

**Masters in Environmental Studies, 2020-21**  
Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

# **Class 2: Racialised natures**

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# This class

- Explain environmental racism
- Explain environmental justice
  - What it is
  - Its main dimensions
- Look at racism and injustice as *ideology*

## **Activity 1. Racism and environmental degradation**

How is racism relevant for understanding the environmental degradation of the Cobbs Creek urban park?

*“...the uncontrolled growth of weeds and their emerging dominance in the landscape do appear to symbolize disorder, decay, and the absence of control that accompany years of political and fiscal neglect. Socially speaking, the significance of weeds is not what they do but, rather, what they represent; the same can be said for the abandoned autos, heaps of garbage, discarded needles, condoms, and drug paraphernalia, and broken glass that are pervasive throughout the park”*

*Why, according to Brownlow, have disorder and decay fallen upon Cobbs Creek?*

Answer in class:

# Disorder and decay in Cobbs Creek

- **Why?**
  - A key factor/ key change that brought about disorder and decay
- **Loss of social (community) control**  
mechanisms that ensured park security for everyone
- What **reasons** produced this phenomenon?
  1. Racist decisions of a man in power (Rizzo): Public Administration neglect of park, community, and its services
  2. Change in gang culture

# Decisions of a man in a seat of power

- Frank (“The Big Bambino”) Rizzo: Police Commissioner turned Mayor
  - Cuts park budget by 50%
  - Reduces mounted Park Guard
  - **Removes park benches**



Copyright: Bill Achatz/AP

# Park neglect and racial discrimination

- Budget cuts started with Mayor Rizzo but continued: since early 80s (i.e. 3 decades = no increase)
- budget cuts followed almost exact pattern as **exodus of whites** from the area

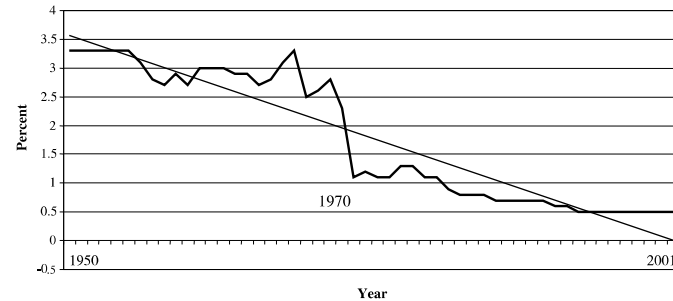


Fig. 9. Fairmount Park budget as a percent of Philadelphia's operating budget, 1950-2001.

*A. Brownlow / Geoforum 37 (2006) 227-245*

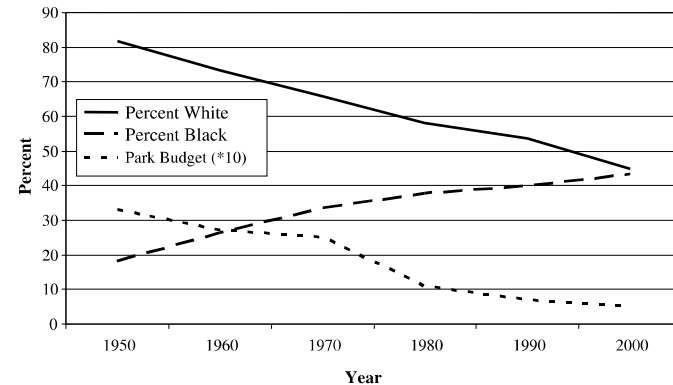


Fig. 10. Population and Park Budget Trends: 1950-2000. (Budget numbers multiplied by 10 for purposes of illustration).

# Changes in gang culture and US racial politics

- John: *“The park was sort of that neutral ground because everybody came to the park, and you had picnics out there and all kinds of things in that community – cook outs”*



Fig. 4. Ecology of Disorder II (kudzu in Cobbs Creek).

## The 50s: the “organic” gangs

- “Homegrown” gangs’ informal agreement over park’s neutrality

## Late 60s – early 70s: Black Power

- Cobbs Creek’s early gangs (and informal security) quietly disappear

## Late 70s: the power vacuum

- Decline of black identity movement
- Outmigration

## The 80s: end of the agreement

- Violent gangs: no agreements, unwritten or otherwise

# Racism and the park: the bigger picture

- Must analyse loss of social control mechanisms from **wider perspective** of evolution of power relations within city's history
  - civil rights movement, racial struggles, economic decay, etc.
  - racist and racially explosive period: *significant* – but *disproportionate* – roles
- Rizzo's decisions to dismantle local social control mechanisms in Cobbs Creek: **social control**
  - means to control social organization and activity of politically active
  - removing primary public arena (*the Park*) of intercourse and exchange



# Argument 1

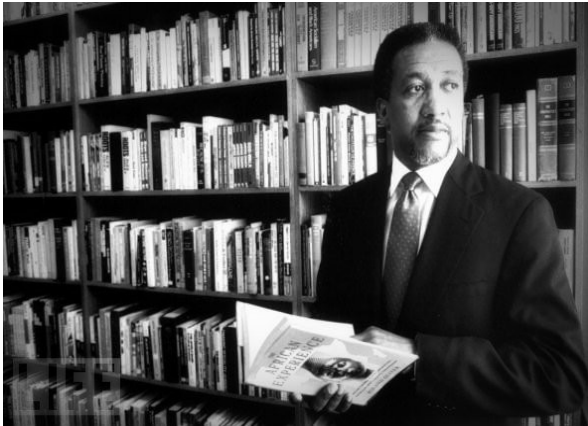
*Racism produces environmental degradation*

- Because: it offloads environmental 'bads' to non-white communities, by both
  - (i) depriving them of resources (park budgets)
  - (ii) reducing their existing capacities to maintain a healthy environment (social control mechanisms)
- Evidence:
  - (–)The racist-motivated actions of Mayor Rizzo
  - (–)The changes in gang culture

From racism and degradation to environmental racism

# **Environmental racism**

## Environmental racism: The Term

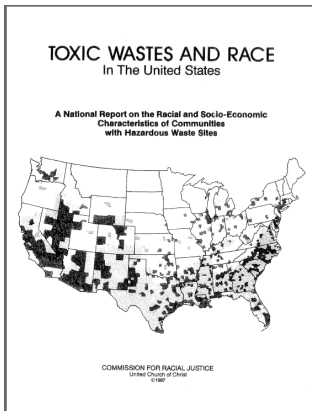


Source: <http://blackkudos.tumblr.com>

## The term

- Reverend Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr.
- *Toxic Waste and Race in the US* (1987) report

First national study to document the strong **correlation between race and hazardous landfill locations at a national level (USA)**



Copyright: Jenny Labalme

Source: [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Environmental-justice-protests-against-dumping-PCB-contaminated-soil-in-an\\_fig1\\_260245549](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Environmental-justice-protests-against-dumping-PCB-contaminated-soil-in-an_fig1_260245549)

## Precedents

- 1982: popular protest and mobilization against a planned large hazardous waste dump in Warren County, a predominantly African-American community in North Carolina

# Environmental racism: example

Robert Bullard:

- *“even **middle income African Americans** are more likely to live in polluted neighbourhoods”*
  - Study: *“African Americans making \$50-60k income are more likely to live in polluted neighborhoods than White Americans who make just \$10k/y*
- *“**minority** neighborhoods (regardless of class) carrying a greater burden of localized costs than either **affluent** or **poor white** neighborhoods”*



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# Environmental racism: definitions

Jepson, 2007: “intentional or unintentional...

- ...racial discrimination in environmental decision-making, ...
- ...systematic exclusion of people of color from the mainstream environmental movement, ...
- ...negligent enforcement of environmental protections, laws and regulations along racial lines, ...
- ...and disproportionate distribution of environmental burdens on racial and ethnic minorities where they live, work, and play”

# Environmental justice

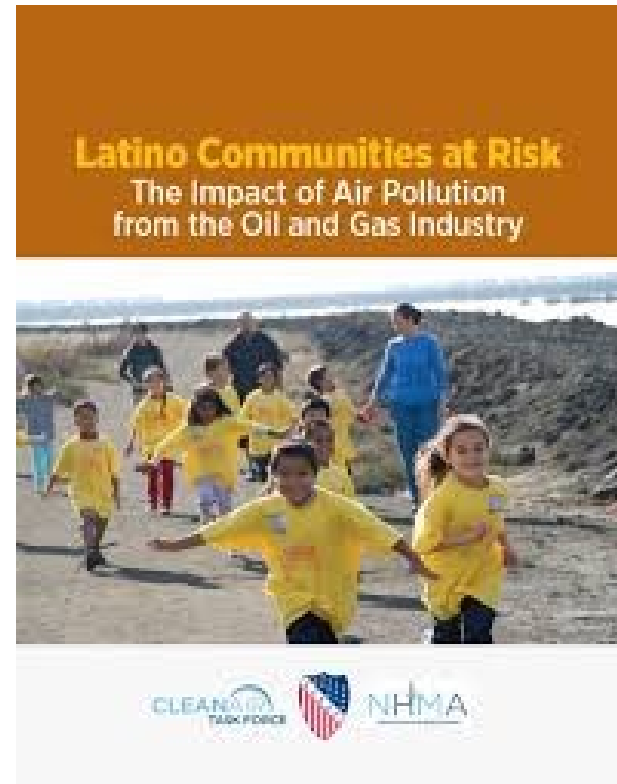
Explain “What is environmental justice?” in your own words.

Imagine your mom, dad, sister, brother, etc. call you today and ask you “What did you learn at school today child?” Explain it to them on the phone!

- Normative reaction to environmental racism
- What should we do to ensure avoiding environmental racism
- **Activity 2.** Watch the video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dREtXUij6\\_c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dREtXUij6_c)

# First, not only race

- Expanding scope
  - Initially: race
  - Bullard: “*Racism trumps class*”
- Expand to cover other groups and minorities
  - Socio-economic status (the poor) and class
  - Ethnic groups (Latinos in US)
  - Other vulnerable groups: women, children and poor



# Gender: women and climate change

(<https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/womenin-shadow-climate-change>)

- Women: more vulnerable than men to the impacts of climate change
  - because they represent the majority of the world's poor and are proportionally more dependent on threatened natural resources
- Difference between men and women can also be seen in their differential roles, responsibilities, decision making, access to land and natural resources, opportunities and needs, which are held by both sexes
  - Worldwide, women have less access than men to resources such as land, credit, agricultural inputs, decision-making structures, technology, training and extension services that would enhance their capacity to adapt to climate change

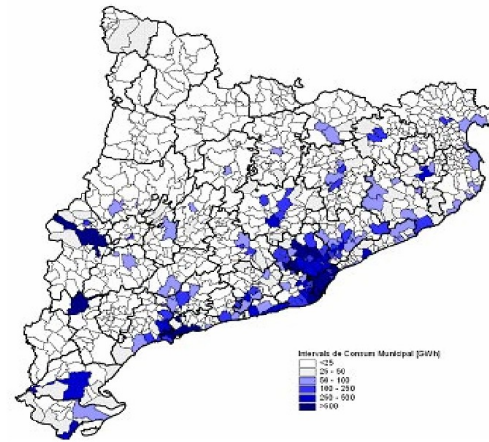
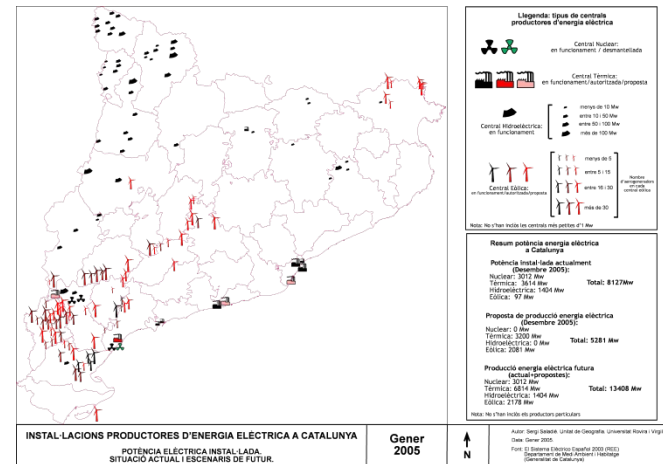


# EJ: distributive dimension

- **Distributive** EJ: [right to] equal distribution of environmental risks and benefits
- Such as in classic environmental racism cases (see before), when toxic environments are disproportionately experienced by African Americans, or for poor, or ethnic minorities, women, children, etc. (e.g. within the US)
- US EPA definition:
  - *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*

# Distributive EJ at national level

- National aspect: “*not only within cities, but also urban-rural divide*”
- Terra Alta wind farms:
  - Protests at macro-concentration
  - Inequities: energy generation **vs.** energy consumption
    - A neo-colonial relation between a centre and “extractive” periphery
  - Procedural aspects: behind closed-doors agreements



# International dimension of EJ (distributive)

- *In a study published by the American journal PNAS in May 2019, climatologist Noah Diffenbaugh claimed that "most of the poor countries on Earth are considerably poorer than they would have been without global warming. At the same time, most of the rich countries are richer than they would have been."*

<https://worldcrunch.com/culture-society/colonialism-the-hidden-cause-of-our-environmental-crisis>

# Distributive EJ: international dimension

- *“And even see that injustice on a global level”*: small island nations forced to directly confront consequences to rising sea-levels but haven't played any significant role in the industries that are causing climate change”



Source: KYODO/ [www.japantimes.co](http://www.japantimes.co)

## Tuvalu:

- Possibly first country (nation) to disappear because of climate change effects
  - SLR – lies only 2m above SL
- GDP: 135/175 (World Bank)
- Per capita CO2 emissions (in metric tn, 2014) (knoema.com) = “0”
  - Tuvalu = 0.06
  - Spain = 5.31
  - China = 7.82
  - USA = 16.63
- Pacific Islands region = 0.03% of global CO2 emissions (germanwatch.org)

# Distributive EJ: uneven goods

- Uneven bads but also uneven goods
  - *“poor urban planning policies...but those trees get planted in the neighbourhoods that are already green”*
  - *“benefits of programmes enjoyed by communities that are doing just fine”*
- Unequal *distribution* of environmental goods
- Heynen et al., 2006:
  - *“inequitable distribution of urban canopy cover within Milwaukee”*
  - *“those ... with higher median household income, non-Hispanic White residents, and low housing- vacancy rates are more likely to have greater total canopy cover”*

# EJ: participation dimension

- Procedural EJ : [right to] fair and meaningful participation
- US EPA definition:
  - ...*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*
  - *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.*

# EJ: Recognition

- Mabo Day: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiQ8YHDfySA>
- *European settlement of Australia and Terra Nullius*
  - *No claim to the land of their ancestors*
  - *1992: **Recognition** of continuing culture*
  - *“We belong to this land, and this land belongs to us”*
- **Recognition EJ**: recognition of community ways of life, local knowledge, and cultural difference
  - E.g. recognise rights to land (e.g. access to forest products) based on custom in the absence of “formal” (e.g. written) proof – e.g. also cases in other parts of the world (e.g. Latin America and Africa)
- Recognition (Schlosberg, 2007):
  - Look at **cultural and racial barriers** to individuals and communities getting a just distribution

# Environmental justice and racism

Integrating recognition dimension of EJ helps address

- Critique of environmental racism research
  - Strong quantitative and geospatial approaches to “prove” statistically racial discrimination
  - Assuming that racism and discrimination are discrete, overt acts that can be measured
  - Instead: Study racism as an **ideology**



# Activity 5: Watch those two videos

Context: aftermath of hurricanes in US (South)

- Is hurricane looting inevitable?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qPmDITU9fqQ>

- Katrina's Hidden Race War

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5r1X\\_G7cWak](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5r1X_G7cWak)

## Question:

What's the problem with looting during Katrina?

# Naomi Klein

*Environmental crises do discriminate [...], leaving poor people of color the most vulnerable, while simultaneously promoting a culture based on **othering**.*

*This is evidenced by the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2006, when African Americans were labeled as looters rather than refugees.*

# Activity

## 1. Read:

- The Other and Othering - A short introduction:  
<http://www.yiannisgabriel.com/2012/09/the-other-and-othering-short.html>

## 2. Get into groups

- Try to explain to each other: What is othering? Is it relevant to the Katrina case, and if yes, how?

# Othering (Oxford English Dictionary)

*othering* n.

*The perception or representation of a person or group of people as fundamentally alien from another, frequently more powerful, group.*



Image by [@imogenfoxell](#)

# Othering (Gabriel, 2012)



Source: [mimiandeu nice.com/2010/07/29/othering/](http://mimiandeu nice.com/2010/07/29/othering/)

- Othering is a key element/ ideology at basis of racism: dominant ideology of colonial culture
- Othering: based on binary relation: Self vs. (different, less valuable) Other
  - Process: establish **own identity** through opposition to and vilification of Other
- In othering, you **deny** Other those characteristics that define the Self
  - E.g. reason, dignity, love, pride, heroism, nobility, human rights
  - Deny their essential humanity-> Other: ready for exploitation, oppression, etc.
- Othering: dominant ideology of colonial culture (Rieder, 2008) and rule
  - Consistent dehumanisation/ **devaluation** of 'Other'
  - E.g. primitives, uncivilized, orientals, blacks, non-believers, women(like)
- Also othering is about removing agency of Other
  - Denying Other her **own voice**, i.e. opportunity to speak for herself
  - Instead: attributing qualities, opinions **of own culture** and identity

# Othering and environmental justice

- In the hurricane response case, othering (black American = looter) deepens the experiencing of unequal effects by certain populations (black American) along racial lines
  - Their vulnerability is made more intense: they are even more exposed to hurricane effects
    - Made more difficult (risking their lives) to reach relief efforts
  - Face additional barriers and problems, not faced by white population
    - Mobility barriers

# Argument 2

*Othering produces environmental injustice* (and transformation)

- Because: it allows mobilising or withholding resources that facilitate distributive/ procedural/ recognition injustice  
(Related to the use of/ access to nature and natural resources)
- Racism as ideology: premised on practice of ***othering***
  - Othering serves to justify (“explain”) “reasonableness” of racism

# Take-away points

- Environmental racism – environmental justice
  - » Not only race
  - » Also: ethnicity, socio-economics/ class, gender
- Distributive EJ
  - Uneven bads; but also uneven goods
  - At both nat'l and int'l level
- Distributive, but also procedural, and recognition EJ

Source: [http://www.columbia.edu/cu/EJ/EJ\\_ricardolevinsmorales.jpg](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/EJ/EJ_ricardolevinsmorales.jpg)



- Othering
  - Denies basic humanity of Other
  - Naturalises discrimination
  - Intensifies and facilitates environmental injustice



# Debate!

Is it equally ok to be any of those two?

