

Samantha Lee (ssammanthha@gmail.com), ssammanthha, Arroyo High School (San Lorenzo, CA)



ISRA HIRSI

Isra Hirsi is a 17-year-old environmental justice activist from Minneapolis, Minnesota. In 2019, Hirsi organized hundreds of student-led climate strikes and went on to co-found the Youth Climate Strike, a student-led movement partnered with dozens of other organizations to lead strikes and climate action in the United States. This organization led an estimated 1.6 million students from 120 different countries to strike.

While Hirsi has achieved so much in such a short time, this road has not been without setbacks and struggles. This global attention has had its upsides and downsides for her, and she has been subjected to harassment and threats--even from her own classmates. Furthermore, as a young Muslim woman of color with such a large platform, Hirsi also has to confront how her identity plays into the way others view her and her achievements. Although the tokenization of people of color for “diversity” is a major issue, Hirsi has learned to understand how her “labels” both drive her work and hold her back. And perhaps most of all, Hirsi has had to try and show others that she is her own person. Her mother is Ilhan Omar, one of the first Muslim women to serve in Congress, and much of Hirsi’s life has been spent being “Ilhan’s daughter.” With her accomplishments in environmental advocacy, Hirsi is creating a name for herself, separate from the work and influence of her mother.

Hirsi has been involved in activism from an early age, but did not realize the enormity of the situation entirely until she joined her school’s environmental club and learned how climate justice intersects with racial justice. The root of her environmental activism stems not necessarily from wanting to protect the outdoors but rather from wanting to protect

marginalized communities and give them a voice. In an article she wrote, she says that, “When I joined my high school’s environmental club, I was the only black kid at most meetings, and usually the only person of color. The club consisted of a group of white students talking about their camping trips. I knew that I would never fit in. It was difficult to look like their token and attend their meetings, but I kept going because I wanted to change that.” Hirsi is a recipient of the 2019 Brower Youth Award, the Voice of the Future Award, and was on *BET*’s “Future 40” list and *Fortune*’s “40 Under 40” list. This year, she gave her first TED Talk titled “Angry Black Girl”, speaking about her identity and the importance of intersectional activism.

I was drawn to Hirsi’s story because I felt as though we have had similarities in our journey. While I value the outdoors greatly and understand how important it is to protect outdoor spaces, it has never been the driving force of my activism and my desire to learn more about environmental issues; I was surprised to learn that other people shared in this sentiment. And of course, there is also the fact that she is a young BIPOC activist inspiring so much change across the globe; at just 17 years old, she has accomplished more than many could ever dream of doing.

If I were to meet Isra, I would want to discuss our backgrounds coming into the world of environmental justice and also encourage her to continue fighting for this cause, using her platform, and ignoring those that doubt her. I would want to talk about the role of youth activists in environmental justice and how she has shown me that age does not dictate how much of a change we can make in the world. Though she likely won’t see it at any point, I will send her a Direct Message on Instagram expressing this.

SOURCES:

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A portrait of Isra Hirsi, a young Black woman with short, curly hair, wearing clear-framed glasses and a pink and white striped turtleneck sweater. She is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a neutral expression.

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greenmantha Isra Hirsi is a 17 year old youth climate activist from Minneapolis. she is the co-founder of the Youth Climate Strike and has overseen the organization of hundreds of student-led climate strikes: an estimated 1.6 million students from 120 countries globally came to strikes organized in part by her.

Hirsi inspires me because she is so open about her role as a youth BIPOC activist and the importance of intersectional activism. she is an example that age does not dictate how much change we can make in the world; if anything, it allows us to make even more change.

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