

Introducing the Georgia Climate Digest Video Series: Get to Know Host Eriqah Vincent

Summary

With the new Georgia Climate Digest video series, Drawdown Georgia set out to shine a light on the many Georgians working to bring climate solutions home. In this launch interview, Lisa Lilienthal of the Drawdown Georgia team sits down with the series' new host, climate and environmental justice advocate Eriqah Vincent, to talk about her path into climate work, what surprises her most about Georgia's progress, and what she's most looking forward to as the series kicks off.

Key Takeaways

- Eriqah's path into climate work began not with a plan, but with a required Comparative Women's Studies course at Spelman College, and a 2009 trip to the Power Shift Convergence in Washington, D.C., a gathering of roughly 10,000 young climate activists that she calls the event that changed her life.
- Eriqah pushes back on the idea that the South is behind on climate progress, pointing to the creative, resourceful ways Georgians have found to drive positive change even in a more conservative political landscape.
- What gives Eriqah hope is the growing number of multi-generational spaces in the climate movement, where younger organizers and longtime movement elders are learning from and mentoring each other with mutual respect.
- As the series launches, Eriqah is especially looking forward to traveling beyond metro Atlanta to talk with climate leaders in Savannah, Albany, Columbus, and other parts of the state, and to featuring voices across the full spectrum of the movement, from policy advocates to community gardeners.

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Lisa Lilienthal: Hi, everyone. Today, we're kicking off our new Georgia Climate Digest video series with a quick interview to get to know our new host of the series, Eriqah Vincent. Eriqah, can you tell us a little about yourself, please?

Eriqah Vincent: Yeah, sure. Hi, everyone, I'm super excited to be here. My name is Eriqah Vincent, I use she/her pronouns. I live in Stonecrest, Georgia — been living in Georgia for about, oh wow, I guess it's been 18 years, close to 18 years, '06 to 2024, yeah, 18 years. I'm really excited to be with you. I'm originally from Newark, New Jersey — I came to Georgia for college, went to Spelman College, and graduated with a bachelor's in Comparative Women's Studies,

with a focus on activism, and have been doing activism and advocacy for all of my career, which spans about 15 years.

It started while I was in college. I'm currently a climate and environmental justice advocate — I do a lot of consultant work right now, and live, like I said, out in Stonecrest, which is east of the city, with my husband, my almost three-year-old, and our dog, Knox. So I'm really excited to be here, really excited for this opportunity, and excited to get this series kicked off. It's gonna be great.

Lisa Lilienthal: We're so happy to have you, and I love that you knew what you wanted to do right from the get-go and got engaged in college — that seems like it must've been an exciting time for you. Tell us a little how it came to be — it sounds like it was your field of study, but were there any sort of event that kicked off your interest, or how did you get engaged in Georgia?

Eriqah Vincent: Yeah, so I'm glad I sound more confident now, because that was not the case when I first started. I did not know what I wanted to do — I was just telling someone this yesterday. I came to college actually, and my major was sociology, with a — my idea was a pre-law track. I thought I wanted to be a lawyer for years, actually, a large part of my life I thought I wanted to be a judge. I think maybe that sounded really cool to me when I was younger, and was also just, people thought I talked a lot and was a good debater, and we always tell kids, oh, you're a good debater, you should be a lawyer. So I was like, okay.

But once I got to college, and started going to law school fairs my sophomore year, when people really start thinking about law school already, I was like, oh, I don't wanna do this at all. So I actually spent about a whole semester really having no idea what I wanted to do. And, at Spelman, it's a requirement to take either a Comparative Women's Studies course or an international relations course. So I opted for Comparative Women's Studies, and fell in love with it, and stopped feeling like I was doing work and really felt like I was learning. Had a fantastic time — shout out to the Women's Research and Resource Center at Spelman College. Really is a magical place, with Dr. M. Bahati Kuumba and Dr. Beverly Guy-Sheftall — Dr. Guy-Sheftall is Founding Director of the center, and is also a Spelman woman herself.

So I started, not till really junior year — and what started me, to your question, was I went to an amazing event called the Power Shift Convergence in 2009. So I was a junior at Spelman, my spring semester, still kind of figuring it out, and that was the event that changed everything for me. I was talking to someone about this yesterday, and saying that event really changed my life. It was, at the time, slated as the largest convergence of youth climate activists in the world — it was 10,000 people, in D.C., in '09, in the cold, in the snow. We actually had to stay for an extra day — some of us had to stay an extra day, because our bus driver didn't want to drive back to Atlanta in the snow. So it was an adventure, but also, I had never seen anything like that before, I had never been a part of anything like that before, and I didn't realize there were so many young folk, so many people in general, but also so many people my age, young folks, who were really passionate about climate and environmental work. I learned so much at that event, and actually went to that event multiple other times, and brought other young people along — my last one being last year, when I was on staff at Power Shift.

Lisa Lilienthal: Oh wow, full circle.

Eriqah Vincent: Yeah, full circle. What I really loved about that event last year is, I heard young folks — and I guess I'm still a young folk, but not really, not a youth — but I heard people who

were my age when I went to the 2009 convergence, saying the same thing I said then: "I've never felt more seen, I've never felt more inspired, I'm so glad to be here, this is an amazing event." And that's the same way —

Lisa Lilienthal: There's real power in that. The power of community.

Eriqah Vincent: Yeah, absolutely. And so I felt really good about creating that type of community for them, that was created for me all those years ago.

Lisa Lilienthal: That's fantastic. Well, so in that time, the past 15 years, you've probably seen a lot happening, particularly in Georgia. We know we have a lot of work to do, but I'm a native Georgian, and I can't help but find myself constantly surprised by the progress we're making. In terms of climate and equity specifically, what has surprised you most about the progress Georgia is making on those fronts?

Eriqah Vincent: You know, I think the South gets — you know, I'm a Northerner to the bottom of my heart, and I'm reminded that I'm a Northerner often, my husband reminds me every chance he gets, he's from Columbus, Georgia, so he reminds me every chance he gets about how much of a Northerner I am. But I think, being a Northerner, being from the East Coast, I think the South gets a bad rap of not being progressive on some of these issues. And certainly, like you said, we have a lot of work to do, but really, I love New Jersey very much, and there are things we're very progressive on, and things we have a lot of work to do on — we could all point fingers all day. But I think what I am surprised by, or what I've become more surprised by, is how progressive things are.

And certainly I know, living in Atlanta, anyone from Georgia will tell you, Atlanta and Georgia are not always the same place. But I do think there's progress being made that I think is really something to be proud of. I think there are a lot of folks with a lot of really good ideas who have found creative ways, in a more conservative place like Georgia, like the South, to get around some of that, and found these niches where they can really effect positive and progressive change. And so I'm constantly surprised about the ways folks have had to be creative, and therefore have come up with these really creative ways to be more progressive, positive, more moves in the right direction, I should say, when it comes to climate and environmental work. It's really inspiring, and I'm really inspired by it.

Lisa Lilienthal: I am too, and I'm inspired by exactly what you said, which is the people who are really stepping up. I'm also inspired when we hear about communities finding common ground in the things we all care about, and I think that's really hopeful. I mean, for sure, the climate world can be a lot of doom and gloom — I think for a lot of years, we spent a lot of time focusing on the negative impacts, and not to minimize them at all, but I think what Drawdown Georgia in particular is energized by is the potential for solutions. So that gives me hope, I think it gives many people in our community hope. What gives you hope?

Eriqah Vincent: I think what gives me hope, honestly, is that there are a lot of spaces becoming more and more committed to multi-generational conversations around climate work. Young folks are very interested in making sure that the world they have, and the world they're leaving to the next generations, that are yet to be born, will inherit something good. And at the same time, there are folks, like you said, who've been doing this for a long time, who've had to do really creative things to find their niches in making progress. So there are a lot of multi-generational spaces being created — there's a real focus, from a philanthropy standpoint, on more

generational, multi-generational spaces. I think when I first started, there was a very strong focus on youth, and while having a strong focus on youth is still very valuable and needed, and I don't think we need to move completely away from that, I think there's value in youth spaces really seeing these innovative ways the next generations are making their own solutions.

I'm also excited about the multi-generational spaces being focused on, where we're inviting youth leaders who've been doing this work, or are starting to really get their feet wet in it, and inviting our veterans, our pioneers, our icons in the work — and certainly we have many of those in Georgia who have done it for a while — and welcoming them into spaces that are multi-generational, that are respectful across age lines, and respectful of the innovative new ways things are being done, while also honoring and being respectful of the ways they've been done, and the progress that's been made. And so that's what really gives me hope, is seeing those types of spaces. My movement elders, whom I love very much, every opportunity I have to be in community with them, to sit with them and hear their stories, hear what they've done, I take that opportunity. And at the same time, I get really excited about learning from and mentoring folks who are younger than me. I'm a millennial, so Gen Z is coming in very strong with their advocacy, and it's really a beautiful thing to see. And I also have big sisters and big siblings and big brothers in the Gen X space, and movement elders, and, you know, parental figures I'd say, in the Boomer and other older generations. So I really like being in this sandwich space right now, because I'm inspired on all sides, and that really gives me hope, because I think we're going to continue to learn from each other, again, in a really respectful way. I think that's the key there — the respect of the newness, and the respect of the history.

Lisa Lilienthal: And the experience. Yeah, that's one thing I really love about Drawdown Georgia, is that we always say we aspire to be a leaderful movement — that there's no one person or organization out in front, because it's going to take all of us. And so we need to bring every community to the table. I think that's what's really exciting about the equity work happening, that I know you've been involved in with Drawdown, and that's what's exciting about what you're saying about multi-generational work — we need all of it, the more please of all of it, yes.

Eriqah Vincent: Absolutely, absolutely, absolutely.

Lisa Lilienthal: So, well, speaking of the work Drawdown's doing, and lifting up people in the community — that's what this whole interview series we're kicking off is all about, lifting up those voices, and giving us all the chance to learn about the many ways solutions are taking shape in our state. So what are you looking forward to? You're going to be in conversation with some really, really cool people, I'm so excited about it. What are you looking forward to the most as we kick off this new series?

Eriqah Vincent: Yeah, y'all, this new series is gonna be great — there's already a great list of folks, and we're continuing to build that list. I'm really excited to talk to folks I know and love, and I'm really excited to talk to folks I've never met before, but may have heard their names before, or heard of the work they're doing. I'm really excited to talk to folks who are — as much as I love Atlanta, I joke all the time that I'm a Northerner, and Atlanta is about as north as the South gets, so that's good for me —

Lisa Lilienthal: Yes, yep.

Eriqah Vincent: — and most Southerners, when I say that, they go, "yeah, I get that." But I would love to get outside of metro, outside of this five-county metro, and talk to more folks in

Savannah, and Albany, and Columbus, and in the southern parts of the state doing some of this work. I think that's what I'm really excited about — to talk to folks in the city proper, and in the five-county metro area, but also to talk to the folks on the coast, and to talk to the folks in the mountains.

Lisa Lilienthal: Oh, we're so excited for you to do that too — that really is just so important, that we recognize there's progress happening all over the state, this isn't just something happening right around City Hall.

Eriqah Vincent: Yes, exactly, exactly. Or, you know, and also I'm excited to talk to folks that — you talked about City Hall, or downtown Atlanta, the capital — I'm also really excited to talk to folks who — I really see the value in the politics of all of it, and the value in trying to drive political change. I also see the value in figuring out what's going on in my city, and I see the value in — I think sometimes folks scoff at the community garden conversation, or the getting-kids-outside conversation, in other parts of the movement. But that's really important too — those kids that we're introducing to nature walks, and to critters and animals in their area, those kids grow up to be folks who are passionate about the environment. Those kids grow up to be folks passionate about conservation, and those folks grow up to be a bit passionate about environmental protection.

And so, I think all of it — like you said, leaderful — all of it is important. Sometimes folks in the movement space call it the inside-outside game — how are we being inside the political space, and making sure we're driving political and policy change, while also making sure our community has green space, and beautification, and things like that. All of it is important, all of it is necessary. So I'm interested to talk to folks who are on all sides of the movement, about how we're collectively making sure we're protecting things as much as we can in Georgia, and driving change here in the state.

Lisa Lilienthal: Great, great. Well, thank you so much, Eriqah, it's great to get to know you a little bit. We really look forward to kicking off this series, and to introducing our audience to your voice, and to all the other voices of folks we're going to get the chance to talk to over the next few months. Awesome, I appreciate your time today.

Eriqah Vincent: It's gonna be fantastic, thank you so much.

Lisa Lilienthal: Thank you.