

Environmental Justice



A large body of research indicates that greater exposure to environmental risks & hazards is related to lower incomes and certain minorities

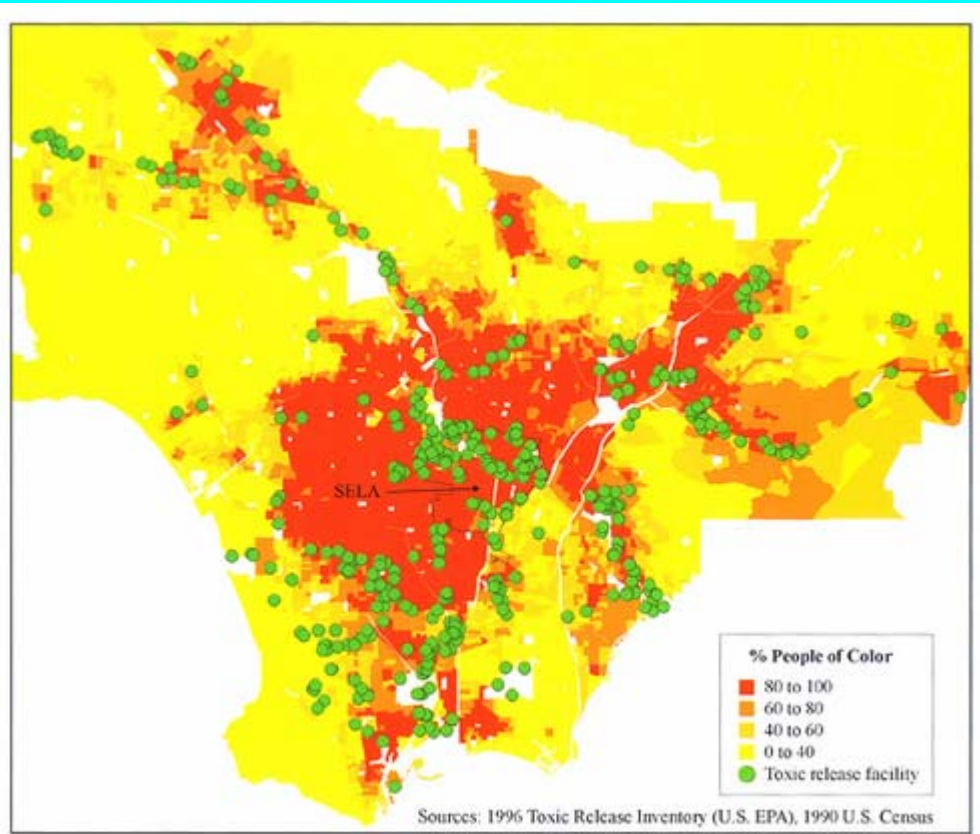
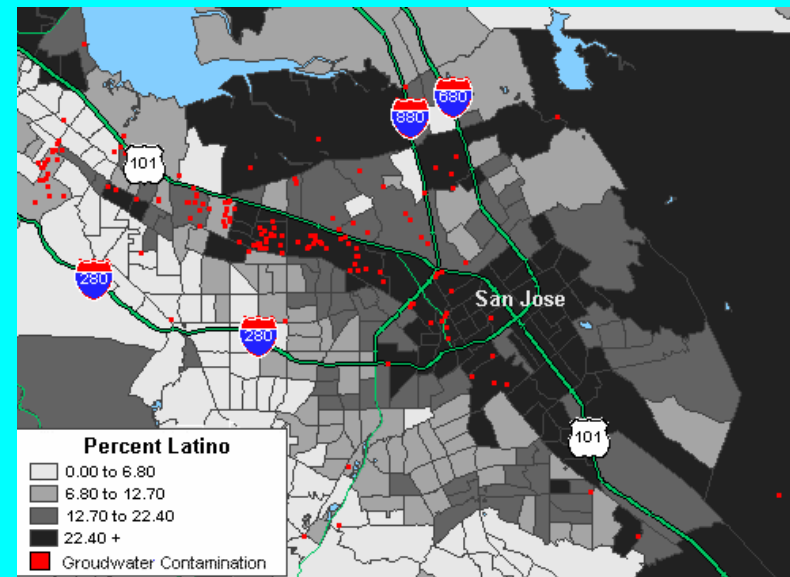
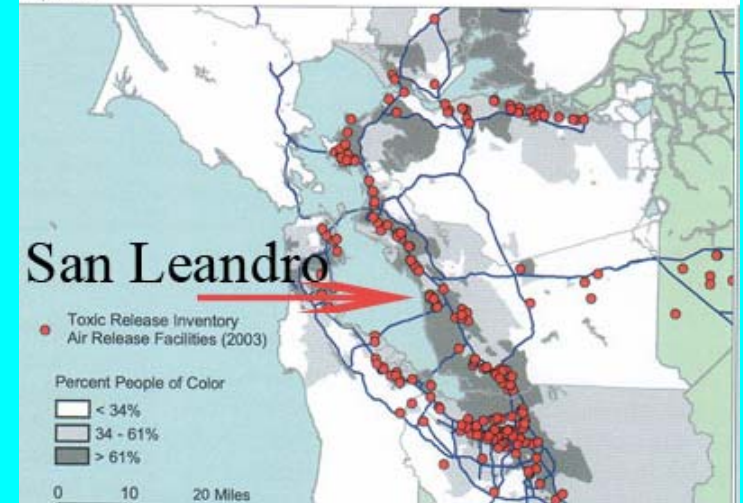


Figure 1.1: People of Color and Toxic Release Facilities in Los Angeles County

Figure 1: Locations of Facilities with Air Releases (as Recorded in the Toxic Release Inventory or TRI) Relative to Neighborhood Demographics in the 9-County Bay Area



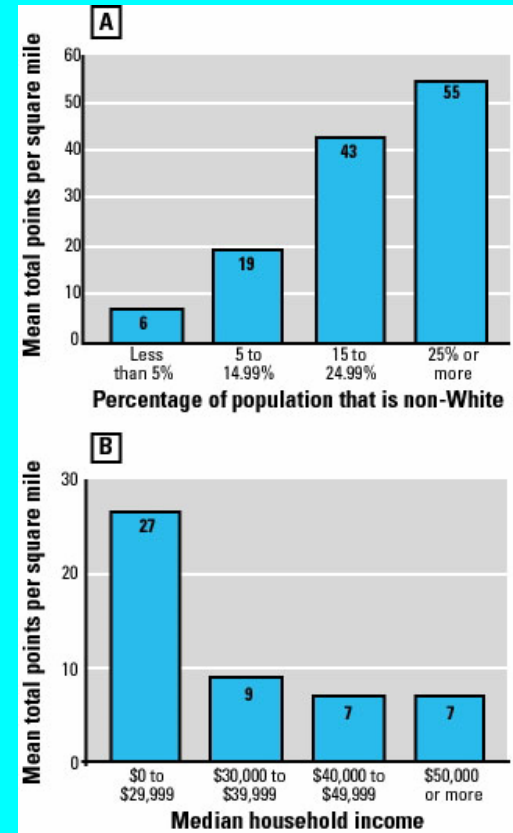
As Brulle & Pellow note: There are “persistent and growing disparities in mortality, morbidity, and disability between whites of high socioeconomic status (SES) and people of color who are less advantaged.”



This is often called “environmental racism,” and efforts to redress these inequities come under the name of “environmental justice”

Research into these questions involves:

- The attempt to map and redress inequities in exposure to environmental hazards based on race and class (income).
- An argument explaining the unequal distribution of environmental impacts among places countries
- A theory about the externalization of hazards and impacts by producers & consumers onto others



Unequal exposure to hazardous waste sites, compared with an average of 4.94 sites per square mile for all 368 Massachusetts communities in 2000. (A) Exposure to hazardous waste sites by race. (B) Exposure to hazardous waste sites by class.

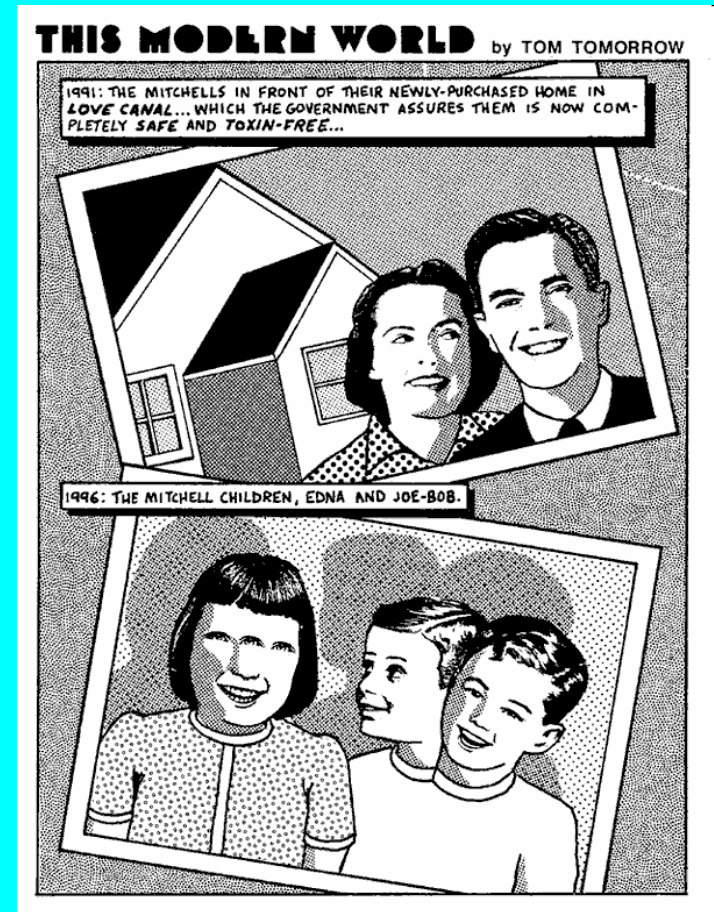
Such findings have been criticized for both methodological flaws & faulty reasoning: which comes first? Residents or facilities?



Workers settle around industrial facilities, which later become low-income & minority neighborhoods—but low real estate values make it cheaper to put polluting industry in or near low-income and minority areas

The debate is important insofar as where blame is to be placed and who is to pay for redress

- If people arrived first and pollution later, it would seem a prima facie case of unjust & unfair placement
- If facility & pollution arrived first and people later, it would appear to be the choice/fault of the people & not a matter of discrimination or racism



But the debate is largely irrelevant: is it fair or just to expose *anyone* to excess levels of toxins?



Now
IS THE TIME
FOR THE FIRST
National Mobilization on
**CLIMATE
JUSTICE**
And Energy Solutions
Join thousands of people
young and old, who are
taking action
to lead us
toward a just and
Sustainable
FUTURE.

**MAKE HISTORY
MARCH 2, 2009
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

CapitolClimateAction.org

The poster features a stylized illustration of the U.S. Capitol building in white against a red background. A large white star is positioned behind the text. The overall design is bold and urgent, with a color palette of red, white, and black.

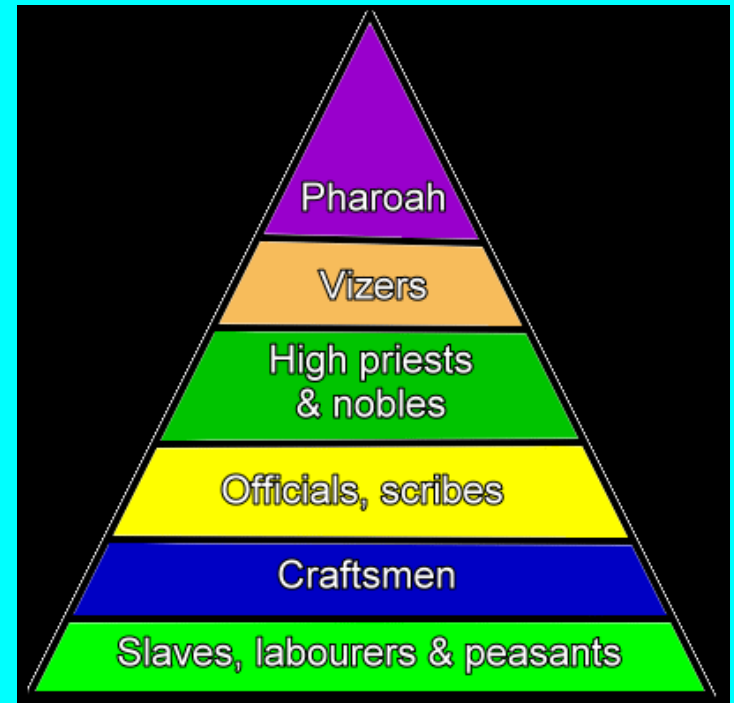
Spatial & temporal data do not explain the whole story

- As Ulrich Beck argues, “environmental problems are fundamentally based in how human society is organized”
- How is the distribution of social goods and bads generated?
- Brulle & Pellow: “treadmill of production” & capitalist expansion generate pollution
- Social & spatial discrimination that lead to unfair siting of polluting & toxic operations
- This is not limited to the United States



As a general point, all societies are organized hierarchically, resulting in disparities in power, wealth and well-being

- These differences have to do with historical circumstances and the ability to organize and institutionalize such differences to the benefit of those in the upper tiers of society
- The better-off get to choose & outbid the less well-off for goods, including land, food, housing, services, education, and so on
- This results in structural biases that are reflected in broader living conditions and life chances
- Environmental racism is one symptom of such biases and must be addressed in the larger context



But don't people have the "choice" to move elsewhere?



And is this a matter limited only to domestic social hierarchies?

What about exporting bads to poorer countries? Why not?

- Comparative advantage? It is cheaper to dispose of wastes in developing countries
- Fair share? Poor countries are less polluted and have greater capacity to absorb waste
- Preferences? Poor people are less sensitive to pollution, especially if associated with employment
- Health? The poor are less concerned about their health than their livelihood



DATE: December 12, 1991
TO: Distribution
FR: Lawrence H. Summers
Subject: GEP



'Dirty' Industries: Just between you and me, shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging MORE migration of the dirty industries to the LDCs [Least Developed Countries]? I can think of three reasons:

- 1) The measurements of the costs of health impairing pollution depends on the foregone earnings from increased morbidity and mortality. From this point of view a given amount of health impairing pollution should be done in the country with the lowest cost, which will be the country with the lowest wages. I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that.
- 2) The costs of pollution are likely to be non-linear as the initial increments of pollution probably have very low cost. I've always thought that under-populated countries in Africa are vastly UNDER-polluted, their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low compared to Los Angeles or Mexico City. Only the lamentable facts that so much pollution is generated by non-tradable industries (transport, electrical generation) and that the unit transport costs of solid waste are so high prevent world welfare enhancing trade in air pollution and waste.
- 3) The demand for a clean environment for aesthetic and health reasons is likely to have very high income elasticity. The concern over an agent that causes a one in a million change in the odds of prostate cancer is obviously going to be much higher in a country where people survive to get prostate cancer than in a country where under 5 mortality is 200 per thousand. Also, much of the concern over industrial atmosphere discharge is about visibility impairing particulates. These discharges may have very little direct health impact. Clearly trade in goods that embody aesthetic pollution concerns could be welfare enhancing. While production is mobile the consumption of pretty air is a non-tradable.

The problem with the arguments against all of these proposals for more pollution in LDCs (intrinsic rights to certain goods, moral reasons, social concerns, lack of adequate markets, etc.) could be turned around and used more or less effectively against every Bank proposal for liberalization.

We can, perhaps, gain more insight into this matter by considering several cases

- Native Americans agree to store spent nuclear fuel on their reservation
- Ships of toxic sludge are sent to the West coast of Africa, where local businessmen have contracted to dispose of the materials
- E-wastes are collected for disposal and sent to China and Vietnam, where poor people live by extracting the residual valuable metals & selling them
- Corporations locate polluting facilities in countries which have lax environmental laws and almost no enforcement of them



Should we be more concerned about "justice" & "equity" for Nature and future generations than for the current generation in other places?



How might this consideration affect our discussions about politics, markets, ethics and the state?

Brulle & Pellow call for

- The implementation of “democratic science” based on local knowledge, experience & popular epidemiology
- Practice of the “precautionary principle” to shift burden of proof to polluters
- National & international policy changes to reduce disparities & inequities
- More research!
- What about power & domination?

