

HISTORY/AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

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"*To Love the Wind and the Rain*" is a groundbreaking and vivid analysis of the relationship between African Americans and the environment in United States history. It focuses on three major themes: the rural environment, urban and suburban environments, and environmental justice. Meticulously researched, the essays cover diverse subjects, including: hunting and fishing by enslaved African Americans, the gardens of rural southern women, the 1919 Chicago race riot, and the relationship of religion to environmental activism. "*To Love the Wind and the Rain*" serves as an excellent introduction to a fuller understanding of African American environmental history.

DIANNE D. GLAVE is Aron Senior Environmental Research Fellow at the Center for Bioenvironmental Research at Tulane and Xavier Universities.

MARK STOLL is an associate professor of history at Texas Tech University and the author of *Protestantism, Capitalism, and Nature in America*.

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To Love the Wind and the Rain

AFRICAN AMERICANS and ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY



DIANNE D. GLAVE and MARK STOLL

Environmental Justice, Ecoracism, and Environmental History

MARTIN V. MELOSI

Influenced by European Romanticism, Americans have thought and written about their relationship to the physical world at least since the beginning of the nineteenth century. The earliest works of environmental history, concerning the United States at least, were written primarily in the 1930s and 1940s and focused on the West. But American environmental history as a distinct field of study that possessed a wide range of nuance and topic did not take shape until the late 1960s with the emergence of the modern environmental movement.

Although it drew enthusiastic support from college students and others caught up in the political and social turmoil of the 1960s, the modern environmental movement was rooted more deeply in the American experience. Attracting major support from the middle and upper-middle classes, and bolstered by the maturing of ecological science, it functioned politically as a coalition of groups with a variety of interests, including natural-environment issues such as outdoor recreation, wildlands, and open space, and in concerns over public health and environmental pollution.

Older preservationist organizations, such as the Sierra Club and the National Audubon Society, experienced a revival in the early 1970s. Newer groups reflected a range of political and social objectives, from the corporate-backed Resources for the Future to the more militant Friends of the Earth and, later, Greenpeace. Their political views, consequently, were not necessarily compatible, nor were their reform tactics similar. Some accepted government-

tal intervention as a rational way to allocate resources or to preserve wildlands; others were suspicious of any large institution as the sole protector of the environment. Some worked within the existing political and social structures; others blamed capitalism for promoting uncontrolled economic growth, materialism, and the squandering of resources.

Since the emergence of environmental history was so strongly influenced by political and social goals of environmental activism in the 1960s and 1970s, some in the academic community were quick to dismiss it as a "fad" or to brand it simply as "advocate history." To be sure, many budding environmental historians did not shy away from advocacy, and much of the scholarship rings with conviction. But by compelling its practitioners to study the past through a combination of science, environmentalism, and history, and by asking grand questions of its data, the new works of environmental history had the potential to address important issues long neglected by other fields.

In tone, substance, and topic, much of the scholarship of the late 1960s and 1970s reflected the spirit—if not the breadth—of the new environmental movement, focusing on the cultural and intellectual roots of environmental thinking or sometimes on the political implications of the older conservation movement. Only rarely in this period did historians venture into the realm of ecological sciences as expressed in Rachel Carson's monumental *Silent Spring* (1962).

The young discipline of environmental history, therefore, took much of its inspiration—if not its execution—from the modern environmental movement. In doing so, historians often shared a common set of values, including a biocentric (or more precisely an "ecocentric") worldview, a belief in the intrinsic value of nature, a faith in ecological balance, and skepticism about—if not contempt for—uncontrolled economic growth.

Into the 1980s and beyond, the field of environmental history began to find many new voices that examined a wide variety of themes—from the environment of the human body and questions of gender to perceptions of nature and the wilderness, from the modification of the land by agriculture to the transformation by urbanization and industrialization. The focus on the United States increasingly expanded to encompass the whole world, especially through the intellectual stimulation of the members of the American Society for Environmental History, the European Society for Environmental History, and several other scholarly and professional organizations.

Of the questions that challenge the contemporary world as well as the human past, race is an issue that is confronting the environmental movement and is destined to help reshape it. Until quite recently, race is a topic that has been largely missing from the literature of environmental history. Consider-

ation of racial issues was implicit in a variety of studies, but at least through the 1980s explicit only in the extensive work on Native Americans. In the literature on the United States historical treatment of African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians with respect to the environment has been limited. Although, with the publication of this volume, Sylvia Hood Washington's *Packing Them In*, and an array of recent articles and paper presentations at academic meetings, the discussion of race is germinating within the field of environmental history.

Aside from the intrinsic importance of race as an issue for further scholarly inquiry, the public debate over questions of environmental justice, ecoracism, and environmental equity are changing the focus of the environmental discourse in the United States and in other parts of the world. Just as the environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s helped to shape the burgeoning field of environmental history, the more recent public dialogue over equity and environmental justice ultimately will have a similar impact.

The appearance of the environmental justice movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s offers a medium through which to examine the question of how race has been introduced into the debate over environmental goals and policies in recent years. The movement also suggests potential shifts—or even basic changes—in perspective which challenge traditional notions of environmentalism. Amidst the diversity of contemporary interests and goals, those individuals in the environmental justice movement seem to be most strident in questioning older environmental thinking of the 1960s and 1970s.

The environmental justice movement found its strength at the grassroots level, especially among low-income people of color who faced serious environmental threats from hazardous wastes and other toxic material. Women have been key leaders in the antitoxics effort, including Virginia civil rights activist Cora Tucker; Lois Marie Gibbs, leader of the protest at Love Canal; and Sue Greer, organizer of People Against Hazardous Waste Landfill Sites (PAHLS). According to sociologist Andrew Szasz, "The issue of toxic, hazardous industrial wastes has been arguably the most dynamic environmental issue of the past two decades." By 1980, he said, "the American public feared toxic waste as much as it feared nuclear power after Three Mile Island."¹

The reaction of local groups to toxics (such as lead poisoning or exposure to pesticides) and to hazardous wastes (through landfills and other disposal sites) may have begun locally, but evolved into something much more expansive. As Lois Gibbs stated, "our movement started as Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) but quickly turned into Not In Anyone's Backyard (NIABY) which includes Mexico and other less developed countries."²

A radical environmental populism—ecopopulism—emerged within the

larger tradition of American radicalism rather than as an outgrowth of the modern environmental movement. One estimate suggests that almost 4,700 local groups appeared by 1988 to oppose toxics. Before the publicity over Love Canal, which began in 1978, contact between the groups was scant, but in the 1980s a more vibrant and better-networked social movement appeared to be arising. Some scholars, including movement leader and sociologist Robert D. Bullard, argue that the struggle for environmental justice for people of color predates the 1970s, but these efforts generally were contested under the rubric of "social" as opposed to "environmental" problems.³

For those defining the goals of the movement, grassroots resistance to environmental threats is simply the reaction to more fundamental injustices brought on by long-term economic and social impacts. According to Cynthia Hamilton, associate professor of Pan African Studies at California State University, Los Angeles, the consequences of industrialization "have forced an increasing number of African Americans to become environmentalists. This is particularly the case for those who live in central cities where they are overburdened with the residue, debris, and decay of industrial production."⁴

For African Americans and other people of color in the movement, struggles against "environmental injustice" are, as Bullard noted, "... not unlike the civil rights battles waged to dismantle the legacy of Jim Crow in Selma, Montgomery, Birmingham, and some of the 'Up South' communities in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles."⁵

Within this context, activists in the movement claimed a full range of rights for any social group, including fair public treatment, legal protection, and compensation. Bunyan Bryant and Paul Mohai of the School of Natural Resources at the University of Michigan took the argument a step further, contending that the civil rights movement that faltered in the late 1970s and 1980s was seeing its resurgence in the area of environmental justice.⁶

The environmental justice movement has its historic roots in civil rights activism, and its members and leaders have openly disclaimed connection to the traditional, or mainstream, American environmental movement. A focus on more immediate human-oriented—or anthropocentrist—goals, as opposed to more generalized ecocentrist values, is characteristic of the movement. For example, there is substantial mistrust over attention that environmental groups have given to global population issues (with their racial implications), and frustration over the little attention given to apparently mundane public health issues. As Robert Gottlieb has argued, some alternative environmental groups "have begun to shift the definition of environmentalism away from the exclusive focus on consumption to the sphere of work and production."⁷

In October 1991, a multiracial group of more than six hundred people met in Washington DC for the first National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. In a document called "Principles of Environmental Justice," conference participants asserted the desire "to begin to build a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities . . ." and for the reestablishment of "our spiritual interdependence on the sacredness of our Mother Earth." Another goal was: "to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples."⁸

The "Principles of Environmental Justice" document, interestingly, overlaps with many of the values found in the literature of other environmental groups. However, leaders in the environmental justice movement have been prone to characterize mainstream environmentalism—especially as represented by the so-called "Group of Ten"⁹—as white, often male, middle- and upper-class, primarily concerned with wilderness preservation and conservation, and insensitive to—or at least ill-equipped to deal with—the interests of minorities. The movement's priority issues were predominately urban-based: siting of toxic facilities in minority neighborhoods and public health problems such as lead poisoning. A concern over the use of pesticides in the produce industry is a link to farm workers and migrants, who represent the rural equivalent of the urban underclass. Bryant and Mohai concluded: ". . . [Environmentalists] are viewed with suspicion by people of color, particularly as national environmental organizations try to fashion an urban agenda in the 1990s. To champion old growth forests or the protection of the snail darter or the habitat of spotted owls without championing clean safe urban environments or improved habitats of the homeless, does not bode well for future relations between environmentalists and people of color, and with the poor."¹⁰

Token representation of people of color in mainstream environmental organizations is an additional reminder of the gap between the movements. Clearly, there is much to justify such criticism. Frederick D. Krupp, executive director of the Environmental Defense Fund noted, "The truth is that environmental groups have done a miserable job of reaching out to minorities."¹¹ Nevertheless, politics makes strange bedfellows, and within the environmental justice movement there has been division of opinion over whether to join forces with mainstream environmental groups and cooperate with them in areas of common interest, or simply to follow a separate path.

The rift among those committed to environmental reform can be traced in part to the failure of mainstream groups to reach out, fired by the suspicion of those in the environmental justice movement that "people-centered" environ-

mental issues have low priority among the Group of Ten. However, an additional reason for the rift is the once widely held—but largely unsubstantiated—belief that people of color and low-income groups marginalize environmental issues, especially if economic survival is at stake.

To counteract the assumption that people of color lack an interest in the environment, supporters of the movement have addressed that issue frontally. Dana A. Alston, director of the Environment, Community Development and Race Project of the Panos Institute in Washington DC, situated environmentalism in a larger social context: "Communities of color have often taken a more holistic approach than the mainstream environmental movement, integrating 'environmental' concerns into a broader agenda that emphasizes social, racial and economic justice."¹² In an effort to dispel the notion of environmental advocacy as "a white thing," several studies have pointed to the strong environmental voting record of the Congressional Black Caucus and the commitment of minorities to key clean-air and clean-water legislation.¹³

In analyzing the evolution of the environmental movement, Dorceta E. Taylor wrote that existing environmental groups have largely failed to attract minorities due to the particular appeals and incentives they have promoted. For instance, the argument that minorities struggle to meet basic needs and thus place environmental issues low on a list of priorities assumes that the priorities are permanently fixed: "The argument does not allow for the possibility that environmental issues could become high-priority issues for minorities by redefining environmental issues in terms of basic needs, or that individuals might seek to meet high-order needs before all of their basic needs are met. Because many of the environmental problems facing minorities are immediate and life-threatening, it is predicted that they will become involved in environmental organizations and groups, if and when these groups deal with issues of survival and basic needs."¹⁴

Taylor analyzed several studies conducted in the 1970s and 1980s concerning the different levels of black/white involvement in environmental issues and concluded that the environmental "concern gap" between blacks and whites can be understood by exploring the disparity between "concern" and "action." First, previous studies may mask levels of black concern because of measurement errors. Second, blacks have a history of higher rates of affiliation with voluntary social, political, or religious associations than whites.¹⁵

A persuasive argument about the relationship between people of color and environmental concern is the notion that environment is culturally constructed, and participation must be understood from that perspective. Barbara Deutsch Lynch's study of Latino environmental discourses sheds light on contrasting views of the environment between U.S. Latino peoples and Anglo-

American environmentalists. The study takes into account the role of "the garden and the sea" as traditional sources of livelihood for Spanish-speaking peoples—as well as instruments of bondage to dominant economic systems such as plantation life—and contrasts these perceptions with such images as the frontier, wild rivers, and forests in the Anglo-American community. "The ideal or utopian natural landscapes of Latino writers," Lynch observed, "are peopled and productive." She concluded: "looking at the impact of environmental ills or mitigation programs on U.S. Latinos solely in terms of end points determined by Anglo environmental agendas (siting of toxic waste facilities; for example) only perpetuated the silence of Latino voices on the environment and postponed fundamental changes in the U.S. environmental discourse."¹⁶

In light of the context in which environmentalism among people of color has been cast, the environmental justice movement's focus on ecoracism is not surprising. Some in the movement connect class and race, but many others view racism as the prime culprit.¹⁷

Some observers look back to the 1970s for the start of the environmental justice movement, when black residents of the Northwood Manor subdivision in Houston filed the first class-action lawsuit challenging the siting of a waste facility in their neighborhood as a violation of civil rights, resulting in *Bean v. Southwestern Waste Management Corp.* (1979). But the event that succeeded in "racializing the antitoxics agenda" was the Warren County, North Carolina, protest in 1982.

Reverend Benjamin F. Chavis Jr., former head of the NAACP, is credited with coining the term "environmental racism" while executive director of the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice (CRJ).¹⁸ One-time reverend Chavis became interested in the connection between race and pollution in 1982 when residents of predominantly African American Warren County, North Carolina asked the CRJ for help in resisting the siting of a polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) dump in their community. The protest proved unsuccessful, resulting in the arrest of more than five hundred people, including Chavis, Dr. Joseph Lowery of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and Congressman Walter Fauntroy of Washington DC.

The Warren County incident and others—some affecting middle-class blacks as well as the poor—convinced Chavis and his colleagues that a national study correlating race and toxic waste dumping was in order. After five years of work, the CRJ produced *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A National Report on the Racial and Social-Economic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites*. The report was the first comprehensive national study of the demographic patterns associated with the location of

hazardous waste sites. The findings stressed that the racial composition of a community was the single variable best able to predict the siting of commercial hazardous waste facilities. Minorities, especially African Americans and Hispanics, were overrepresented in communities with these facilities. Furthermore, the report concluded, it was "virtually impossible" that these facilities were distributed by chance and thus race must have played a central role in location. Supporters of the report's conclusions argued that other, less comprehensive studies conducted as far back as the 1970s generally corroborated the findings.

The CRJ report—especially its strong inference of deliberate targeting of communities because of race—gave powerful ammunition to those interested in broadening a concern over ill-defined "environmental equity" into the movement for environmental justice. Later statements by Chavis demonstrated more depth in the call for environmental justice: "Millions of African Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans are trapped in polluted environments because of their race and color. Inhabitants of these communities are exposed to greater health and environmental risks than is the general population. Clearly, all Americans do not have the same opportunities to breathe clean air, drink clean water, enjoy clean parks and playgrounds, or work in a clean, safe environment. People of color bear the brunt of the nation's pollution problem."¹⁹

The question of deliberately targeting communities of racial and ethnic minorities is viewed by some leaders of the movement as indispensable in keeping the focus on the relationship between race and pollution. Also critical are efforts to reject the notion that siting decisions are most often based on distinction by class not race. The perceived culprit in deliberate targeting is not simply private companies, but also government. "In many instances," Bullard asserted, "government is the problem." He argued that a "dominant environmental protection paradigm" has been in operation which, among other things, institutionalizes unequal enforcement of laws and regulations, favors polluting industries over "victims," and delays cleanups.²⁰

Efforts by the federal government to address some of the concerns over environmental racism and inequity have been viewed with skepticism by those within the movement. A June 1992 report issued by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)—*Environmental Equity: Reducing Risk for All Communities*—supported some of the claims of the exposure of racial minorities to high levels of pollution, but it linked race and class together in most cases. In November 1992, an Office of Environmental Justice (originally called the Office of Environmental Equity) was established within the Environmental Protection Agency. Its purpose was to ensure that communities including

large numbers of low-income families and people of color received protection under environmental laws.²¹ EPA administrator Carol Browner designated environmental justice as one of the agency's top priorities in 1993. In September of that year, the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) was created as a forum through which activists and communities could bring their concerns to EPA.

Nevertheless, a study conducted by the *National Law Journal* in 1992 questioned the EPA's environmental equity record up to that time, pointing out that in the administering of the Superfund program, disparities existed in dealing with hazardous waste sites in minority communities as compared with white neighborhoods. William Reilly, EPA director under presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush, was strongly criticized for not attending the People of Color Environmental Summit. And although President Clinton signed the Executive Order on Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, many have been disappointed because an Environmental Justice Act has yet to pass Congress.

Environmental justice claims, however, vary widely because they derive from an increasingly diverse body of supporters, a loosely knit national coalition of grassroots organizations, and a variety of leaders from several walks of life. There is little doubt, nonetheless, that the movement has broadened the issue of equity as it relates to environmentalism. The movement has persuaded—or possibly forced—environmental groups, government, and the private sector to consider race and class as central features of environmental concern for Americans as well as for people of color in developing countries. It has helped to elevate the toxics and hazardous waste issue to a central position among a vast assortment of environmental problems. It has shifted attention to urban blight, public health, and urban living conditions to a greater degree than earlier efforts by predominantly white environmental reformers. And it has questioned the demands for economic growth at the expense of human welfare. Whether or not the environmental justice movement grows larger, it has altered the debate over the future goals and objectives of American environmental policy.

The movement, however, is not without its limitations, particularly its stance on the issue of race versus class; its underestimation of its friends and sometimes mischaracterization of its foes; and its own exclusivity. After all, the environmental justice movement, although born at the grassroots, is first and foremost a political movement with an agenda questioning many traditional practices and values, and attempting to define new ones in order to change the law and the regulatory apparatus of the nation.

The core view that race is at the heart of environmental injustice is born of

an intellectual and emotional attachment to the civil rights heritage of the past several decades. Few—including the EPA—would deny that poor people of color are often disproportionately impacted by some forms of pollution. But the qualifiers are significant. Outside the movement, there has been serious questioning: Is the issue really environmental racism or just poverty? Even within the movement there are those who cannot cleanly separate race and class in all cases. Given the political goals of the movement, the unbending assertion of the centrality of race may prove unworkable if broadening the constituency is to be achieved.²²

Because of its controversial nature, and not despite it, the emergence and persistence of the environmental justice movement suggests several points of inquiry worthy of deeper historical analysis: (1) environmental equity, especially as it relates to race, class, and gender; (2) environment as a cultural construct; (3) the clash between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism; (4) the importance of urban environmental problems, especially as they impact human life; and (5) the nature of the environmental movement itself, including its short-term and long-term goals. Of these five areas, more exploration of the first three may offer the freshest insights, since historians have devoted substantial attention to the last two in recent years.

The environmental justice movement, because of its stances on race, class, and the environment and its skepticism about the goals and objectives of mainstream environmentalism, has played a historic role in reintroducing equity into the public and academic debate over environmental policy. Equity, however, has been transformed into environmental justice, with a particular focus on the traditional American underside caught beneath the wheels of an avaricious economy. From the historian's vantage point, this is but one aspect of a larger issue, which has already been addressed broadly by philosophers and social scientists—especially sociologists and economists—concerned mainly with distributional effects. Sociologist Allan Schnaiberg, for example, argued that the redistributive element (such as a windfall profit fund to provide cost offsets to the poor) has been largely absent from most of the history of environmental movements through the 1970s, “despite rhetorics that have been vaguely populist,” and that environmental movements “are simply not welfare-oriented to the degree that a stable sustained coalition-building effort will be possible.”²³ Such a conclusion leaves us to speculate if and how concerns over environmental equity can be uncovered in the historical record, especially if they were not a priority in various environmental movements over time as Schnaiberg argued.

In *Forcing the Spring*, Robert Gottlieb pointed to a few historical episodes of “environmental discrimination” with respect to workplace hazards, espe-

cially the Gauley Bridge episode which led to the death of hundreds of miners—white and black—working for Union Carbide in West Virginia during the Great Depression.²⁴ Industrial accidents, workplace hazards, and community pollution problems offer potentially good data for examining questions of equity with respect to exposure to health risks.

Clayton Koppes suggested another approach to addressing the equity issue in his article, "Efficiency, Equity, Esthetics: Shifting Themes in American Conservation." Koppes maintained that three ideas dominated the American conservation movement in the Progressive Era: efficiency (management of natural resources); equity (distribution of the development of resources rather than control by the few); and esthetics (the preservation of nature free from development). Of the three, efficiency held the greatest sway. Supporters of the "gospel of efficiency"—proponents of applied science and environmental management—did not want to undermine development per se, but questioned short-term private gain at the expense of long-term public benefit. Although this view was not wildly popular among all capitalists, it certainly was less threatening than strict preservationism. Koppes argued further that for many conservationists of the Progressive Era, "efficiency was not enough; they were also concerned for greater equity." In this context, "equity" implies that natural resources remain in public control so that their benefits could be distributed fairly. "The equity school," Koppes stated, "saw wise use of the environment as a tool to foster grass-roots democracy." By the 1960s, the efficiency school remained dominant, the esthetics school at least had successfully protected the national park system, but the equity branch wallowed. Without grassroots organizations to press for change—and with resistance to redistributive efforts at every turn—equity moved little beyond the conceptual stage.²⁵ Equity, in Koppes's study, has clear definitional limits—more in line with the concerns over distributional issues than class or race questions. It is, nonetheless, a useful starting point for asking some key questions about the intent and direction of national policy expressed in terms of the impartial distribution of resources.

Andrew Hurley's influential *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945–1980* is a model monographic study that goes to the heart of environmental justice and environmental racism. Applying the twin perspectives of environmental and social history, he argued that industrial capitalists and wealthy property holders had "a decisive advantage in molding the contours of environmental change. Those groups who failed to set the terms—African Americans and poor whites—found themselves at a severe disadvantage, consistently bearing the brunt of indus-

trial pollution in virtually all of its forms: dirty air, foul water, and toxic solid wastes."²⁶

The cultural construct of environmentalism opens up another world of possibilities, and has been receiving substantial attention from environmental historians, especially at recent meetings of the American Society for Environmental History. Leading the way have been several works on Native Americans and women. Also of particular significance has been Alfred Crosby's biohistory, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900*, which identified European models of environmental practice and how they clashed with indigenous approaches. Despite these fruitful efforts, there is room for more and for a wider range of studies, especially those dealing with the environmental values and goals of a wide variety of racial and ethnic communities. Since environmental historians have never feared borrowing methodological approaches from other disciplines, the notion of culturally constructed environmentalism begs for a greater range of methods, including studies on the use of language.

The question of anthropocentrism versus ecocentrism is not new, but can be brought to bear more directly on issues concerning race and class. Also important are questions about the practical objectives of environmental reform. Human-centered issues offer an immediacy and accessibility to environmentalism that global warming, ozone depletion, overpopulation, and so forth do not possess. Because the environmental justice movement is political at its core, the concreteness and immediacy of its environmental agenda is understandable. But there are some significant longer-range issues underlying the embrace of this brand of anthropocentrism. In *Who Pays the Price? The Sociocultural Context of Environmental Crisis*, applied anthropologist Barbara Rose Johnston argued that environmental quality and social justice issues are "inextricably linked." She explained: "Efforts to protect a 'healthy environment' may, in some cases, result in human rights abuse, and depending upon subsequent social response, may ultimately fail to meet original environmental integrity objectives. And conversely, responding to human rights needs while ignoring the environmental context infers temporary intervention rather than substantive solution; it may thus serve to initiate or perpetuate a cycle of human rights abuses." To lessen victimization from environmental threats, Johnston and other authors in the book promoted the need for more citizen empowerment.²⁷ While the emphasis in the book is clearly policy-related, the subject of the human-rights dimension of environmentalism begs for more of the historian's scrutiny.

Of all the faults we may possess as scholars and teachers, for all the per-

sonal biases and secret passions we may indulge while pursuing our research projects, no shortcoming is more deadly than complacency. If the emergence of the environmental justice movement has shown us anything, it clearly has demonstrated that the foundations of environmentalism laid many years ago are not unshakable; the connection between environmental rights and civil rights have to be taken seriously. We have an obligation to ferret out what is happening to the theory and practice of environmentalism over time. We have the training and the interest to make a contribution to the incredibly complex interface of humans with their world. We have a duty to expand the historical horizons of our field whenever possible. The question of race is central to environmental history.

Identity Politics and Multiracial Coalitions in the Environmental Justice Movement

EILEEN M. MCGURTY

The environmental movement, like other social movements, has succeeded, in part, by representing and reinforcing a collective identity of members and potential members. People join because the movement "expresses something essential to their sense of self."¹ Yet the environmental movement long excluded the poor and people of color and neglected to address the potential for disproportionate impacts of environmental risks either directly from pollution or indirectly through unintended consequences of regulations.² Beginning in the early 1980s, environmental justice activists confronted the underlying elitism in the environmental movement and demanded that environmentalists address the characteristics, values, and experiences of people who had been victims of unjust environmental risk.

The month-long protest in 1982 against a chemical waste landfill siting in Warren County, North Carolina, a poor and predominately black county, was pivotal in initiating the challenge to environmentalists. The activists in Warren County articulated the heretofore unspoken problem of environmental racism and argued that solutions to this problem must include multiracial coalitions and expanded participation by people of color. Environmental racism purported that people of color were more likely to be exposed to environmental risks than whites. The solution of multiracial coalitions promised to help build a bridge between environmental issues and social issues. According to Dorceta Taylor, a vocal critic of elitism in the environmental movement, environmental justice should: "... mobilize community-wide coalitions built