



Trees have a complex history in America. There are the stories of Johnny Appleseed, who planted apple trees across early settlements but the kind used for cider, not for eating. There is the legend of George Washington and his cherry tree - "I cannot tell a lie." And then there are the trees used by racist mobs to hang Black people, an act of terror spawning in the Reconstruction South that made its way across our beloved land to even sunny California this past week and inspiring Abel Meeropol to write the poem "Bitter Fruit," popularized in 1939 by Billie Holiday as the song "Strange Fruit."

This is to say that the tree and its importance in American history is deep-rooted, so we are not out of line when we state that to Trees Matter, Black Lives Matter.

At our reorganization in 2016 we accounted for the potential awkwardness of "Trees Matter" existing in the same world as "Black Lives Matter," and one of our Board members spoke with leaders of the local Black Lives Matter movement at the time for their input. There was an overwhelming consensus that the differences between people and trees were self-evident and not offensive. It's on our website.

Our vision is a Valley where for now and the future, all generations have lifelong access to the benefits of trees including shade, food, beauty, and pollution and dust reduction. There are groups of people, many of whom are minorities, who are not receiving the benefits of trees. We're clear that in order for us to remain true to this mission, we must continue educating and advocating that trees are infrastructure, trees are health, trees build community, and they are not for the destruction of Black people. Being in the bull's eye of climate change, action is needed now more than ever. Here's how we're working every day to bring the benefits of trees to the whole of the Valley:

- We'll include partners in our upcoming projects that directly work with Black people and non-Black people of color. We're already doing this with our Trees For Schools program. We're working to include nonprofits that directly work with minority communities and making sure they are funded to continue their good work.
- Internally we have an equity priority but we will work to better integrate equity in our external messaging, because we know trees are an important benefit in every community.
- We encourage our staff to feel confident and secure in matters of the heart, and that they know that there will be no retribution for posting about Black Lives Matter on social media and encouraging anti-racism education.
- Making Juneteenth an organization holiday focused on education and acknowledgement of its celebration as patriotism.