

Integrities

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**ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE
IS
RACIAL JUSTICE**

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*All people and
communities have
the right to equal
environmental
protection . . .*

*. . . live, work,
play in safe,
healthy
conditions*



*Photo by
Lauren Moody*

Cover Photo by Karen Cane

COMBATING ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM AND CLIMATE CHANGE: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN THE PAJARO VALLEY OF CALIFORNIA

by Linda Wallace and Adrienne Frisbee

We often hear about social justice issues and efforts to improve the quality of life for vulnerable populations, as well as environmental organizations working to improve the environment for current and future generations. In fact, there is a field of study called environmental justice where social justice and protecting the environment intersect. Robert Bullard, who has been working in this field since the 1970s, says environmental justice “embraces the principle that **all people and communities have a right to equal protection and equal enforcement of environmental laws and regulations** (drrobertbullard.com).” Another definition, published by a group of students from Columbia University on the website “A Primer for Allies, Academics, Planners and Scientists” expands the concept beyond already existing laws:

All people and communities have the right to equal environmental protection under the law, and the right to live, work and play in communities that are safe, healthy and free of life-threatening conditions.
(<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/EJ/index.html>)

ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT

Race is the number one predictor of exposure to pollution and those most affected by pollution are generally the least responsible for producing it (*American Journal of Public Health* 2018).

The environmental justice movement began in the mid 1960's as a reaction against toxic waste dumps located in poor communities of color. ***In 1967, African American students protested against a garbage dump that was responsible for the deaths of two children in their Houston neighborhood.*** The next year residents of West Harlem fought unsuccessfully against the siting of a sewage treatment plant in their community (<https://www.nrdc.org/stories/environmental-justice-movement>). But, the roots of the movement go back to the early 1960s when farmworkers first organized to gain workplace rights, including protection from the harmful pesticides they were exposed to in the fields (O'Brien 2009).

Since then, many studies and demographic analyses have confirmed that pollution sources, such as toxic landfills and polluting industries, are generally located in poor communities of color. In fact, The New York Times recently published the results of a new study that documents people of color in the United States suffer disproportionately more from pollution than white Americans.

Black Americans are exposed to more pollution from every type of source, including industry, agriculture, all manner of vehicles, construction, residential sources and even emissions from restaurants. People of color more broadly, including Black and Hispanic people and Asian-Americans, are exposed to more pollution from nearly every source. (Hiroko & Popovich 2021).

TRANSNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

Environmental racism does not just occur in the United States. It is present around the world. Often exposure to pollution and degradation of land in the Global South is a result of Northern demand for natural resources and agricultural commodities located in the South. Drilling for oil in the Amazon rainforest in order to fuel automobiles in the United States is an example of transnational environmental racism. The once fresh-water drinking sources of indigenous people living downstream from oil operations are polluted in the process of extracting oil, leaving people without potable drinking water.

Another example is the destruction of forests in the Peruvian Amazon in order to make way for oil palm and cacao plantations that will provide chocolate and oil for processed foods in the Global North. The destruction of these forests leaves indigenous people without a place to gather food and medicinal herbs, as well as increasing global carbon emissions.

Another cause of exposure to pollution in the South is very similar to the pattern of locating toxic waste dumps in poor communities of color in the United States. It is the routine transfer of hazardous waste from rich countries to poor countries in order to reduce disposal costs for the waste producer and to avoid the inevitable protests that would result from disposing of the waste in the wealthy country where it was generated. Shipping garbage and toxic waste for disposal in the Global South exposes poor people of

color to health risks as these toxic materials seep into the environment, contaminating land, water and air, and sickening the people who work at the disposal sites or live nearby. As with toxic waste disposal, it is difficult for us to see the consequences of our demand for natural resources and agricultural commodities when they are sourced far away from our eyes and the resulting environmental degradation and pollution affects poor people of color who have no voice and are invisible to us.

ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM IN THE UNITED STATES

While we tend to locate sources of pollution near low income communities of color where protest is less likely and the pollution less visible, large protests can, and do, bring media attention, making environmental racism, on occasion, highly visible. Examples of environmental racism in the United States are many: the Dakota Access Oil Pipeline that threatens to destroy the water quality and way of life for the Standing Rock Lakota Sioux; the Richmond, CA petroleum refineries that affect the air quality for residents of the City, 80% of whom are people of color; the exposure to agricultural contaminants in the drinking water of the predominantly Latino populations who live in California's Central Valley; and the continued exposure to pesticides and herbicides of the farmworkers who work in the fields everywhere in the United States. **The common theme among these examples is poor environmental health affects the health of residents in high-exposure zones, who are overwhelmingly people of color** (*Environmental Justice*)

Journal 2018). This phenomena is also connected to the COVID 19 crisis. Many residents in communities of color have preexisting health conditions as a result of environmental pollution, which makes them more susceptible to COVID (along with reduced access to resources and/or the inability to social distance) (CDC 2019).

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

Climate change is a notorious example of transboundary pollution and the impact of Northern industry and consumption on the livelihoods of the poor in the Global South (Woodhouse 2000). Scientists attribute global warming to the build-up of carbon dioxide, and other ‘heat-trapping gases’, in the atmosphere (Climate.nasa.gov/causes). This buildup began in the 18th Century with the Industrial Revolution and the use of coal to power machinery. Based on data from 2016 published by *Climate Watch* and the *World Resources Institute*, three quarters of greenhouse gas emissions come from fossil fuel use. Energy use in industrial production (not necessarily in the country where the product will be consumed) makes up the largest component of energy usage followed by transportation, primarily road transport, which includes cars, generally in wealthy countries (Richie 2020). Sarah Kaplan summarizes a statement by Penn State meteorologist Gregory Jenkins that captures the relationship between race and climate change in a 2020 *Washington Post* article:

Racism is “inexorably” linked to climate change because it dictates who benefits from activities that produce planet-warming gases and who suffers most from the consequences (Kaplan 2020).

The highest emitters of annual carbon dioxide depend on whether emissions are ranked by total emissions per country, per capita emissions per country, or historical cumulative emissions per country. According to a 2020 updated report by the *Union of Concerned Scientists*, China is now the top emitter, producing 28% of global carbon emissions and the US is the second, producing 15% of global carbon emissions. But, when ranked by per capita emissions, China is not even among the top ten emitters. Two major oil producing countries (oil produced for export), Saudi Arabia and Kazakhstan, are the two top per capita emitters. Australia is the third highest per capita emitter and the US is a close fourth. When looking at cumulative emissions, the United States is responsible for the most total cumulative historical emissions since the start of the Industrial Revolution (ourworldindata.org).

Overall, the richest half of countries in the world “emit 86% of global CO2 emissions” and the bottom half only 14% (ourworlddata.org/co2 emissions). The citizens of these “bottom half” poor countries are people of color, almost half of whom live in Sub-Saharan Africa (worldbank.org). As with environmental racism in general, the countries and people least responsible for producing global warming are the ones most affected by it.

As we know, global warming is associated with increased drought and flooding, both of which are detrimental to the livelihoods of rural poor. Drought reduces crop yields and dries up drinking water sources; flooding in low-lying coastal areas causes crop loss. Both result in food shortages and hunger (*Worldwatch* 2003, *UN Human Development Report* 2003, and *Goodstein* 2002). In addition to drought, wildfires and heat wave are also linked to global warming. Even in urban areas, hurricanes, floods, wildfires and landslides can destroy people's homes and incomes. In wealthier countries, where people's livelihoods are not so closely tied to the land, people can shield themselves from the impacts of climate change with air conditioning, or by relocating, and government compensation for homes lost in floods and wildfires. Nevertheless, global warming does not affect everyone in wealthy countries equally. According to the California Attorney General's website, those who are socially and economically disadvantaged are disproportionately affected, as they were in Hurricane Katrina (EveryCRS.com).

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: ORGANIZATIONS COMBATING ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE PAJARO VALLEY

IF helps support two organizations, Regeneración and Watsonville Wetlands Watch, that are tackling local environmental justice issues in Santa Cruz County's Pajaro Valley. Both organizations are located in **Watsonville** and are working with the community to develop solutions to the local impacts of climate

change. Watsonville, the Pajaro Valley's primary city, is a community of 53,452 residents whose major industries are agriculture and food processing. **The majority of residents are farmworkers of Latino descent who, like most hired farmworkers in the US, survive on low incomes and are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate changes.** Research shows that migrant farmworkers are generally invisible to the American public (Gonzales 2019). California Assemblymember Robert Rivas describes the impact of climate change on agriculture and low income minority communities, like Watsonville, in California:

Climate changes costs lives and billions and billions of dollars of damage. These impacts have disproportionately impacted our low income and minority communities. Having grown up in rural California on the Central Coast, I can tell you our rural communities are truly on the front lines of climate change and the negative impacts of climate change. Drought has shortened our growing season for Ag, which threatens our agricultural way of life and our future food supply (Assemblymember Robert Rivas, Speaking on a Regeneración Climate of Hope webinar)



Cal Matters Photo from article “Newsom signals more protections coming for essential workers, including hotel rooms for farmworker”, by Barbara Feder Ostrov, July 24, 2020 updated July 29, 2020)

Below we highlight the inspiring efforts of Watsonville Wetlands Watch and Regeneración to combat climate change in the Pajaro Valley.

WATSONVILLE WETLANDS WATCH

Watsonville Wetlands Watch (WWW) is an environmental organization dedicated to the protection, restoration, and fostering of appreciation of the Pajaro Valley wetlands among students and all residents of the area (Watsonville Wetlands Watch.org).

This past July, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and the reality of a very different way of life, **Watsonville Wetlands Watch started a new youth program with a mission of hope through climate action leadership. The Climate Corps Leadership Institute**



Climate Corps Intern propagates restoration plants at the Fitz Wetlands Educational Resource Center.

(CCLI) offers Watsonville High School youth the opportunity to safely connect with their peers and gain leadership skills while engaging in a variety of projects designed to implement climate.

A central theme of the CCLI program is environmental justice in the Watsonville community with an emphasis on impacts associated with Climate Change. CCLI works to achieve this goal by focusing environmental restoration work in those areas with the greatest need, by directing environmental benefits to those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and by supporting youth in becoming change-makers and local leaders while they earn a paid stipend for this work.

Quote from a young person participating in the program:

My favorite part about participating in the Climate Corps Leadership Institute is that I was given the opportunity to be with new people and learn so much more about green careers.... I have not spoken to anyone new since March. It gave me a heartwarming feeling when I was able to make someone laugh and learn about them.

A major aspect of these efforts is increasing tree canopy cover in the City of Watsonville, as the City has a severe lack of urban trees that directly affects community health. Tree canopy cover in the City is 7.8%, well below the 30% goal for a healthy urban forest. Healthy tree canopy cover provides shading and cooling, improves air and local water quality, and creates safe and welcoming outdoor spaces at schools, in parks, and on local trails, bike lanes and streets. As of this fall, CCLI youth have planted and cared for 400



CCLI participants planting a tree.

new trees in Watsonville neighborhoods and parks, maintained nature trails and implemented local wetland restoration projects, all while working alongside and

learning from local environmental professionals. Through this work, CCLI aims to give youth the tools, skills, and confidence to build resilience for our planet and spread messages of hope for a brighter, but cooler, future.

REGENERACIÓN

Regeneración is a place-based grassroots climate action organization located in the Pajaro Valley. It was founded on the belief that the local impacts of climate change should be addressed locally in order to build resilient communities.

Regeneración's mission is to:

...help our community adapt and flourish as the climate changes so that everyone can thrive and live in harmony with the natural world. Advocacy for just and equitable laws and policies is key to our work, as is collaborating with community partners to activate a local movement for climate justice.

(Nancy Faulstich, Executive Director).

Regeneración works with the Pajaro Valley community to increase awareness of climate change and its impacts on farmworkers and other local residents. Farmworkers in the Pajaro Valley, where strawberries are a major crop, supply the hand labor that is essential for the production of blemish-free berries, as well as the flowers, cauliflower, broccoli and artichokes grown there. Their work during the time of the Coronavirus has been deemed essential. The working conditions of farmworkers are frequently substandard, including long hours of stoop labor in the fields, extreme heat, exposure to pesticides, and lack of shade and adequate drinking water. Climate change has intensified extreme heat and its impacts on farmworkers in the Pajaro Valley.

Regeneración conducted a grass roots survey in 2017-18 to identify the effects of environmental changes on Pajaro Valley workers, both farmworkers and non-agricultural workers. Pesticide exposure was a concern of a majority of all workers; the two most common concerns related to climate change were heat waves and high temperatures. Extreme heat can cause heat cramps, heat stroke,



Photo by Bernardo Salce (www.bernardosalce.com)

heat exhaustion, hyperthermia, and dehydration. Regeneración also conducted a small survey (2019) to identify climate impacts on local farms. Participants in the survey included growers and farmworkers. The study found that both farmworkers and farm operators were concerned about work stoppages due to heat. Growers were also concerned about the impacts of high heat on crops, as well as farmworkers. Small farmers, community members, and farmworkers were interested in increasing access to organic food and marketing local farm products locally in order to mitigate climate change and promote healthy eating. All groups were interested in stronger accountability for climate change mitigation. These results, along with analysis, were presented via video available on the Regeneración website (www.regenerationpajarovalley.org). Since the pandemic began, Regeneración has been working on social media outreach and

webinars on topics including survey results, climate change impacts on the community, farmworkers and farms, social justice, and women and girls and climate justice. Webinar participants have included a diverse range of people from CA State Assembly Member Robert Rivas to farmworkers.

One farmworker who spoke on a Regeneración Climate of Hope Webinar was recruited by his daughter, Elizabeth Hernandez, Regeneración Office Assistant:

“I was motivated to video my dad’s testimony as a farmworker in regards to heat stress and even took initiative to create care packages that consisted of resources from Regeneración, food, and gifts for some local farmworkers.”

In response to farmworker and grower concerns about the impacts of climate-change-induced extreme heat, Regeneración published a brochure in Spanish and English about heat stress that can be used by both farmworkers and growers. The brochure describes the symptoms of heat stroke and heat exhaustion, how to prevent these conditions, and what to do when a worker exhibits symptoms of heat stress.

Respondents from the grassroots survey identified priorities for action that Regeneración translated into policy recommendations to local government, including bringing renewable energy to the community and safe and affordable transportation. Regeneración has also been discussing the “intersections of climate change and

equity in local spaces like city budgets” (Malsbury, Good Times April, 14, 2021). Because legislation and regulations that protect and empower vulnerable populations must be enacted to safeguard the health and safety of farmworkers, Regeneración also writes to local, state, and federal agencies to advocate for improved protections from the threats of climate change for farmworkers.

Regeneración views climate change as a social justice issue. According to Watsonville City Councilman, Francisco “Paco” Estrada, who also serves on the Board of Regeneración,

“without the organization’s efforts the city’s large farmworker community would remain unrepresented in local response efforts.” He further explained Regeneración’s place-based approach to climate action. *“We are building an inclusive and inspirational climate justice movement that’s relevant to our area, Regeneración’s success can serve as a model for the nation.”*



Staff of Regeneración. Photo courtesy of Regeneración

AFTER 40+ YEARS AT THE HELM, BILL CANE HAS DECIDED TO RETIRE AS EDITOR OF *INTEGRITIES*.

He certainly deserves to be able to lay down that responsibility after all these years. But it is hard to imagine *Integrities* without Bill. It has always carried his unique imprint, naming the “principalities and powers” that cast shadows over our world and holding up the signs of new life that are around us and that give hope.

So the IF board has decided to lay down *Integrities* itself. We will continue to publish a newsletter and utilize other means to stay in touch with you, our loyal supporters and collaborators. But we won't continue to publish the magazine. If you haven't already, please subscribe to our free email newsletter by contacting us at if.integrities@gmail.com with your name and email address.

The board has also decided to publish a final issue of *Integrities*, dedicated to Bill and filled with reflections about what Bill and *Integrities* have meant to us. We invite your participation in that effort. We would welcome whatever you might like to share. How has *Integrities* affected you over the years? What examples, memories, appreciations, photos, etc. would you like to share, whether about *Integrities* specifically or about Bill?

**Please get responses to
if.laurenmoody@gmail.com by July 31, 2021.**

We will collect what you send and share all of it with Bill, and we will use some of it in a final tribute issue of *Integrities*.

Thank you for considering this request and for accompanying IF on this wondrous journey.

With Love and Gratitude from *All of us at IF*

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