

SEEING SYSTEMS

PEACE, JUSTICE & SUSTAINABILITY



Northwest
Earth Institute
DISCOVER CHANGE, TOO

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By



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**Northwest
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DISCOVER CHANGE, TOGETHER.

Oops! Please forgive our editing mistake!

These Principles of Environmental Justice complement the "Everyday Hero: Dr. Robert D. Bullard" article by Katrina Fried in Session Three of Seeing Systems: Peace, Justice and Sustainability. Refer to this insert when reading Fried's article in Session Three – it will help you answer the discussion questions for that session.

Principles of Environmental Justice

Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held on October 24-27, 1991, in Washington DC, drafted and adopted these 17 Principles of Environmental Justice. Since then, the Principles have served as a defining document for the growing grassroots movement for environmental justice.

- 1) **Environmental Justice** affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
- 2) **Environmental Justice** demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.
- 3) **Environmental Justice** mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.
- 4) **Environmental Justice** calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food.
- 5) **Environmental Justice** affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.
- 6) **Environmental Justice** demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.
- 7) **Environmental Justice** demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.
- 8) **Environmental Justice** affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.

9) **Environmental Justice** protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.

10) **Environmental Justice** considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration On Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.

11) **Environmental Justice** must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination.

12) **Environmental Justice** affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and provided fair access for all to the full range of resources.

13) **Environmental Justice** calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.

14) **Environmental Justice** opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations.

15) **Environmental Justice** opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.

16) **Environmental Justice** calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.

17) **Environmental Justice** requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our lifestyles to ensure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

The Proceedings to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit are available from the **United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice**, 475 Riverside Dr. Suite 1950, New York, NY 10115.

Another source of information is the Environmental Justice Resource Center (www.ejrc.cau.edu) at Clark Atlanta University.

ABOUT THIS SESSION

In his seminal book *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold speaks of “enlarging the boundaries of the community” to include the whole biotic community. As humans, we often have difficulty expanding our idea of community to include other humans from different places and with different experiences than us, let alone expanding it to include other creatures or the whole ecosystem. Environmental justice is a social movement that calls for fair distribution of environmental benefits

and burdens — and justice for the whole community. It’s a concept that connects sustainability and justice in our journey into how everything is connected.

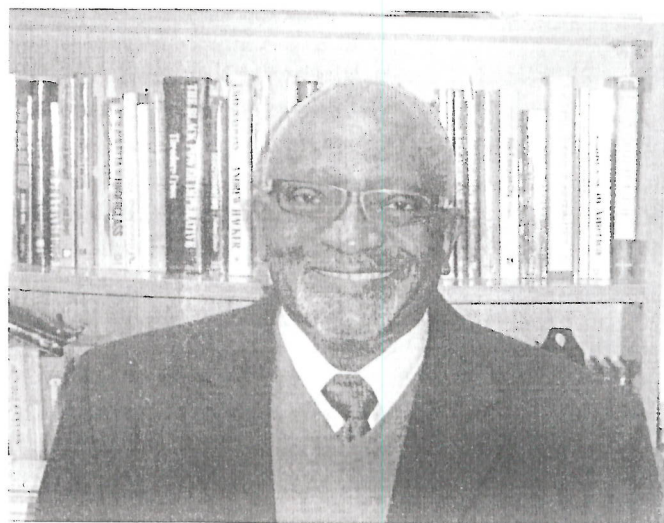
In this session we explore environmental justice in four different ways: who climate change impacts, who has access and rights to water, whose community we deposit our waste in, and how the way we grow our food affects the people closest to that process. The readings in this session encourage us to enlarge the boundaries of our community, and to act with integrity toward all beings.

EVERYDAY HERO: DR. ROBERT D. BULLARD

By Katrina Fried

Widely acknowledged as the “father of environmental justice,” Dr. Robert D. Bullard has spent the last forty years crusading against eco-racism. Over the course of his professional life, Bullard has published prolifically, penning dozens of articles and seventeen books exposing the environmental disparities in low-income and minority communities, ranging from the glut of toxic waste dumps and pollution to the deficit of public green spaces and healthy food resources. When Bullard started in this field of work in 1978, not one American state had legislation concerning environmental justice. Today, all fifty states and the District of Columbia have passed some type of law, policy, or executive order. Yet the inequalities persist. African Americans are 79 percent more likely than whites to live in neighborhoods where industrial pollution is thought to cause the greatest health risks. “People may think I am racializing this, but how can you not?” wonders Bullard.

Dr. Bullard was chosen as one of 50 Everyday Heroes for the book *Everyday Heroes: 50 Americans Changing*



the World One Nonprofit at a Time published by Welcome Books. This first person narrative was written by Katrina Fried.

I was born in 1946 and I grew up in Alabama, in a small town called Elba, which was an all-black community. We did not have paved streets, sidewalks, sewer lines — all the things that were present in the white communities.

DEFINITIONS

The Commons are resources shared by all members of a society, and are not privately owned. The commons can include natural resources like water, air, and public land; cultural resources like software, literature and music; and public goods like public education and public infrastructure. Enclosure is used to describe the process of commonly held property being turned into private property, or privatized.

According to the EPA, **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.”

Justice is a concept of moral rightness and can be used to refer to legal, fair, reciprocal and/or moral action or behavior.

No library, no swimming pool. I learned how to swim in a river that was very dangerous. I grew up during the time of Jim Crow. When I graduated high school in 1964, it was ten years after *Brown v. Board of Education*. The signs had come down, but it was still very segregated.

We were a blue collar, working class family. Both my mom and dad finished high school. They didn't go to college, but they believed in education, that education is the key to success. That was always drilled into us. I have three brothers and one sister, and my parents paid for all of us to get our advanced degrees. We didn't have any loans. It was tough, we were very stretched out, but they managed, somehow. In my high school, there were only three possible tracks: college, army, or Dorsey Trailers — which was the local industry in Elba. The idea of not going to college was not an option in my family.

I always knew that I wanted to be a college professor. It seemed to me that professors had a really cool job. I loved the idea of an occupation that was about the sharing of ideas. Looking back now on thirty years of teaching and what I'm most proud of — it's the impact I've had on other people's lives. I've taught hundreds of students, and the biggest compliment that a teacher can get is when a student gives you a call or shout-out, and says, "You know, Dr. Bullard, I'm an environmental attorney, or I'm a toxicologist, or I'm a law professor." Because you never know who's listening, and you never know how you've touched someone's life.

I'm at Texas Southern University now. It's actually a return to the place that gave me my start. I was fresh out of graduate school in 1976, after finishing Iowa State University, and my first job was at Texas Southern University. I was here until 1987. I was an assistant professor of sociology. And I did urban sociology — housing, residential patterns, segregation. That was twenty-five years ago, so it has come full circle. When the opportunity became available to be dean here in the policy school, it was very enticing. It feels wonderful to be back, because I know much more now.

Just two years out of graduate school, I was asked by my wife, who was a practicing attorney, to collect data for a lawsuit that she had filed here in Houston. *Bean v. Southwestern Waste Management Corporation* was the first lawsuit that used the civil rights law to challenge environmental discrimination. The suit claimed that the siting of one particular landfill in Northeast Houston fit a pattern that was racially motivated, and was a form of racial discrimination, and that black neighborhoods were

systematically selected for the location of disposing of garbage. It was a landmark case.

I did a study to map the solid-waste landfills in Houston. I had ten graduate students in my research methods class, and we set out to examine the locations of landfills, garbage dumps, and waste incinerators, which did not have zoning back then and still do not have zoning. So we had this puzzle to put together — and this was before computers. We were able to get base maps, and we color-coded exactly where the landfills were with Magic Markers and stickpins.

What we found is that Houston sited 100 percent of its landfills in predominately black neighborhoods. And six out of the eight incinerators and three out of the four privately owned landfills were located in predominately black neighborhoods. Black people only made up 25 percent of the population of the city, but they got 82 percent of the waste. This was the first study done of its kind.

We didn't win the case, because this was 1985, and in many ways the rules were not fair as they related to meting out equal justice. The elderly white judge kept calling the plaintiffs (residents of the neighborhoods) "Nigras," which is not a term of endearment. It's just short of calling someone the "N" word.

Even though we lost the legal battle, I expanded the studies to look at Dallas, Louisiana, and Alabama. That's what sociologists do: we carry out studies. And once I started looking, I saw this pattern. As a researcher and a social scientist, it became an area that was really attractive to me because I was uncovering another form of discrimination.

So I started to recruit others to help me. We began writing together and collaborating. There was no established methodology for doing this type of research. We invented a strategy for plotting these facilities on maps, and color-coding, overlaying, and looking at the demographics and the proximity of waste facilities to public facilities, such as parks, schools, and recreation centers. It seems like common sense that you would not put a landfill next to a school or a petrochemical plant next to a park. But we found that this was systemic, and it was happening all across the United States in poor communities, and communities of color.

One of my heroes is W.E.B. Du Bois. He was an excellent scholar, researcher, policy analyst, political critic, and an activist. I tried to model my career after his. Du Bois's approach became my approach: gather the facts, document everything, and put your findings in the hands of someone who can make change; and educate and inform those

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individuals and communities that are in the impacted areas — get them information so that they can start to speak for themselves.

I knew that if I could document it, I could have an impact on policy. Once I had the research, I gave it to people who could use it and take it to the next level — like the city council or a county commissioner meeting or a Congressional hearing. These issues may be invisible to the larger society, but that does not mean that people aren't getting hurt. Awareness is the key. Legal action is important, but it has to go hand in hand with education, training, organizing, and mobilization. That has always been the case. That was true in the civil rights movement and it's still true today.

The turning point that really brought the issue of environmental justice to national attention was in 1983, in Warren County, North Carolina. PCB-contaminated oil had been illegally dumped on the roads in 1978 and the governor needed someplace to move the dirt. He chose Warren County, which is very poor and predominately African American. A national protest broke out. It was the first time anyone in the United States had been arrested for protesting a toxic-waste landfill. That's when the term "environmental racism" was first coined by Reverend Ben Chavis, who was leading the demonstrations.

I had no direct involvement with what was happening in North Carolina, but I knew it was very similar to the placement of waste facilities in Houston. It quickly became clear that this issue of waste and race was a national phenomenon. A group of us sociologists began sharing and comparing information and ideas via phone and fax — this was before the age of email — from all around the country. And then two environmental justice professors and leaders, Bunyan Bryant and Paul Mohai, held a conference that brought a number of us together. That's when we pooled our research to create the first real picture of what environmental inequality looked like in America.

We started planning the first National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit to be held in Washington, D.C., in 1991. We invited community groups, professors, environmental justice groups, lawyers, and policy makers from around the country who had all been working in isolation up to that point. The intention was to connect all these separate factions into a single army, if you will, and create a strategy for change. We expected five hundred people to attend, and more than fourteen hundred people showed up. Together, we developed the seventeen principles of environmental justice. Those principles stand as relevant today as they did then.

I've never seen myself as an organizer, but it has taken a high level of dexterity to mobilize not just communities but also lawyers, toxicologists, epidemiologists, hydrologists, economists — to work with all these various disciplines and

with people who have different worldviews. The glue that holds us all together is the idea of justice.

The early days of the movement were focused mainly on anti-toxics — fighting landfills, incinerators, pollution, and poisoning. Over the years, groups started to expand to all kinds of issues, including transportation, housing, food security, and climate change. Because when we talk about overlaying race and class with space or place, you can see how the communities that are most likely to get environmentally dumped on are the same ones that are most likely not to have a green space, or a full-service grocery store. Even all transit is not created equal — some communities get light-rail and clean transit, and others get diesel buses that are dilapidated, or have very little public transit at all. Think about what happens without adequate or safe public transportation: it cuts people off from jobs, from parks and recreation facilities, from hospitals. It is all intertwined.

At the center of all these disparities dwells the question: Why is it that some communities get benefits, while other have to pay the cost? That's the equity analysis that has now been adopted across the board. The results of the analysis are being used to challenge the way that tax dollars are spent, and to challenge the disparate allocation of resources that is starving some communities for parks, transit, full-service supermarkets, banks and other services.

At the same time that we've been focusing on all these inequities domestically, we've also expanded our sights beyond US borders to examine global environmental justice issues. Years ago, we started to engage the U.N. process and attend U.N. summits, where we presented our seventeen principles of environmental justice. By 1992, those principles had been translated into at least a dozen languages and environmental justice was becoming an international movement. Our framework has been adopted at every U.N. summit, and it's being adopted in a number of countries around the world. These issues resonate globally, whether we're talking about human rights, climate justice, land rights, or sovereignty.

The environmental justice movement has redefined *environment* to mean both the natural world and the places where we live, work, play, learn, and worship. We can't leave people out of our concept of the environment. And once we start to talk about people, we have to talk about justice and equality. Our society is still very segregated along class and race lines, and the poor and minorities suffer more adverse effects. Too many Americans don't have a clue what happens outside their own neighborhood. They assume that everybody shares equally the effects of pollution or degradation, but that's simply not true.

Katrina Fried has been creating unique visual narratives that push the boundaries and traditional limits of illustrated books for years. She is Associate Publisher and Senior Editor at Welcome Books.