

Environmental Racism Remains a Problem

The worldwide struggle for environmental justice and equality continues. While many advances have been made globally in defining, researching, and confronting the realities of environmental racism, here inside the United States there are still far too many African Americans, Latino Americans, Pacific Islander and Asian Americans, Native Americans and others who remain disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards, toxins, cancer-causing pollutions, and other life-threatening environments.

Of course, there are more than one contributing factor to these circumstances: economic, social, political, and geographical. But, one of the most “determinative” factors is the issue of race. The whole history of denial when it comes to issues of racial discrimination in the U.S. remains true. Tragically, those who are the victims of these types of injustices are often denied the possibility for adequate redress and resolution. In other words, challenging “environmental racism” in 2011 should be one of the top priorities for the U.S. government as well as for state and local governments.

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Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.

But, we all know well from prior experiences, that effective governmental corrective action and meaningful public policy changes only happens when there is an effective and sustainability movement for freedom, justice, and equality around the specific issue at hand.

Thus, we must build a stronger environmental justice movement in the U.S. and establish strategic organizational alliances

at the United Nations and with other grassroots environmental justice organizations internationally. It will take stronger movements for change to get all governmental bodies to seek greater environmental justice.

Most of the 15 million weekly readers of the National Newspaper Publishers Association, America’s

Black Press, should recall that it took many years before the federal government would even admit the existence of environmental racism. Under Presidents Reagan and Bush, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the 1980’s and 1990’s refused to acknowledge this social problem. By February 1994 President Clinton issued Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice that gave the environmental jus-

“Racial discrimination in the deliberate targeting of ethnic and minority communities for exposure to toxic and hazardous waste sites and facilities, coupled with the systematic exclusion of minorities in environmental policy making, enforcement, and remediation.”

President Barack Obama is no stranger to this issue. When he was a state senator from Illinois, he worked with others to chal-

lenge environmental injustices in places like Altgeld Gardens located deep on the Southside of Chicago. Hazel Johnson, an African American grassroots leader from Altgeld Gardens became one of the

strong effective national “mothers” of the environmental justice movement. Today, we must press forward without relenting. Literally, millions of African American, Latino, and other minorities are suffering from an increase in multiple forms of cancer and other diseases as a direct results of unjust and terrible expo-

sure to environmental dangers. That is why we must oppose any attempt to scale back health care coverage and reform in the United States. Millions of lives are at stake.

Let’s work with the EPA today and the Obama Administration to get more relief and to establish better living conditions for our families and communities across the nation. 2011 should be a year for more progress. Don’t let the negative, cynical forces of reaction take us backward. Yes, there are many different issues and priorities that will demand out attention and energy. It is in the context of our overall struggle for justice and empowerment that I am reminding us not to forget about the air we breath, the water we drank, and the environment where we live. Racism in all of its deadly forms must be challenged.

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tice movement an official federal status. Today, the EPA has an ongoing Office for Environmental Justice.

Due to my prior work with the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice and my background as a chemist, I was fortunate back in 1982 to first coin the term environmental racism:

Blacks in the White House Came Before Obama

On January 20, 2009, Barack Obama was sworn in as the first Black President of the United States of America. Upon waving farewell to George Bush and former First Lady Laura Bush, President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama moved their family into the White House. For many Americans, the history of African Americans in the White House began in 2009. Not true.

Dr. Clarence Lusane, Political Science professor at American University, has written a book entitled, *The Black History of the White House*, which historically honors the contribution of African Americans as free and enslaved people within the most celebrated house in the United States of America. Dr. Lusane, aside from his formal scholarship, is no stranger to the Black community.

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Either directly or indirectly, Dr. Lusane has worked with many of the Member Organizations of the Black Leadership Forum, Inc, among them the TransAfrica Forum and the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

Prior to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW in Washington, D.C. being the address of the White House, the first President’s House was located in New York and Philadelphia, respectively. For years, archeological evidence and the relentless efforts by progressive African Americans in Philadelphia have pointed toward a full public recognition that, despite historic omissions and falsehoods in the teaching of

American history in classrooms, enslaved Black people were forcibly worked for free within the

spoke of his opposition to the institution of slavery, he enslaved Ms. Oney Judd and other African

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Two in particular, an African American lady named Oney Judd and a man named Hercules are featured in the book. According to Dr. Lusane, President George Washington words and deeds did not match on the subject of slavery. While President Washington

Americans. One evening, Ms. Oney simply walked out of the rear door of the President’s House while George Washington and his wife Martha ate dinner. Following a search, Ms. Judd was found and was offered her freedom, if she would return to bondage. She simply replied, “I am already free”,

and did not return.

In another case, an enslaved African American man by the name of Hercules emancipated himself by escaping the bondage of George Washington on a trip from Philadelphia to the Mount Vernon, Virginia private plantation of George Washington.

Both cases are featured in *The Black History in the White House* that should be required reading in Sunday schools and public school systems. Until American education exposes students to all history—pleasant and unpleasant—our nation will not be able to fully address the issue of race.

Gary L. Flowers, Executive Director and CEO of the Black Leadership Forum, Inc.

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communities have faced attempts to have their homes taken away. Both bills are similar to legislation requested by the Attorney General that died in committee in 2010.

The Attorney General requests three bills to help protect consumers:

Stolen Mail: The Attorney General’s Law Enforcement Group Against Identity Theft (LEGIT) Task Force recommends defining mail theft as a Class C felony. “Our mailboxes are a treasure-trove for identity thieves

because they contain our financial, medical and other personal information,” said House sponsor Rep. Jason Overstreet, R-Blaine. “This crime devastates people’s credit ratings and drains bank accounts.” The Senate bill is sponsored by Carrell.

Fixing the Consumer Protection Act: Washington is the only state that awards defendants attorney fees in government enforcement actions without requiring a determination that the state’s case was frivolous or malicious. This discourages the pursuit of targets engaged violations of consumer

protection or antitrust laws due to the risk of large attorney fees – even in a case that succeeds overall. The bill, sponsored by Sen. Steve Conway, D-Tacoma, permits reasonable attorney fees for a defendant only upon a finding by a judge that the state’s action was frivolous. It also makes it clear that that the Consumer Protection Act applies to Washington businesses that deal only with out-of-state consumers.

Unauthorized Practice of Law Affecting Immigrants: A flaw in state law allows seemingly government-approved “immigration

assistants” to charge for help even when they’re not qualified to offer legal advice. Their mistakes can delay or ruin a customer’s chances of obtaining legal status. The bill, sponsored by Rep. Phyllis Gutierrez Kenney, D-Seattle, eliminates the “immigration assistant” designation. “This law will help protect immigrants who enter the country on visas and try to do the right thing by seeking government-approved help, rather than over-staying those visas,” said Rep. Kenney.

In November of last year, Attorney General McKenna

announced his proposal to fight gang violence. The mix of civil and criminal provisions, along with more resources for prevention and intervention, continues to be honed by legislators. At a work session in December, Don Pierce, executive director of the Washington State Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs, warned that some neighborhoods in the state are “nearly under siege” from gang violence.