In the United States, the overwhelming narrative toward immigration is: “These people are taking our jobs. These people don’t deserve to be here.” That’s the wrong message. Immigration is actually the solution to our economic challenges. We have to make it easier for people to come here and participate in our economy. As I often say, immigration is a democratic right. It’s a human right. The way we actually make immigration work is if we build it with the communities that people are fleeing. We’re building it with the undocumented workers on the farm, the undocumented workers in the cities, the undocumented workers who are staying in the border communities. We’re building it with the communities that are doing similar work around the world: in communities figuring out how to survive the best. We’re figuring out how we can support them in that process.

In historic victory, grad students at private universities win bargaining rights

Meet the volunteer organizing for black justice and climate action in Paris

The veterans organizing to stop Trumpism

It's really unfortunate that there’s a disconnect between those two things. I see the murder of black people every 28 hours in the United States as a direct signifier of the ecological imbalance. Black people are part of the environment. Climate and violence are some of the most clear indicators of a society that isn’t working in ecological balance. We have to start responding to them. Otherwise we’re going to see more and more death.

The delegates have come to COP21 demanding that the U.S. negotiating team commit to binding emissions cuts; leave fossil fuels in the ground; act with transparency and accountability; and support community-rooted solutions. The U.S. negotiators know that they will have to come up with something transparent and binding. They won’t just be talking; they’ll be agreeing to binding targets.

For me, the question was, “Who are they disturbing?” It hit home that to be black anywhere within this world is to be criminal. That’s not something that we can carry. But we can use that to our advantage. Let’s make this struggle our whole platform. Let’s use our struggle as the framework for everyone else who is struggling. We need to start engaging in a lot of different ways the black liberation struggle as a framework for all of our struggles.

I think the way we can get these targets agreed to is to show strength. It’s really a negotiating strategy that the U.S. and the rest of the world have to show strength. They need to show that they can’t just have another failed meeting.

Inside-outside strategies work for some communities, but for black communities, we weren’t included in the first place. One of our tagging principles I want to bring with me is: “You can’t negotiate peace with the people who have imposed violence upon you.” They have to be excluded from that. We have to be the ones leading from inside. We can’t negotiate from the outside.

In large parts of the United States, climate change can be seen as several steps removed from basic fights for survival like that being waged by the movement for black lives. What do make of that disconnection?

The It Takes Roots delegation inside the talks, it seems like there’s a constant struggle for them to maintain what rights they have within COP21 itself. They can’t even talk about their own community, because it’s not on the agenda. We’reycle on this issue, and we can’t keep getting talked about inside COP21. It’s been a lot of controlling the narrative inside COP21. They need to know that we’re going to have to speak our language, talk about our fights.

We have to come up with a narrative around COP21 that is very inspiring and very real. We have to be able to talk about the kind of targets that we really think are necessary. It’s not just about talks and agreements. We have to be able to talk about what we’re going to do. COP21 can be the beginning of a process that will result in a new half-century of global action to heal the climate and to heal our communities.

Connecting with migrant communities here in Paris that face some of the same anti-black racism and xenophobia as our communities in the United States. I think this is important, because we have to connect to communities that are doing similar work around the world: in communities figuring out how to survive the best. We’re figuring out how we can support them in that process. From Brazil to Kenya, Latin America, the United States, the Philippines, everywhere. If COP21 was really concerned about confronting climate change, they should be responsible for paying reparations, and funding the transition for frontline communities all over the world: in the United States, in the Philippines, in Brazil, in Kenya, Latin America, around the world.

Negotiators at COP don’t really have a reason to listen to us. We have to make them listen to us, and we can do that by strengthening our agreements’ commitment to human and indigenous rights; and support community-rooted solutions. For those understandably cynical about COP21, what I think is the real task is to come up with a narrative that says: “Look, we’re not going to buy into what they’re giving us as our deal. We want these targets agreed to. We want binding targets agreed to. We want transparency. This can’t be just a series of talks. These have to be agreements’ commitment to human and indigenous rights; and support community-rooted solutions. For those understandably cynical about COP21, what I think is the real task is to come up with a narrative that says: “Look, we’re not going to buy into what they’re giving us as our deal. We want these targets agreed to. We want binding targets agreed to. We want transparency. This has to be a real deal.”

This is an opportunity for us to link with frontline communities around the world that are engaged in doing one transition or another to support the transition that we’re doing for Jackson.

This is an opportunity to make sure that we have a global agreement that is going to address the needs of the communities that we’re working with. What do we make of COP21, this time around, as an opportunity for us to think about what sort of agreement we really want to see as a part of the global transition? COP21 can be the beginning of a process that will result in a new half-century of global action to heal the climate and to heal our communities. We need to be able to talk about the kind of targets that we really think are necessary.

I think there are three things that we can take away from COP21. The first is that we have to be very clear about what our goals are. We need to have a very clear framework. We need to have a very clear platform. We need to be very clear about what we’re going to do. The second thing is that we have to come up with a narrative around COP21 that is very inspiring and very real. We have to be able to talk about the kind of targets that we really think are necessary. It’s not just about talks and agreements. We have to be able to talk about what we’re going to do.

The third thing is that we need to make sure that we don’t get co-opted by COP21. We need to make sure that COP21 doesn’t become just another process that we’re working with. We need to make sure that COP21 is the beginning of a process that will result in a new half-century of global action to heal the climate and to heal our communities. We need to be able to talk about the kind of targets that we really think are necessary.