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Reaction Paper #3

### **Environmental Inequality Formation - David N. Pellow, *American Behavioral Scientist* (2000)**

Pellow introduces his EIF framework as a way to frame inquiry and understanding of issues of environmental (in)justice. Its three main distinctions:

1. environmental injustice is not just a single harmful event/action/result, but rather a complicated history of political, social, and economic interactions leading up to, and continuing beyond, the contested instance of perceived injustice
2. environmental injustice result from decisions made by all parties which may seem contradictory or change over time with shifting circumstances--this is in opposition to the simple Them v. Us or Perpetrator-Victim frame
3. a life-cycle perspective must be taken on hazard production and consumption in order to fully account for the distribution of costs and benefits in time and space related to hazards

In general, I think Pellow's points are good ones, though his choice of the Chicago WMI incinerator-turned-recycling program for an illustrative case study was problematic in places. He rightly points out the complex set of interests represented by government, community, and environmental groups that worked together to get the incinerator closed and recycling program initiated, but he then continues to suggest that they walked from one environmental injustice (the incinerator) into another (poor labor practices). I think that the labor abuses by WMI are unacceptable by all means, but I do not see how they constitute a new environmental injustice posed to the community. It seems more like sad irony. There is definitely the issue of workers health and exposure, but, again, I think that is at a different level than community hazards exposure in that it is more voluntary (though still inexcusable) and rectified by different means (labor unions, arbitration, active resistance at the workplace). I don't think that recycling was the wrong choice in this case, and I don't think any of the involved parties, except maybe WMI would be satisfied with the result, rather, I think they would all agree to see it refined to be more worker-friendly as well as community-friendly.

### **The Justice of Environmental Justice - David Schlosberg**

Defines justice, as it pertains to the environment, to include three main factors that are inseparably linked:

Distribution-- (in)equity in the spatial location of environmental ills

Recognition-- legitimacy of affected parties, their knowledge and concerns; a recognition of identity and inequity

Participation-- non-tokenist participation of the affected community in decision-making and oversight

I did not care for this paper particularly. It restated the three aspects listed above over and over as a theoretical basis for approaching issues of justice without making the importance of such distinctions clear in the realm of environmental justice. I think all of these factors are critical to having a just society, but the equity of distribution seems to be a result of the other two factors. In the case of environmental justice, it is the disproportionate risk and burden

placed on disenfranchised and unempowered communities that drives an examination of their unjust situation as it relates to recognition and participation.

I am confused by a couple of the recurrent statements of the paper regarding recognition of social differences and their role in equitable distribution. Also, 'postmaterial.'

### **Project Ideas:**

I think I would prefer to do two smaller project/papers, though I am still conflicted. Here are the ideas I am thinking about right now:

#### **Project**

I would really like to do a design project based on a GIS of various population and environmental statistics. The problem is, I have no idea how readily available spatial data is (maybe from the census or EPA monitoring). I think it would be very interesting to put together a visual presentation based on geographic maps of various social, economic, and environmental metrics--to persuade and imply connection without direct use of statistics. Some of the things I was thinking about were: topography and income; SO<sub>x</sub>, NO<sub>x</sub>, ozone; the courses of the most polluted waterways; military bases and reservations; racial composition, population density, population growth and decay over the past 100 years... many things, but I need to find out about data coverage

#### **Papers**

1. GM food aid-- I am only vaguely familiar with the situation in Zambia, but am interested in finding out more about the role of GMOs in development aid (both as institutionalized long-term development projects and as immediate famine relief). What are the costs and benefits, known and supposed risks, from economic, social, and health perspectives?

2. Land/wildlife conservation and displaced people-- many examples from southern Africa, and I am sure all over the world as well. How to reconcile conservation with rural/indigenous culture and land-rights. Urban and affluent populations look outside their neighborhoods to protect the 'unspoiled' environment that puts them in direct conflict with those people inhabiting the proposed conservation site. Issues that arise include (in)equitable legal access, cultural/indigenous legitimacy (eg Khoi/San people who do not live as hunter-gatherers are not entitled to traditional lands etc), rural preservation to compensate for urban pollution, what is 'fair' compensation?, what is the value of conservation for the various stakeholders?

3. System of emissions trading, where countries can buy unused emissions allotments from less-developed countries. Is this system in the best interest of the global population/environment? What is fair compensation? Who benefits from the compensation? What are the long term health, social, and economic effects? Does it reinforce or widen the disparity between developed and less-developed nations?