

# Race, Poverty & the Environment

A newsletter for social and environmental justice

Volume I, Number 1

• Earth Day Issue •

April 1990

*"Over the years I've led many demonstrations -- the right to public accommodations, the right to open housing, the right to be free of a third world war, the right to register to vote... Today, we struggle for the right to breathe free. For unless I have the right to breathe, the right to drink good drinking water, no other right can be realized. Environmental justice is a fundamental human right."*  
-- Rev. Jesse Jackson

## A Statement of Purpose

The idea for the *Race, Poverty & the Environment Newsletter* grew out of a caucus of interested people at the University of Oregon's Public Interest Law Conference, held March 14, 1990. Caucus participants recognized the importance of increased attention to the nexus of race, class and environmental issues, and the need for a forum in which to continue their dialogue. The caucus decided on a newsletter as the vehicle to continue our dialogue, and the two of us were delegated the task of putting it out.

Since the meeting in Oregon, we  
>> see PURPOSE, page 2

## David Brower on the Need for New Coalitions

Our reckless use of energy is creating acid rain, global warming, endangering the ozone barrier, and we're not doing enough about it. What can we do to be more effective? We can try to build better coalitions among people, among nations, among organizations. We must recognize that environmental hazards affect people as well as wilderness. Toxics, pollution and pesticides especially affect poor people and people of color. We as environmentalists must build bridges to people affected by those hazards if our movement is to succeed.

We have begun to build such bridges in our *Fate and Hope* of the Earth conferences. We've had these conferences in New York, Washington and Ottawa. Last June, we had 1,200 people from 60 countries at a great conference in Managua, Nicaragua. The next conference will be in Zimbabwe in the fall of 1991. We're trying to get something going in the Soviet Union, Japan and in other parts of the world. We're trying to get as many different kinds of organizations into this whole act of keeping the earth a livable one.

An enormous amount of good can be done if we have multi-cultural and multi-racial teams, cross generational,

male and female, going around to various spots in the developed nations as well as the nations of the South, to help them recover from the damage done by the industrial revolution. Their work could focus on the out-of-doors, the soils and the forest. But it could also help to put the cities back together again, to get the hearts of cities that are deteriorated fixed up. It's a great

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challenge, one of the most important challenges there is, one of the most important opportunities. Building organizational bridges is exactly what the International Green Corps is about, and Earth Island is doing everything it can to make this project succeed.

*Dave Brower was Executive Director of the Sierra Club from 1952 to 1969. He is founder of Friends of the Earth, the League of Conservation Voters, and Earth Island Institute.*

# A Statement of Purpose

>> **PURPOSE**, from page 1 have circulated **questionnaires** to the original group, and have talked to a number of people about the **RPE Newsletter**. Many people around the country are exploring the intersection of race, poverty and the environment. We come at it from different places. Some of us are environmental designers, some poverty lawyers, others **grassroots** activists. Some are students, others part of "mainstream" environmental groups. Some are urban planners, religious workers, health care professionals, government officials. Some of us are **low-income**, others privileged. Some are people of color. some white, some highly educated, some self-educated. All of us are concerned about the dis-

proportionate impact environmental hazards have on low-income and minority communities. And all of us need information to keep us abreast of activities, articles, events and people working in the area. We hope that this newsletter will be a source of that information.

This first issue is by necessity a bare-bones model — we are still in the process of working out what the newsletter should be, how grand a scale we want to attempt, how ambitious we can **all** be. Like the caucus at which the newsletter was born, we would like the newsletter to be a democratic, relatively free-form dialogue, an honest sharing of stories and strategies. resources and relevant events. The success and health

of the newsletter will depend on you, the readers — for contributions in the form of articles, book reviews, stories from your community, resources and upcoming events of interest, profiles of activists; for constructive criticism of our communal efforts; for mailing lists of people who should receive the **RPE**

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## A note from the Editors

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**Newsletter**; and for creative funding ideas so that we can get this thing off the ground. It is up to you. We are willing to be the conduit through which your information passes, but we are not willing to do **all** the work of **tracking** down articles and contributors. Let us **know** what is going on out there.

We operate under several premises:

First, that poor people and people of color have long been "environmentalists" — people concerned with the health of their communities — but have been defined out of the "environmental movement" by forces beyond their control. This is not to point fingers, but instead to recognize the historical contributions of poor people and people of color to protecting our environment. DDT was **first** banned from use not by the U.S. government, but by United Farm Workers' contracts with grape growers in the late **1960s** — farmworkers who understood the dangers of pesticides and who today continue fight for their elimination. **As** one **Latina** community leader told a group of white, middle-class environmentalists recently, "Welcome to the environmental movement!"

To understand the nexus of race, poverty and the environment, we must be aware of the way people engaged in struggle view themselves, their **culture**, needs and priorities. For many environmentalists, success or failure of a project is measured in specialized ways: legislation passed, a project halted. For people living in communities, the connections must be viewed more holistically. How does the project

>> see **PURPOSE**, page 16

### In This Issue...

David Brower on the Need for New Coalitions.....	1
A Statement of Purpose, by Carl Anthony & Luke Cole.....	1
Women, Home & Community: The Struggle in an Urban Environment, by Cynthia Hamilton.....	3
A Challenge to the Environmental Movement, by Victor Lewis.....	4
Why African Americans Should be Environmentalists, by Carl Anthony.....	5
Freeways, Community & "Environmental Racism," by Gar Smith.....	7
Environmental Groups Told They are Racist in Hiring.....	8
A Short List of Resources Organizations for Grassroots Environmental Activists, by Sanford Lewis.....	8
No Deposit, No Return, by Paul Ruffins.....	9
US Forest Service Hosts African-American Leaders.....	14
<b>Departments</b>	
Resource Groups.....	14
Job Opportunities.....	15
Reportback.....	15
Upcoming Events.....	15
Resources.....	17

# Women, Home & Community: The Struggle in an Urban Environment

by Cynthia Hamilton

In 1956 women in South Africa began organized protest against the pass laws. As they stood in front of the office of the Prime Minister, they began a new freedom song with its refrain "now you have touched the women you have struck a rock." This refrain provides a description of the personal commitment and intensity women bring to social change. Women's action has been characterized as "spontaneous and dramatic," women in action portrayed as "intractable and uncompromising." (Cockburn) Society has summarily dismissed these as negative attributes. In reviewing the two-year battle in South Central Los Angeles against a solid waste incinerator we see these same tenacious characteristics. When the City Council decided that a thirteen-acre incinerator, burning 2000 tons a day of municipal waste, should be built in a poor, residential Black and Hispanic community, the women there said "no." Officials had indeed dislodged a boulder of opposition.

*"I noticed when we first started fighting the issue how the men would laugh at the women... they would say, 'don't pay no attention to them, that's only one or two women... they won't make a difference.' ..But now since we've been fighting for about a year the smiles have gone."*

-- Charlotte Bullock

Minority communities shoulder a disproportionately high share of the burden for housing the by-products of industrial development waste, abandoned factories and warehouses, left over chemicals and debris. These communities are also asked to house the waste and pollution no longer acceptable in white communities in the form of hazardous landfills or dump sites. In 1987 the United Church of Christ's

Commission for Racial Justice published a report *Toxic Wastes and Race*. They concluded that race is a major factor related to the presence of hazardous wastes in residential communities throughout the United States. Three out of every five Black and Hispanic Americans live in communi-

*This article addresses the specific problems and developments associated with community organizing in Los Angeles against the solid waste incinerator known as LANCER. The majority of the activists engaged in this issue were women. This resulted in a unique set of problems for these women as they struggled to preserve their community. This review will focus on the evolution of political organization and political consciousness among working class women in this effort. This article is an attempt to describe the process of individual and group development by using the voices of the women involved.*

ties with uncontrolled toxic sites. Seventy-five percent of the residents of rural areas in the Southwest are drinking pesticide-contaminated water; the majority are Hispanic. Over 2 million tons of uranium tailings have been dumped on Indian reservations. The result is that Navajo teenagers are said to have reproductive organ cancer at 17 times the national average. Over 700,000 inner-city children are said to be suffering from lead poisoning, which results in learning disorders -- 50 percent of these children are Black, Latino and Asian. (*Toxics & Minority Communities*, 1986) Working class minority women are therefore motivated to organize around very pragmatic environmental issues, rather than those normally associated with more middle-class organizations.

*"I did not come to the fight against environmental problems as an intellectual but rather as a concerned mother... people say, 'but you're not a scientist, how do you know it's not safe...?' I have common sense... I know if dioxin and mercury are going to come out of*

*an incinerator stack, somebody's going to be affected."*

-- Charlotte Bullock

When Concerned Citizens of South Central Los Angeles came together to oppose the solid waste incinerator

planned for the community, no one thought much about environmentalism or even feminism. These were just words in a community with a 78 percent unemployment rate, an average income (\$8,158) less than half that of the general Los Angeles population, and a residential density more than twice that of the whole city. In the first stages of organization what motivated and directed individual actions was the

need to protect home and children; for the group this individual orientation emerged as a community-centered battle. What was left in this deteriorat-

>> see WOMW, page 10



# A Challenge to the Environmental Movement

by Victor Lewis

Green is good. A deep and uncompromising commitment to the embodiment of ecological wisdom is of the utmost importance to the continued survival and flourishing of humanity and the whole Earth community. Recent reports about the human impact on the environment are alarming indeed. Acid rain, global warming, the decimation of the rain forests, the destruction of six billion tons of North American topsoil every year, our continued reliance on toxic and non-renewable energy resources, all point to a state of affairs in which, in the words of Einstein, "we drift toward unparalleled catastrophe." The threat of ecocide (ecological suicide) is a pressing political and spiritual reality that transcends the ideological debate between "capitalisms" and "communisms." The human future will be a "Green" one or no future at all.

It is out of my appreciation for the core values of the Green movement that I wish to point to some of its key unsolved problems. The ecological values of the environmental movement are too important for it to remain tainted and marginalized by a few important but correctable shortcomings.

My basic problem with the Green movement, and I am speaking primarily of the U.S. movement inspired by the group calling themselves the Green Committees of Correspondence (GCoC), is that it has shown inadequate **solidarity** with the many human victims of **ecocidal** ideology, in particular, people of color and **working** class people. It has not listened to and learned deeply enough **from** the social movements to whom it, in large part, owes its existence.

The U.S. Green movement is historically indebted to the women's movement, the anti-war movement, the anti-nuclear movement and the environmental activism epitomized by the first Earth Day in 1970. These movements in turn are, substantially, patterned after and midwifed by the civil rights movement. The civil rights movement was itself nourished by the traditions of African-American liberation theology, **Gandhi's satyagraha** movement for the liberation of India from British colonial rule, and the spirit and tactics of the labor movement. These movements that paved the way for the immediate predecessors of today's Green movement were composed largely of people of color and white members of the **working** classes. Why then does the

to listen to white activists who can spontaneously identify with the threats to the ozone layer, the mountain goat, or the California condor, but withdraw in fear, guilt, despair, or whatever, when confronted with the "environmental effects" of racism on humans. For example, more young African-American males died from murder in the U.S. in 1977 than in ten years of fighting in Viet Nam. Young African-American men die at a rate six times greater than their white counterparts. The median family income for African-Americans has declined over the last twenty years, and since 1986 the life expectancy of the African-American people as a whole has been declining. If you cannot speak of or listen wisely and learn about the lives of African-American people, you may not speak to me of condors.

The U.S. is a nation whose white majority population through no fault of its own has been traumatized with a very deep and painful racist conditioning. The legacy of racism in this country includes the enslavement of African people, the virtual enslavement of Chinese peoples, illegal internment of much of the U.S. Japanese population, the genocide of millions of Native Americans and the theft of Native lands.

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*It is not that "people of color don't care about the environment," though we have been so accused.*

*It's just that we find it hard to listen to white activists who can spontaneously identify with the threats to the ozone layer, the mountain goat, or the California condor, but withdraw in fear, guilt, despair, or whatever, when confronted with the "environmental effects" of racism on humans.*

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Green movement have only a token representation of people of color and **working** class people?

People of color, in particular, have traditionally shunned the Green movement. Why? Racism. It is not that "people of color don't care about the environment," though we have been so accused. It's just that we **find** it hard

Because this profoundly evil social reality goes so deep into the history and fabric of our nation and **retains** such a pervasive influence on the psyche of its people, any progressive social movement, including the environmental movement *must* embody a commitment and competence in understanding **and**

>> see **GREENS**, page 19

# Why African Americans Should be Environmentalists

by Carl Anthony

When Martin Luther King Jr. decided to raise his voice in opposition to the war in Vietnam, many of his friends, as well as his critics, told him he ought to stick to domestic issues. He should concentrate on securing civil rights of Blacks in the South and leave foreign policy to the professionals who knew best. But King decided to oppose the war because he knew it was morally wrong and because he understood the link between the brutal exploitation and destruction of the Vietnamese people and the struggle of Blacks and others for justice and freedom in our own land.

Today, Black leadership and the Black community face a similar situation. Every day the newspapers **carry** stories about the changing **atmosphere** and climate, threats to the world's water supply, threats to the biodiversity of the rainforest, and the populations crisis in poor nations growing too fast to be supported by the **carrying** capacity of their lands. Can we afford to view the social and economic problems of Black American communities in isolation from these global trends?

## Developing New Visions

Blacks could benefit from expanding their vision to include greater environmental awareness. For example, a recent study of the deteriorating conditions within the Black community called young Black males in America "an endangered species." "This **descrip-**

**tion** applies in a metaphorical sense, to the current status of young Black males in contemporary society," says Jewelle Taylor Gibbs. Her study presents a comprehensive interdisciplinary perspective of the social and economic problems of these young people, providing valuable statistics on high school drop out rates, work skills and attitudes, unemployment, robbery, rape, homicide and aggravated assault, drug addiction and teenage parenthood. But Gibbs makes no mention of the utter alienation of these young people from the natural environment, which is, after all the source of Earth's abundance and well being. The loss of this contact with living and growing things, even rudimentary knowledge of where food and water comes from, must have serious consequences which we have no way of measuring, as yet.

The study said nothing of the difficult days ahead as American society seeks to make the transition from its current levels of consumption of resources to more sustainable patterns of the future. Developing an environmental perspective within the Black community could help smooth this transition in several ways:

- by promoting greater understanding of the productive assets of society, including land, water and natural **resources;**
- by strengthening collaboration with groups seeking to redirect public investment and economic development away from wasteful exploitation of

nature toward urban restoration and meeting basic human needs;

- by gaining access to information and resources which enhance the potential of community survival;

- by developing new knowledge and skills to be shared by groups of people who live in the city; and

- by strengthening the social and political organization and creating new opportunities for leadership within the community.

Environmental organizations in the United States should also modify practices to expand their constituency to include Blacks and members of other minority groups as participants in shaping and building public support for environmental policies. With the exception of limited collaboration between environmentalists and Native American groups, and anti-toxics campaigns, there has been little communication between environmentalists and non-European minority groups in the US. Critical issues such as population control, limiting human intervention in the ecosystem, or rebuilding our cities in balance with nature have been discussed almost entirely from a European, and often elitist, perspective.

Environmental organizations have taught us to appreciate and respect the diversity of non-human species and to recognize the fundamental **inter-dependency** of human and non-human life on the planet. Thus far, however, the environmental movement, despite its highlighting crises in underdeveloped countries, **has** tended to be racially exclusive, expressing the point of view of the middle- and upper-income strata of European ethnic groups in developed countries. It has reproduced within its ranks prevailing patterns of social relations. Until recently, there has been little **concern** for the environmental needs and rights of historically disadvantaged groups in developed **countries**. Few efforts to mobilize such groups **in addressing** environmental **needs** of third and fourth world communities have been made. If environmentalists hope to have credibility as the voice of a

>> see **AFRICAN AMERICANS**, page 6

<< **AFRICAN AMERICANS**, from page 5

**grassroots** planetary perspective, this pattern will have to change. Blacks can play an important role in this shift of **strategy** and consciousness.

### Environmental Justice

The principle of social justice, however, must be at the heart of any effort aimed at bringing Blacks into the mainstream of environmental organizations in the United States. Such a vision must offer a real alternative to a view of the tropical rainforest as an inviolate preserve or a private laboratory for Europeans' pharmaceutical companies, ignoring the needs of indigenous populations. While **recognizing** limits to growth, it must avoid misuse of environmental information as a way of rationalizing the economic status quo. It must not misuse concern for endangered species as a way of diluting our responsibility to meet basic need for human health care, food and shelter. It cannot manipulate the legitimate need for population control as code words for preserving racial dominance and purity.

Environmental protection must be understood as intimately connected to efforts to eradicate injustice. Solutions must offer a practical guide for goals which can be accomplished in the short run as we seek a path toward a more sustainable future. Environmental organizations can no longer afford to take the view that they are unconcerned about who benefits and who loses from **restrictions** on economic growth. Shifting resources away from projects which are damaging to the **ecosystem** toward programs and projects which meet basic human needs must become the highest priority for the environmental movement. In the United States, **organizations** such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Urban League have a real stake in these outcomes. They should be part of the environmental dialogue. New organizations dealing explicitly with urban habitat are needed.

### The Inner City as Damaged Land

The American **inner** city was once a wilderness. Today, islands, estuaries, forests, and riparian habitats that once existed in these privileged locations have been replaced by asphalt, concrete, barbed wire fences, boarded-up stores, crack houses, abandoned factories, landfills and pollution. After generations of isolation and manipulation, the people who live in these places rarely remember what it once was, or speculate on what it might become.

Isolation of Blacks from stewardship of the environment has deep historic roots. It is hard to keep the faith. The

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## Restoration of inner-city neighborhoods should be a high priority for environmentalists.

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Black population migrated to the cities to escape the four centuries of exploitation on the plantations, crop farms and coal mines of the South. Displacement from rural areas parallels displacement in the Third World. Understanding of these experiences, however painful, is an important resource as we seek a path towards sustainable development

For two decades, the **central** city cores have been shrinking in population as those more fortunate have been fleeing to the suburbs in search of a better life. Suburban flight, in turn, extends the destruction of fragile agricultural lands. Can we afford a new round of urban expansion and abandonment as America's Black urban population — after twelve generations of exploitation and oppression — seeks to realize its legitimate aspirations as a part of the American Dream? Can we ignore the **underclass** trapped in American ghettos while claiming to speak for reconciliation of economic

growth and the integrity of the environment? If we are to restore the cities, we must invest in the future of the people who live there.

### Developing Eco-Leadership

In the next decade, important decisions about the future of cities and surrounding agricultural land will have consequences for millions of people. The deteriorated infrastructure of urban areas must be rebuilt. There are hidden rewards for undertaking a program of rebuilding our urban cores in tune with nature. The investment of the billions of dollars that will be required offers opportunities for fresh approaches to affordable housing, public **services**, resources and waste. There is room for small projects and for bringing wilderness back into the city.

But investment in education and social organization of the existing inner-city population is needed if this population is to have a stake in the outcome. Restoration of such inner-city neighborhoods should be a high priority for environmentalists. Within this same time period, **hundreds** of geologists, biologists, humanists, agricultural economists, political scientists, epidemiologists, resource and population specialists who make up the leadership of the environmental movement could be Blacks. They could provide leadership to hundreds of thousands more in society at large and in their own communities, helping to smooth the difficult **transition** from industrial to more sustainable **patterns** of urban life.

In order to meet responsibilities for citizenship, Blacks must have **opportunities** and learn to play a greater role in formulating environmental policies which affect all members of the community. We must **find** new ways to bridge the gap between environmental advocates and Black communities.

*Carl Anthony is a co-founder of the Urban Habitat Project of the Earth Island Institute, and an editor of the RPE Newsletter.*

# Freeways, Community and "Environmental Racism"

by Gar Smith

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA — When the October 17 earthquake brought the I-880 overpass crashing down, it marked the second time in 35 years that the residents of east Oakland's Cypress Village had seen their community torn apart by forces beyond their control. The earlier disaster was man-made, however.

It began slowly in 1954 and over the next three years it built to a shattering crescendo as the I-880 freeway was driven through the heart of what had once been a stable, thriving community. Prior to the construction of the freeway, West

Oakland's population had begun a slow shift from white to lower-income minority residents. When the freeway came to town, the remaining middle-class residents — both white and non-white — were forced to move. Scores of local businesses were obliterated. Family homes were bulldozed. Fruit trees were knocked over and their roots sealed beneath concrete.

As Bill Love, who was born in the community 49 years ago, explained to a local reporter: "Had they not torn down the single-family houses, built projects and then built the freeway, it would have remained a thriving community." When the freeway came to town, Love recalled, "the YWCA was lost, an orphanage and a day-care center, two mortuaries, most of a business district... [The freeway] was a line of demarcation — everything on the side closest to the bay was allowed to deteriorate. And it was a source of constant noise and pollution."

The noise and pollution may have

*The freeway "caused a barrier, it caused separation of family, it caused a separation of community. It created an attitude of 'I'm better than you because I live on this side of the freeway.'"*

*-- Earl Meneweather, Oakland resident*

exacted a tragic toll on the health of residents remaining along the freeway's flanks. A county Health Department study has found cancer clusters in several communities along the route of the heavily-trafficked highway. The highest cancer rates were in West Oakland.

Dr. George Kaplan, a health specialist at the University of California-Berkeley, agreed that the freeway could have a negative effect on health (particularly for children) but the link is difficult to establish. As Kaplan explained to the Oakland Tribune, "freeways aren't placed randomly in cities. They often go through areas that are poor and vulnerable to that disruption."

For the people of West Oakland, I-880 was a disaster the day it went up. Now, instead of walking a few blocks to go shopping, residents had to drive for miles to reach a major grocery store or find a filling station to top off their gas tanks.

Seventy-year-old Earl Meneweather's family lost their classic Victorian home to

the forces of "urban renewal." As Meneweather explained to the Oakland Tribune, the freeway "caused a barrier, it caused separation of family, it caused a separation of community. It created an attitude of I'm better than you because I live on this side of the freeway."

Over the years, the division between the two communities has grown worse. On one side the city lavished money on renovations, turning Victorian relics into chic neighborhoods for a gentrified mid-

decade class. On the bay side of the freeway, civic neglect, poverty, drug abuse, crime and violence rule the day.

"I will oppose rebuilding the freeway,"

declared Oakland City Councilmember Carter Gilmore. "We have a good chance to give that area back to the community." This sentiment was echoed by a coalition of eight local environmental groups. "We have a golden opportunity here to remove a section of unnecessary freeway... , turn it into a city street and integrate it into the neighborhood," said Sierra Club transportation

committee chair Kenneth Ryan. The groups have said they may seek a lawsuit to force an environmental assessment before any new freeway construction is attempted.

California Department of Transportation officials were adamant that work on a "temporary" six-lane, ground-level replacement would begin by December. To facilitate this schedule, demolition crews were ordered to work through the night, knocking down the remaining mass of broken freeway. The impact on the lives of the beleaguered residents of West Oakland was tremendous. The noise of demolition and shaking of nearby homes as huge wrecking balls smashed the ruins of the overpass kept residents awake at night, ears deafened by concussions, eyes filled with dust and their homes shaking from the endless impacts.

During daylight hours, mammoth tractor-trailer rigs rushing down the streets put the lives of elderly residents and

>> see FREEWAYS, page 14

## ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS TOLD THEY ARE RACIST IN HIRING

Members of civil rights and minority groups have written a letter to eight major environmental organizations charging them with racism in their hiring practices, according to the *New York Times*, February 1. The letter has caused quite a stir among environmental groups around the nation as the groups prepare for the 20th anniversary of Earth Day, on April 22. Spokespersons for the environmental groups, including the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Wilderness Society and the Sierra Club admitted that they have a poor record of hiring people of color in positions of significant responsibility.

The civil rights groups complained that minorities are the chief victims of pollution and environmental degradation, yet their voices are rarely heard in decision-making about the environment. Among those criticizing environmental groups were Dr. Benjamin Chavis, Jr. of the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice, Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth of the Southern Organizing Committee for Social and Economic Justice, Richard Moore of the South-West Organizing Project, and Amos Favorite of the Ascension Parish Residents against Toxic Pollution in Louisiana

## *A Short List of Resource Organizations for Grassroots Environmental Activists*

**CITIZENS CLEARINGHOUSE FOR HAZARDOUS WASTE**  
PO Box 926, Arlington, VA 22216 • 703-276-7070

Assistance to grassroots action groups. Publishes newsletter (see **RESOURCES**) containing the best concise roundup of victories and fights at the grassroots. The staff of CCHW are experts at cutting through techno-jargon and bureaucratic excuses. Their message is a simple one: ORGANIZE! ORGANIZE! ORGANIZE!

**CLEAN WATER ACTION**

317 Pennsylvania Ave, SE, Washington, DC 20003 • 202/547-1196

Providing technical and organizing assistance to groups involved in fighting incinerators, cleaning up dumps and protecting groundwater. Also leading providers of strategy and support to citizens' efforts to inform the public on electoral candidates' environmental positions.

**ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION**

PO Box 3541, Princeton, NJ 08543-3541 • 609/683-0707

Provides weekly newsletter (see **RESOURCES**) and on-line database for grassroots activists on solid-waste and hazardous-waste issues.

**GREENPEACE USA**

1436 U Street, NW, Washington, DC 20009 • 202/462-1177

The largest national grassroots-based group fighting toxics and solid-waste abuses, and also to conserve and restore the natural environment. Hard-hitting organizing and direct action campaigns. A major international force that is changing the way the world views environmental issues.

**INSTITUTE FOR LOCAL SELF-RELIANCE**

2425 18th St, NW, Washington, DC 20009 • 202/232-4108

An excellent resource for local activists and local government on the economics and technical ins and outs of solid waste.

**NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST THE MISUSE OF PESTICIDES (NCAMP)**

530 7th St, SE, Washington, DC 20003 • 202/543-5450

Technical assistance to groups and individuals fighting abuses of pesticides.

**NATIONAL TOXICS CAMPAIGN**

37 Temple Place, 4th Floor, Boston, MA 02111 • 617/482-1477

One of the most ambitious and far-reaching grassroots action and support groups in the world. Currently has 15 offices across the country.

**U.S. PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP (USPIRG)**

215 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20003 • 202/546-9707

A great source of information on toxics and solid-waste issues. Engaged in national and statewide legislative fights. Offices of affiliated **PIRGs** are located in numerous states.

**WORK ON WASTE**

82 Judson Street, Canton, NY 13617

Publishes the weekly newsletter on solid-waste issues for grassroots activists. The founder, Professor Paul **Connert** of St. Lawrence University, is one of the most eloquent speakers in the nation on the need to shift to a non-wasteful economy.

— Sanford Lewis

(From the Spring 1990 *Whole Earth Review*. Reprinted with permission of the author.)

# No Deposit, No Return

## How the Politics of Race Defeated the DC Bottle Bill

by Paul Ruffins

Passing a bottle-deposit law by initiative petition in Washington should have been a piece of cake.

The 70 percent black city has traditionally been very receptive to liberal initiatives. Many environmental organizations have offices in the area. There are no bottle or can manufacturers whose employees might be threatened by recycling.

And by 1986, when the bill was introduced, the city was in dire need of recycling. Since the district measures only about 45 square miles, it has to dispose of all its waste in Virginia's Lorton landfill, which was rapidly reaching capacity. The City Council had already authorized a comprehensive waste-recycling program. According to Jonathan Puth, who coordinated the bottle-bill campaign, initial polls revealed that 60 percent of the city's residents favored returnable deposit bottles.

But, in the end, despite starting off with nearly every advantage, the initiative was soundly defeated. Why?

The bottle-bill initiative was the brainchild of Jim McCarthy, a "lifestyle environmentalist" who enlisted Puth of Environmental Action, Tom Tobin of Ralph Nader's Public Citizen, and Gene Karpinski from the US Public Interest Research Group to coordinate the campaign. Together, they represented an impressive array of political savvy. However, none of them were prepared for what they would experience in the district's black political world.

Industry groups responded to the initiative with a blistering campaign eclipsing anything Washington had ever seen. Representatives of Budweiser, the Glass Packaging Institute, can manufacturers, the Beer Institute, Coke, Pepsi, and others immediately formed the Clean Capitol City Committee (CCCC) to oppose the bill, citing the difficulties of handling and processing. The group then proceeded to shower local black organizations and individuals with cash. It gave \$400 to a church event, contributed \$350 to a women's shelter, and made similar donations to other community groups. It also formed an advisory committee made up almost entirely of locally influential black people, including ministers and well-connected public-relations consultants.

The CCCC also retained Mat Reese and Associates, a well-known political consulting firm, to create an advertising campaign that saturated the local media, black radio stations, and newspapers in particular. Some ads claimed that empty bottles would attract roaches. Others portrayed elderly black women struggling to return huge bags of empties.

The consistent thrust of the campaign was that the deposit law was something wealthy white outsiders were trying to impose on the black community. One flyer proclaimed, "You can tell a lot about an issue by who support it and who opposes it." Although 30 of the city's 37 advisory neighborhood commissions supported the bill, the flyer listed primarily supporters from the city's wealthy white neighborhoods.

Almost all those listed as opposing the bill were black activists or organizations. Things got even nastier when Sterling Tucker, a black former city councilman paid by the CCCC, was quoted as warning that "our little black boys and girls would be subject to AIDS and other diseases" as a result of storing empty bottles.

In the end, the CCCC won the election by a margin of 55-45, after spending over \$2 million — or nearly \$54 a vote. "It was incredible," says Peter Williams, the black executive director of Common Cause, which supported the bill. "A white-controlled and funded industry group successfully made the bottle bill into a racial issue of us against them."

Of course, there are people such as CCCC consultant Ofield Dukes who vehemently deny that race was an issue. "We just ran a better campaign. It was Puth who started yelling racism when he began to lose. It was more of an economic issue than a racial issue. But these sometimes go hand in hand, since the people who decided to make the bottle bill an issue were all from west of the park."

Though the bill's organizers didn't all live in the expensive neighborhoods west of Rock Creek Park, they were all white, male, and middle-class. But even some CCCC supporters agree that it was the CCCC that used race as a weapon. Lenneal Henderson, a black environmentalist who opposed the bottle bill for technical reasons (such as the fact that its economic projections were based on the erroneous assumption that most of the district's residents lived in single-family dwellings as opposed to apartments), denies that the CCCC campaign focused solely on race. But, he concedes, "Nobody in their right mind could argue that they weren't making it an issue of black and white."

*Paul Ruffins is executive editor of Black Network News and publications editor for the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation.*

*This article originally appeared in the March/April 1990 New Age Journal, and is reprinted with permission of the author.*

## &lt;&lt; WOMEN, from page 3

ing district on the periphery of the Central Business and Commercial District had to be defended; a "garbage dump" was the final insult after years of neglect, watching downtown flourish while residents were prevented from borrowing enough to put up even a new roof.

The organization was never gender restricted but it became apparent after a while that women were the majority. Reflecting on this some twenty-four months later provides the advantage of hindsight. The particular nature of organization which the group assumed, the actions engaged in, even the content of what was said, were all a product not only of the issue itself, that is the waste incinerator, but also a function of the particular nature of women's oppression and what happens as the process of consciousness begins.

Women often play a primary part in community action because it is about things they know best. (Cockburn, p. 62) They also tend to use organizing strategies and methods which are the antithesis of those of the traditional environmentalist movement. Minority women in several urban areas have found themselves as part of a new radical core as the new wave of environmental action, precipitated by the irrationalities of capital-intensive growth, has catapulted them forward. These individuals are responding not to "nature" in the abstract but to their homes, and the health of their children.

*"I have asthma, my children have asthma, my brothers and sisters have asthma, there are a lot of health problems that people living around an incinerator might be subjected to and I said, 'they can't do this to me and my family.'"*

-- Robin Cannon

Women are more likely to take on these issues than men precisely because the home has been **defined** and **prescribed** a women's domain. According to Cynthia Cockburn, "in a housing situation that is a health hazard, the woman is more likely to act than the man because she lives there all day and because she is impelled by fear for her children. Community action of this kind is a significant phase of class struggle, but it is also an element of women's liberation." (p. 62)

This phenomenon was most apparent in the battle over **LANCER (Los Angeles City Energy Recovery Project)**. Women with no political experience, who had no history of organizing, responded first as protectors of their children. Many were single parents, others were older women who had raised families. While the experts were convinced that their smug dismissal of the validity of health concerns which these women raised would send the **women** away, it only reinforced their

women did not fit the prototype of opposition. Rather, their studies had concluded:

Certain types of people are likely to participate in politics, either by virtue of their issue awareness or their financial resources, or both. Members of middle or high socioeconomic strata (a composite index of level of education, occupational prestige, and income) are more likely to organize into effective groups to express their political interests and views. All socioeconomic groupings tend to resent the nearby siting of major facilities, but the middle and upper **socioeconomic** strata possess better resources to effectuate their opposition. Middle and higher socioeconomic strata neighborhoods should not fall at least within the one mile and five mile radii of the proposed site.

... [A]lthough environmental concerns cut across all subgroups

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***Working-class minority women are motivated to organize around very pragmatic environmental issues, rather than those normally associated with more middle-class organizations.***

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determination.

*"..Peoples' jobs were threatened, ministers were threatened... but I said, 'I'm not going to be intimidated... My child's health comes first... that's more important than my job.'" — Charlotte Bullock*

None of the officials were **prepared** for the intensity of **concerns** or the consistency of agitation. In fact the consultants had **concluded** that **these**

people with a college education, young or middle-aged, and **liberal** in philosophy are most likely to organize opposition to the siting of a major facility. Older people, with a high school education or less, and those who adhere to a free market orientation are least likely to oppose a facility. (**Cerrell Associates**, p. 42-43)

The organizers in South Central are >> see **WOMEN**, page 11

## &lt;&lt; WOMEN, from page 10

the antithesis of the prototype: high school educated or less, some above middle age and some young, **non-professionals** and the unemployed, low income persons with no previous political experience, these were the characteristics of the protest group. The consultants and politicians persisted in their disbelief, however, that opposition from this group could be serious.

*"In the 1950s the City banned small incinerators in the yard and yet they want to build a big incinerator... the Council is going to build something in my community which might kill my child ... I don't need a scientist to tell me that's wrong."*

-- Charlotte Bullock

The intransigence of the City Council intensified the agitation, and women **became** less willing to compromise as time passed. Each passing month gave them greater strength, knowledge and **perseverance**. In the end the men of the corporation and the City had a more formidable enemy than ever expected, and in the end they had to compromise — politicians backing away from their previous embrace of incineration as a solution to the trash crisis, and the corporation backing away from a site in a **poor**, Black residential **area**. While the issues are far from resolved, it is important that the willingness to compromise has become the official position of the City and the corporation, as a result of the determination of "a few women."

The women in South Central Los Angeles were not alone in their battle. They were joined by women from across the City, white, **middle-class** and professional.

*"I didn't know we all had so*

*many things in common... millions of people in the City had something in common with us... the environment."*

-- Robin Cannon

These two groups of women, together, have created something previously unknown to the City of Los

unlike men, are less conditioned to see the value of small advances. (Cockburn, p. 63) These women were all guided by their vision of the possible: that it was possible to stop completely the construction of the incinerator, that it is possible in a City like Los Angeles to have reasonable growth, that it is possible to humanize community

*"The Council is going to build something in my community which might kill my child ... I don't need a scientist to tell me that's wrong."*

-- Charlotte Bullock

Angeles — unity of purpose across neighborhood and racial lines.

structures and services.

*"We are making a difference... when we come together as a whole and stick with it, we can win because we are right."*

-- Charlotte Bullock

This unity has been accomplished by informality, respect, tolerance of spontaneity and decentralization. All of the activities which we **are** told destroy organization, have worked to sustain a movement. For a year and a half the group functioned without a formal leadership **structure**. The unconscious acceptance of equality and democratic process resulted practically in a rotation of the chair's position at meetings; **retically** it was an expression of what analysts have come to refer to as the feminist critique of bureaucracy, which we've **seen** in other women's actions like **Greenham Common**. The news media was disoriented when they asked for the spokesperson and the group responded that everyone could speak for the **neighborhood**.

It may be the case that women,

*"My neighbors said, 'You can't fight City Hall... and besides, you work there.' I told them I would fight anyway."* -- Robin Cannon

None of these women were convinced by the consultants, and their traditional justifications for capital intensive growth: that it increases property values by intensifying land use, that it draws new business and investment to the area, that it removes blight and deterioration, and the key argument used to persuade the working class, that growth creates jobs.

*"They're not bringing real development to our community... They're going to bring this incinerator to us and then say 'we're going to give you 50 jobs when you get this plant...' Meanwhile they're going to shut down another factory (in Riverside) and eliminate 200 jobs to buy more pollution rights... they may close more shops."*

-- Robin Cannon

>> see WOMEN page 12

<< **WOMEN**, from page 11

Ironically, the consultants' advice to industry **backfired**. They had suggested that emphasizing employment and a "gift" to the community (of \$2 million for a community development fund for park improvement) would persuade opponents. But promises of heated swimming pools, air conditioned basketball courts and 50 jobs at the facility were more insulting than encouraging. Similarly, expert assurance that health risks associated with dioxin exposure were less than those associated with "eating peanut butter" unleashed a flurry of dissent. All of the women, young and old, working class and professional, had **fixed** peanut butter sandwiches for lunch for years.

The experts insistence on referring to congenital deformities and cancers as "acceptable **risks**" cut to the heart of women **who rose** to speak of a child's asthma, or a parent's influenza, or the

and the unemployed alike; whites and Blacks were castigated as irrational and uncompromising. **As** a result, new levels of consciousness were sparked in these women.

The reactions of the men of the corporation and the City provided a very serious learning experience for women, both professionals and **non-professionals**, who came to the movement without a critique of **patriarchy**. That critique was developed in practice. In confronting the need for equality these women forced men to a new level of recognition — that working class women's concerns cannot be dismissed even if it means more years of organizing.

Individual transformations accompanied the group process. As the struggle against the incinerator proceeded to take on some elements of class struggle, individual consciousness matured and

*comes home from work, cooks, helps the kids with their homework, then I watch a little TV and go to bed to get ready for the next morning. Now I would rush home, cook, read my materials on LANCER... Now the kids were on their own... I had my own homework... my husband still wasn't taking me seriously. My husband had to learn to allocate more time for baby-sitting. Now on Saturdays if they went to the show or the park, I couldn't attend... in the evenings there were hearings... I was using my vacation time to go to hearings during the work day."*

-- Robin Cannon

As parents, particularly single parents, time in the home was strained for these women. Children and husbands complained that meetings and public hearings had taken priority over the family and relations in the home.

*"My children understand, but then they don't want to understand... They say 'you're not spending any time with me.'"*

-- Charlotte Bullock

***They're going to bring this incinerator to us and then say 'we're going to give you 50 jobs when you get this plant...' Meanwhile they're going to shut down another factory and eliminate 200 jobs to buy more pollution rights."***

-- Robin Cannon

high rate of cancer, heart **disease** and pneumonia in this poverty-stricken community. The callous disregard of these human concerns by the experts brought the women closer together. They came to rely more on each other as they were subjected to the sarcastic rebuffs of men who referred to their concerns as "irrational, uninformed and disruptive." The experts used gender as the basis for discrediting women's concerns. The experts laughter and contempt was directed at professionals

developed. Women began to recognize something of their oppression as women. This led to new forms of action not only against institutions but to the transformation of social relations in the home as well.

*"...My husband didn't take me seriously at first either... he just saw a whole lot of women meeting and assumed we wouldn't get anything done... I had to split my time... I'm the one who usually*

Ironically, it was the concern for family, love of family, which had catapulted these women into action to begin with; but, in a pragmatic sense the home did have to come second in order for health and safety to be preserved. **These** were hard learning experiences. But meetings in individual homes ultimately involved children and spouses alike, and everyone worked and everyone listened. **The** transformation of relations continued as women spoke up at hearings and demonstrations and husbands transported children, made **signs** and looked on with pride and

>> see **WOMEN**, page 13

## &lt;&lt; WOMEN, from page 12

support at public forums.

The critical perspective of women in the battle against LANCER went far beyond what the women themselves had intended. For these women the political issues were personal and in that sense they became feminist issues. These women in the end, were fighting for what they felt was "right" rather than what men argued was reasonable. (Laura Lake) The coincidence of the principles of feminism and ecology, which Carolyn Merchant explains in *The Death Of Nature*, found expression and developed in the consciousness of participants: the concern for earth as a home; a recognition that all parts of a system have equal value; the **acknowledgement** of process; and finally that capitalist growth has social costs.

*"This fight has really turned me around, things are intertwined in ways I hadn't realized... all these social issues as well as political and economic issues are really intertwined. Before, I was concerned only about health and then I began to get into politics, decision-making and so many things...*

.. Robin Cannon

In two years, what started as the outrage of a small group of mothers has transformed the political climate of a major **metropolitan area**. What these women have aimed for is a greater level of democracy, a greater level of involvement, not only for their organization but in the development process of the City generally. They have demanded accountability regarding land use and ownership, very subversive concerns in a capitalist society. Second, the group process, collectivism, was of primary importance. It allowed women to **see** their own power and potential and therefore allowed them to consoli-

date effective opposition. Third, the movement underscored the role of principles. In fact citizens have lived so long with an unquestioning acceptance of profit and expediency that sometimes they forget that our objective is to do "what's right." Women are beginning to raise this in a very forthright manner, emphasizing that "experts" have left us no other choice but to follow our own moral convictions rather than accept neutrality and capitulate in the face of crisis.

The environmental crisis will escalate in this decade and women are sure to play pivotal roles for the reasons

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*In two years, what started as the outrage of a small group of mothers has transformed the political climate of a major metropolitan area.*

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discussed in this example. If women are able to sustain for longer periods some of the qualities and behavioral **forms** which they display in crisis situations (direct participatory democracy and the critique of bureaucracy, for example), they may be able to reintroduce equality and democracy into progressive action. They may also reintroduce the value of being moved by principle and morality. Pragmatism has come to dominate all forms of political behavior and the result has been disastrous as individuals and groups negotiate **pell mell** issues which must be understood in their totality. If women maintain leadership positions and resist the "normal" organizational thrust to barter, bargain and fragment ideas and issues, they may help set new standards for action in the new environmental movement.

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*Cynthia Hamilton teaches Pan-African Studies at California State University - Los Angeles.*

## U.S. FOREST SERVICE HOSTS AFRICAN-AMERICAN LEADERS

<< **FREEWAYS**, from page 7

schoolchildren at **risk**. Dust clouds from pulverized cement made it impossible for residents to hang their clothes outside to dry. Children, drowsy from lost sleep, began to complain of breathing problems. This, and more, was perfectly legal since the Governor had signed an executive order waiving the protections of the California Environmental Quality Act.

The unexpectedly high costs of repairing all the state's earthquake-vulnerable roads and bridges, however, has resulted in a delay of construction on the new roadway. Meantime, police erected cordons in the community, blocking streets and forcing homeowners to show identification to return home. One African-American gas station owner bitterly complained that he had been stopped at gunpoint several times on his way to open his station by police demanding to know what he was doing in the neighborhood.

In December, former Oakland Black Panther leaders Bobby Seale and David Hilliard called a press conference and attacked the official response to the **I-880** collapse as an instance of "environmental racism." **Seale** and Hilliard criticized the effort of the Red Cross and the Federal Emergency Management Agency for turning "a deaf ear to the cries of the people of West Oakland." Paul Cobb, a long-time community activist and president of the Oakland Urban Renaissance Society, made a similar charge a month earlier, announcing that his group was undertaking a door-to-door canvass of the neighborhoods to find people who were qualified for assistance. "FEMA is understaffed and in disarray, so we have to do it ourselves," Cobb declared.

Community groups, environmentalists and progressive politicians are now forging links to halt the new freeway and give West Oakland residents the green light to rebuild the diverse, self-reliant community the freeway took away from them 35 years ago.

*Gar Smith is the editor of Earth Island Journal.*

Officials from the US Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region met with twenty African-American representatives of churches, social agencies, and educational institutions March 30, 1990 in Oakland, **California** to explore ways the Forest Service and community leaders can work together on the environment and social justice.

The meeting was organized by Paul Barker, Regional Forester, and Larry Bembry, Deputy Regional Forester for the agency. The Forest service manages 200 million acres of **publically** owned forests and rangeland in the US.

The two officials announced job openings, economic opportunities and educational career programs for minority communities, and urban **forestry**

programs, to be funded this year.

Among those present were Sister **Maries de Porres** Taylor, Rev. Daniel Buford of the Ecumenical Peace Center, James Head **from** the National Economic Development Law Center, David Glover from OCCUR, environmentalist Paul Cobb of the Citizen's Earthquake Relief Team, McKinley Williams, Dean of Instruction at **Merrit** College, **Chapelle** Hayes, a well known Oakland activist, and Carl Anthony of the Urban Habitat Program.

For information about Forest Service programs, contact anthropologist **Amahra** Hicks, USDA Forest **Service**, PSW Region, 630 **Sansome** Street, San Francisco, CA 94111, or call **415/705-1882**.

### Resource Groups

Earth Island Institute Urban **Habitat** Program. Program emphasizing urban restoration and access by people of **color** to global, regional and neighborhood environmental resources. Two part video on Urban Barnraising, creating neighborhood commons through mutual aid. Collects bibliographies and documents on global and local environmental issues affecting African, Caribbean and African-American communities. Clearinghouse and speakers bureau. 300 Broadway, Suite 28, San Francisco, CA 94133. **415/788-3666**.

Forum For Community Transformation. Forum for people of color starting a dialogue on how we create a viable, sustainable 21st century, including physical development projects. P.O. Box 10652, Portland Oregon 97291.

**Labor/Community** Strategy Center. Born out of many progressive organizing experiences,, the UCSC is dedicated to making Los Angeles a more democratic and livable city and to developing new models of urban coalitions for worker and community empowerment. UCSC, 6454 Van Nuys Boulevard, Suite 150, Van Nuys, CA 91401. **818/781-9922**.

Legal **Environmental** Assistance Foundation. A public interest law firm protecting the South's ground water, lakes and streams. 203 North **Gladsden** Street, Suite 5, Tallahassee, FL 32301-7633. **904/681-2591**.

**SouthWest Organizing** Project. Working to empower the disenfranchised in the Southwest to realize racial and gender equality, and social and economic justice. Runs a community environmental program, a **community** development program, and a citizen participation program. "Lasting change comes from and is based on empowering **ourselves**." 1114 7th Street NW, Albuquerque, NM 87102. **505/247-8832**.

Urban Ecology. Develops strategies and actions for rebuilding cities in balance with nature. Sponsors of the 1st International **Ecocity** Conference, 1990, Berkeley, **California**. Conference proceedings available. P.O. Box 10144, Berkeley, **California**, 94709. **415/549-1724**.

## Upcoming Events...

Symposium on Siting of Toxic Activities in Poor **Communities** and Communities of Color, at Booth Auditorium, Boalt Hall, UC-Berkeley, April 18, 5-9 pm. Info: Daniel **Suman**, Committee on Race Poverty & Environmental Justice, Boalt Hall, UC-Berkeley, Berkeley, CA 94720, 415/848-4716.

The New Public Health: 1990, a Statewide Conference on the Future of Public Health in California, April 25-27, Hyatt Regency, Los Angeles, CA. Panels include "Equity, Poverty and Health **Promotion**," "Improving Community Participation in Health Promotion: A Multi-Cultural Perspective," "Leadership Strategies for Diverse Populations," "Empowerment Through Information: Is the 'Right to Know' Working?" and "Environmental Racism: Policy Decisions that Impact Disenfranchised Communities." Info: Julie Williamson, California Public Health Foundation, 2001 Addison St, Suite 200, Berkeley, CA 94704-1103, 415/644-8200.

**53rd** National Lawyers Guild National Convention, May 31-June 3, 1990, Austin, TX. The NLG Convention will include a major panel on "The **Grassroots Toxics** Movement," as well as workshops on "Workplace Toxic Exposure" and skills trainings on related legal topics. Info: NLG Convention Headquarters, 607 West 10th St, Austin, TX 78701. 512/472-1736.

Women of Color at the Center: 3rd National Conference on Women of Color and the Law, October 6-7, 1990, at Stanford Law School. Speakers will be legal and non-legal scholars and practitioners who place women of color at the center, in **theory** and practice. Info: Women of Color Conference, Stanford Law School, Stanford, CA 94305, 415/723-8014.

## Job Opportunities

In this space, we would like to begin a clearinghouse of job opportunities: jobs for people of color and working class people in the environmental **movement**; and **opportunities** and needs that community groups have for "experts": scientists, lawyers or environmental advocates.

### HEALTH EXPERT NEEDED:

*El Pueblo para el Aire y Agua Limpio* (People for Clean Air and Water), a **community group** in Kettleman City, CA, is fighting a toxic waste incinerator proposed by Chemical Waste Management f a their community. The group is looking for a health expert to critically evaluate the Health Risk Assessment found in the Environmental Impact Report. We're in a hurry - the public comment period closes May 15! Please contact Espy Maya. 209-386-5339, or Luke Cole, 415-864-3405 if you can help.

## Reportback

There are a variety of events around the topics of race, poverty and the environment that are happening with increasing frequency. It is obviously impossible to attend each symposium, forum, talk, conference and workshop — and many of the events are focused at specific communities (lawyers, organizers, academics, etc.). To keep all of us informed of what is going on around the country, we propose a Reportback section of the RPE Newsletter, in which participants or attendees at events of interest could let the rest of us know what has been going on. Like the rest of this newsletter, this is going to depend on people writing up and sending in reports on their events. In our next issue, we will have reportbacks on:

- The University of Michigan School of Natural Resources Conference on Race and the **Inci-** dence of Environmental Hazards, Ann Arbor, MI, January 25-28, 1990.
- The California Communities Against Toxics Conference, a gathering of over 125 grassroots anti-toxics activists from around the state on March 10-11, 1990 in Kettleman City, CA.
- Urban Ecology's **Eco-Cities** Conference, March 31-April 1, 1990 in Berkeley, CA.
- The Southwest Organizing Project's **Re-** gional Activist Dialogue on Environmental **Justice**, April 6-7, 1990 in Albuquerque, NM.
- The Center for Environmental Intern Programs (CEIP) Fund's National Minority **Environ-** mental Career Conference, April 9-10, 1990 at Howard University in Washington D.C. (The conference was designed to provide **minority** and women college students with an introduction to the environmental field and its employers and to encourage them to become environmental professionals. Over 1,000 students were expected, with the historically Black colleges and universities, the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, and tribally-controlled colleges emphasized.)
- The Symposium on **Siting of Toxic Activi-** ties in Poor Communities and Communities of Color at UC-Berkeley around Earth Day, mentioned in our Upcoming Events section to the left.

<< **PURPOSE**, from page two

strengthen local leadership? How does it create new opportunities for cooperation? The RPE Newsletter will cover pro-active **neighborhood** revitalization strategies such as tree planting and creek restoration as well as protest, what people are thinking as well as what they are doing.

Further, we must continue to build the bridges that have been tentatively constructed in the past few years between mainstream environmentalists and grassroots environmentalists, in a way which preserves the autonomy of community groups. One of our primary purposes is to strengthen the networks between environmental groups and working people, people of color and poor people. Consequently we seek articles, book reviews and stories which highlight a range of interests, attitudes and practices within such groups: **from** established national organizations such as the NAACP and the Sierra Club to **grassroots** organizers, cultural workers and communities.

Finally, this movement is broad enough for each of us to make our own niche, so long as we are aware of what others are doing and we are all working in the same direction. Differences in tactics or style should not divide us, nor should differences in culture, color, language or class background — if this happens, the polluters win. Industry has been successful at pitting us against each other in the past (see, for example, "No Deposit, No Return," on page nine). We must work together in the future.

Several procedural points:

**T i e .** We are proposing that the *RPE Newsletter* be quarterly, with the next issue out in July.

**Money.** This first issue was underwritten by the Earth Island Institute and the California Communities at Risk Project of California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation. Production and distribution of the newsletter is expensive, however, and this arrangement is not sustainable. We are **currently** exploring other sources of funding and

your ideas are welcome.

**Place.** A quick glance at this newsletter will betray its West-Coastedness — many of the events listed and players described are from the Western U.S., specifically California. This is not purposeful exclusion of other regions — it's simply that the two of us are "in the loop" for West Coast events, and don't always hear about what is going on around the country. This is also an appeal for you to send us information.

**People.** This newsletter began out of a group of about 30 interested people, and fell onto our shoulders quite by accident. We pulled together some articles of interest with the help of the original caucus; we now rely on you to send us new stuff. Our initial mailing will be to several hundred people around the country. We need your help in building our mailing list. If we want to expand the scope and distribution of the newsletter, an editorial or advisory board may be an important next step.

Special thanks to the authors of the pieces in *RPE*, and to Arthur Monroe, Karl Linn, **Ellie Goodwin**, Johanna Wald, **Izzy Martin**, Craig Breon, Marta Salinas, Bob Bullard, Eleanor Waldon, Daniel **Suman**, Robin Cannon, **Lori-Ann Thrupp**, **Cordell** Reagon, Ralph **Abascal**, Marion Standish, **José Padilla**, **Halima al Zahid**, **Amhara** Hicks, Jerry Poje, **Indra** Mungal, **Mary** James, Justin

**Lowe**, **Brad Erikson**, Robin Freeman, Rachael Steinberg, Rev. Dan Buford and **Steve Rauh**.

This is what we are thinking. Let us know what you are thinking...

For environmental justice,

Carl Anthony                      Luke Cole  
Co-Editors

*Carl Anthony is a board member of Earth Island Institute and a co-founder of Earth Island's Urban Habitat Program. He is an architect and development consultant. He serves on the board of the Center for Economic Conversion and Urban Ecology, and is working on a book entitled The Landscape of Freedom.*

*Luke Cole is staff attorney and coordinator of the California Communities at Risk Project of the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation, where he is preparing a report on the impact of environmental hazards on poor people. The project is funded by the Harvard Fellowship in Public Interest Law, the Stanford Public Interest Law Foundation and the Glen Eagles Foundation.*

## A Resource for Lawyers...

**National Lawyers Guild Toxics Committee.** In existence for three years, the NLG toxics committee is made up of about 250 lawyers across the country. The committee puts out a regular newsletter (**Toxic News**) and conducts workshops at the annual NLG convention on politically significant toxics issues. The Toxics Committee is undertaking a major project to look at Maquiladoras, the U.S.-owned industries just across the US-Mexican border which are polluting both countries while taking advantage of Mexico's much less stringent tax, labor and environmental laws. The committee is also planning a number of talks and workshops at the annual NLG conference (see **Upcoming Events**, page 5). Membership for Guild lawyers is \$25 year (\$10 students and legal workers), or \$35 for non-Guild lawyers. Info: **Michael Royce**, NLG Toxics Committee, 215 SW Washington, Suite 200, Portland, OR 97204.

# Resources

## Recent Articles and Reports

"Beyond White Environmentalism: Minorities and the Environment," the **January/February** 1990 issue of *Environmental Action*, is devoted to the intersection of issues of race and the environment. It includes articles such as "Minorities at Risk" and "Protection Quandry in Indian Country," as well as excellent profiles of local activists and a resources section. Single issues \$2.50 (**\$20/year** to subscribe to the bi-monthly magazine). EA, 1525 New Hampshire Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20036. **202/745-4870**.

**Labor/Community WATCHDOG: A Three Year Organizing Strategy to Impact the Los Angeles Clean Air Plan.** This 16-page pamphlet outlines step-by-step "a campaign for workers, communities and people of color to have a direct impact on the air quality of Los Angeles and the policies of the South Coast Air Quality Management District." A useful model for activists interested in air pollution, labor-environmental issues and organizing. Available from the **Labor/Community Strategy Center**, 6454 Van Nuys Boulevard, Suite 150, Van Nuys, CA 91401. **818/781-9922**.

Peter Montague, "What We Must Do — A Grassroots Offensive Against Toxics in the '90s," *The Workbook* (July-September 1989), p. 90. 23 pages. A critical history of the environmental movement, and a discussion of strategies which we can all use in local and global struggles. An inspirational piece. Available for \$3.50 from SRIC, PO Box 4524, Albuquerque, NM 87106. **505/262-1862**. See also *The Workbook*, below.

Lynda Taylor, "The Importance of Cross-Cultural Communication between Environmentalists and Land-Based People," *The Workbook* (July-September 1988), p. 90. 11 pages. A detailed and compelling examination of the need for greater understanding and communication across cultural and racial boundaries; includes a dialog among grassroots activists on several key Southwest issues. Available for \$2.00 from SRIC, PO Box 4524, Albuquerque, NM 87106. **505/262-1862**. See also *The Workbook*, below.

**Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A National Report on the Racial and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites**, by the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ, is the definitive work showing that minorities and poor people bear the brunt of toxics disposal. \$17.50 from UCC/CRJ, 105 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016. **212/683-5656**.

Paul Ruffins, 'Divided We Fall,' *New Age Journal* (March/April 1990), p. 45. An analysis of the historical divide between blacks and environmentalists, and what we can all do to bridge the gap. Includes "No Deposit, No Return," which is reprinted on page nine. 8 pages.

Dennis Pfaff, "Pollution and the Poor," *Detroit News* (November 26-28, 1989). A detailed 3-part case study of several low-income Detroit neighborhoods battling toxics and pollution. 12 pages.

Brian Tokar, "Marketing the Environment," *Z Magazine* (February 1990), p. 15. An examination of "corporate environmentalism." and a look at just how effective — or ineffective — environmentalists have been over the years. 6 pages.

The Fall 1988 issue of *California Tomorrow* is devoted to a discussion of potential common ground among the environmental, slow-growth and civil rights movements. Eight important articles. Available from California Tomorrow, Fort Mason Building B, San Francisco, CA 94123.

**All articles with no ordering information listed are available from RPE for 10 cents a page copying costs.** RPE Newsletter, CRLAF, 2111 Mission St, Suite 401, San Francisco, CA 94110.

### Minority Opportunities Study

The Center for Environmental Intern Programs (CEIP) has published a **Minority Opportunities Study** prepared by Marsha Chen. This study assesses the state of minorities in the environmental field, and analyses how the CEIP Fund could improve participation by minorities through recruitment, training, and retention. The study found that:

- Most employers in the environmental field are seeking qualified minority candidates but many employers are unsuccessful.

Members of minority groups are not exposed to environmental issues and career opportunities.

- No educational or career pipeline exists to encourage minorities to enter the environmental fields.

- The current supply of minority environmental professionals and recent college graduates in the science and engineering fields is very limited.

- When minorities are provided with opportunities, they are both interested and competent in environmental fields.

Very little overlap exists in the extensive networks within the minority and environmental communities.

For more information about the **Minority Opportunities Study** contact CEIP, 512 Second Street, 4th Fl. San Francisco, CA 94107, 4151 543-4400 or 68 Harrison Ave., Boston, MA 02111, **617/426-4375**.

# Resources, continued...

## Books

Robert Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class and Environmental Quality*. Available summer 1990 from Westview Press, 5500 Central Avenue, Boulder, CO 80301. 3031444-3541. Bullard, a UC-Riverside sociologist who has been studying the impact of environmental hazards on Blacks for more than 10 years, documents the rise of grassroots environmental groups in Black communities in the South.

Peter Berg, Beryl Magilavy, and Seth Zuckerman, *A Green City Program for San Francisco Bay Area and Towns*. Planet Drum Books, San Francisco. Presents a vision of what neighborhood groups and community based organizations can do to make cities more livable in balance with nature. There are readable chapters on urban planting, smart transportation, neighborhood character and empowerment, celebrating life place vitality, urban wild habitat and socially responsible small business and cooperatives.

Rick Simonson & Scott Walker, *The Graywolf Annual Five: Multicultural Literacy*. Graywolf Press, Saint Paul, 1988. Brings together essays by writers as diverse as James Baldwin, Carlos Fuentes, Michelle Cliff, Paula Gunn Allen, Ishmael Read and Wendell Berry. A single volume treasure chest of a variety of voices and heritages which contribute to the vibrant culture of the United States.

Peter Wentz, *Environmental Justice*. State University of New York Press, 1988. Provides philosophical background on questions of environmental justice, focusing on the manner in which benefits and burdens should be allocated when there is a scarcity of benefits and a surfeit of burdens. Valuable reading for anyone interested in the ethical issues in making the transition from current practices to more sustainable living patterns.

Wendell Berry, *The Hidden Wound*. North Point Press, San Francisco, 1988. A controversial personal essay about how racist conditioning and formative experience with blacks shaped his farming, writing and vision. Valuable insights on his childhood experiences of prejudice, how religion and language blunt the pain of racism, and the decline of farming and property ownership among blacks in the American South.

Jewelle Taylor Gibbs, *Young, Black and Male In American: An Endangered Species*. Auburn House, Dover, MA, 1988. Sociological study of the impact of educational, employment, criminal justice and health systems on inner city youth.

Brad Erikson and the Environmental Project on Central America (EPOCA), *A Call to Action: Handbook for Ecology, Peace and Justice*. Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, CA, 1990. Forward by Jesse Jackson.

## Periodicals and Newsletters

**Everyone's Backyard**. The bi-monthly newsletter of Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste, this indispensable tool is full of news, advice, strategies and stories from grassroots struggles around the country. Now in its eighth year, *Everyone's Backyard* also includes news on polluting corporations and excellent regular columns on organizing and legal problems. \$25 membership dues in CCHW (\$15 low income) includes as subscription. CCHW, PO Box 926, Arlington, VA 22216. 7031276-7070.

**NACE News from the Grassroots**. The quarterly publication of Native Americans for a Clean Environment, this newsletter contains a wide variety of environmental news of interest "to all earthlings committed to the survival of the planet." \$6/year subscription, \$10 (\$5 student, \$20 family) for membership in NACE. NACE, PO Box 1671, Tahlequah, OK 74465.

**RACHEL's Hazardous Waste News**. "Providing news and resources to the Movement for Environmental Justice," RACHEL (which stands for the Remote Access Chemical Hazards Electronic Library) is a weekly one-page newsletter that is chock-full of incisive technical, strategic and policy information. Editor Peter Montague of the Environmental Research Foundation brings technical information into everyday language for all to use. \$25/52 issues (\$8 students and seniors, \$250 for businesses and professionals). ERF, PO Box 3541, Princeton, NJ 08543. 6091683-0707.

**Toxic Times**. The newsletter of the National Toxics Campaign, published four times per year. Contains news and strategies from anti-toxics fights across the country, as well as useful strategies and resources. \$25 for one year includes membership in the National Toxics Campaign. NTC, 37 Temple Place, 4th Floor, Boston, MA 02111. 6171482-1477.

**The Workbook** Published by the Southwest Research and Information Center, the quarterly *Workbook* is a "fully indexed catalog of sources of information about environmental, social and consumer problems. It is aimed at helping people gain access to vital information that can help them assert control over their own lives." Each issue contains one feature article and 20+ pages of reviews of relevant publications. \$12/year. SRIC, PO Box 4524, Albuquerque, NM 87106. 505/262-1862.

>> **GREENS**, from page 4

eliminating racism in order to be broadly effective. A GCoC document called "Ten Key Values of the American Green Movement" mentions "postpatriarchal values" and "respect for diversity" in a way that is, I believe, meant to "include" a commitment to justice for people of color and the working classes. A key insight of the women's movement reminds us that when women's issues **are** not explicitly addressed, they are effectively wiped out and forgotten, not "included."

I applaud the commitment to the achievement of women's liberation that is present in at least the language of the Green movement. My concern with Green feminism is that it may be insufficiently informed by the vitality, experience, and wisdom of women of color and working class white women to be truly robust and healthy. I challenge the Greens to examine their conditioning around gender, race and class with equal vigor and to make racial and economic justice more explicit priorities. Let the Green movement name "post-racist" and "post-capitalist" as key values. I suspect that a phobia against being identified with leftist groups has hindered liberal Greens in the **U.S.** from developing a deep analysis of the injuries of class. Whatever the cost may be, these realities must be confronted, for if our values are inadequately named, they will be inadequately practiced.

Human beings are unique creatures in the history of the universe. The behavior of jaguars is highly predictable, and will vary within very strict limits from individual to individual. The same is **true** of oak trees, banana slugs, elephants, roses and all other species. **Human** individuals alone have the potential to introduce novelty into the universe. No one could have anticipated the appearance of Mother Theresa, Mozart, Rosa Parks, Einstein, **Rilke**, Charlie Parker, **Buckminster Fuller**, Pope John XXIII, Alice Walker, **Mohandas Gandhi**, Carl Lewis, King

**Asoka**, Lily Tomlin, Bob Dylan, Mohamad, or you. Each human being is a completely new creature. In our incredible capacity to birth novelty and newness into the universe each human individual is in fact a "virtual species."

Every day that passes marks the unnecessary extinction of more than **fifty** new species. That's one species every 25 minutes. It is entirely possible that one of the species that will disappear from **the** Earth today is a plant with the unique capacity to manufacture an up-to-now undiscovered molecular compound that would provide a key to **putting** an end to the **AIDS** horror, or to cancer. Every species is a once-in-a-universe event. If we lose one it is lost forever.

Every day that passes marks the unnecessary death of **28,000** children of hunger-related causes. That's 486 children every 25 minutes. Almost all of these children **are** People of Color. It is entirely possible that one the the

condition of "functional extinction" upon us.

The most precious natural resource on the planet at this time is novelty. We exist at a time in our evolutionary history when the Earth cannot continue to live and flourish without it. Human beings **are** the dimension of the Earth process designed to produce novelty. Oppression destroys it.

I call on the political and spiritual Green movements to continue taking the lead in defending the Earth, its air, its lands, its water, its non-human species. I also call on the Greens to become the leading champions for the liberation of **all** people, the defenders of the right of all people to birth their precious uniqueness into this world that so sorely needs it to survive. I challenge the Greens to move toward reflecting the **gender**, cultural, and class diversity of our current societies in their leadership, as well as rank-and-file membership. Let the Greens become

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*It is entirely possible that one of the species that will disappear from the Earth today is a plant with the unique capacity to manufacture an up-to-now undiscovered molecular compound that would provide a key to putting an end to the AIDS horror.*

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**28,000** children who will die today in the name of profit would otherwise grow into a world-saving scientist or **poet** of peace, a pivotal voice in the race between a sustainable relationship to the Earth and a planetary holocaust. Every **human** individual is a one-in-a-universe event. If we lost one we lose him or her forever.

We should not minimize the impact on the planetary ecology of the needless loss of even a single human. Even when the direct effect of these oppressions is not physical death, the coercion of human beings into rigid roles of victim and persecutor imposes a

known as the movement that befriended the Earth. Let them become known as the movement that befriended People of Color, befriended the poor and working classes, that befriended women. There is **time** to do everything that needs to be done and a way to do it. No one need be left out. I believe the Greens **are** ready to meet this challenge.

*Victor Lewis is ~~the~~ director of Catalyst Communications and a contributing editor of Creation magazine. He can be reached at Creation, P.O. Box 19216, Oakland, CA 94619, 41515474723.*

### *In Upcoming Issues...*

- Jesse Jackson's Earth Day 1990 tour
- Profiles of Grassroots Environmental Activists
- Stories from Community Struggles
- "Restoring the Urban Habitat," by Karl Linn
- "Environmental Blackmail in Minority Communities," by Robert Bullard
- "Water, Suburban **Growth** and **Inner City** Needs," by Nancy Nadel
- "Youth at Risk in Cities at Risk," by Running Grass
- "Environmental Poverty Law," by Luke Cole

### **Become a Contributor**

The *Race, Poverty & the Environment Newsletter* is published quarterly. Articles, reviews, letters, announcements of upcoming events or **reportbacks** on events which have already occurred are welcome. Please mail your submissions to *RPE Newsletter*, c/o Carl Anthony, Earth Island Institute, 300 Broadway, Suite **28**, San Francisco, CA 94133-3312, or c/o Luke Cole, CRLAF, 2111 Mission, Suite **401**, San Francisco, CA 94110. Please also send us names of people who would be interested in receiving the *RPE Newsletter*.

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