



Earth Day is recognized annually on April 22 since 1970. As we celebrate Earth Day this year, we would like to take some time to discuss Environmental Racism. Let's first of all define what it is:

“Environmental Racism is the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on people of color. It also includes the institutional rules, regulations, policies or government and/or corporate decisions that deliberately target certain communities for locally undesirable land uses and lax enforcement of zoning and environmental laws, resulting in communities being disproportionately exposed to toxic and hazardous waste based upon race. Environmental racism is caused by several factors, including intentional neglect, the alleged need for a receptacle for pollutants in urban areas, and a lack of institutional power and low land values of people of color. It is a well-documented fact that communities of color and low-income communities are disproportionately impacted by polluting industries (and very specifically, hazardous waste facilities) and lax regulation of these industries.” (Source: <http://greenaction.org/what-is-environmental-justice/>)

Clean air and water are a basic human need and right yet many low-income areas that people of color disproportionately call home, do not have access to safe drinking water and clean air to breathe. The location of factories and landfills that pollute the air and often water table are disproportionately located in low-income areas of town. These pollutants are commonly carcinogens and contribute to cancers and other long term, serious health issues and even death. One of the more notable recent examples is the water crisis in Flint, Michigan. One of the common toxins people of color are disproportionately exposed to is lead. Lead poisoning can lead to brain damage and other harmful conditions as well as damage to an unborn baby's

nervous system and can impact behavior and intelligence. It is also likely cancer causing. Proper sanitation and increased disease exposure are also significant problems in low-income areas.

Environmental racism even has a connection with redlining (systemic denial of housing loans to people living in predominately Black neighborhoods by the federal government and mortgage lenders for decades beginning in the 1930's). There are fewer trees with more paved surfaces in formerly redlined areas. This increases the community's risk for heat waves and extreme storms as well as more localized flooding with less vegetation to absorb rainwater. This impacts not only the outdoor environment but also contributes to hotter homes and higher electric bills (if you can choose to compensate) for communities that can't afford the increase. Communities of color are also disproportionately impacted by natural and manmade disasters. (Source: [https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2021/03/the-link-between-racist-housing-policies-of-the-past-and-the-climate-risks-of-today/?gclid=EA1aIQobChMIiPuwud3Y7wIVdAOzAB2FMQJSEAMYASAAEgILivD\\_BwE](https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2021/03/the-link-between-racist-housing-policies-of-the-past-and-the-climate-risks-of-today/?gclid=EA1aIQobChMIiPuwud3Y7wIVdAOzAB2FMQJSEAMYASAAEgILivD_BwE))

Additionally, environmental racism impacts harmful narratives being created and perpetuated of people of color and poor people being "dirty". We see how the environment around low-income areas is not desirable without considering the impact of decisions to put factories and landfills in those communities as well as many other harmful policies and regulations that are outside the environmental scope.

We also must consider access to nature and not just harmful toxins. People of color have disproportionate access to green spaces and nature: whether that be proximity to parks, rivers, oceans or other natural venues. Nature can provide recreation, respite and recovery as well as functional elements.

We want a healthy environment for all people. Everyone has a right to clean and safe environments. When we work to protect the planet, we need to be mindful of especially vulnerable communities and how our policies impact them. Native Americans traditionally view land as a communal resource. We could certainly learn a lot from that perspective.



## Ways to Engage in Your School Community:

- This website has great ideas for engaging all age groups in lessons and activities about environmental racism

<https://humaneeducation.org/teaching-about-environmental-racism-two-activities/>

- Another great lesson plan for middle and high school students

<https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/lessons/analyzing-environmental-racism>

- Resources for all ages

<https://www.learningtogive.org/resources/environmental-justice-toolkit>

-Fantastic teacher resources for middle and high school with lesson plans and activities for specific current examples of environmental racism. Small cost associated for downloadable material.

<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Browse/Search:environmental%20justice>



✚ Incorporate this information along with any Earth Day events.



✚ Plan a community project for Earth Day utilizing some of the ideas in the links above.



✚ Start a school environmental club



✚ Invite a local guest speaker to share about the work of Environmental Justice. A great recommendation would be Ashantae Green. She is an elected official in the office of Duval County Soil & Water Board is an environmental advocate!