

attendance at a citizens meeting regarding the landfill construction, "the results [of studies], which were quite conclusive, were that landfills inevitably leak, and that safe landfill technology is only a concept, not a reality."⁶ In other words, there was a possibility that the toxic PCBs would leach into groundwater that supplied drinking water to the area.

Despite city council meetings and court battles, the federal and state governments approved for the landfill to be built. In the six week span, when contaminated soil to be dumped in the landfill arrived, almost 500 people participated in protests.⁷ Groups such as the local chapter

McGurty writes “[the] two issues of the initial opposition were translated into a language that resonated with past experiences of blacks in the county: Blacks had been victims of past transgressions at the hands of whites, causing excessive poverty, physical suffering and even death. The landfill was the latest manifestation of their experience for the past several centuries.”¹¹ This idea puts into context the fears that the African American community was facing. Not only was it a possibility that chemicals would leach into their drinking water, and not only were many blacks systematically rendered powerless in the political process, but also it was again the white, powerful majority that would put blacks under these circumstances. While Warren County was not the first case of environmental racism, it was “ “ h’ uuš tgeac .

Before the site to build LANCER was determined, Cerel Associates consulting firm reviewed South Central Los Angeles. The firm concluded that South Central Los Angeles would be the best place for the incinerator because, as they write:

Certain types of people are likely to participate in politics... led the all socioeconomic groups tend to resent the nearby siting of major facilities, but the middle and upper socioeconomic strata possess better resources to educate their opposition. Middle and higher socioeconomic strata neighborhoods should not fall at least within one mile and five mile radii of the proposed site.¹⁶

In other words, the site should be placed in a low income, uneducated neighborhood because it would mobilize less political power to stand against the construction. Because of systematic segregation and oppression, low income, uneducated neighborhoods are more likely to be made up of minorities, and in this case, it is African Americans and Latinos who get affected.

The Concerned Citizens group banded together with other grassroots movements—including Greenpeace, Citizens for a Better Environment, and the National Health Law Program—in order to fight the LANCER project. Additionally, grassroots activists were backed by two white majority groups based in the west side of Los Angeles.

Toxic waste sites are not the only environmental issue that minorities struggle with disproportionately. Flint, Michigan, for

in that the area of New Orleans most affected by the hurricane had experienced little demographic and economic growth since its settling.³³

Katrina hit ground on August 29, 2005 as a Category 3 hurricane, with winds reaching up to 125 miles per hour. Surges from the ocean and excess rainfall pushed against already weak levees, which broke or leaked, leading to floods that covered eighty percent of New Orleans in water.³⁴ After the storm retreated, nearly one million people were displaced, with about half of those people coming from New Orleans alone.³⁵ In their study following the events of Hurricane Katrina, Elliot and Pais surveyed more than 1500 people about the emergency response they faced during and after the hurricane. They found that blacks were

waste landfills to be built in certain neighborhoods or water sources to be switched from a clean one to a corrosive one. A similar effect is seen at the federal level in the form of access to FEMA and federal loans after a natural disaster. If African Americans had better access to voting perhaps that would allow more diversity in American politics, which would allow for more equitable decisions in how environmental detriments are spread out through communities.

There is a similar lack of diversity in big environmental organizations, which historically have been made up of middle to upper class white men. These groups, such as The Natural Resource Defense Fund, Greenpeace, and the Sierra Club, play a major role in lobbying for federal and state environmental policy, as well as promoting more local and regional campaigns. In a 2014 study on the state of diversity in environmental organizations, 191 conservation and preservation organization, seventy-four governmental agencies, twenty-eight grant-making organizations were studied for diversity.⁴⁴ The study found that when it comes to gender equality, gains have been made specifically by white women. It also found that despite racial and ethnic minorities making up around thirty-eight percent of the United States population, only about sixteen percent of the employees at the studied organizations were minorities.⁴⁵ Few preservation and conservation organizations had a diversity manager position, and none of the grant-making organizations did. Additionally, it is through word-of-mouth and informal recruitment that many environmental organizations hire people, which is less likely to reach minority or lower socioeconomic circles.⁴⁶ All of these factors result in less representation of minority voices in large environmental groups, thus less top-down political and bottom-up grassroots power to minority communities.

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