

## Joel Elizaga's ENGL 131 Final Project: The Script

Okay, so I'm Joel Elizaga, and I researched environmental racism,  
and I'm going to do a quick presentation on what environmental racism is, and why it matters.  
So, first, I'd like to address environmentalism in the United States. Ever since I was in  
elementary school, we had global warming and climate change,

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and for some reason or another, it somehow became a politically contentious topic. Simplified,

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on the political right, you have that guy who threw a snowball in the Senate as if it somehow  
disproved climate change exists at all, and

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on the left you've got Al Gore and his polar bears.

And the polar bears are important, because for the most part, growing up in the late 90's and  
early 2000's,

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I remember this seemingly endless deluge of environmentally conscious films, shows, media  
whose message essentially boiled down to

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"we've gotta save the environment for the sake of the cute fluffy animals." Animals are the  
honored as the primary victims of human industrialization. They're fragile and vulnerable. The  
icon of this mentality is

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the ice glaciers, gradually melting into the sea, which will eventually cause a rise in global temperatures of about 10°F and raise the oceans. Now, as someone who grew up in Washington, a 10 degree boost is *nice*. That's perfect. That's California weather. I wouldn't mind if the Sound rose a bit either. You could kayak for days.

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My point is, the consequences of environmental devastation haven't been portrayed as particularly menacing or immediate. What's often ignored is that environmental injustice is killing humans right now, and that's where environmental racism comes in.

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In my research, I've found that

... **FAST:**

68% of black Americans live within 30 miles of a coal power plant, despite only being 13% of the population. What's wrong with coal power plants?

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They release 67% of the sulfur dioxide produced in this country, a gas which causes shortness of breath, exacerbates asthma, lowers birthrates, and increases the rates of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and other diseases like bronchitis and emphysema.

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They emit 23% of the nation's nitrogen oxides, which turn into ozone, which causes slowed lung growth and asthma attacks. They also produce

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38% of our carbon dioxide,

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34% of our mercury,

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and wastes like

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arsenic,

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lead,

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chromium,

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and cadmium,

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100 million tons of which are dumped into abandoned mines, landfills, and lagoons every year.

The report I read found that coal plants release 67 different air toxins, 55 of which are neurotoxic, 24 of which are carcinogenic.

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Unsurprisingly, black Americans visit the ER for asthma attacks at thrice the rate of whites and die from asthma at twice the rate.

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The University of Minnesota found last year that non-white populations are exposed to 38% more nitrogen dioxide than whites.

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I've also found that black Americans living in chemical disaster fenceline zones (zones "in which those affected are least likely to be able to escape from a toxic or flammable emergency") is

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75% greater than the U.S. as a whole and 60% greater for Latinos. This is a problem, because

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the U.S. Chemical Safety Board finds an average of 250 "high consequence chemical incidents involving death, injury, evacuation, or serious environmental property damage per year."

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For example, in 2012, an explosion at the Chevron Refinery in Richmond hospitalized 15,000 citizens for respiratory issues. 80% of the population of Richmond consists of minorities, 25% of the population is below the poverty line.

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Since 1945, Altgeld Gardens, a housing project meant for black World War II veterans in Chicago has been trapped in a circle of 50 ACME Steel landfills and 382 industrial facilities. They call this place "the toxic donut."

Toxicology studies in the 1990's found

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all of this in Altgeld Gardens. 11 miles of rivers surrounding Altgeld have been deemed "unfit for human consumption and recreation."

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In 2014, Freedom Industries dumped 10,000 gallons of 4-methylcyclohexanemethanol (known to be a “minor toxic” to the liver and kidney) into a public water source in Kanawha County, West Virginia, poisoning the water of 300,000 people.

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In 2015, one in four children have asthma in Mott-Haven, South Bronx, and death rates from asthma are five times higher than the U.S. average. New York University found a correlation between these rates and the pollution from diesel fumes, various fossil fuel plants, a sewage treatment facility, the 5,000 tons of commercial waste being transferred through the neighborhood, a Wall Street Journal printing and distribution center, and a FedEx Hub.

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In 2006 the city of Houston, Texas linked oil refineries lining the Gulf Coast to prenatal brain damage, asthma, and emphysema, with a 56% higher likelihood of children getting acute lymphomatic leukemia for living within 10 miles of the Houston Ship Channel. In 2015, these same refineries will be processing the crude oil of the Keystone XL Pipeline.

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The statistics and stories don’t end there.

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I had 18 different sources on my paper. My point is, whether or not climate change exists,

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everybody knows that sucking on the tailpipe of a Honda Civic can kill you. Animals are cute and all, but there’s a very real, and very immediate human cost to pollution. Now, one might think that the solution is simple: perhaps if we

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replaced all the coal power plants with solar farms and wind turbines and found cleaner ways to manufacture goods and energy, a shit ton more people would be able to breathe.

Environmentalism may be done to correct environmental racism. However, I doubt this'll confront the greed or the apathy or the racism that allowed our fellow humans to be treated this way in the first place.

So, when you encourage pollution via your purchases or use too much electricity, and I think we all do it,

...

I don't want you to think about the seagulls you're poisoning. Seagulls are creepy, and they're loud, and they steal food. I'd rather you consider that you might be giving some elementary schooler in Tacoma brain damage, or someone in the Bronx asthma, or a kid on the Gulf Coast leukemia.