

# Combating environmental racism

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People before Profit: Combatting Environmental Racism After years of protests, court cases, deaths and stereotypes, the civil rights movement finally helped create equality in the United States and the saying in the Declaration of Independence, 'All men are created Equal', finally had meaning. But not all communities are created equal. Those communities inhabited by the poor and minorities are more degraded, less powerful and less protected. The government engages in environmental racism against the people living in these communities, putting their health and safety at risk.

The profit maximizing mindset of western companies is putting profits before people, endangering lives and communities around the world and should be corrected before more people face the consequences. Environmental racism "refers to any policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intentionally or not) individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color" (90). As more and more countries shift to capitalism, humans are becoming increasingly greedy, selfish, and profit-maximizing beings.

We are completely disregarding the cost to nature and each other; the only green we care about is the dollar. Individuals in power are taking advantage of minorities and placing toxic waste, landfills and polluting factories on their communities in order for them to save costs. Minorities such as blacks and Latinos are perceived as being weak and passive to government related actions. They are too scared to fight the government in fear that it will put their jobs in jeopardy and increase their economic burden. According to research by Dr.

Deborah Robinson, three out of five African Americans in the United States live in communities with uncontrollable toxic waste sites. Also, three of the five largest commercial hazardous waste landfills are located in African American and Latino communities. People need to take notice that environmental racism is also a form of racial oppression. It is the same product in different packaging. The people living in these communities suffer “shorter life ps, higher infant and adult mortality, poor health, poverty, diminished economic opportunities, substandard housing and an overall degraded quality of life. Also, studies have shown that long-term exposure to air pollution or toxic waste can cause lower IQ on children. How can one expect the poor to climb the class ladder and leave these slums if their IQ is being lowered by the environment that they are forced to live in? Corporate greed is to blame for this problem. People must take action to remove these dangerous plants and chemicals from these communities. Just because the poor are helpless does not mean we need to make their situation worst.

The people most likely to be exposed to these dangerous chemicals are also the least likely to have medical insurance. There are just over four million uninsured Americans; “That 4 million is broken down into 33% Hispanics, 21% African Americans and 21% Asian and Pacific Islanders”(92). 75% of people without insurance are minorities. These people are getting sick and cannot afford to pay for their healthcare costs so they are just dying by the masses. Not only are we hurting the very poor with our corporate greed, but we are also hurting nature.

Environmental racism also encompasses nature. Toxic material is being dropped into our lakes and our air. A recent study has revealed that 40% of

America's rivers and 46% of America's lakes are too polluted for fishing, swimming or aquatic life. One American produces over 3,285 pounds of hazardous waste. Our countries are deteriorating, species are becoming extinct; we are destroying our planet and there are simple solutions to correct that can help alleviate these predicaments, but first, corporate greed needs to be exterminated.

The corporate mindset needs to change from 'Profits before people' to 'People before profits'. It is simple; companies need to move their factories from those areas where people will be affected. No matter if they are black, Hispanic, Asians or whites, people are people, and one life is worth the same. There are millions of acres of desert land hundreds of miles from civilization that can be used to house those factories. Also, companies should start investing in more environmental friendly technologies for their factories in order to decrease pollution and toxic waste.

If the entire world lived like the average American, we would need 5 planets to provide enough resources. Yes, investment in green technology is costly, but it is worth it. First of all, because it leads to a cleaner and more sustainable planet. Second, because the communities near the plants would not be at risk and third, because it saves money for the companies. It is a heavy short-term investment that provides long-term results. It is good for the environment and for the companies as it saves them money. Take for example Pepsi. Pepsi makes Walkers potato chips in England.

Martyn Seal, the director of sustainability watches the clouds of steam rise from his office and all he sees is lost resources and lost money. To solve this, he and his team developed a manufacturing process that "will allow them to

suck water out of potatoes and even unplug the plant from the public water system”. Potatoes are composed of 80% water, so they could use this captured water to clean the equipment, wash the potatoes and even irrigate the plants outside the factory. It is estimated that this method could save them more than \$1 dollars a year.

Companies need to start following Pepsi’s initiative and help conserve our planet. When companies shift their views to People before Profits, they will finally be morally aware of the damages they are causing to not only nature but also the people living in these communities. The problem of environmental racism is also due to the transnational power and the extent of the mobility of these global corporations that are exploiting workers. Economic integration has facilitated the movement of goods and services across national borders.

Firms are becoming more and more powerful to nations. ” Their mobility has made it possible for them to seek the greatest profit, the least government regulations, and the best tax incentives, anywhere in the world. ” This is what creates environmental racism, if the proletariat does not accept a low waged job with environmental health risks, the mobility of the firm will allow it to relocate and find labor in another part of the world that has looser government regulations, oppressing those people instead.

They are being forced to live under these conditions in order to put food on their family’s table. Another reason why environmental racism is occurring is due to lower environmental standards abroad. Luckily, the United States is passing stricter environmental regulations such as Title IV “ which prohibits discriminatory practices in programs receiving federal funds and...a law that

set policy goals for the protection, maintenance and enhancement of the environment”(91). These stricter laws have caused a downsizing of US operations and an expansion of operations across national borders.

Large polluting firms that can no longer operate in the United States due to strict sanctions are now moving to third world countries where they can operate as these countries are in much need of capital and hence have lower environmental standards. The problem is not being reduced but rather passing on from one country to the next. For example, there are 2, 000 maquiladoras in the US-Mexico border operated by American, Japanese and other foreign countries. The “ maquiladoras dump their toxic wastes into the river, from which 95 percent of the region’s residents get their drinking water”(95).

These corporations are making top profits, while poor communities in Mexico are forced to low-wage jobs and environmental health threats. “ There is no ‘ right to know’ law in Mexico, so both workers and communities are denied information about the toxins to which they are exposed. ” These companies are degrading the environment and also they are keeping the toxic waste stored in Mexico, which should be returned to the US by law. This is just one example of how corporate mobility and lower standards abroad are leading to a higher degree of environmental racism.

The profit maximizing mindset of western companies is putting profits before people, endangering lives and communities around the world and should be corrected before more people face the consequences. To combat against environmental degradation and racism one needs to change the governmental policies regarding these issues. Governments need to engage

in ‘ globalizationfrom below’, “ a global civil society that seeks to extend ideas of moral, legal and environmentalaccountabilityto those now acting on behalf of the state, market and media”.

Countries with loose environmental laws need to place tougher conditions in place, and although they might lose revenue, they will free their people from environmental slavery. They need to realize that a life is worth more than a dollar bill. The United Nations needs to get involved helping these third world countries that do not have other options but to allow these companies into their countries. Tougher sanctions are desperately needed. “ Grassroots groups are fighting back and winning. They are forming alliances, coalitions, networks and collaborations that stretch across the globe”(95).

Environmental justice is needed, barriers need to be taken down and borders crossed. We cannot let our people live under these degrading conditions fearing for their own health and the lives of their children. Works Cited " 11 Facts about Pollution. " Environmental Racism. N. p. , n. d. Web. 2 Nov. 2011. . " Air Pollution. " National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). N. p. , n. d. Web. 4 Nov. 2011. . Brecher, Jeremy. Globalization From Below . " Third World Traveler. N. p. , n. d. Web. 4 Nov. 2011. . Deming, Alison Hawthorne, and Lauret E. Savoy. The colors of nature: culture, identity, and the natural world. Rev. ed. Minneapolis, Minn. : Milkweed Editions, 2011. Print. Robinson, Dr Deborah M.. " Environmental Racism. " The WCC. N. p. , n. d. Web. 4 Nov. 2011. . " Why sustainability is winning over CEOs. " Vancouver Sun. N. p. , n. d. Web. 3 Nov. 011. . ----- [ 1 ]. " Air Pollution. " National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). N. p. , n. d. Web. 4 Nov. 2011. . [ 2 ].

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