

# IGNITION

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO FIGHT GLOBAL WARMING AND SPARK A MOVEMENT

EDITED BY

JONATHAN ISHAM AND SISSEL WAAGE

INTRODUCTION BY BILL MCKIBBEN



# *Ignition*

WHAT YOU CAN  
DO TO FIGHT  
GLOBAL WARMING  
AND SPARK A MOVEMENT

Edited by  
**Jonathan Isham Jr.**  
**Sissel Waage**

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*To the young leaders  
of the climate movement,  
who are making history  
and shaping entirely  
new possibilities for  
the generations to come*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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WHILE IN GRADUATE SCHOOL, we both studied the process of social change under the guidance of several remarkable mentors. With Grace Goodell at Johns Hopkins University, Jon learned the value of thinking critically about social change and the institutional determinants of well-being. With Louise Fortmann, Nancy Peluso, and Jeff Romm at the University of California, Berkeley, Sissel studied the challenges of effecting change within complex social, economic, and ecological systems.

In many ways, this book began with Hilary Bradbury at Case Western Reserve University. We are thankful she asked Sissel in 2003 to collaborate on a dialogue focused on social and organizational principles related to sustainability-oriented transformation. This book is truly an unexpected ripple from that original stone thrown into the pond. Sissel also owes a debt of personal gratitude to Catherine Gray, George Basile, Eric Olson, and Ruth Rominger at the Natural Step for supporting that initial work. A special thanks goes also to Bryant Rice, a consultant to the Natural Step, who actually suggested the title *Ignition* for another book!

Beginning in 2004, we codirected a collaborative research project to help concerned citizens share, critique, and build strategies for the new climate movement. At a meeting over coffee at Middlebury College in the spring of 2004, Nan Jenks-Jay and Bill McKibben not only offered their critical support for this risky project; Bill also succinctly christened it “What Works.”



The first outcomes of the What Works project were two coordinated events that took place in January 2005: a Middlebury College winter-term course called Building the New Climate Movement and a three-day workshop called What Works? New Strategies for a Melting Planet that took place at Middlebury as the class ended. During the course, we were fortunate to work with six wonderful service-learning partners: Ben and Jerry's, Clean Air–Cool Planet, Energy Action, Environmental Defense, the Green House Network, and the Middlebury Area Global Warming Action Coalition. We could not have presented this workshop without generous funding from many sources, including the BPB Foundation, Christian A. Johnson Foundation, Mellon Foundation, Schumann Foundation, Seventh Generation, Vermont Campus Compact, and the following contributors from Middlebury College: Ada Howe Kent Fund, Alliance for Civic Engagement, Charles P. Scott Spiritual and Religious Life Center, Office of Environmental Affairs, Program in Environmental Studies, Pooled Enrichment Fund, and Rohatyn Center for International Affairs.

The workshop itself proved to be inspiring in large part thanks to the leadership of the twenty Middlebury College students in the winter-term class who helped pull it together and set the tone. Diane Munroe, Jon's Middlebury colleague, was equally instrumental to the workshop's success. Rob Hartz and Joni Parker-Roach did a masterful job of coordinating and documenting the workshop. The inclusion of filmmakers Judith Helfand and Daniel Gold, taking footage for their documentary *Everything's Cool*, added a feeling that history was turning right before us, as did the enjoyable breakfast that featured a conversation among Bill McKibben, John Passacantando, Ted Nordhaus, Michael Shellenger, and Peter Senge, another trusted ally in our work. We were also immensely fortunate that Mary Lou Finley and Bill Chaloupka, who had participated in the social change dialogue at Case Western in December 2003, helped lead the workshop. Two Middlebury faculty members who attended the workshop, Christopher McGrory Klyza and Rebecca Kneale Gould, later became chapter authors for this book. During the event, Gary Braasch's photos enabled us to see climate change—literally—through the melting, eroding, and (in some parts) collapsing world in which we now live. In addition, the roster of other participants who

so memorably shaped this workshop reads like a climate movement all-star team: Will Bates, May Boeve, Meg Boyle, Gary Cook, Liz Cunningham, Peyton Fleming, Jihan Gearon, Eban Goodstein, Anne Hambleton, Jamie Henn, Rev. Paul Mayer, David Merrill, Susanne Moser, Jeremy Osborn, Billy Parish, Bill Shutkin, Michael Silberman, Tom Stokes, Mike Tidwell, and Jon Warnow, just to name a few.

Following this workshop, the third outcome of the What Works project is this book, *Ignition*. As our work on this volume began in earnest, we were incredibly fortunate to be supported by Brendan Bechtel, who helped us secure a grant from the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation. The foundation's generosity was a much needed and important sign that this project was worth undertaking. We also received invaluable advice from our colleague Jean Black about how to shape and market the book. Adam Markham and Roger Stephenson at Clean Air–Cool Planet were also immensely helpful as the book began to take shape. During the summer of 2005, Thomas Hand and Julia West provided invaluable research assistance, thanks to the financial support of the Middlebury College Office of Environmental Affairs. During the Fall of 2006, Jon received generous support from the Mellon Foundation.

We are honored to have collaborated with our chapter authors, who will surely continue to inspire us with their amazing work in the halls of academia, in the corridors of the U.S. Capitol, and in the diverse places around the United States and the globe where this movement is being strengthened. They were remarkably understanding and patient with us.

Todd Baldwin, our editor at Island Press, has left us speechless with his ability to provide diamond-sharp comments. His work immensely improved the manuscript, and we are fortunate to have worked with him as well as his colleagues at Island Press. Sincere thanks also go to Joe Spieler for helping us get over the finish line.

It has been a pleasure to collaborate with each other. Since meeting at the Case Western workshop in December 2003, we have been able to shape a common vision about contributing to the nascent climate movement. At various times, we have leaned on each other for ideas, energy, and counsel.

Finally, we are mostly indebted to our families, whom we are honored to personally praise here.



## I ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank my husband, Steven, for being unflaggingly supportive, kind, and generous. I cannot imagine a more fun fellow traveler through life. Ultimately, though, this book is for Leif, as he literally came into being along with it. I was newly pregnant at the What Works conference, and he has grown as the manuscript emerged. I hope that our small efforts here will contribute to a sound future for you, Leif, and all children everywhere.

—SISSEL WAAGE

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I thank my wife, Tracy, for being the best possible friend, spouse, and parent I could imagine. I am constantly in awe of her abilities to manage the demands of work, family, and household. I am particularly thankful that she was willing to forgo a job she loved in Washington, D.C., so that we could take our lives in a new direction in central Vermont. Our girls, Faith, Katie, and Lily, are thriving here, in large part thanks to Tracy. I owe her, big time.

—JONATHAN ISHAM JR.

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## *Introduction*

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BILL MCKIBBEN

IN MID-SUMMER 2006, I HAD a feeling of despair (a strong one) and an idea (a bad one). I imagined walking from my home in central Vermont fifty miles to the state's main city, Burlington, and, once there, getting myself arrested on the steps of the federal building while protesting Washington's inaction on global warming. I wasn't sure what good that would do, aside from make me feel a little less helpless, but that didn't stop me from e-mailing friends and neighbors, asking if they wanted to go along.

Surprisingly, a good many did. Better yet, many wanted to help out. Those colleagues proved to be more astute planners than I was; it took them only a few phone calls to figure out that you really couldn't be arrested in Burlington, not without breaking something, which was not our style. So we jointly evolved the idea of a march across the same fifty miles, but with a different aim: we would ask all Vermont's candidates for federal office in the fall election to meet us by Lake Champlain and pledge to support strong climate legislation.

Thus began a month of nonstop organizing, most of it done by people more competent than me: Will Bates, for instance, a recent Middlebury College graduate with a quiet knack for getting things done; Becca Sobel, a Greenpeace organizer who was already in the state working on global warming and who now joined our efforts; Connie Leach, who at the very first coffee shop meeting said, "I'll take care of the food" and proceeded to



do just that; Steve Maier, our local state representative, who started calling his fellow politicians; Jon Isham, a Middlebury College colleague; and on and on and on.

Here's what we learned in those weeks. Many people want to do something about climate change, something real and large and meaningful. They've already put in some compact fluorescent lightbulbs, and maybe they've even bought a Prius. Yet they realize that those moves are small stabs in the dark, that if we have a chance at dealing with global warming, it's going to require quick and decisive political change. Almost everyone we asked said either "Count me in" or "If I wasn't going to be away on Labor Day weekend, I'd be there." Many were overjoyed to be asked, and people thanked me repeatedly for giving them the "opportunity" to trudge across the late summer countryside. That should give us a clue: the climate movement is rich in scientists and economists and engineers; we have no shortage of answers, of analysis. Until now, however, we've never bothered to build the *movement* part of the movement. There's been no way for people to really engage in the process of fighting for change, no way to make very deep fears and hopes public and powerful.

Given the opportunity to be part of the movement, however, three hundred people showed up on Thursday noon to start the walk. That may not sound like many folks except that it was a workday, we were gathering in one of the state's smallest and most remote towns, and we were planning to go eleven miles before supper. We listened to a few talks, most notably John Elder, one of Vermont's most beloved writers, who dressed as an endangered maple tree and read from Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken." It was in homage to Frost that we'd come to this small burg of Ripton; the great poet's summer writing cabin was a few hundred yards from the roadside turnout where we stepped off. With his words ("I took the one less traveled by/And that has made all the difference") ringing in our ears we hit the road, with a crew of real pros from Greenpeace out front to slow down traffic and keep us safe.

And what do you know? Three hundred people walking two and three abreast down a winding country road turns out to be one hell of a long line. We felt buoyant from the very start, a crowd of kids and elders and moms and college students and golden retrievers on a perfect late summer

day, walking through a landscape we loved and also knew to be threatened by a warming atmosphere.

By late afternoon we'd reached the town of Middlebury's green, where more people were waiting for us, waiting with banners and music and food. We heard speeches from our Middlebury College president, Ronald Liebowitz, and from a chief aide of Patrick Leahy, one of our state's two senators. Then came dinner—a potluck pulled together by one of the local churches—and sleep.

That was the rhythm of the next few days: long walks (ten miles on pavement is much more tiring than ten miles on mountain trail), long conversations (with the whole day stretching out, there's no reason to give the short version of any story), and a steadily growing sense of optimism. We mostly hiked along Route 7, western Vermont's main north-south thoroughfare, on the left shoulder, facing traffic, which meant that we could see drivers as they passed. They'd read our signs, and by the time they were halfway down the line of marchers, three-quarters of them would be honking or waving or both. (The great danger was overexcited hybrid car drivers veering wildly in their enthusiasm.) It was clear that, at least on this road, climate change was not an iffy proposition or a hard sell; the reaction fit those public opinion polls showing that 80 percent of Americans understand that we have a problem (even if they might not be willing yet to march themselves, or even to countenance higher gasoline prices). Every night we'd have a wonderful meal: a wheat farmer used a newly built cob oven to bake us pizzas by the score, an activist opened her waterfront home not only for supper but for a much-needed swim in the lake. We got used to stirring welcomes, such as a rock band on the lawn of the senior center. And as we walked, and as our numbers grew, we began to pull in rumors that many of the politicians we wanted to hear from were actually planning to come to our final rally.

Sunday morning began with a church service so crowded that people were spilling out of every door of the sanctuary, so crowded that the communion wine ran out before everyone was served. That didn't matter much, though, for there was a communion of song and spirit that rocked the halls. That night we bedded down at Shelburne Farms, one of Vermont's great institutions. This conserved farm on the shore of Lake

Champlain features, among other things, the northern hemisphere's largest wooden building, originally built to breed horses to pull cabs, but this night put to use for a dance and for talks from local business owners, local farmers, local clergy. In the morning, a bagpiper waked camp. By now, there were six hundred of us wrapping blisters and munching bagels, ready to take our cause from the small country towns into the heart of what passes for urban Vermont. As we marched by the car dealerships and strip malls, the line kept growing. Soon, more than a thousand people were marching, with television crews and wire service photographers hustling to get their pictures. Vermont is a small state—this march was its largest political demonstration in many years—and as we wound through the streets of downtown Burlington in a line too long to see from any one corner, we could feel our power.

This power was confirmed when we finally reached the rally site. There, along with many supporters, were all the major state candidates for federal office, and they were not just the obvious suspects like Bernie Sanders, Vermont's progressive representative who was now seeking a Senate seat. Also there were the state's Republicans: Sanders's opponent Rich Tarrant, for instance, who for weeks had been running vile ads about immigration, and Martha Rainville, the former commander of Vermont's National Guard, who only weeks before had declared at her first campaign press conference that she wasn't sure global warming was even caused by humans, that maybe it was just a natural cycle and perhaps we should do some more research (she seemed to have changed her mind now).

One thing we had decided from the start was that we didn't want vague declarations of concern, nicely worded promises of shared worry and possible action, from our politicians. Rather, we wanted them to sign on to the legislation that our retiring U.S. senator, Jim Jeffords, had offered earlier that summer. The companion to California Rep. Henry Waxman's House bill, Jeffords's legislation called for 40-mile-per-gallon cars, 20 percent renewable energy by 2020, and 80 percent carbon reductions by 2050. These steps are not enough to solve global warming, but this bill was the most ambitious one introduced in Washington so far. Not even the House Democratic leadership was embracing it, but we were. We had the key points written on a huge sheet of paper, and we had the youngest marcher who'd gone