

**The Environmental Justice Movement:
Equitable Allocation of the Costs and
Benefits of Environmental Management Outcomes**

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Abstract:

We present a critical review of the theoretical and methodological advances in the social scientific literature on environmental inequality and argue for new directions in research efforts that pay more attention to: 1) the complex role of stakeholders (particularly the state and transnational capital) in environmental justice conflicts; 2) the trade-offs between environmental protection and social equity; 3) the impact of social movement activity on the state of environmental protection. We find that environmental inequality involves and impacts many actors and institutions with often contradictory and cross-cutting allegiances. These struggles therefore become a moving drama, a process, rather than a cross-sectional outcome, as stakeholders promote or resist environmental inequalities as they emerge. Hence, environmental inequalities continuously evolve and vary over time and context. We conclude with an analysis of environmental inequality on a global scale and argue that the role of transnational capital remains largely untheorized in environmental inequality research. We suggest new models for explaining environmental inequality's causes, consequences, and argue for more widespread use of historical and qualitative data in the environmental justice literature.

Introduction: The Environmental Justice Movement

Research on Environmental Inequities

Over the last three decades a growing number of scholars, activists, and policy makers have begun to pay attention to the distributive impacts of environmental pollution across dimensions of class and race (Asch and Seneca 1978; Berry 1977; Bryant and Mohai 1992; Bullard 2000; Freeman 1972; Schnaiberg 1975; UCC 1987). The predominant finding to emerge from this research is that environmental racism exists. The pattern emerges that, through the location (intentionally or otherwise) of environmental hazards, the poor and people of color bear the brunt of the nation's pollution problem. While there are hundreds of studies and reports that support this conclusion, the major works in this vein include:

- (A 1983 Congressionally authorized General Accounting Office study that revealed that three out of four off-site, commercial hazardous waste landfills in the southeast U.S. were located within predominantly African American communities, even though African Americans made up just one fifth of the region's population. The report concluded that it was unlikely that this maldistribution of waste in African American communities was the result of race-neutral decision-making (General Accounting Office 1983).
- < A 1987 study, *Toxic Wastes and Race in the U.S.*, conducted by the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice. This was the first national study to correlate waste facilities and demographic characteristics and found that race was the most significant factor in determining where waste facilities are located. Among other findings, the study revealed that three out of five African Americans and Latinos live in communities with one or more uncontrolled toxic waste sites, and fifty percent of Asian Pacific Islander Americans and Native Americans live in such communities (United Church of Christ Commission on Racial Justice 1987).
- < A 1990 book, *Dumping in Dixie*, written by sociologist Robert Bullard, that detailed several case studies of environmental racism and the range of resistance strategies communities of color were using to repel toxics.
- < A 1992 study by the National Law Journal, "Unequal Protection: The Racial Divide in Environmental Law," uncovered significant disparities in the way

the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) enforces the law: "There is a racial divide in the way the U.S. government cleans up toxic waste sites and punishes polluters. White communities see faster action, better results and stiffer penalties than communities where Blacks, Hispanics and other minorities live. This unequal protection often occurs whether the community is wealthy or poor" (Lavelle and Coyle 1992). This study thereby provided some indicators of the causes of environmental racism: government inaction, officially-sanctioned discrimination, and an alliance between corporations and the state to produce environmentally unjust decisions. This report also underscored that environmental racism impacts people of color at all socioeconomic levels.

- < In 1999, the Institute of Medicine released "Toward Environmental Justice: Research, Education and Health Policy Needs." This report concluded that government, public health officials, and the medical and scientific communities need to place a higher value on the problems and concerns of non-White communities with regard to environmental health issues (Institute of Medicine 1999).

This body of evidence presents strong evidence that environmental inequities exist; that these inequities impacts millions of U.S. residents and workers; and that communities of color suffer a disproportionate share of the long term exposure even when controlled for class. For this reason, many scholars have argued that we have environmental inequalities which are a form of environmental racism.

This evidence has provided impetus to and legitimacy for a growing environmental justice movement mobilized around the common protest theme of "unequal protection" along racial lines. Among other arguments, this movement has called attention to how unequal protection emerges from locally situated unwanted land uses (LULUs) that often include exposure to, among other things, lead smelters, coke ovens in steel mills, sewage treatment plants, municipal, chemical, and medical waste incinerators, municipal and hazardous waste landfills, waste transfer stations, and chemical plants (see Chart 1).

Chart 1
Indicators of Environmental Inequality As Racism

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- * Widespread Unequal Protection and Enforcement against Hazardous Facility Siting in Poor and People of Color Communities
 - * Disproportionate Impact of Occupational Hazards on the Poor and Workers of Color
 - * The Abrogation of Treaties with Native Populations, particularly with Regard to Mining, Waste dumping, and Military Weapons Testing
 - * Unsafe and Segregated Housing
 - * Discriminatory Transportation Systems and Zoning Laws
 - * The Exclusion of the Poor and People of Color from Environmental Decision-Making
 - * The Neglect of Human Health and Social Justice Issues by the Established Environmental Movement
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Contrarily, a handful of scholars have argued that race is less salient than class in hazardous facility siting. Others say that market dynamics explain away any allegations of environmental racism (see Anderton, Anderson, Oakes, and Fraser 1994; Been 1993). Yet the overwhelming majority of EJ studies by social scientists, legal scholars, government agencies, and non-profit organizations corroborate the broad environmental racism thesis.

The majority of this past research focused on the distribution of hazardous facilities in vulnerable communities and on local responses to these policies. The latter studies generally centered on the importance of organized community-based resistance to facility siting -- the "environmental justice movement". Recently, researchers have begun to explore several other areas of environmental justice concern, including the workplace, housing, and transportation. These studies reveal that, paralleling LULU conflicts, the poor and people of color are disproportionately impacted by pollution on the job, in their homes, and via transportation systems (Bullard and Johnson 1997; Robinson 1991).

Scholars have typically argued that environmental racism occur when the poor or people of color are "dumped on" or exposed to hazards, because they are less powerful than corporations and the state. This is what we term a "perpetrator-victim scenario".

A typical scenario is that a corporate producer or waste facility or military production site located itself unannounced in a poor, non-white neighborhood. Once the facility was set up, the emissions or waste often had detrimental health impacts on the residents of the area. Groups of residents got together to discuss their immediate health concerns or worked to detect the source of a particular health threat. They demanded more information on the facility causing the damage, or sought the right to know what was causing their immediate health problems (Silliman 1997, p. 113).

An Alternative View : Environmental Inequality As An Unfolding Process With A Racial Dimension

We argue that environmental inequality unfolds in ways that are more complex than these written accounts of EJ struggles reveal. Not only are industry and government often guilty of perpetrating these acts of injustice, but many times community leaders, neighbors, and even environmentalists are also deeply implicated in creating these problems. In order to understand how and why environmental inequality disrupts communities, we must extend our research further into the history and the roles of the many people and organizations involved. We need to study the impacts of social inequality, and the power of the disenfranchised to shape the outcomes of these conflicts.

Much of the existing literature is focused on proving or contesting the existence of environmentally unequal siting outcomes, without thoroughly understanding how these outcomes were produced (Weinberg 1998). Some of the causes of environmental inequality include: institutional racism in housing, discriminatory zoning and planning practices, the lack of community access to environmental policy-making, the absence of people of color as elected officials, the historically-rooted tendency for corporations and governments to follow the path of least resistance in facility siting, market dynamics, and the exclusion of low-income and people of color communities from the dominant environmental movement.

Each of these topics has been addressed to some extent in the work of social scientists and legal scholars (Been 1993; Bullard 2000; Foster 2000). Yet this haphazard approach offers no syntheses or coherent models. In the social science literature, the most exciting research on the causes of environmental inequality consists of historical analyses

of case studies. Studies by Hurley (1995), Hersch (1995), Roberts and Toffolon-Weiss (2001), and Szasz and Meuser (1998) stand out as the models. Each demonstrates how racism, classism, and our changing knowledge of environmental hazards interact, to shift the burdens of environmental risks to different populations over time. These studies reveal that stakeholders are constantly jockeying for quality living and working environments. Moreover, they note that social stratification and environmental quality are present in the minds of urban planners, corporations, workers, and residents. Other scholars have conducted longitudinal studies using statistical analyses to demonstrate how hazards and people have shifted over time (Coursey 1994). However, we have yet to see a singular conceptual framework put forward that would explain the general emergence of environmental racist behaviors.

In the rest of this article, we build upon the EJ literature by analyzing the processes by which environmental inequalities are created, reproduced, and sometimes challenged. That is, we seek to move away from quantitative analyses of large data sets to a different set of methods -- qualitative and historical analyses of EJ conflicts. Using historical and qualitative data, we not only uncover where the people and hazards are located, but we can provide a social and political context in which environmental policy and struggles are constructed. These methods can aid us in uncovering the social origins of environmental inequality and reveal how these processes evolved.

Environmental inequality is a social process involving and impacting many actors, institutions, and organizations. These actors, or 'stakeholders', often include social movement organizations, private sector firms, the state, residents, and workers. Each group's interests are complex and often involve cross-cutting allegiances. Thus it is often difficult to distinguish between heroes and villains. The environmental justice framework allows us to move beyond a view of environmental racism where hazards are unilaterally and uniformly imposed upon victims, who then react. Instead, we offer a scenario wherein many actors are viewed in their full complexity. Putative victims often become active agents in resisting and shaping environmental inequalities before, during, and after they emerge. Within this framework, we also move beyond a view wherein outcomes are defined simply as the presence or absence of hazards. In contrast, we can account for variations in patterns of environmental inequalities. In its present state of development, the environmental justice literature does not provide an adequate accounting for why such variations occur.

Environmental inequality occurs as different stakeholders struggle for access to valuable resources within the political economy, and the benefits and costs of those

resources become distributed unevenly. Stakeholders who are unable to effectively mobilize resources are most likely to suffer from environmental inequality. Conversely, stakeholders with the greatest access to valuable resources are able to deprive other stakeholders of that same access. This perspective captures the dynamic nature of environmental inequality. Valuable resources can include clean living, recreational, and working environments. They can also include power, wealth, and status.

Thus, the inability to access these resources often means living and working under dangerous conditions, with very little power, wealth, or status. Conversely, those stakeholders with the ability to access these resources live and work under safer, healthier conditions with more power, wealth, and status. In communities where environmental inequality is evident, immigrants, people of color, low-income populations, and politically marginal groups tend to bear the brunt of the pollution, the toxins, and the risk. Environmental inequality has a negative impact on people's physical and psychological well-being, and on the levels of health of entire communities.

Since power is equated with race, over and beyond class, in American society, we argue that environmental inequality also has a racial dimension. Beyond the typical factors that make somebody disempowered, people of color are likely to have lack power partially because they are people of color. People of color are likely to lack economic power because of institutional racism embedded in every facet of the labor market process (Wilson 1997). Secondly, communities of color continue to lack equal access to political power. They have a harder time getting elected to political office and to raising the massive amounts of funds needed to exert influence through lobbying organizations. Thus, many people lack power for racial reasons. This is not a surprising sociological argument.

Our framework stresses four major points (see Chart 2 for further explanation). First is the importance of process and history; second is the role of multiple stakeholder relationships; third is the impact of social stratification such as institutional racism and classism; and fourth is the ability of those with the least access to resources to resist toxics and other hazards. It should be evident from these four factors that environmental inequalities are not always simply imposed unilaterally by one class or race of people on another. Rather, like all forms of stratification, environmental inequalities are relationships that are formed and often change through negotiation and conflict among multiple stakeholders.

Chart 2
A New Framework

1) The historical origins of environmental inequality are key to understanding these conflicts and promoting solutions. The socio-political processes by which hazards are created and distributed must be the focus.

2) Environmental inequality involves and impacts many actors and institutions (i.e., 'stakeholders') with often contradictory and cross-cutting allegiances (the state, workers, environmentalists, residents, private capital, neighborhood organizations). These stakeholders are engaged in struggles for access to valuable resources (clean and safe working/living environments, power, profit). Environmental inequalities are rarely characterized by simple 'perpetrator-victim' interactions. Rather, they involve stakeholders with varying degrees of power and access to resources such as political power.

3) Institutional racism and other forms of inequality play a decisive role in environmental justice struggles. Specifically, those populations of workers and residents with the least access to political resources are generally low-income and/or people of color and are therefore more likely to suffer environmental injustices.

4) Despite the yokes of racism and classism (among other forms of inequality), marginal groups can sometimes create or exploit openings in the political process to mitigate or change the nature of environmental racism they confront. Their resistance can reshape environmental inequalities. Thus environmental inequalities continuously evolve and vary over time and context, rather than being an unchanging pattern of unequal outcomes.

To make this framework more clear, we present the recent and somewhat well-known battle over the Robbins Incinerator in Chicago. As this historical case study makes the clear, a focus on the socio-political processes by which the Robbins Incinerator emerged reveals a more complex process than can be captured by a simple 'perpetrator-victim' analysis .

Divide and Conquer: The Fight For and Against the Robbins Incinerator

Historical Factors

In 1992, Robbins, an all-African American suburb of Chicago, was literally begging a waste company to locate an incinerator in its borders. The typical responses by EJ activists in Chicago were: " How in the world did that happen?" and " Is that environmental racism or not?" These are two of the many perplexing questions this case raises. Without addressing them, we will never successfully move toward an environmentally just society .

In 1987, EJ groups around the nation were attacking the waste industry, blocking landfills and incinerators everywhere. As a response, the Illinois legislature feared a sudden exhaustion of landfill capacity and passed the Retail Rate Law. This provided significant tax subsidies to incinerator companies that chose to locate in the state. This was the state of Illinois' way of saying "we're open for business and we'll pay you to burn trash here." Not surprisingly, this legislation sparked an enormous growth in incinerator proposals in Illinois.

This is an example where the EJ movement was in fact influencing (if not driving) policy. The shift from landfills to incinerators was both an unintended consequence of the anti-LULU movement, and also a trend that had occurred even in the 1890s and early 1900s. In 1987 there was only one incinerator in the state of Illinois. In the next several years, nine incinerators were either proposed or built in the state, seven of which were in African American communities, while the other two were in working class and/or white ethnic neighborhoods (Portney 1991: 138ff). African Americans comprise only a fraction of the state's population, so any observer of Illinois' incinerator siting practices would have to conclude that this pattern did not emerge by chance. Both class and race intersected to position communities of color, working class and low-income, and ethnic European populations as the most attractive candidates for LULU sitings.

Robbins is an historic African American town. Founded in 1917, it is the oldest all-Black governed town in the Northern United States. Today, unfortunately, this village of 7,000 people is also one of the poorest communities in the United States. It faces mounting financial debts, including a \$1.3 million unpaid water bill owed to the City of Chicago. Since the 1980s, the city has held charity drives to raise funds to pay for the city's operations. This is a ghost town as far as most businesses are concerned, a barren landscape with few prospects for economic development. In fact, the major economic activity in Robbins consists of a nursing home, liquor stores that open at 8 a.m., mom-

and-pop convenience stores, and the illicit trade in drugs and sex. Like many cities, Robbins experienced a mass exodus of both businesses and residents during the period between 1970 and 1990. Since that time, each Mayoral administration has courted all manner of businesses, to no avail--until the early 1990s.

Robbins had been working for sometime to attract any sort of business, including waste management facilities. In the 1970s, the administration developed a plan for an "energy park," where a waste-to-energy incinerator and several ancillary industries would be sited. That idea languished for a while because land filling was cheap and even waste firms had reservations about the level of poverty and destitution in the village. Finally, in 1986, the Illinois Senate approved a measure to acquire land for an incinerator in the village of Robbins. Robbins struck a deal with the Reading Energy Company (and later the Foster Wheeler company) . With the taxpayer subsidy from the Retail Rate Law, the company could boost annual profits from the burner to \$23 million, and it would pay the village nearly \$2 million in rent each year, doubling the city's revenue.

Resistance Against Inequality: Stakeholder Battles

This proposal immediately spawned a major campaign against the incinerator. A regional EJ coalition emerged to oppose the " burner." Most of the organizations in this coalition were located outside Robbins. Soon thereafter, there emerged several strong-willed residents and leaders within Robbins who stood up against the incinerator as well. These groups quickly joined the EJ coalition. In a memo written by the coalition, these organizations outlined the hazards of incineration and the environmental injustices of locating this burner in Robbins:

Minority and low income communities have long been the favorite dumping ground for society's pollution. Recently, there has been a growing movement demanding environmental justice. To that end, we should oppose facilities such as Robbins that wish to add pollution to our already overburdened populations. Although our communities need additional jobs, this cannot be justification enough for exposing our families to a considerable health risk. Ironically, it has been certain African American politicians who seem to have blocked an effort to repeal an Illinois law enacted in 1987 (the Retail Rate Law) that subsidizes the construction and development of incineration facilities like Robbins, using Illinois tax-payers money."

This was a case of environmental racism, they argued. While the company had not targeted the community, the community was in such dire economic straits they felt they had no choice but to court such an incinerator (Portney 1991: 138ff). In flyers, speeches, and letters to newspapers, the EJ coalition sent a message to the public that an incinerator burning 1600 tons of refuse per day would release dangerous levels of mercury, dioxin, and other carcinogens into the air. This would not only impact the health of people in Robbins, but also put people in adjacent communities at risk. Also, many of the eighty jobs Foster Wheeler was promising to Robbins residents would be hazardous and low-wage (and probably less than a dozen in the final analysis), while any white collar jobs would go to non-Robbins residents. The price tag that taxpayers would pay for this facility was \$730 million and that figure alone catalyzed a lot of support for the anti-incinerator cause. The coalition also claimed that incinerators are hazardous operations because they routinely experience a high rate of accidents. The movement argued that recycling initiatives would be much more economically and environmentally sound, and could produce many more jobs with less funding.

At a hearing in 1992, scores of supporters (outnumbering opponents) attended, wearing painters' caps that read: " Yes. In My Backyard," " Don't Trash Jobs," and " Right 4 Robbins." Incineration opponents wore shirts that read: " Ban the Burn" and " Over Our Dead Bodies." The Chicago Tribune was staunchly in favor of approving the Robbins incinerator, printing editorials decrying anti-burner protests and the regulatory hurdles placed before the facility's developers. In 1993 the incinerator received the green light from the Illinois EPA and was given a permit. But the movement against the facility moved forward.

The EJ coalition drew on a two-pronged strategy. First, they put the spotlight on the Robbins facility and framed it as environmental racism. Second, they sought to repeal the Retail Rate Law. Without it, Foster Wheeler and other incinerator companies would lose profits and eventually leave the town. In 1993, nearly a dozen south suburban municipalities passed resolutions opposing the Robbins incinerator. This meant that the potential regional sources of trash to fuel this burner were dwindling rapidly.

Robbins' Mayor Irene Brody, the person leading the campaign to court the burner, cleverly framed this conflict as one stirred up by " outside agitators". She rendered as illegitimate their position as environmental justice advocates. The Mayor also used the observation that white citizens in the region were universally against the incinerator as "evidence" that whites did not want to see an all-black town "pull itself up and out of poverty." Furthermore, she claimed that if activists prevented Robbins from building the incinerator, that such an outcome would constitute environmental racism! In what some

activists have called a "twisted logic," Brodie proudly proclaimed, "There's always been environmental racism. We're just making it work for us for once."

Foster Wheeler's reaction to the EJ coalition was predictable: like incineration proponents a century before, they claimed in billboard and newspaper ads and in trade journals that they planned on constructing a state-of-the-art facility that would be clean and safe: "Pollution emissions will be low," they argued. These promises were dashed when, after its construction in 1997, the Robbins incinerator was plagued by accidents, Clean Air Act violations, and continued negative campaigns by environmentalists. Environmentalists helped repeal the Retail Rate Law that same year, halting all subsidies to Foster Wheeler, and in the year 2000, the decision was finally made to shutdown the facility.

Because Robbins was actually recruiting an incinerator, rather than being targeted by the waste company, this case raises the questions a) is this environmental racism? and b) how did this happen? As Jim Schwab of the American Planning Association told a group of environmental scholars and activists at a conference at the University of Chicago, "asking the question is this environmental racism?' begs the question as to why Robbins would seek an incinerator. When you answer that second question, you have to confront the fact that racism had everything to do with the current position the village finds itself in." In short, Schwab would answer "yes" to the question as to whether the Robbins struggle was an example of environmental racism. Those analysts who view the struggle as rooted only in one town's efforts to climb out of poverty are ignoring history and the legacy of racism.

The Transnational Trade in Hazardous Waste: Global Environmental Racism

The sort of history that unfolded in Robbins is generalizable more globally. To make this more clear, we now turn to the transnational trade in hazardous waste.

Historical Forces: Nation, Race, Class, and Unintended Consequences

Since the end of World War II, industrialized nations have generated increasing volumes of hazardous chemical waste -- the result of several technological "advances" in the manufacturing, transportation, and military sectors, among others. The amount of toxins produced at the turn of the millennium has risen exponentially in the last five decades. Today, it is estimated that nearly 3 million tons of hazardous waste from the United States and other industrialized nations cross international borders each year. Of

the total volume of hazardous waste produced worldwide, 90% of it originates in industrialized nations. Much of this waste is being shipped from Europe and the U.S. to nations in South America, Southeast Asia, and Africa -- the Third World (Critharis 1990; Marbury 1995; Tiemann 1998).

There are two principal reasons for this shifting of the burden to southern or Third World nations. First is the emergence of more stringent environmental regulations in nations in the North. These changes have driven up the costs of waste treatment and disposal, which are magnitudes greater than those found in " developing" nations, which allow for dumping at a fraction of the cost. Similarly, the typical legal apparatus found in industrialized nations is much more complicated when compared to the lax regulatory regimes in many Third World nations. This is in part due to a comparatively more influential environmental movement sector in industrialized nations. This sector has successfully produced a regulatory structure that provides at least a minimal level of oversight over polluting firms. The unintended consequence of this "success" in the North is to provide an incentive for the worst polluters to seek disposal sites beyond national borders (Marbury 1995).

The second factor is the widespread need for fiscal relief among Third World nations. This need--rooted in a long history of colonialism and contemporary loan/debt arrangements between Third World and industrialized nations -- often leads government officials in Africa, Asia, and South America to accept financial compensation (i.e. bribes or officially-sanctioned payment) in exchange for permission to dump chemical wastes in their borders (Porterfield and Weir 1987). Many observers (economists and business leaders in industrial countries) have described these transactions as " economically efficient," while others (African leaders and environmentalists) prefer the terms " toxic colonialism" and " garbage imperialism" (Marbury 1995)

Stakeholder Struggles and Resistance to the Toxic Trade

Despite the existence of several international treaties and domestic legislation in many nations intended to regulate and even prohibit this trade, toxic dumping in the Third World continues to grow. However, environmental and social justice advocates have continued to monitor and resist these practices. A sampling of notable cases will provide a more substantive context. Some years ago, the African nation of Guinea-Bissau was on the verge of permitting the dumping of several tons of toxic waste in its borders, in return for payment equal to four times that country's Gross National Product. Several environmental and social justice groups in Africa and around the world protested this arrangement and persuaded Guinea-Bissau officials to reject the shipment. The fiscal

incentive was very tempting, given the absolute dire poverty in which most of Guinea-Bissau's citizens find themselves.

In another example, Formosa Plastics Company attempted to dump a load of the toxic polyvinyl chloride (PVC) in the Philippines in 1997. Local activists in the Philippines and Taiwan teamed up with Greenpeace and several other labor, human rights, and environmental justice organizations around the world to repel the shipment from the Philippines and several other nations over a period of two years. The company was eventually forced to return the waste to the original site for disposal.

In Koko, Nigeria during the 1980s, several thousand tons of highly poisonous wastes were illegally dumped by an Italian chemical firm. The result was the release of dioxin, lead, mercury and other chemicals into the local environment, which produced elevated rates of cancer, lead and mercury poisoning, birth defects, miscarriages, kidney disease, and mortality among the local population. Nigerian officials responded by arresting Italian diplomats and ambassadors and threatened to execute any individuals responsible for future waste dumping.

Nigeria, the Philippines, and Guinea-Bissau have been colonized by other nations. Their own natural resources were extracted for the benefit of foreign stakeholders, leaving these states bereft of natural and fiscal capital. "Development" loans provided by international banking institutions generated little development, and left these states mired in debt. Their workforces and citizenry are desperate for economic development to meet subsistence needs and their political leaders are often willing to do whatever it takes to ensure that this happens. And bribes, or "ground rent", provided an extra incentive for officials and leaders to cooperate.

Scholars researching the transnational waste trade have focused mainly on the legislation and treaties that have been enacted to control these activities. This literature has centered on one major pressing question: to what extent can domestic regulations and international agreements control or minimize the waste trade? The majority of the existing research emphasizes the legal/regulatory aspects of this global form of environmental racism without paying attention to the driving forces behind the waste trade. If one only takes a cursory look at the nations importing waste (legally or illegally) into their borders, it immediately becomes clear that they are nations on the geopolitical and economic periphery, they are nations that have endured colonization in the last two centuries, and they are often nations populated by a majority of people of color. This parallel with environmental inequalities within industrial nation-states like the U.S. might indicate that similar forces are causing global environmental inequalities. For example, the African nation of Benin was colonized by France. After independence, it is

now deeply in debt to France and several financial institutions. French waste traders have recently offered to pay Benin large sums of money, in compensation for accepting toxins. Benin's motivation to accept such payment stems largely from its desire to repay its loans to France--hence, the term "toxic colonialism" and a brief explanation for one of the causes of global environmental racism.

Shaping Waste Trade Policy

The movement against toxic dumping in poor and people of color communities in the U.S. emerged during the 1980s, just as the movement against the global waste trade was taking shape. Our reading of this history is that these two parallel events were related. Shortly after the movement for environmental justice in the U.S. made headlines in the early 1980s, activists and policy makers began to take notice of similar patterns of environmental inequality around the globe. The Basel Convention, a transnational accord regulating the hazardous waste trade among nations, was first signed in 1989, during the height of the EJ movement's visibility in the U.S. It is also probably not coincidental that Greenpeace, an organization that has been intimately involved in struggles against environmental racism across the U.S., has been the principal advocate for a ban on the transnational trade in hazardous waste. As a result of the pressure applied by movement organizations, politicians, and the media in the late 1980s and early 1990s, significant segments of the toxic waste trade are shifting away from Africa, and toward Eastern Europe and Russia. Thus, like the flow of solid waste eventually being burned in Robbins, Illinois, the waste was simply shifted to a new location, rather than reduced at the source.

Domestic versus Global Environmental Racism

There are major similarities and differences between environmental inequalities in the domestic U.S. and global environmental inequities. We will begin with the similarities. The domestic U.S. case of the Robbins incinerator resembles the transnational waste trade in three ways. First, Robbins and all Third World nations have a history of externally-imposed oppression and subordination (Rodney 1982). All-Black towns like Robbins may instill pride in African Americans, but they are also peripheral to society. They receive fewer federal funds, have little business development, and enjoy little-to-no political influence in state politics. Similarly, nations in the Third World, by definition, are on the periphery of the " global village" economically and politically. While inner city African American communities have some of the highest rates of

unemployment and mortality within the U.S., nations in West Africa experience some of the highest levels of poverty and infant mortality in the world.

Second, both types of communities shoulder a disproportionate burden of toxic waste. African American communities like Robbins, have been described as environmental "sacrifice zones" (Bullard 2000) while entire nations and regions in the Third World have been referred to as the "global dumping ground" (Moyers 1990) and the "outhouse for industrialized nations."

Third and finally, local leaders and citizens are willing to accept compensation for having their communities shoulder the toxic burdens, whether they be illicit "pay offs" or legal payments. The Robbins incinerator represented "blood money" and "environmental blackmail" to many activists. They felt the Mayor could have demonstrated greater integrity if she had rejected the notion that the only jobs poor blacks towns can attract are hazardous jobs. Other observers view Mayor Brodie's decision to court the incinerator as pragmatic planning in a difficult situation. Many African American leaders have scorned those who do accept dirty industries in the name of economic development because of the greater long term environmental and human health costs the citizens will pay. Similarly, leaders of many Third World nations have been exposed for accepting bribes for--or simply permitting--toxic dumping in their borders as well.

The differences between domestic EJ struggles in the U.S. and those in the Third World have mainly to do with regulatory structures, governmental apparatus, and movement infrastructures. In the first case, the regulatory structures in the U.S. versus those in Third World nations are vastly different. Hazardous waste dumping in the U.S. can cost up to \$4,000 per ton while the charge in many African nations is as little as \$5 per ton (Marbury 1995). The existence of a relatively strong domestic regulatory regime provides U.S.-based communities of color with a body of law with which to fight environmental injustices. Communities in many Third World nations have few such resources.

The second major difference between U.S. versus international EJ struggles is less apparent. Communities of color -- in fact all communities -- in the U.S. have no formal autonomy with regard to the waste trade. In the 1990s, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down a ruling that "flow control" was unconstitutional -- thus denying municipalities the right to decide where they would import or export their solid waste for land filling, incineration, or recycling. Furthermore, state and federal laws take precedent over municipal laws if the latter are found to be in violation of the former. Third World nations, on the other hand, are not bound by the U.S. Supreme Court, and can control the

export and import of their waste as they please (as long as it does not violate treaties they have signed with other nations, or agreements with the World Trade Organization). In this way, Third World nations can theoretically exert much more control over the waste trade than domestic U.S. communities.

Third, the social movement infrastructure in many U.S. communities of color is often much more influential (and less endangered by severe state repression) than advocacy groups in most Third World nations. This has allowed movements in the U.S. to have a stronger influence on state and industrial policy making than movements in Third World nations. So taken as a whole, Third World nations are in a much more tenuous position than communities of color in the U.S.

Conclusions

Returning to the EJ framework suggested earlier, we emphasize the following key points for understanding these conflicts:

- the importance of the history of environmental inequalities and the processes by which it unfolds;
- the role of multiple stakeholders in these conflicts;
- the role of social stratification by race and class; and
- the ability of those least powerful segments of society to shape the contours of environmental justice struggles.

In the cases discussed in this paper, we find that populations with minimal political power are generally the most vulnerable to environmental inequalities. We have sought to suggest some of the ways that racism, classism, and our changing knowledge of environmental hazards interact, to shift the burdens of environmental risks to different populations over time. Within and across communities, stakeholders are constantly jockeying for quality living and working environments. Moreover, we note that social stratification and environmental quality are present in the minds of urban planners, corporations, workers, and residents who are trying to maximize their vested interests often at the expense of others.

However, departing from conventional accounts of environmental racism, this study finds that class and political privilege often place certain people of color in a position to benefit from (and perhaps perpetrate acts of) that have been labeled as "environmental racism". When EJ struggles take this direction, the simple claim that environmental racism is at work becomes problematic. These dynamics add an ingredient long absent from much of the literature -- the way that class and political power often

divide communities and racial groups, creating intra-racial, intra-community, and class conflicts. Unfortunately, these internal community dynamics often serve to divert attention from the larger political economic structures where more affluent classes still remain in the cleanest, best-protected living and working environments (Portney 1991: 138ff).

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