

## DEFINING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The notion of 'environmental justice' rests on the equitable distribution of environmental risks and known hazards among all segments of the American population. But, in a society with vast disparities in wealth, political clout, and education, defining a 'just' distribution has not necessarily been synonymous with an 'even' distribution of associated health and economic repercussions related to siting of hazardous materials and processes. The papers we read this week largely asserted the right of all Americans to a clean and healthy living and working environment, and documented the systematic and unbalanced burden placed on historically underprivileged communities (typically poor, rural, minority groups). The statistics and case studies presented paint a disturbing picture at a local scale, but bring up some larger chicken-and-egg questions for me about the chronology of property devaluation, job creation (or loss), and neighborhood racial compositions. It seems like it would be logical to tabulate changes in racial and economic compositions of communities at various stages both before and after the arrival of a LULU, but the authors seemed to favor biased (on both sides) presentations of data with the intent to convince. Maybe the data doesn't actually exist, but it would be nice to know all the information that is available.

In many ways it seems like pitching environmental (in-)justice issues as racially motivated discrimination undermines the more fundamental need to place the burden of responsible hazards management (both curtailing production and effectively mediating waste) on those who profit from it--the producers and the users. The poor and working class suffer disproportionately because their economic livelihoods are tied to these environmentally harmful industries. They can't afford to refuse work, they can't afford to relocate their families away from hazardous areas, and, because of these confused interests they often don't agitate effectively to resist the arrival of hazardous facilities. This is not to discount the gravity of racial discrimination, but to refocus the issue at what seems to be its driving economic cause.

Ideally, where should hazardous sites be located? Does it make more sense for landfill to be located in the middle of the urban center that produces the waste or in an outlying community that may or may not be willing to take the risk? I think there should be a cost assessed for safe disposal of all waste produced industrially, but even this is laden with problems. It seems that there is always a community willing to make an environmentally unsound decision in hopes of economic benefit. As we read, the economic benefits usually do not materialize. Job creation is generally not significant and draws upon a wider region than the immediately surrounding area that bears the brunt of adverse economic and health effects from environmental degradation (property devaluation, sickness) associated with hazardous sites.

Some questions:

Should hazards be concentrated geographically or literally evenly distributed? (Yucca Mountain etc)

Who decides if distribution of burden is equitable? The government? Local community that may want a hazardous site? Based on population? Can burdened communities be adequately compensated somehow?

Race--easier to define than socioeconomic status? What are the statistics and their causes. Are systematic trends important, or individual cases on inequity?

