

Petrice Jones (00:03):

What's up, and welcome to another episode of 52 Hertz, the Lonely Whale podcast. I'm your host Petrice Jones.

Petrice Jones (00:09):

Today on our show, we are talking to Zanagee Artis from Zero Hour, which he co-founded when he was just 16 years old. The climate justice organization has since expanded 24 sister chapters across the United States and many more internationally. And is youth led because—

Zanagee Artis (00:24):

As long as we've been able to remember, this has been the norm. There have been oil spills. There have been hurricanes, 100 year floods, and we need to convey that message to older generations of people that this is not normal.

Petrice Jones (00:42):

He's been recognized in national publications, including the New York Times and most recently, Teen Vogue, as one of the magazines, nine climate activists of color that you should know. We'll talk about the ability of young leaders to galvanize change, how Zero Hour goes against the current by centering voices of diverse youth, and the power of the vote.

Zanagee Artis (00:57):

We want climate change to be a top priority for voters going into the polls on November 3rd. And that's because we see climate change as this intersectional issue. You can talk about healthcare. You can talk about foreign policy and war. You can talk about anything, and you can relate that back to the environment and impacts for climate change in the future.

Petrice Jones (01:24):

Welcome to 52 Hertz, the Lonely Whale podcast.

Petrice Jones (01:26):

But first some good news from around the reef. When it comes to fashion brands, Gen Z is pulling all the strings. A survey conducted by First Insight this past December tells us that 62% of Gen Z consumers prefer sustainable brands and 73% will pay more for sustainable product.

Petrice Jones (01:47):

Retailers are beginning to take notice with a list of clothing and designer brands embracing sustainability getting longer and longer. But surface level promises won't fool Gen Z who believe programs and policies need to back up any sustainability commitment.

Petrice Jones (01:59):

What's more, according to a Porter Novelli study, 75% of Gen Z's will

do the research to see if a company is being honest when it takes a stand on issues. This is a much needed practice when according to the United Nations Environmental Program, the fashion industry is responsible for eight to 10% of global carbon emissions. That's more than international flights and maritime shipping combined. And according to Oxfam, making one pair of jeans and a tee shirt uses 13 years worth of drinking water.

Petrice Jones (02:24):

But the good news is Gen Z is leading the way towards a future where slow and sustainable fashion is part of the new norm.

Petrice Jones (02:34):

So, Zanagee, thank you so much for being here. We're super excited to be talking to you today.

Zanagee Artis (02:39):

Happy to be here.

Petrice Jones (02:40):

I'd love to just hear a little bit about you and how old you are now and a little bit about Zero Hour.

Zanagee Artis (02:45):

Sure. So I'm 20 years old now. I'm a rising junior at Brown University studying political science and environmental studies. I founded Zero Hour with a few other activists a few years ago, and we set out with a mission to carve out a space within the environmental movement specifically for young people of color who had no avenue to get involved with environmental activism.

Zanagee Artis (03:11):

In 2018, we had the Youth Climate March in July of 2018 in Washington, D.C. That inspired tons of other marches around the US and around the world. What we've done is create a space where youth on the front lines of climate change really have a voice for themselves to be heard. That's something that is often neglected in the mainstream movement. And so that's why I've really loved continuing to work with Zero Hour.

Petrice Jones (03:40):

Zero Hour in itself, it's a pretty loaded phrase. Why do you feel as though Zero Hour is an appropriate name?

Zanagee Artis (03:47):

We decided on Zero Hour because we wanted to convey how urgent this issue is for young people especially. Climate change is our futures, and it is what we're fighting against, but it's also right now. Climate change is impacting people around the world right now. And just because the majority of people, perhaps in the US, or in Europe,

or places of privilege, and places who are also contributing the most to climate change, are not on the front lines, that doesn't mean that marginalized communities are not being impacted right now.

Zanagee Artis (04:22):

So we have decided on Zero Hour as way to emphasize that we are out of time to act on climate change. We need to act right now. And I'll also mention there is a countdown on our website at thisiszerohour.org. And that countdown is based on the IPCC climate report saying that we have 11 years left to act on climate change before we reach these tipping points within the environment where there is no point of return.

Petrice Jones (04:56):

Why do you think it's so important for youth to organize and lead this climate movement?

Zanagee Artis (05:00):

One major reason why is, and Wawa actually talked about this, in one of your recent episodes is that young people have a much more intersectional understanding of the environment than the traditional Big Greens and environmentalists who have been in the movement for a really long time. I also think for us as young people, many of us don't want to be those career environmentalists. We don't want to grow up and say, "Yeah, I want to do environmental law." Well, I actually do want to do environmental law. So that's a lot, but one of our other co-founders, Jamie Margolin, she wants to study film, and she's starting college right now to do that, and the same case for so many other people. They want to be artists. They want to work in different areas.

Petrice Jones (05:49):

Right. It's out of necessity almost rather than a desire. How are you guys at Zero Hour helping these young people harness the power to actually go out and create change?

Zanagee Artis (06:00):

We have found that storytelling is a really impactful way to make change and inspire others to join the movement. There's so many different examples of environmental issues, but hearing that from the perspective of young people who have really, as long as we've been able to remember, this has been the norm. There have been oil spills. There have been hurricanes, 100 year floods, and we need to convey that message to older generations of people that this is not normal. And they know that, because they've lived it before, but hearing that perspective from young people and seeing how much the world has changed because of the actions of generations who've come before us, we think is very important to highlight.

Petrice Jones (06:51):

How do you incorporate these older generations? What do they need to

care about and put their thoughts and energy and support, because ultimately they're often the decision makers. What do you see older generations role being in this youth led movement?

Zanagee Artis (07:07):

Well, older generations definitely holds a major role in our movement and we are youth led and that's very important to us, but we also recognize that there are so many people who've come before us, especially people of color and indigenous activists who have been fighting for these issues for so long. And the march we had in 2018 wouldn't have been possible without them.

Petrice Jones (07:28):

Right.

Zanagee Artis (07:29):

We hadn't, of course, organized a march before. We just came up with this idea to do this big action in D.C. And we thought, "Yeah, let's do a march. This sounds like a good idea." But we didn't know anything about permitting. We didn't know about all the logistics behind what is needed. And that continues to reveal itself in all of our other campaigns as well.

Zanagee Artis (07:55):

Right now, we're working on a campaign called hashtag vote for our future. And that's also aimed at older generations of people. We need young people to vote, of course, because our generation is just not voting.

Petrice Jones (08:10):

Right.

Zanagee Artis (08:11):

But we also need older generations to vote for our futures as well. They are the majority of voters in this country, and we need them too.

Petrice Jones (08:24):

You're a full time student and you're a volunteer activist. How does your day shape up on a daily basis trying to do all these things whilst live your personal life?

Zanagee Artis (08:33):

That's really interesting, and it's a challenge for student activists everywhere, I think. I like to compare it to being a student athlete. You have all your classes during the day, and then you're going out and being an athlete the rest of the time that you have. And that's what I've been doing for the past few years, is I have all these other things that I care about, but I know that if I'm not fighting for this, then who will?

Petrice Jones (09:01):

Right. How do you guys address these systems of oppression that we see that affect the environmental movement?

Zanagee Artis (09:08):

When we actually started out, we were very thoughtful about how to craft our platform and how we would set ourselves apart from existing environmental orgs. We knew that we had to create something different to prevent perpetuating the harm that has been done for so many years around the world. So we named four different systems of oppression as the root causes of climate change. And those are colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, and racism. We see those things right now all the time, but especially so because of the movement for black lives and the work that they're doing, and that's where you really begin to see the systems repression people are facing around the world, all relate to the environments that we live in and climate change, and who that's impacting the most.

Petrice Jones (10:06):

I want to unpack that individually. We could start with racism. What is you guys' take on dealing with this in the environmental space?

Zanagee Artis (10:14):

Environmental racism is definitely, it's a beast. It's this big system.

Petrice Jones (10:23):

No doubt.

Zanagee Artis (10:24):

It's everywhere. Yeah. It shows itself differently everywhere you go. We also believe that it is very intersected with capitalism and classism, but we know that low income black and brown communities in the US at least are being impacted the most by polluting plants, by new natural gas facilities, by pipeline construction. And that is because these companies are preying on the fact that many of these communities don't have the capacity to organize against these problems. They're using the lack of privileges and the lack of resources that these communities have to further exploit them for profit.

Petrice Jones (11:11):

How does that translate to gender, and then the patriarchy, and the sort of this male led world of what we call Mother Earth.

Zanagee Artis (11:20):

First, I actually want to talk about the idea of Mother Earth. It's really interesting that we offer this feminization of nature. That is really interesting to think about when so many polluting industries are exploiting the land, and that is synonymous with an exploitation

of women. One example is during pipeline construction these man camps that come along that are these giant groups of construction workers who are coming into this area that they do not belong, that is not their home, and incidences of sexual violence increase, we know, around places of fossil fuel infrastructure during the construction process. That's just one example. But tying it to colonialism, we know that men have decided all of the wars for natural resources. they've decided where to colonize. And that has really just connected that back to capitalism. And you can now see that all of these systems are connected, that men are the ones who are deciding how our market functions, who gets exploited, and who doesn't, and essentially deciding who gets to live a life with access to clean air and clean water, and who is exposed to the elements and is exposed to the harms of climate change, that they themselves are causing.

Petrice Jones (12:54):

I want to take it forward and go back to what you were talking about earlier about voting, because this is a big part of it, oppression has historically started with just being disenfranchised, has been a huge part of it, and not allowing people to vote. So that's kind of a good segue into you guys' campaign for vote for our future or hashtag vote for our future. So firstly, just tell us a little bit about what this campaign is and how you intend to sort of increase voter turnout?

Zanagee Artis (13:22):

Hashtag vote for our future is a joint campaign between Zero Hour and the National Children's Campaign. It is targeted at young people and getting people who are first time voters and historically disenfranchised voters to vote this upcoming election, because they're going to be the most impacted if they do not turn out to vote in November. It's also aimed at other people who have had privileges who need to use those privileges to support black people, indigenous people, brown people in this election.

Petrice Jones (14:02):

So tell me a little bit about vote for our future campaign and what you guys are doing to essentially increase voter turnout? Where's the focus?

Zanagee Artis (14:10):

So hashtag vote for our future is trying to register those voters focusing on a few key places in the US to turn out the vote. Philadelphia and Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania, and then in Michigan, we're focusing on Detroit. If we just increase the votes in these places by a few thousand with our two organizations alone, that will have major impact for the results in November.

Petrice Jones (14:38):

Are you being strategic about how you target in order to actually achieve a result?

Zanagee Artis (14:43):

We chose these cities, one, because we know that there is a history of environmental injustice in these places. And because they have some of the highest populations of people of color in their respective states. Also strategically choosing because in 2016, we saw that the turnout among these groups was much lower than it had been in the past. And we have seen, of course, the results of that.

Petrice Jones (15:13):

Do you feel as though we'd just have a very different world, and a very different America, if everybody voted?

Zanagee Artis (15:19):

Definitely. And if you look at the numbers, the non-voter category is actually even more than the sum of both the amount of votes that Hillary Clinton got and that Donald Trump got in 2016, right? So the possibilities are endless really. We don't know what, what the world would look like. And I say the world, because of course the United States has such a big influence on the world stage, and our actions even just related to climate change, you look at the Paris Climate Accords, and you look at all of these things that the US has led in the past, and how much that has changed since 2016. The world could look very different if everyone in the US did vote.

Petrice Jones (16:01):

Is your goal to make climate issues and climate justice the central part of why people would essentially vote Democratic?

Zanagee Artis (16:13):

Yes, definitely. So vote for our future, we want climate change to be a top priority for voters going into the polls on November 3rd. And that's because we see climate change as this intersectional issue. You can talk about healthcare, you can talk about foreign policy and war, you can talk about anything, and you can relate that back to the environment and impacts for climate change in the future. Part of that campaign, we are doing an educational presentation called Getting Through to the Green New Deal. That's something activists in the US are really rallying around as this vision for the future. We're hoping that voters in November see that the Green New Deal is such an intersectional issue and an issue that they can support. That's how we are going to succeed in November.

Petrice Jones (17:07):

But what is the Green New Deal?

Zanagee Artis (17:10):

We get this question all the time so I'm glad you're asking that. The Green New Deal is a lot of things. What it is not is a piece of legislation. And oftentimes people get confused by that. Why are all

these young people fighting for a Green New Deal when it's not actually a concrete policy proposal?

Petrice Jones (17:29):
Right.

Zanagee Artis (17:29):
And what it is right now is a resolution, that was passed by Ed Markey in the US Senate and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in the House of Representatives. And what it is is a vision for the future. It talks about guaranteeing Medicare for all, bringing carbon emissions down to net zero. It offers timelines for all these different issues. It provides a vision, but not the solution to how to get there. That's what we need our elected officials to do. That's why we are pushing people to vote for people who do support this idea of a Green New Deal, because they're the ones who are going to figure out how to do it, right? Youth activists aren't creating all these policy proposals and creating the solutions. But we are pushing elected officials to do that themselves, and the ideals of a Green New Deal and what it represents, are something that we all feel like we can support.

Petrice Jones (18:30):
Right, right, right. Tell us about, it's not just, "Okay, we're going to stop fossil fuels." It's not just cutting one thing off and then starting a new thing. If I'm understanding it correctly?

Zanagee Artis (18:40):
Right. Definitely. Just going back to the goal of getting to net zero carbon emissions, what does that entail? It includes closing down coal plants, natural gas facilities, pipelines, all of these fossil fuel suppliers that are creating the pollution that we see right now. But what a Green New Deal says is, "Let's not just shut these down and not have anything to continue off of." We want to have what's called a just transition and a just transition means offering safe Union jobs to people who are working in the coal industry right now, who might not have anywhere else to go, whose families may have been in the coal industry for generations. We need alternatives for people who are just employed by the fossil fuel industry and other environmentally harmful industries, because they're not the ones who have caused this problem. It's the people at the top, the CEOs, the boardrooms, making these decisions, knowingly by the way, that they are contributing to climate change, that are at fault here.

Zanagee Artis (19:53):
And so a just transition really means including everyone in that process. And it will create jobs. It will create millions of jobs for people employed right now who are transitioning out of the fossil fuel industry, and new jobs for people who can work on construction for these projects, who can manage it afterwards. There's so much potential for a green economy with a Green New Deal.

Petrice Jones (20:19):

So it started out as you, Jamie Margolin, Nadia Nazar and Madelaine Tew? Is that right?

Zanagee Artis (20:26):

Yeah, that's correct.

Petrice Jones (20:27):

How different would your life be if you hadn't met Jamie, Nadia and Madelaine?

Zanagee Artis (20:32):

My life changed the day that I met Jamie and Madelaine. And I honestly have no idea what my life would be like if I weren't an activist today. Meeting them and hearing that there are other young people who are so passionate about climate change changed the trajectory of my life. And I wouldn't be at Brown today. I wouldn't be on this call with you today, if not for meeting them.

Petrice Jones (21:01):

There seems to be so many, so many entities coming out now, organizations fighting for the same issue. How do you feel about that?

Zanagee Artis (21:11):

I think that that's really interesting to think about. We have had people in Zero Hour actually leave our organization to start their own projects. I, for a long time thought, "Why is everyone starting their own thing? Everyone should be in Zero Hour, because we can do this as one organization that is centered around youth." And I think that the reality is that doesn't need to be the case. And people will pursue what they are most passionate about in the manner in which they're most interested in. And that only serves to benefit the movement.

Petrice Jones (21:48):

Right. Yeah. And I guess you're also hearing more voices because everybody's going to have a different perspective, and frankly, even within your organization there's going to be people who have different perspectives and they're all valid.

Zanagee Artis (22:01):

Absolutely. Yes. And I think we see that as well with the sort of adult environmental movement where you have Greenpeace, you have Lonely Whale, you have all these organizations we call the Big Greens, Sierra Club, 350. They're all working on the environment as well, but they do have different goals and different ways of campaigning and reaching their audiences. The more organizations we have, the more people we can reach. That for me is really great to see that there are people who are passionate about this issue and are tackling it in different ways.

Petrice Jones (22:36):

What do you think needs to change from this point about the environmental movement? What's going to get us through to the next goal?

Zanagee Artis (22:44):

It's including youth voices, and especially those youth who are black and indigenous on the front lines of the climate crisis and environmental injustice. We need to include them in decision making processes. They should be consulted around policies and how we implement the Green New Deal. And we need to make an active effort to reach out to these people. The environmental movement as it is now has historically been vast majority white, but there are environmentalists who are people of color, who've been working on this for a long time, who are not included in the environmental movement and weren't considered to be environmental organizers.

Zanagee Artis (23:27):

So, we first need to redefine what we actually see is environmental organizing, and then we reach out to the people who are being impacted by these issues every day, to hear from their own perspective how they're being impacted and how they would like to see a solution be implemented.

Petrice Jones (23:44):

Zanagee, it's been such a pleasure.

Zanagee Artis (23:48):

Thanks so much for having me. I really enjoyed talking with you today.

Petrice Jones (23:52):

Hey, listeners, just before you go, here's a quick ocean saving tip for you from our guest.

Zanagee Artis (23:57):

For us at Zero Hour, we focus on a systems approach. So a great thing that you could do is write to your decision makers, your policy makers, on protecting our oceans. One example in the US is the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is being opened for oil leasing on the coastal plain. That's the northernmost part of Alaska. We can write to those people. They need to hear from their constituents. They need to know that oil producers and companies are not the only people who care about our oceans. They need to know that there are people who are making their livelihoods off of the ocean. If we do that, if we tell our stories, policy makers will listen, and we can get corporate influence out of politics everywhere in the world.

Petrice Jones (24:49):

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support like you. So go to lonelywhale.org and support season two. Your donation helps amplify the voices of ocean advocates all around the world. Thank you.

Petrice Jones (25:01):

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