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Environmental Equity: Broadening the Scope of Environmental Collections

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At the time this article was originally written, I was employed by Labat©Anderson, Inc., contractor for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Headquarters Library. This article does not reflect the opinions of either the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, or the U.S. Department of Justice.

Any library containing a collection of environmental materials is faced with the challenge of managing an ever- changing information base. An environmental collection limited to scientific subjects such as pollution control and toxicology will most likely be incomplete in today's environmental arena. Not only is the populace in general becoming more involved in environmental issues, but the scope of this interest is broadening. Proactive environmental collections must be prepared to provide information in economic, social, public policy, and other non-traditional areas.

An important and growing area of environmental activism is known as environmental equity, environmental justice, or environmental racism. The basic premise of this facet of environmentalism is that certain elements of the population face greater risks from exposure to environmental hazards than do others. Beginning in the 1980s, a series of studies, some of which are described below, found "unequivocal class and racial biases in the distribution of environmental hazards."¹ Motivated by the findings of these studies, activist organizations have sprung up across the country, and growing numbers of minority and low-income individuals are joining the cause.²

Libraries have an obligation to respond to the information needs of environmental justice activists. Many environmental justice groups are grassroots organizations and dependent on community libraries for information. For example, libraries may be consulted by urban dwellers close to the poverty level, minority activists concerned about the siting of waste facilities in their neighborhoods, representatives of rural communities, or Native American and women's groups. And, according to Dr. Dorceta Taylor, interest in these issues will continue to increase because "those who already belong [to the environmental justice sector] are committed to mobilizing more minorities around environmental issues."³

Of course, traditional environmental sources will provide some information on environmental equity, but these should not be considered comprehensive. Biomedical literature contains a wealth of information valuable to someone studying environmental equity. For example, health related information on lead poisoning in inner city children, dietary exposure to toxics through fish consumption in Native Americans, pesticide exposure in farm workers, and public health issues in the Colonias will be found in medical databases and statistical sources. An assessment of the increasing involvement of minority groups in environmental issues will be found in social science literature, along with studies of environmental issues from a civil rights perspective. Newspapers, wire reports, and popular magazines cover recent initiatives taken by equity advocacy groups and announce studies completed by government agencies and other organizations. Religious groups such as the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ have been instrumental in drawing attention to environmental equity issues. Non-secular journals and

newspapers are a valuable source of information on the connection between religion, social justice, and the environment. And, finally, an examination of traditional legal sources shows that law reviews have begun to address equity issues as well.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is examining the impact of environmental hazards on racial minority and low-income communities. In support of this activity, the EPA Headquarters Library scoured online and CD-ROM databases, reference sources, and newsletters for information on environmental equity. The results of these efforts include a bibliography of books, reports, and journal and newspaper articles that address equity issues; a reference file of newspaper articles, congressional reports, and EPA publications; and a monthly current awareness service tracking equity issues in the popular press. Examples of resources located are listed below, followed by a description of useful databases and organizations.

Books

Bryant, B., and P. Mohai. 1992. *Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards: A Time for Discourse*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. (ISBN 0-8133-8513-X)

Goldman, B. 1991. Environmental Justice. In: *The Truth about Where You Live: An Atlas for Action on Toxins and Mortality*. New York: Times Books. (ISBN 0-8129-1898-3)

Bullard, R., and B. Wright., eds. 1992. *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*. Boston, MA: South End Press. (ISBN 0-89608-447-7)

Bullard, Robert. 1990. *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. (ISBN 0-8133-7954-7)

U.S. General Accounting Office. June 1, 1983. *Siting of Hazardous Waste Landfills and Their Correlation with Racial and Economic Status of Surrounding Communities*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. General Accounting Office.

Commission for Racial Justice, United Church of Christ. 1987. *Toxic Waste and Race in the United States: National Report on the Racial and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites*. New York, NY: Public Access Data.

Newsletter, Journals

Race, Poverty & the Environment: A Newsletter for Social and Environmental Justice. Earth Island Institute Urban Habitat Program and the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation: quarterly.

Everyone's Backyard: Journal of the Grassroots Movement for Environmental Justice. Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes, Inc.: published six times a year. (U.S. ISSN 0749-3940)

Environmental Protection Agency Publications

For information on obtaining copies of the following publications, contact the U.S. EPA Environmental Equity Office (address given in the Organizations section of this article), or U.S. EPA, Public Information Center PM-211B, 401 M Street SW, Washington DC 20460.

Environmental Equity: Reducing Risk for All Communities (2 Volumes) EPA/230-E-92-008.

EPA Summary Environmental Plan for the Mexican-U.S. Border Area: First Stage (1992-1994).

"Environmental Protection: Has It Been Fair?" *EPA Journal Vol. 18* No. 1 March/April 1992.

A Solid Waste Resource Guide for Native Americans: Where to Find Funding and Technical Assistance.
EPA/530-K--92-002.

Environmental Risk in Indian Country. EPA/171-R-92-014.

This publication is available from the National Technical Information Service by calling (703)487-4650. The order number is PB92-182393.

Online and CD-ROM Databases

Enviroline is a good source for equity articles in general environmental journals. The term "Environmental Equity" was recently added as a descriptor (subject heading). This change should be reflected in the Winter 1992 version of Bowker's Enviroline CD-ROM. Unfortunately, when searching for older information, there is not any single descriptor that will find everything discussing environmental equity, racism, or justice. Alternative descriptors include: "Env Action--State Local," "Racial Comparisons," "Amer Blacks, Lower Class," and "Inner City."

PAIS (Public Affairs Information Service, Inc.) provides coverage of a variety of sources, including Congressional hearings and reports. A useful descriptor is "United States--Environmental policy--Racial aspects," but it is not used consistently for items addressing environmental equity, racism, or justice. "Environmental health--United States-- Southwestern states" can be used to find information on environmental equity in the U.S.-Mexico border area, including the Colonias, and Maquilladoras. PAIS contains citations to documents discussing the environmental situation on Native American reservations. These can be found using the descriptors "Indians--Reservations-- Environmental aspects" or "Indians-- Reservations" combined with "United States environmental policy." Sources of information on international environmental equity issues may also be found in this database.

Medline and Toxline, both products of the National Library of Medicine (NLM), are useful for finding citations about the environmental health issues, such as the situation at the Texas-Mexico border. Useful Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) include: "Communicable-Disease-Control," "Occupational-Diseases-prevention-and-control," and "World- Health, Mexico-". Using the NLM search system command "explode" on the MeSH heading "Ethnic groups" (which will include Blacks, Eskimos, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Indians) and combining this with subject headings such as "Rural Health," "Urban Health," "Environmental Health," "Rural Populations," or "Transients and Migrants" will provide information of peripheral interest to patrons studying environmental equity issues.

Sociological Abstracts lists demographic studies of the correlation between race and toxic waste sites, topics often examined in sociology journals and association papers. Successful search descriptors include: "Equity," "Racism," "Sociodemographic Factors," "Segregation," "Black Community," "Black Americans," "Environmental Protection," "Environment," "Environments," "Environmental," and "Environmentally." The

terms "Environmental Racism" and "Environmental Hazards--Equity Issues" appear in the database, but are not, as of this writing, included as official descriptors.

Newspaper and Magazine Databases

For those databases offering the full text of newspapers and magazines, searching for the terms "environmental equity," "environmental racism," or "environmental justice" seems to work well. When searching Magazine Index on Dialog, useful summary articles were found using the following descriptors: "Environmentalists--Race Relations" or "Environmental Policy--Social Aspects." Legal Bibliographic Databases

Legal literature is a valuable source of equity information. For example, the 21 September 1992, issue of the *National Law Journal* contains an entire section entitled "Unequal Protection: The Racial Divide in Environmental Law." Additional articles may be found by examining the CD-ROM or other versions of Index to Legal Periodicals and Legaltrac.

Legaltrac (the law version of Infotrac) permits both keyword (includes title and abstract) and subject heading searching. The most efficient way to compile a bibliography on environmental equity using this database is to search for "environmental equity," "environmental racism," and "environmental justice" in the keyword field. The subject terms "Racism--environmental aspects" or "Environmental policy--social aspects" were usually, but not always applied to the articles retrieved by the keyword search.

The Index to Legal Periodicals on Wilsondisc also allows searching by keywords. Entering "environmental" as the first subject term and either "equity," "justice," or "racism" as the second subject term retrieves a number of relevant articles.

Organizations

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Environmental Equity Office, PM-224, 401 M Street SW
Washington DC 20460. 1-800-962-6215

This toll free number serves as a hotline and sounding board for anyone concerned about equity issues in their community. The Environmental Equity Office is also an alternative source for EPA documents on Environmental Equity.

Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes, Inc. (CCHW) National Office, PO Box 6806, Falls Church VA
22040. (703)237-2249

Besides producing Everyone's Backyard and Environmental Health Monthly, CCHW makes available guidebooks and fact packs to people concerned about chemical hazards.

Earth Island Institute, 300 Broadway Suite 28, San Francisco, CA 94133 (415)788-3666

In addition to publishing *Race, Poverty & the Environment: A Newsletter for Social and Environmental Justice*, Earth Island supplies a list of organizations focusing on environmental equity issues.

United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, 475 Riverside Drive Suite 1950 New York, NY 10115.
(212)870-2077

Toxic Waste and Race in the United States is sold by the Commission for \$20.00. The Proceedings of the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit is available for \$22.50.

Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, 1200 Mott Foundation Building Flint, MI 48502. (313)238-5651
Has limited copies of People of Color Environmental Groups Directory, which is available free of charge.

Conclusions

Librarians must be prepared to assist patrons whose environmental information needs go beyond traditional technical or scientific areas. Environmental equity is a particularly challenging subject for two reasons: the language of equity, justice, and racism has not yet been absorbed into the databases frequently used for retrieving environmental information, and discussions of environmental equity issues are found in a wide variety of sources. The print sources, bibliographic databases, and organizations listed in this article are one way to access environmental equity discussions.

References

1. Mohai, P., and B. Bryant. 1992. "Race, Poverty, and the Environment." *EPA Journal* 18 (March/April): 8.
2. See, for example, Edwards, B. 1992. "New Environmentalists Rise from Threatened Communities." *CUA Magazine* 4(1): 14-16.
3. Rees, M. 1992. "Black and Green: The Birth of `Eco-racism.'" *New Republic* 206(9): 15-16.
4. Taylor, D. 1992. "The Environmental Justice Movement." *EPA Journal* 18(1): 24.