Environmental Racism
IN ILLINOIS
HOW PEOPLE OF FAITH CAN ADDRESS INEQUALITIES

WITH PASTOR SCOTT ONQUE'
SEPTEMBER 14, 2019
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What is Environmental Racism?

- **Environmental racism** is a concept in the environmental justice movement, which developed throughout the 1970s and 1980s in the United States, but goes back historically to the 1800.
- The term is used to describe environmental injustice that occurs in practice and in policy within a racialized context.
Environmental Racism places communities of color, who are more likely to be poor and without access to resources, near harmful environmental hazards, like pollution, toxic waste and other urban decay.

Access to resources and the power to make decisions are directly tied to making people of color sick and more vulnerable to natural disasters.

Examples:
- Haiti Earthquake
- Hurricane Katrina - Louisiana
- Hurricane Maria - Puerto Rico
Hazardous facilities and other harmful environmental burdens — like climate change, pollution, and waste disposal — are disproportionately placed on low-income people and people of color.
Underrepresentation!
The underrepresentation of black people on city councils, local governments, state governments in cities and states where they are the majority population has led to harmful decisions about their communities being made on their behalf.

**For example:** Where will the next factory which pollutes go?

**Study: Black People Are 75 Percent More Likely to Live Near Toxic Oil and Gas Facilities**

— Mother Jones-Natalie Baptiste
Environmentalists have long contended that communities of color are disproportionately affected by pollution from the oil and gas industry.

According to *Fumes Across the Fence-Line*, a report from the NAACP and the Clean Air Task Force—an advocacy group dedicated to reducing air pollution—black people are 75 percent more likely to live in so-called “fence-line” communities that are next to industrial facilities.
These facilities release a toxic stew of pollutants—including formaldehyde, which has been linked to cancer, and benzene, which has been linked to brain damage, birth defects, and cancer. Using the data on how many Americans are affected by toxic air pollution that CATF compiled for their Fossil Fumes and Gasping for Breath reports, the new study focuses on the specific impact of pollutants in the air on black Americans.
Most fence-line community residents are low-income and predominantly of color. The study reports that more than 1 million black people live within just half a mile of an oil or gas facility and face serious health risks such as cancer, asthma, and other respiratory diseases as well.
Lead poisoning has cost our country 50 Billion dollars. But it has also cost our country something far more precious: 23 million lost IQ points every year.
“It’s important that we look at issues that pertain to our environment with a racial equity lens because lives are at risk.” - Maya Lewis

Civil Rights Are Green: A Concise History of Environmental Racism and Justice in the US
October 6, 2017
How did we get here?
If you’re wondering about how racism slowly seeped into our environments, I’ve made it easy for you. Here’s a timeline of how environmental injustice grew what we see today.

1800s: In search of a new world order following the end of Slavery, whiteness becomes equated with cleanliness, and people of color, as well as low-income peoples, with uncleanness. This is later used as a justification for people of color working dirtier jobs dealing with sanitation and cleaning.

1916: Starting with New York City, American city planners in the early 20th century began to divide the “cities into areas for residence and areas for industrial and commercial growth” also known as land use zoning. This practice would become the bedrock of environmental racism through industrial zoning of residential communities of color.

1965: Following the passing of the Voting Rights Act, many cities begin enacting at-large elections for voting. This method is often “discriminatory because they, in combination with racially polarized voting, prevent voters of color from electing their candidates of choice where they are not the majority in the jurisdiction,” according to the NAACP. At-large elections still keep people of color out of local government, which make important environmental decisions.
1970: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was founded by the Federal government to “consolidate in one agency a variety of federal research, monitoring, standard-setting and enforcement activities to ensure environmental protection,” according to the EPA.

1974: The Safe Drinking Water Act was established to protect public drinking water supplies around the country.

1977: The supreme court ruled in Arlington Heights v. Metropolitan Housing Development — a landmark zoning case — that any break of the equal protection clause must be the result of both discriminatory intent and have led to discrepant outcomes. This problematic ruling neglects to notice the non-racial reasons for hazardous zoning, like less political engagement or low land costs that often affect communities of color as a result of racial inequality.

1982: Poor, rural and overwhelmingly black, Warren County, North Carolina, might seem an unlikely spot for the birth of a political movement. Frustrated citizens of Afton, NC lead by people of faith protested against trucks heading for a newly constructed hazardous waste landfill. Concerns over PCBs leaking into drinking water supplies, they met and stopped the trucks by lying down on roads leading into the landfill. Six weeks of marches and nonviolent street protests followed, and more than 500 people were arrested -- the first arrests in U.S. history over the siting of a landfill.
1983: Following the Warren County protests, Robert Bullard published the groundbreaking study of waste disposal practices and sitting in Houston, Texas. A few months later, Congress’ General Accounting Office published a similar study proving a correlation between the siting of hazardous waste landfills and the racial and economic status of host communities.

1987: Dr. Benjamin Chavis coined the phrase “Environmental Racism” to help better explain the results of a study he aided — Toxic Wasye and Race in United States — exploring the direct relation between race and the frequency of hazardous waste sites placed near or in communities of color.

1988: Peggy Shepard, Vernice Miller-Travis, and Chuck Sutton founded the West Harlem Environmental Action, or We Act, to fight environmental injustice in West Harlem. It was the first environmental organization in New York City to be run by people of color.

1990: A group of environmental leaders, activist, teachers, students, and artists wrote a letter to the nation’s ten biggest conservation groups charging them with a lack of support for the environmental justice movement, a history of exclusionary practices toward communities of color and lack of diversity within their ranks.

1990: 800 residential acres of a majority black neighborhood in St. John the Baptist Parish, Louisiana were rezoned for industrial use despite other available land zoned for industry near the area.
1991: Hundreds of environmental activists and leaders from all over the Americas came together in the fall of 1991 for the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, in Washington, D.C. They laid out what is effectively a constitution of environmental justice consisting of 17 principles that still informs environmental activists today from grassroots to large foundations.

1992: The EPA established the Office of Environmental Equity. The name was later changed to the Office of Environmental Justice in 1994.

1994: February 11, 1994, President Bill Clinton issued Executive Order 12898 or “Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations.” The Order aims to address environmental injustice within existing federal laws and regulations.

2005: Both local and state government’s delayed response to and preparation for Hurricane Katrina, which ravaged the predominately Black areas of New Orleans, Louisiana, left residents stranded and aided in nearly 2000 fatalities.

2007: Robert Bullard, now often called the Father of Environmental Racism, publishes a follow-up to the numerous studies in the 1980s. This one, Toxic Waste and Race the Twenty, showed that neighborhoods that hosted commercial hazardous waste facilities were 56% people of color compared to only 30% in non-host neighborhoods.

2007: The heart of “Cancer Alley”, the predominantly black town, St. James, Louisiana is zoned from residential to industrial allowing for “fifteen large industrial sites” to develop there over the years.

2010: Environmental Justice is made an agency-wide priority at the EPA. The White House also hosts a forum on Environmental Justice. More than 100 environmental leaders, along with cabinet secretaries and senior officials, attend the event.

2014: The city of Flint, Michigan changes its water source in an effort to save money, eventually leading to high levels of lead in the water, poisoning the predominately black and lower class population of the city.
2014: Gas and Propane company Energy Transfer Partners proposes and is approved by federal and state governments to build the 1,200-mile Dakota Access pipeline. The pipeline would carry oil through the Dakotas, crossing under and endangering Lake Oahe, a reservoir that serves as the Standing Rock Sioux tribe’s main source of drinking water.

2015: The CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) released a study showing that black children are twice as likely to have asthma than white children. Respiratory issues like asthma have been linked to environmental injustices.

2016: The National Hispanic Medical Association (NHMA) reported that “Hispanics are 51 percent more likely to live in counties with unhealthy levels of ozone than are non-Hispanic whites.”

2016: The EPA finalize the framework for the Environmental Justice 2020 Action Agenda to address “significant national environmental justice challenges facing the nation’s minority, low-income, tribal, and indigenous populations, according to the EPA.”

2017: Hurricane Maria hits and devastates Puerto Rico, a US Province. A less than stellar response from the US Government prompts an investigation. Puerto Rico officials originally set the hurricane's death toll at 64, but a more recent assessment of the data yielded an estimate closer to 3,000. Most importantly, the report proffered key recommendations for helping not only Puerto Rico but the mainland United States develop better methods for natural disaster preparedness and response.

2018: Environmental Performance Index (EPI) finds that air quality is the leading environmental threat to public health.

2019: Senator Tammy Duckworth (D) Illinois, Senator Cory Booker (D) New Jersey, and Tom Carper (D) Delaware form the Environmental Justice Senatorial Caucus to address issues around Environmental Justice.

2019: Congressional Environmental Justice Convening in Washington DC Co-hosted by Natural Resources Chair Raúl M. Grijalva and Rep. A. Donald McEachin to address and update on the current Environmental Justice issues and create a working group to develop a plan of action.
The Trump administration and EPA have been slowly scaling back environmental protections. The results will, in all likelihood, continue to disproportionately affect communities of color, further clarifying that Environmental Racism has no plans of going down without a fight.

But that's where people like you and I come in.

“At the end of the day, the system isn't working on so many levels,” said Vijou Bryant, community activist and healthcare worker. “The solution is for us to organize our communities and expose the realities for people.”
What do we do now?
Remember, the environmental justice movement began with ordinary people fighting for their communities — for healthy spaces to live, work and play. They looked around their neighborhoods and recognized that the decay surrounding them wasn’t normal or fair.
…where we live, play, pray, go to school, recreate and interact with others. It means equity and distributive justice—meeting people where they are, determining what they need to be safe and healthy.” —Adrienne Hollis
Is it worth the fight?
On Justice

“Environmental justice means loving my neighbor. It means speaking truth to power and standing up for the right to breathe clean air, the right to drink clean water and the right to eat clean food. Environmental Justice means equity for all, most of all, environmental justice means putting justice first.”

-Rev Michael Malcolm, pastor and environmental advocate, serving as director of South Carolina Interfaith Power and Light and Alabama Interfaith Power and Light
Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.
There must be

Legislative Accountability.
Faithful Citizen Engagement
Voter Education on Environmental Justice and Environmental Racism

- Understanding the Issues and Voting Records of Legislators, Alderman, Mayoral Candidates
- Doing your Homework and Providing Information for Legislators
- Understanding your vote counts
- Knowing who can vote
Voter Turnout

Individuals, Blocks, Neighborhoods, Wards and Districts – all need to go to their polling places and VOTE!
The stresses of climate change are destroying not just our planet but the livelihoods of people of color.

This is not right!

We want to hold the people and institutions behind these acts accountable.
Stay Connected!

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Save the Date

For Fall Advocacy Day October 29th

Learn More At
https://www.faithinplace.org/events/fall-advocacy-day-2019
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