



## Life in Brief

**Hometown:** Chicago, IL

**Current Residence:** Washington, DC Metro Area

### Education:

- BA, Yale University, 2011
- MPhil, University of Oxford (Rhodes Scholar), 2015

### Family:

- Raised by her mother, grandmother, and extended family

### Work History:

- Policy Lead, New Consensus, 2018-Present
- Policy Director for Abdul El-Sayed Gubernatorial Campaign, 2018
- Design Research Fellow, ECMC, 2015-Unknown
- Policy Intern, First Lady's Office, 2013
- Mariam K. Chamberlain Fellow, Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2011-13

## Quick Summary

**Rising progressive star and policy expert focused on addressing climate change. Developed sweeping "Green New Deal" policies plan in coordination with progressive Democrats**

- Policy researcher who studied effects of social and environmental policy on women and minorities while at Yale and Oxford
- Since 2018 has worked to promote social justice policies with progressive politicians
- Developed Green New Deal policies on behalf of Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez following 2018 election
- Green New Deal plan—introduced in early 2019—proposes extensive agenda to eliminate fossil fuel use by reducing emissions and investing in clean energy infrastructure
- Although in 2019 the Green New Deal resolution has not advanced in the House and failed in the Senate, it has set the agenda for Democratic climate policy
- Uses new media venues like podcasts, YouTube, and Twitter to expand awareness of climate change policies, especially among young people

## Approach and Motivations

**Intensely focused on the effects of government policy and environmental conditions on vulnerable communities**

- Experienced asthma due to pollution growing up in South Chicago—awakened her to the effects of environmental conditions on vulnerable communities
- Research and policy work have focused on improving conditions for women and minority groups
- Environmental policies aim to address disproportionate effects of climate change on these communities

## **Policy Positions and Areas of Focus**

**Focused on climate policies as vehicle to improve conditions for vulnerable communities**

### **The Green New Deal – *Developed revolutionary policies to address climate change***

- Recruited by Rep. Ocasio-Cortez Campaign Manager Saikat Chakrabarti to develop policy framework to transition country off fossil fuels
- Plan developed by Gunn-Wright includes shifting to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions, creating millions of high-wage jobs, investing in infrastructure, securing clean air, water, and resources, and promoting justice and equity in vulnerable communities
- Aims to transform the economy over ten years through investments in clean energy and infrastructure
- The plan has set the agenda for Democratic environmental policy by creating a litmus test for addressing climate change
- So far, it has not advanced in the House or Senate, though the House established a Select Committee on the Climate Crisis

### **Social Justice – *Prioritizes social justice across all policy sectors***

- Informed by upbringing in Chicago and experience with vulnerable communities
- Early research and policy work focused on ways to improve social justice
- Green New Deal policies would seek to improve economic and social conditions for vulnerable communities
- The Green New Deal resolution includes calls for universal health care, increased minimum wages, and anti-trust action
- Supports politicians and organizations that prioritize social justice, like the Justice Democrats and Rep. Ocasio-Cortez

## **Core Communities**

**Connected with progressive politicians and activists who advance climate policies**

### **Progressive Politicians and Staff – *Developed Green New Deal with progressive politicians***

- Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY-14), introduced Green New Deal bill
- Saikat Chakrabarti, Ocasio-Cortez Campaign Manager and former Chief of Staff, recruited Gunn-Wright to develop Green New Deal after meeting through her work on Abdul El-Sayed's campaign
- Ariel Eckblad, current Ocasio-Cortez Chief of Staff, key to environmental agenda
- Dan Riffe, current Ocasio-Cortez Legislative Aide, key to environmental agenda
- Senator Ed Markey (D-MA), introduced Green New Deal bill
- Morgan Gray, Markey Chief of Staff/Legislative Director, key to environmental agenda
- Lindsey Griffith, Markey Environment Legislative Assistant
- Abdul El-Sayed, former candidate for Michigan Governor, Gunn-Wright served as policy director

### **Environmental Researchers and Activists – *Works on a daily basis with climate activists***

- Demond Drummer, former community organizer from Chicago, co-founder and Executive Director of New Consensus
- Zack Exley, senior advisor for Bernie Sanders, co-founder of New Consensus
- Joel Bach, founder and Executive Director of the YEARS Project
- Davide Felber, founder and chairman of the YEARS Project
- Alexandra Rojas, current Justice Democrats leader
- Nasim Thompson, current Justice Democrats leader
- Members of the Sunrise Movement, an environmental activism organization

## **Selected Publications**

**Infrequently authors formal commentary on climate policy goals**

**Commentary – Rare commentary with legacy media outlets on Green New Deal policies**

- With Justin Talbot Zorn and Ben Beachy, "[A Green New Deal is fiscally responsible. Climate inaction is not.](#)" The Guardian, February 2019, arguing that real economic responsibility relies on sustaining communities and resources

**Research Articles – In previous work with the Institute for Women's Policy Research, published research on issues for vulnerable communities**

- With Barbara Gault, "Improving Outcomes for Marginalized Girls in the Secondary Education and Workforce Development Systems," January 2013
- "The Pregnancy Assistance Fund as a Support for Student Parents in Postsecondary Education," July 2012
- With Abby Thorman and Jessica Otto, "Housing Resources and Programs for Single Student Parents at Community and Technical Colleges," April 2012

## **Financial Disclosures and Donors**

**Contributes small donations to Democratic progressive politicians she is connected to**

- \$145 to Abdul El-Sayed for Michigan (Governatorial Candidate who Gunn-Wright worked for), 2017

## **Media Appearances**

**Leverages new media to expand awareness and support for climate policies**

**TV – Appears occasionally on cable news to promote policies**

- CBS News: Interview explaining Green New Deal, May 2019
- MSNBC: Addressing concerns with the Green New Deal plan, March 2019
- MSNBC: Discussing the impact of climate change, June 2019

**Online Media – Maintains prominent persona on sites like YouTube and Twitter to discuss climate change**

- Regular appearances discussing the Green New Deal and dispelling myths with YouTube channel for "The YEARS Project," a climate activism organization
- Uses Twitter account to promote progressive politicians and issues

**Podcasts – Conducts frequent interviews on progressive podcasts focusing on climate activism**

- Interview on the Ezra Klein Show, March 2019
- Interview on "Pod Save America," explaining the Green New Deal, February 2019
- Interview with the Columbia Energy Exchange, focusing on the Green New Deal, February 2019

## **Speaking Engagements**

**Occasional speaking engagements with academic institutions and nonprofit groups focus on explaining the Green New Deal**

- Speech at Tulane University on the Green New Deal and studying the environment across academic disciplines, November 2019
- Panel discussing the Green New Deal at the Aspen Ideas Festival, June 2019
- Discussion with Ashima Sukhdev at the Ellen MacArthur Foundation on the goals and ideas of the Green New Deal, June 2019

## Criticisms and Controversies

Criticisms of Gunn-Wright focus on the policies of the Green New Deal and their feasibility

- Republicans have often criticized the Green New Deal by characterizing it as “socialism,” claiming that it would require a government takeover of the energy industry
- Some Democrats have criticized the Green New Deal for going too far and for causing division within the Democratic party

## Profiles Others Have Written

Profiles focus on Gunn-Wright’s background and her work with progressive politicians in developing the Green New Deal

Donna M. Owens, [“She, The People: Meet Rhiana Gunn-Wright, An Architect Behind the Green New Deal.”](#) Essence, April 2019

- Brief biography detailing Gunn-Wright’s background and experience

David Wallace-Wells, [“Green New Deal’s Rhiana Gunn-Wright: ‘You Just Don’t See This Sort of Change This Rapidly.’”](#) New York Magazine, September 2019

- Interview explaining the policy approach of the Green New Deal

Karen L. Smith-Janssen, [“The Architect Behind Aleandria Ocasio-Cortez’s Green New Deal Has a Plan to Save the Planet—and All of Us.”](#) Marie Claire, October 2019

- Profile linking the Green New Deal to Gunn-Wright’s upbringing and experience in activism

## Info From Formative Years

Background in Chicago and education attune her to the experience of vulnerable populations

- Raised by family on the south side of Chicago
- Experienced asthma growing up due to Chicago pollution
- Left for boarding school in Aurora, IL at age 14
- Graduated magna cum laude from Yale studying African American studies and women’s, gender, and sexuality studies—has subsequently focused on the effects government policy for vulnerable populations

## Family Background

Raised by large extended family in Chicago

- Raised by mother, grandmother, extended family and caring “village” on the south side of Chicago