my zeal for stopping this pipeline, which was designed to ship billions of gallons of dirty tar sands oil from Alberta, Canada, to the United States for refining, came from its ultimate destination: Port Arthur, Texas. Port Arthur specializes in refining dirty oil, no doubt because industry can get away with literal murder in the National Sacrifice Zone between southeast Texas and coastal Louisiana.

Growing up in Texas, in a company town owned lock, stock, and barrel by the oil giants, I was always interested in politics. Because my father was in the OCAW trade union at the oil refinery, an integrated union with whites, blacks, and Latinos as members, I learned early on that racism was not only morally wrong but an impediment to democracy and working-class unity. Unlike many Southern whites at the time, my parents and grandparents were respectful of other races and nationalities, politely referring to blacks as “colored people” or Negroes.

My hometown was completely segregated at the time. There were no blacks in the schools, churches, civic clubs, or any of the white neighborhoods. Restrooms and drinking fountains in public places were labeled as “whites” or “coloreds only.” Blacks were forced to live in the ghetto of Port Arthur, across the railroad tracks, many in ramshackle houses straight out of the antebellum South of the nineteenth century. They were basically forbidden to come into the white part of town after dark. Those caught on the wrong side of the tracks after sunset ran the risk of being accosted, not only by the all-white police force, but by racist gangs as well. Because of the intense segregation in the Golden Triangle, I never really met any black people my own age until I went off to college and got involved in the anti-war and civil rights movements.

I was (and still am) a voracious reader, especially of history books and novels with political themes. In high school, I was intrigued by the radical populist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; as it turns out, the Farmers’ Alliance, an agrarian populist organization, had been especially strong in Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana. I was fortunate then to have a young civics teacher, fresh out of college, who taught us all about the Abolitionist movement and the Civil War, the robber barons of the nineteenth century, the populist movements of the late 1800s, the Depression and the New Deal, and the civil rights and anti-war

6 | Grassroots Rising

movements that were just then starting to gain momentum. His influence crystallized some of the ethical and political views that my grandparents and father had tried to instill in me.

When I was nine years old, my Cajun grandparents took me on a sightseeing trip to the Louisiana State Capitol in Baton Rouge. In a scene that I will never forget, my grandfather, or Papa, as I always called him, led me over to the marble wall behind the Speaker's podium in the room where the state legislature meets. He put my fingers in several of the numerous pockmarks in the wall.

Papa said, "Son, these are bullet holes from a machine gun. This is where the oil company men, Rockefeller's gunmen, took down Governor Huey Long on September 10, 1935."

I said, somewhat stunned, "Papa, why would they kill the governor?"

He replied, "Because Huey was organizing the poor people, black and white, small farmers and sharecroppers, to take back what was rightfully ours."

My life experience has taught me that money rules and power corrupts, and that putting profits before people and environmental health is not only wrong but deadly. But fifty years of activism—from the 1960s radical student movement through the modern ecology movement that emerged in 1970, the anti-nuclear power movement of the late 1970s, the Central America solidarity movements of the 1980s, and the organic, climate change, and Occupy movements of the past twenty-five years—has also taught me that organized grassroots power can make a big difference, whether we're talking about public consciousness, marketplace pressure, or politics and public policy. The current situation we are facing in the United States and throughout the world is indeed dire, on all fronts, and time is running out. But as I and my fellow activists in the new Regeneration movement believe, there is still time to turn things around, before it's too late.

For those wondering what they can do to help address the global climate crisis, joining the Regeneration Revolution might be the best first step

In *Grassroots Rising*, Ronnie Cummins offers a blueprint for building and supercharging a grassroots Regeneration Movement based on consumer awareness, farmer innovation, political change, and regenerative finance—embodied most recently by the proposed Green New Deal in the United States. Cummins asserts that the solution lies right beneath our feet and at the end of our forks through the transformation of our broken food system. By restoring our agricultural and grazing lands, we can sequester massive amounts of carbon in the soil. Coupled with an aggressive transition to renewables, he argues that we have the power to not only mitigate and slow down climate change, but actually reverse global warming.

A lucid call to action for America and the global body politic, *Grassroots Rising* offers a practical playbook for how to survive—and thrive—in catastrophic times. It aims to educate and inspire citizens worldwide to organize and become active participants in preventing ecological collapse. The book shows that we, the global grassroots, can indeed solve our most pressing Degeneration crises, while also meeting our everyday needs.

RONNIE CUMMINS is founder and director of the Organic Consumers Association (OCA), a non-profit, US-based network of more than two million consumers dedicated to safeguarding organic standards and promoting a healthy, just, and regenerative system of food, farming, and commerce. Cummins also serves on the steering committee of Regeneration International and OCA's Mexican affiliate, Vía Orgánica.

PRE-ORDER NOW:

ON-SALE DATE: February 11, 2020

\$17.95 US • \$24.95 CAN • £14.99 GBP

ISBN 978-1-60358-975-8

Paperback Original • 6 × 9 • 208 pages



BARNES & NOBLE 

ChelseaGreen.com

