

## The Environmental Justice Movement, its Relevance, and Why it Resonates with Many

While most movements focus on issues that affect a specific demographic, environmental issues affect us all to some degree because we all share one large ecosystem. Our negative impact on the environment through excessive pollution, resource overuse and waste primarily affects neighboring communities, but these practices impact the ecosystem as a whole and cause larger, widespread issues over time. This is why the environmental justice movement resonates with many people. People of all demographics recognize that harmful environmental practices in any location will eventually affect them in some way. Although the magnitude of impact varies by location or demographic factors, our environment is interconnected and one environmental problem will eventually spread to many regions. Harmful environmental practices do affect us disproportionately, however, which is why the concept of environmental justice exists. For example, there is a strong correlation between the income level of a community, or the predominant race in the area, and the amount of pollutants local governments and corporations produce in that area. People disagree on whether the primary cause of this disproportionate impact is income level, race or another factor where correlation has not yet been identified. Despite this, most people recognize that there are greater environmental repercussions in these regions such as lower air quality, higher toxins, and a greater prevalence of health issues.

One circumstance that illustrates this well is the contaminated water of Triana, Alabama caused by a DDT production plant that operated merely 6 miles away during 1954 to 1970. The plant claimed that it ran a closed operation and that none of its waste was escaping into the local waterways, however chemicals were seeping into the waterways. This pollution was proven to be a cause of the increasing adverse effects in Triana, particularly a myriad of health issues among community members. Historically, corporations and governments have allowed more pollution within lower income communities or communities of color. People recognize, however, that the same can happen to them, even if it is less likely. Many movements are a struggle for specific communities, but anyone can face environmental injustice since corporations are capable of committing these harmful deeds in any location. It is easier for them to avoid consequences in some communities, however, due to lack of political influence. People recognize that these practices can occur in their communities no matter who they are, which is one of the reasons that environmental justice resonates with people of many different demographics. Most people are more responsive to issues that have a direct, personal impact on themselves or their own communities. This is why we see advocacy for environmental justice from more diverse groups of people than those of several other movements.

Many people within the environmental justice movement recognize how our connected ecosystem allows for toxins and pollution to spread from one community to others. Toxins from one area can enter the supply chain, and they often remain for long periods of time. They can be transferred through environmental factors such as waterways, air, and wildlife movement. The

waterway pollution in Triana, for instance, almost certainly spread to waterways in other communities. This expands the issue beyond a local issue. It is an issue that creates a risk for a wide range of communities. Another example of an area highly affected by pollution consists of small communities along the Mississippi River. These communities were named “Cancer Alley” from 1978 to 1997 due to the high incidence of cancer per capita compared to the rest of the country. This trend was linked to 39 separate industrial chemical accidents that released many toxins into the Mississippi river and other waterways near these communities. These incidents are similar to the situation in Triana, Alabama, and they are a good example of how pollution in one area can spread to other areas. The Mississippi river carried these chemicals to communities located downstream, where they increased the incidence of negative health effects in these communities. Situations like this tend to create a justified concern among people who do not live in close proximity to polluting facilities. The chemicals from the Mississippi river spread so far throughout other water bodies in the state of Louisiana that they were detected in over 75% of the state’s regulatory water bodies.

The environmental justice movement exists in response to a continuous, disproportionate trend of harmful environmental practices within certain communities. These practices lead to greater health problems within a community, ecosystem imbalance, and supply chain issues to name a few. Affected communities have historically been low-income communities of color. Although these communities are the primary victims of bad environmental practices, governments and corporations can choose to subject any community to these bad practices depending on which locations are ideal for production and have little political influence to yield consequences. Communities with closer proximity to polluting facilities experience the greatest negative impact, however this environmental impact spreads throughout the ecosystem. Any community can be unjustly subject to high levels of pollution, and the harmful environmental practices of one location can affect the wider ecosystem. This is why the environmental justice movement resonates with many people and the need for environmental justice is relevant to all of us.