

# Environmental Justice:

## AN INTRODUCTION



*First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win.*

-- Gandhi.

# Quick Overview

- **What is Environmental Justice?**
- **What has Created Environmental Injustice?**
- **EJ: A Brief History**
- **The Issues**
- **Local Examples**
- **Some Solutions**

# What is Environmental Justice?

- Interpretation of environmental issues using a social justice lens.
- Begins with the question: who reaps the benefit and who is carrying the burden of the adverse impact of a modern industrial society?

# What Creates Environmental Injustice?

- Disproportionate exposure to environmental bads.
- Unfair denial of environmental goods.
- Vulnerability of the poor.
  - Chronic vulnerability
  - Vulnerability to Crisis
- White Privilege

*Cumulative Impact!*

# A Brief (and incomplete) History

- Early 1960s - Farm workers organized by Cesar Chavez fight for workplace rights, including protection from toxic pesticides in California farm fields.
- 1964 - Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed. The law's "Title VI" -- prohibiting use of federal funds to discriminate based on race, color and national origin -- will become an important tool in environmental justice litigation.
- 1969 - Lawsuit filed on behalf of six migrant farm workers by California Rural Legal Assistance plays a role in the ban on the pesticide DDT in the United States. DDT is banned in 1972.
- 1971 - President's Council on Environmental Quality acknowledges that racial discrimination negatively affects the quality of the environment for the urban poor.
- 1979 - African-American community in Houston opposing a landfill brings first Title VI lawsuit challenging the siting of a waste facility.

# EJ Movement Launches

- 1982 - African-American community in Warren County, North Carolina, rises against dumping of toxic PCB-laced soil; first nationally recognized environmental protest by people of color.
- 1984 - California Waste Management Board report advises governments and companies looking to site hazardous waste facilities to target small, low-income and rural communities with a high percentage of people who are old or have little education. (Los Angeles Times breaks the story to the public in 1988.)
- 1987 - The United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice releases Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States, the first report to show that race is the most important factor in determining where toxic waste facilities are sited in the United States.

# A Few Key Moments

- 1990 - Several environmental justice leaders co-sign a widely publicized letter to the "Big 10" environmental groups accusing them of racial bias in policy development and hiring.
- 1991 - The First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit meets in Washington, D.C., and creates the Principles of Environmental Justice.
- 1994 - President Bill Clinton signs Executive Order 12898 directing federal agencies to identify and address disproportionately high adverse health and environmental effects of their policies or programs on low-income people and people of color.
- 2001 - U.N. Commission on Human Rights lists living free of pollution as a basic human right.

# Principles of Environmental Justice

- Environmental justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity, the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
- Environmental justice demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.
- Environmental justice mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and all other life.
- Environmental justice calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food.
- Environmental justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.
- Environmental justice demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.
- Environmental justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.



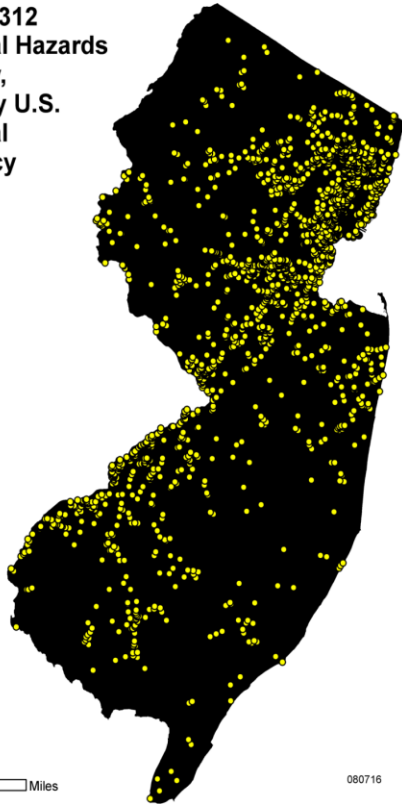
- Environmental justice affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment, without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.
- Environmental justice protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.
- Environmental justice considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration On Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.
- Environmental justice must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination.
- Environmental justice affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and providing fair access for all to the full range of resources.
- Environmental justice calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.
- Environmental justice opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations.
- Environmental justice opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.
- Environmental justice calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.
- Environmental justice requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our lifestyles to insure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

# Primary Issues

- Air
- Water
- Soil
- Land Use
- Working Conditions
- Food

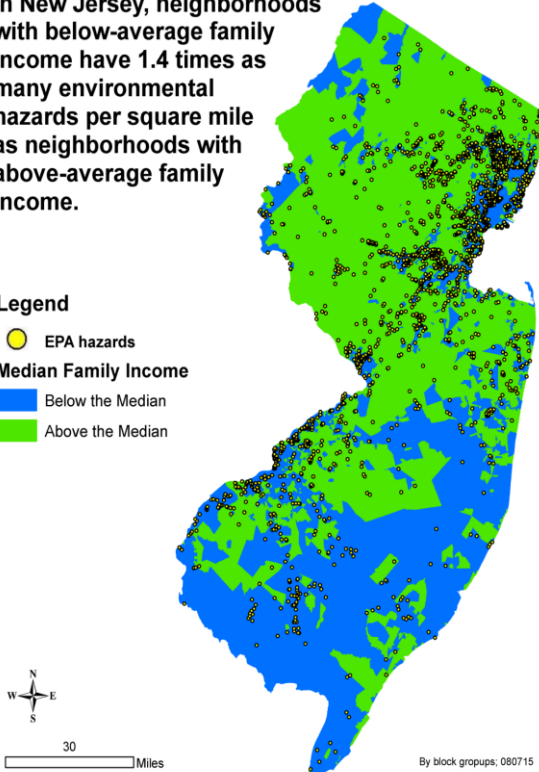
# Examples

Location of 2,312 Environmental Hazards in New Jersey, as reported by U.S. Environmental Protect Agency (EPA)



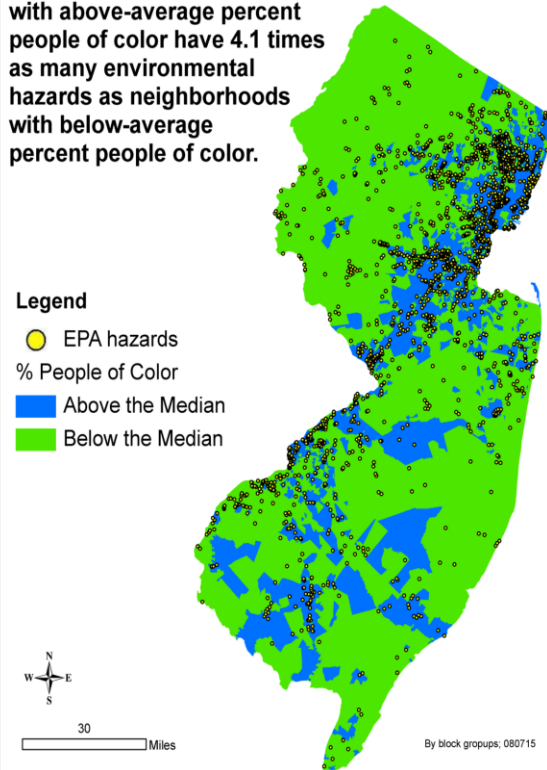
In New Jersey, neighborhoods with below-average family income have 1.4 times as many environmental hazards per square mile as neighborhoods with above-average family income.

Legend  
● EPA hazards  
Median Family Income  
■ Below the Median  
■ Above the Median



In New Jersey, neighborhoods with above-average percent people of color have 4.1 times as many environmental hazards as neighborhoods with below-average percent people of color.

Legend  
● EPA hazards  
% People of Color  
■ Above the Median  
■ Below the Median



# Our Lenses

- **Racism**
- **Classism**
- **Consumerism**
- **Sexism**
- **Religious/Spiritual**
- **Cultural**

# What To Do?

- **Figure out what you want.**
- **Figure out who has the power to give it to you.**
- **Figure out what they'll need to do the right thing.**
- **Organize neighbors to make it happen.**

# What To Do: Getting Specific

- Talk to members of your church and others in the community
- Research all the facts
- Develop a good description of the problem
- Collect good documentation of issues and activities
- Consult with other communities with similar issues; don't reinvent the wheel
- Select the most appropriate resource persons and organizations
- Identify government agencies who are supposed to help
- Clarify the legal, scientific and medical issues involved
- Hold community meetings to share information and strategize
- Prepare educational materials for your community
- Formulate an action plan
- Form partnerships with university, environmental, health and other groups
- Devise a media strategy
- Don't be intimidated or overwhelmed; you are the expert on your community
- Network with other environmental justice groups

# Our Vision

- **The vision of environmental justice is the development of a holistic, bottom up, community based, multi-issue paradigm for achieving healthy and sustainable communities.**
- **Are you ready and willing to create a new way of being?**

# What's Next

- **Join our Google Group**
  - You'll get an invitation if you've signed in today
- **Mark your calendars for the EJ tour in Newark, NJ on Saturday, October 13<sup>th</sup> at 10:30am.**
- **Let your congregation know you've joined this Council and determine if you have any partners in this work, even if they can't join the Council.**