

Four Dimensions of Environmental Justice

ENG/ENV M30: Environment across Cultures
Prof. Heise
Spring 2023



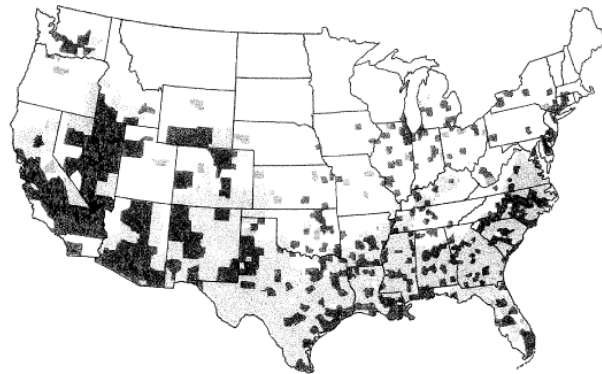
Environmental Justice in the US

- Movement starts in the 1980s
- 1983 US General Accounting Office's (GAO) *Siting of Hazardous Waste Landfills and their Correlation with Racial and Economic Status of Surrounding Communities*
- 1987: Rev. Benjamin Chavis coins the term "environmental racism"
- 1987: Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice publishes the report "Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States"



TOXIC WASTES AND RACE In The United States

**A National Report on the Racial and Socio-Economic
Characteristics of Communities
with Hazardous Waste Sites**



COMMISSION FOR RACIAL JUSTICE
United Church of Christ
© 1987

Commission for Racial Justice: "Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States" | 1987

Environmental Justice in the US

- Movement starts in the 1980s
- 1983 US General Accounting Office's (GAO) *Siting of Hazardous Waste Landfills and their Correlation with Racial and Economic Status of Surrounding Communities*
- 1987: Rev. Benjamin Chavis coins the term "environmental racism"
- 1987: Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice publishes the report "Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States"
- 1990 Publication of Robert Bullard's *Dumping in Dixie*



Environmental Justice in the US

- Movement starts in the 1980s
- 1983 US General Accounting Office's (GAO) *Siting of Hazardous Waste Landfills and their Correlation with Racial and Economic Status of Surrounding Communities*
- 1987: Rev. Benjamin Chavis coins the term "environmental racism"
- 1987: Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice publishes the report "Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States"
- 1990 Publication of Robert Bullard's *Dumping in Dixie*
- 1991 First People Environmental Justice Leadership Summit: 17 principles of environmental justice
- 1992: Environmental Justice act fails in Congress
- 1992: EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) establishes office on enviro-equity
- 1994: President Clinton issues order to address environmental justice issues in minority and low-income communities

Environmental Justice in the US

- Movement starts in the 1980s
- 1983 US General Accounting Office's (GAO) *Siting of Hazardous Waste Landfills and their Correlation with Racial and Economic Status of Surrounding Communities*
- 1987: Rev. Benjamin Chavis coins the term "environmental racism"
- 1987: Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice publishes the report "Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States"
- **1990 Publication of Robert Bullard's *Dumping in Dixie***
- 1991 First People Environmental Justice Leadership Summit: 17 principles of environmental justice
- 1992: Environmental Justice act fails in Congress
- 1992: EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) establishes office on enviro-equity
- 1994: President Clinton issues order to address environmental justice issues in minority and low-income communities

What Is Environmental Justice?

<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/amanpour-and-company/video/robert-bullard-how-environmental-racism-shapes-the-us/>





"The environmental movement in the United States emerged with agendas that focused on such areas as wilderness and wildlife preservation, resource conservation, pollution abatement, and population control. It was supported primarily by middle-class and upper-middle-class whites. . . . Mainstream environmental organizations were late in broadening their base of support to include blacks and other minorities, the poor, and working-class persons" (Bullard 1990: 1).

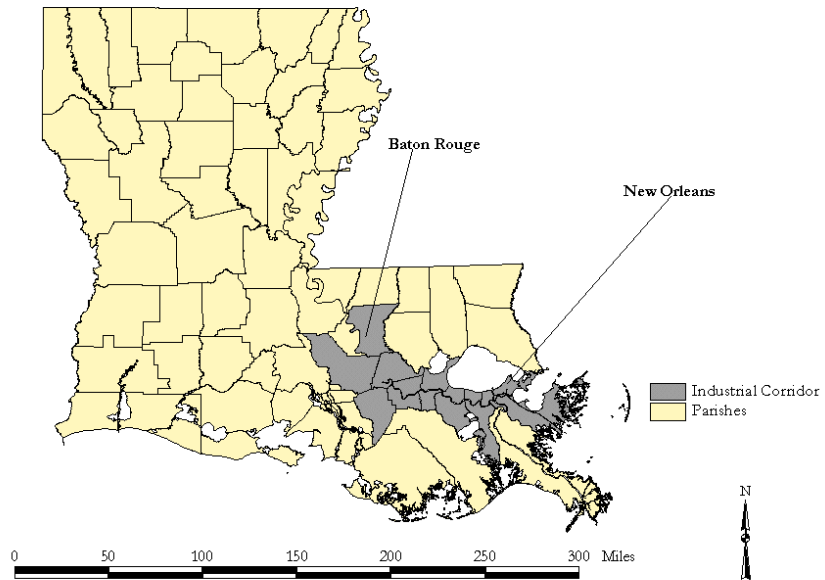


"Many of the interactions that emerged among core environmentalists, the poor, and blacks can be traced to **distributional equity** questions. How are the benefits and burdens of environmental reform distributed? Who gets what, where, and why? Are environmental inequities a result of racism or class barriers or a combination of both?" (Bullard 1990: 2; emphasis mine).



"The differential residential amenities and land uses assigned to black and white residential areas cannot be explained by class alone" (Bullard 1990: 6).

Louisiana's Industrial Corridor



"Cancer Alley" in Louisiana





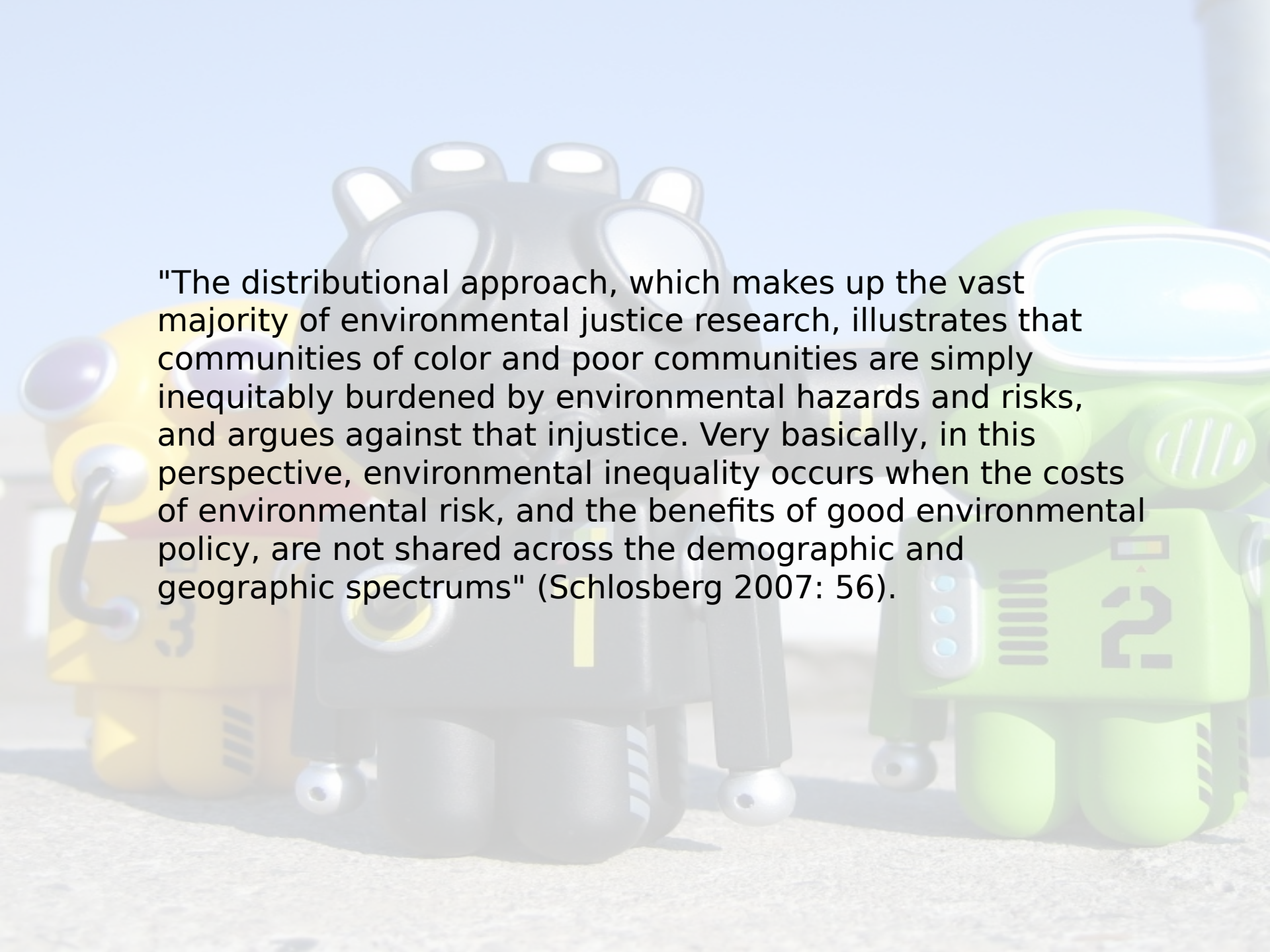
"Environmental discrimination is a fact of life. Here, environmental discrimination is defined as disparate treatment of a group or community based on race, class, or some other distinguishing characteristic" (Bullard 1990: 7).

"Environmental discrimination [is] a civil rights issue. . . . Environmental protection and social justice are not necessarily incompatible goals" (Bullard 1990: 14).



For Bullard and many other activists in the first wave of the environmental justice movement, environmental justice was primarily an issue of **distribution**:

- Distribution of environmental risks (exposure to pollution, proximity to toxic sites)
- Distribution of access to environmental benefits (clean water, clean air, access to parks)

Three stylized, blocky robots are visible in the background. On the left is a yellow robot with a purple eye and the number '3' on its chest. In the center is a grey robot with two large white eyes and the number '1' on its chest. On the right is a green robot with a large blue eye and the number '2' on its chest. They are all standing on a light-colored, textured ground against a light blue sky.

"The distributional approach, which makes up the vast majority of environmental justice research, illustrates that communities of color and poor communities are simply inequitably burdened by environmental hazards and risks, and argues against that injustice. Very basically, in this perspective, environmental inequality occurs when the costs of environmental risk, and the benefits of good environmental policy, are not shared across the demographic and geographic spectrums" (Schlosberg 2007: 56).



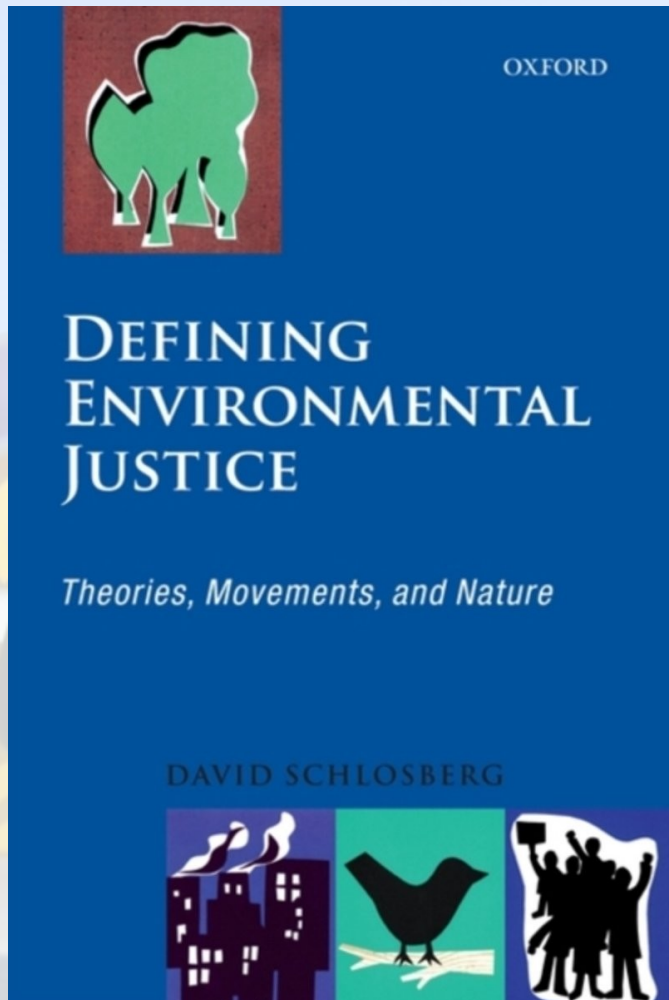
Environmental Protection Agency:

"Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. EPA has this goal for all communities and persons across this Nation. It will be achieved when everyone enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work."

In the 1990s, a second dimension of environmental justice moved to the forefront: **participation.**

- Involvement in decision-making over environmental issues
- Power to veto environmental decisions
- Power to implement environmental decisions





2007

Environmental Justice: Four Dimensions

■ **Distributive Justice:**

- Access to environmental resources and benefits
- Protection from environmental scarcities and risks

■ **Participatory Justice:**

- Involvement in decision-making over environmental issues
- Power to veto environmental decisions
- Power to implement environmental decisions

■ **Recognition Justice:**

- Acknowledgment of different kinds of knowledge about and management of ecosystems
- Respect for spiritual or religious meanings of nature for particular communities

Environmental Justice: Four Dimensions

■ **Distributive Justice:**

- Access to environmental resources and benefits
- Protection from environmental scarcities and risks

■ **Participatory Justice:**

- Involvement in decision-making over environmental issues
- Power to veto environmental decisions
- Power to implement environmental decisions

■ **Capabilities Justice:**

- Possibilities for flourishing & living a full life for humans and nonhumans
- Includes health, free movement, social bonds, and emotional ties, among others

■ **Recognition Justice:**

- Acknowledgment of different kinds of knowledge about and management of ecosystems
- Respect for spiritual or religious meanings of nature for particular communities

Environmental Justice and Rights/Human Rights

- The concept of "rights" typically applies to individuals, not collectives.
- Calling something a "right" is to give it the highest moral and legal priority: nothing should stand in the way of a person's human rights.
- Three generations of human rights (Karel Vasak):
 - first-generation **civil and political rights**: right to life and political participation
 - second-generation **economic, social and cultural rights**: right to subsistence
 - third-generation **solidarity rights**: right to peace, right to a clean environment.

Please note: The idea of "rights" is not the only way to talk about the ethical obligations that privileged individuals and communities have toward disadvantaged individuals and communities.

Environmental Justice: More than Toxicity

Exposure to toxins in the soil, water, or air is an important issue for environmental justice, but not the only one. Other crucial issues include:

- Exposure to wildfires, floods, and other natural disasters
- Land ownership and land use
- Access to parks and green spaces
- Access to biodiversity/kinship with other species
- Shade equity
- [Access to healthy food]
- [Access to safe housing]
- [Access to healthcare]