Environmental Racism Essay, Research Paper

The Non-ethical Practice of Environmental Racism To begin with, a definition of environmental justice is necessary. This may be accomplished quite well by using ôThe Principles of Environmental Justiceö. They contain 17 principles ôdrafted and adoptedö in Washington, D.C. on the 24th through the 27th of October 1991by delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. 1) Environmental Justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction. 2) Environmental Justice demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias. 3) 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 other living things. 4) 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. 5) Environmental Justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples. 6) 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. 7) Environmental Justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation. 8) 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. 9) Environmental Justice protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care. 10) 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. 11) 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. 12) 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 provided fair access for all to the full range of resources. 13) 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 vaccination on people of color. 14) Environmental Justice opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations. 15) Environmental Justice opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms. 16) 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. 17) 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. (WOEJ) Environmental racism is the social injustice represented by the disproportionately large number of health and environmental risks cast upon peoples of color in the communities in which they live. These minorities are the most common victims of toxic waste. Environ- mental racism is now well documented in America’s communities. From Baton Rouge’s Cancer Alley to South Central Los Angeles millions of Americans live in housing and physical environments that are over burdened with environmental problems and other pollution related illnesses. Grassroots multiracial organizations have sprung up to initiate lawsuits and fight the polluters. Should anyone care about racism? On one level, working for systemic change, groups need allies. On another level, the philosophy that allows racism is similar, if not the same, as the philosophy that allows humans to separate themselves from nature. Both of these explanations are important, interesting and critical in the long term. However, there is a third explanation, that in the short term if not paid heed to will continue to lead to tragic results. The third explanation, and the one most difficult to deal with, is that the environmental movement has traditionally been passively racist – or, at least, because of the environmentalist’s inattentiveness to racial issues, environmental damage has disproportionately fallen upon the shoulders of people of color. Consider toxic dumping in itås present form. Fifty-three out of fifty-four California toxic waste sights are located in communities dominated by people of color. Even with the controlling for income, communities of color are much more likely to be burdened with waste than white communities. While poor white communities don’t get dumped on; more affluent African American, Chicano or Native American ones do. The traditional explanation for this phenomenon is to blame this location bias on alleged racist motives within corporations such as Romic, a recalcitrant hazardous waste facility currently under fire in East Palo Alto. The corporations predictably, and accurately, deny this. Large corporations can’t be racist. They have no morals (good or bad) because they care only about profit. If most large corporations were people, they’d slit their mother’s throats for an extra nickel or frantically build rubber rafts for drowning people if they thought they’d profit from the positive publicity. There is no way that a toxic waste facility would move into a moderately affluent community of color instead of a slightly less affluent, slightly less educated white one unless it was more profitable to do so – or unless racism existed on someone else’ part. One possible, frequently fingered, culprit for this racism is the government. However, while individuals in government organizations like Occupational Safety and Health Administration can be racist, the government operates (mostly) on objective standards and is thus unlikely to be responsible for subjective racism. Environmentalists, on the other hand, operate entirely on subjective standards in choosing their battles. There is no set algorithm for mobilization. No one insists, for example, that every three dumping violations should equal one protest. Moreover, though slowly becoming more accepting of people who don’t fit the standard stereotypes, the environmental movement is still relatively homogenous and in the 1970s and 1980s, when most of these toxic facilities were finding locations, the movement was almost completely homogenous. Had Romic violated the law in Menlo Park, local communities would have coalesced in opposition and citizens, used to being listened to, would have risen up in opposition. In East Palo Alto, there is too much baggage for a support network to exist and there is enough disempowerment and disenfranchisement for organization to be extremely difficult. Growing up in America deals everyone a certain amount of racism. Environmentalists, being well-meaning, probably have smaller doses than other people. However, there’s a certain inertia of internalized attitudes that everyone picks up from the news, from their textbooks and from observing the interactions of people of different races. I have it, you have, we all have it; no matter what race we are, we all subconsciously classify different-looking people as "others." Furthermore, even if all of this internal racism could be expunged, there’d still be the great mountain of divisions and lack of trust, brought on by history, to overcome before communities and people of different races could really coalesce and mobilize. In the end, race is too much a part of our history and of our present to be ignored. The environmental movement tried to ignore it for 20 years and failed. Now that movement and others like it must become actively anti-racist if they wish to succeed. src="/Graphics/ClassifiedsButton.GIF" border=0>

Contact the Daily

Copyright © 1995-96 Stanford Daily Urban sprawl and rapidly rising human populations carry a significantand ongoing threat to a variety of environmental and non-environmentalvalues. Agricultural lands impinge on wild habitat. Highways replacewetlands, and sprawling urban settlements impinge on agriculturallands. Expanding road systems sever communities and force familiesand businesses to relocate. All of this results in diminishing wild spaces.The remaining spaces may well come to be more and more highly valuedby some. This enhanced, near-to-sacred valuation may obtain for some particular characteristic of the land or because the land is the lastwild habitat of some particular species. This change will not, however,necessarily result in rising economic value. Indeed, economic needfulnessand willfulness has driven wild spaces back to the very ends of theearth. The only hope for halting this trend is that non-material valueswill be manifest through the political process as a basis for enhancedprotection. Certain statistical evidence exists to support the argument that environmental racism does occur in locations throughout America. ôThe Landmark Studyö, a report written in 1987 and a study ômost often citedö when questioning the ethics of environmental racism ôhad two important components: an analytical survey of commercial waste TSDFås [treatment, storage, and disposal facilities] and a descriptive analysis of uncontrolled toxic waste sitesö (Goldfarb 74). The study ôfound that the percentage of nonwhites within ZIP codes with one waste plant was approximately twice that of ZIP codes without such a facilityFor areas with more than one waste plant, the percentage of minority residents on average was three times greater than that of communities with no facilitiesö (74). These statistics are staggering and make it difficult to understand why and how the government or the people of the United States can permit this to occur. The effects of pollution and environmental hazards on people of color, the poor, and the working class have been overlooked by environmental policy makers because it is perceived that these communities are politically powerless and could not protest. A very influential individual who brought attention to the term environmental racism is Robert D. Bullard. As a member of the Clinton administration’s Environmental Justice Transition Team. According to Robert Bullard, the minority ô[communities] are ideal because of their powerlessness and their lack of education and vulnerability. Itås path of least resistance whether itås a municipal landfill, an incinerator, a toxic-waste dump or a chemical plantö (Rosen 67). With the knowledge that environmental racism exists there are some very influential laws in place to assist citizens in the fight against environmental racism. For example, the EPA has made significant efforts to promote environmental justice. However, in the 1990’s the EPA has changed its view of Title VI. (Dear 1992) ôOne of the first steps toward addressing the problem of environmental racism was the establishment of the Conference on Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards in 1990ö (Bullard 1993). It gave national visibility to the public debate on environmental abuse of minority groups. The mainstream movement, however, has been criticized for its lack of minority representation. Critics claim that these organizations fail to recruit minority memberships and have not addressed the daily environmental hazards in minority communities. Public outcry has prompted a response from the federal government on environmental racism. In 1994, on February 11, President Clinton signed an Executive Order on Environmental Justice addressing environmental racism. The laws that are in place however, are not always successful in preventing environmental racism. That is why citizens who are tired of being subjected to the dangers of pollution in their communities have been confronting the power structures throu Watchdog groups are also effective in strategic planning to combat environmental racism. The group comprises workers, high school and college students, women, farm workers, and inner city residents who are victims of environmental racism. The Watchd It is a fact that there is a prominent problem of environmental racism throughout the U.S. More importantly is the fact that environmental racism that does occur is gaining recognition, publicity, and support from programs such as LEAN, individuals l

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