



## How Can I Help?

Josue A. Cruz, J.D. , Vieques Youth Leadership Initiative, Vieques, Puerto Rico

### ☀ Call to Action

**Urge your congresspeople to vote for urgent funds to rebuild Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria.**

**Support Josue's social justice & legal practice: Facebook: @abogadojcruz; abogadojosuecruz@gmail.com**

### ☀ Values

- Justice
- Compassion
- Solidarity
- Determination
- Cooperation

### ☀ Lessons Learned

**Be empathetic of the plight of others, and offer to help.**

**When making a decision always ask yourself:** What is the legacy I want to leave behind? Then act accordingly.

**The four most powerful words you can say are "How can I help?"**

**When Josue Cruz was 14, he was invited to serve as a youth delegate to a Youth Leadership Summit being held in his home of Vieques, Puerto Rico.**

When he arrived there, his first question was, "How can I help?" Then he saw a poster that said "What is your dream for your life, for your island, and for the world?" and he realized that for the first time in his life, he was being encouraged to dream big. "My dream for my life is to become a lawyer," he said to himself. That was the beginning of a challenging journey--and an illustrious career--for Josue. After working very hard, he became a lawyer, and his first clients were the people in Vieques, whose land had been confiscated by the U.S. Navy. Josue helped them to reclaim their land: it was a long, arduous process and he spent many days pleading their cases. Today Josue lives in Texas, where he is defending the rights of border wall refugees from Central America. Now 30 years old, Josue loves seeing all the young people he has mentored at the Institute's Sustainability Summits who are pursuing their dreams. The work he started goes on! To Josue, this is life's greatest reward.

### ☀ Language Arts

**How has climate change affected Caribbean islands, particularly Puerto Rico?** Create a timeline showing how the weather in the region has changed in the past 50 years, and how those changes have affected the economy, health, and quality of life of the people in this region. Make a digital poster presenting your findings and share it with your class.

**Write a personal narrative in which you explore the concept of empathy and how you could help those less fortunate in your community.** Choose a particular issue that has resulted in people being treated unfairly, and using specific examples

to explain how you would fight the injustice.

**Vieques was home to a military base for three generations.** Working in groups of 3-5 people, create a poster on one of the following topics: 1. Sonic pollution, heavy metal pollution, economic restrictions imposed by the military base, and their consequences; 2. The importance of learning a second language in school; and 3. What is a nonviolent protest? Using your posters, create a [Gallery Walk](#)<sup>1</sup> with the rest of your class.

**Write an essay comparing the treatment of the people of Vieques by the U.S Navy** with the treatment of refugees at the southern U.S. border wall by U.S immigration officials.

## STEM Activities

**Research the rates for various diseases (cancer, cardiovascular, diabetes) in Vieques, Puerto Rico, and the Caribbean as a whole.** Create a graph highlighting the distribution between regions. Do you see any trends in the data? Are the rates for some illnesses higher in Vieques than the average rates for Puerto Rico overall, or the Caribbean? Why do you think that is?

**Research how the effects of the U.S. Navy testing still affect the people of Vieques to this day.** What can the Navy, or the U.S. government, do to mitigate these impacts? What would the cost be of implementing such a solution? Where might that fit into the annual U.S. budget?

**Research the economy of the island since the departure of the U.S Navy from Vieques in 2003.** What are the main industries present on the island today? What are the sources of income for the residents? Graph the income distribution among demographics - local vs. mainland U.S. What percentage of the population falls below the federal income poverty line? Use the [U.S Census report for Puerto Rico](#)<sup>2</sup> as a guide.

**How much land was sold to the U.S Navy?** How much did the Navy pay the locals for their land? What is the land being used for today, and how much is it worth? What percentage of the land was returned to the people of Vieques?

## Sustainability Innovations

**[Earth Justice](#)<sup>3</sup> is one of the premier nonprofit public interest environmental law organizations in the world.** Review some of their recent victories and learn how they are contributing to creating a more sustainable world.

**Earth Justice is one of the 20 environmentally-focused organizations specializing in law and policy that are highlighted in this [article](#)<sup>4</sup>.** Why is it important to understand the scope of law as it pertains to environmental and social justice?

**In addition to addressing issues of environmental law, it is important to protect organizations that specialize in solving sustainability issues.** The [Environmental Defense Center](#)<sup>5</sup> specializes in providing legal counsel to sustainability-focused organizations.

**After Hurricane Maria, Vieques became a hotspot for organizations focused on disaster preparation and community empowerment.** [Vieques Love](#)<sup>6</sup> is one of the major organizations focused on preparing communities for disasters.

## Sustainability Career Pathways

**Environmental Lawyer.** Lawyers are central in the fight for a sustainable future, whether addressing local, national, or global chal-

lenges. Perhaps this is the path for you? Here is a brief overview of [what an environmental lawyer is<sup>7</sup>](#), [how to become one<sup>8</sup>](#), and a [guide to careers in environmental law<sup>9</sup>](#).

**Disarmament Advocate.** According to the U.N. Office for Disarmament Affairs (UN ODA), disarmament is “vital for sustainable development and global survival.” The U.N., national governments, and NGOs all have jobs supporting the global reduction of arms. Do you want to help with this essential fight? [Learn more at UN ODA, and review job opportunities<sup>10</sup>](#).

**Immigration Services Officer.** Climate change will increase cross-border movement and immigration. Helping people adjust to life in a new country and navigate the difficult legal challenges involved is a noble career path. Investigate immigration services [here<sup>11</sup>](#).

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1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSt5echeRrM>

2 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/PR>

3 [https://earthjustice.org/our\\_work/victories](https://earthjustice.org/our_work/victories)

4 <https://www.humanrightscareers.com/magazine/20-international-ngos-defending-environmental-rights/>

5 <https://www.environmentaldefensecenter.org/mission/>

6 <https://viequeslove.org/>

7 <https://www.environmentalscience.org/career/environmental-lawyer>

8 <https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/cool-schools-2017/how-be-environmental-lawyer>

9 <https://hls.harvard.edu/content/uploads/2008/07/full-working-draft.pdf>

10 [https://www.unjobnet.org/organizations/UN\\_ODA](https://www.unjobnet.org/organizations/UN_ODA)

11 [https://study.com/articles/Careers\\_in\\_Immigration\\_Services\\_Education\\_Requirements\\_and\\_Job\\_Options.html](https://study.com/articles/Careers_in_Immigration_Services_Education_Requirements_and_Job_Options.html)

