

Confronting environmental racism in the 21 century



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In recent years, grassroots multiracial organizations have sprung up to file lawsuits and fight the polluters. Should anyone care about environmental racism? The environmental movement has traditionally been racist or at least, because of the environmentalist's carelessness to racial issues, environmental damage has unjustly fallen upon the shoulders of people of color. Consider toxic dumping in its present form. Fifty-three out of fifty-four California toxic waste sights are located in communities dominated by people of color (p. 51). Even when income is a large factor, communities of color are much more likely to be burdened with waste than white communities (p. 64). While poor white communities don't get dumped on; poor 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 hazardous waste facility currently under fire in East Palo Alto (57). The large corporations predictably deny this, on the grounds that large corporations can't be racist. These large corporations have no morals (good or bad) because they care only about profit. There is no way that a toxic waste facility would move into a moderately prosperous community of color, instead of a slightly less prosperous, slightly less educated white one, unless it was more profitable to do so, or unless racism existed on someone else's part. Had Romic violated the law in a prosperous white local community, where citizens are used to being listened to, the citizen would have risen up in opposition. Growing up in America gives everyone a certain amount of racism. Environmentalists, probably have smaller doses than other people. However, there's certain apathy that everyone picks up from the news, from his or her textbooks and from observing the interactions of people of different races. I have it, you

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have, we all have it, no matter what race we are, and we all subconsciously classify different-looking people as “others.” Furthermore, even if all of this internal racism could be expunged, there would 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 join together 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.