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Title
Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4rh1w703

Journal
Contemporary Sociology A Journal of Reviews, 47(4)

ISSN
0094-3061

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Publication Date
2018-07-01

DOI
10.1177/0094306118779814mm

Peer reviewed

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Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility.
By **Dorceta E. Taylor**. New York, NY: New York University Press. 2014. 343 pages. ISBN: 978-1-4798-6178-1.

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Categories: Community and Urban Sociology, Environment, Stratification
Word count: 1120

"Why don't they move?" This rhetorical question, asked by skeptics of claims that low income people and people of color are unfairly over-burdened by environmental hazards and deprived of environmental amenities, has bedeviled environmental scholars and activists for decades. The presumption here is that the individual choices of these populations, not environmental racism embodied in acts of commission and omission by corporations and government agencies, is imperiling their health and well-being. Dorceta Taylor takes skillful aim at this blame the victim discourse in *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility.* Taylor, whose prolific career stretches back to the first generation of environmental justice scholars in the early 1990s, provides a tremendous service to the field by synthesizing hundreds of studies on the fraught relationship between race, space, place, and power in the United States. She provides dozens of short case studies ranging from the siting of hazardous waste dumps in the rural Black Belt, to internal colonialism on Native American reservations, to the politics of blight in northern urban cores that illustrate the book's major theme of the racialization of land use policies, plans, and practices that systematically place minority communities in harm's way.

Taylor engages in a kind of war of attrition, that does not directly refute, but instead grinds down critiques of environmental racism by scholars such as Vicki Been and Doug Anderton, whose research purports to find little to no evidence of racial bias in hazardous facility siting, through the deployment of a vast array of contrary studies. One string of such citations runs more than a half a page. Where the

critics tend to highlight a “moving to the hazard” counter-explanation or use methods that do not show evidence of a racial bias effect in facility proximity to communities of color, Taylor highlights the findings of alternative spatial statistical techniques (e.g., varying the scale and units of analysis, using different toxic facility data sets, including measurements of cumulative hazards, and degree of toxicity) that support claims of environmental racism. She couples this with treatment of broader sociological questions, such as, what are the policy processes that result in specific siting and regulatory outcomes, who is included and who is excluded in these processes, and what is the impact of the regional political economy on the kinds of facilities that are solicited and accepted by local governments?

Towards this end, she presents multiple case studies of corporate malfeasance and local government complicity in the siting, management, and mitigation of hazardous facilities. He chapter title on the siting process, “Manipulation, Environmental Blackmail, and Enticement” neatly summarizes these audacious corporate practices. One egregious example was the Waste Management (the largest waste management firm in North America) seeking a tax exemption for its hazardous waste landfill in the predominantly Black community of Emelle, Alabama that is only granted to facilities that control, reduce or eliminate air or water pollution. In other cases, waste management companies offer incentives that local governments, strapped for tax revenue, accepts placing nearby populations at risk without adequate public notice and while distributing the benefits to other places in the community.

In many of these contexts, local advocacy to prevent the siting or compel the clean-up of hazardous facilities is made more challenging by legal and policy arguments that preempt local actions in favor of the “public benefit” (e.g., the trumping of local and state opposition to waste dumping by the constitutional commerce clause that gives the federal government sovereignty over interstate commerce). This was the situation of St. James Parish, Louisiana, where the Rollins company prevailed over the local government’s attempt to prohibit the dumping of PCBs in their waste facility

through local ordinance. This appeal to the "public good" was the same rhetoric invoked by Alabama's Governor Hunt in permitting the infamous Warren County PCB landfill in a conflict that launched the modern environmental justice movement. Repeatedly, it is the health and well-being of the most vulnerable populations that are excluded from notions of public or national interests, as if these communities were cut off from the body politic.

While *Toxic Communities* explores the spatial dimension what accounts for the proximity of people of color and hazardous facilities it is also effective in providing temporal analyses of the racial projects that have produced and reproduced inequitable landscapes. Indeed, in her conclusion, Taylor calls on the next generation of EJ scholars to "take history into consideration" and to decode "what forces compel people to live beside such facilities." This history does not stop at the 'chicken or the egg question of whether toxic facilities are sited next to communities to color or whether these populations move to the cheap land nearby. Instead, Taylor devotes significant time historical accounts of the construction and dogged defense of segregated communities by white residents and elected officials starting with Reconstruction, continuing through racialized zoning and housing policies, waves of sanctioned mob violence, the war on "blight" and on to the latest housing bust with communities of color at ground zero. The same segregating forces intended to protect white people from the social contagion of living near people of color also concentrate people of color into less healthy places.

Taylor extends her analysis of racialized land use policies and practices in well-crafted review of studies related to 'expulsive zoning' through which unwanted land uses push out residents and business able to move, leaving behind those without economic mobility, and 'intensive zoning', which concentrate such facilities in neighborhoods inhabited by low-income people and people of color. She also reviews the flip side of such unwanted land use zoning in the form of green gentrification in which the removal of polluting facilities leads to rising rents, housing discrimination, and the uses of eminent

domain to “reclaim” blighted neighborhoods” can lead to the displacement of already vulnerable populations.

Taylor’s structuring the book around rigorous reviews of the environmental justice and associated research has the tremendous benefit of providing readers with a comprehensive desk reference for the literature on race and environmental hazards with 48 of the volume’s 331 pages devoted to the references. The downside of this approach is that her own voice in commenting and synthesizing this literature is all too rare and comes in primarily in short sections at the end of each chapter and a three-page conclusion on future directions of environmental justice research. Given Taylor’s prominent place as a leading environmental justice scholar, it would have enhanced the book’s value if she had applied even more of her unique insights to help frame and direct the field. Likewise, more fully applying the theories she briefly cites to explain the unequal exposure to environmental hazards could have helped the reader navigate her otherwise magisterial tour of the environmental justice literature.