

Environmental Racism/ Environmental Justice- and the Need for a State Response

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Environmental racism refers to the institutional rules, regulations, policies or government and/or corporate decisions that deliberately target certain communities for locally undesirable land uses and lax enforcement of zoning and environmental laws, resulting in communities being disproportionately exposed to toxic and hazardous waste based upon race and wealth.

Environmental Justice refers to those cultural norms and values, rules, regulations, behaviors, policies, and decisions to support sustainability, where all people can hold with confidence that their community and natural environment is safe and productive.

VERY distinct from “environmentalism” or “conservation.”

How the Environmental Protection Agency defines “Environmental Justice”:

Environmental justice (EJ) is the **fair treatment** and **meaningful involvement** of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.

Fair treatment means no group of people should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, governmental and commercial operations or policies.

Meaningful involvement means:

- People have an opportunity to participate in decisions about activities that may affect their environment and/or health;
- The public's contribution can influence the regulatory agency's decision;
- Community concerns will be considered in the decision making process; and
- Decision makers will seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected.

Published in “The Atlantic,” February 28th 2018:

Trump's EPA Concludes Environmental Racism Is Real



A new report from the Environmental Protection Agency finds that people of color are much more likely to live near polluters and breathe polluted air—even as the agency seeks to roll back regulations on pollution.

([HTTPS://WWW.THEATLANTIC.COM/POLITICS/ARCHIVE/2018/02/THE-TRUMP-ADMINISTRATION-FINDS-THAT-ENVIRONMENTAL-RACISM-IS-REAL/554315/](https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/02/the-trump-administration-finds-that-environmental-racism-is-real/554315/))

- “results at national, state, and county scales all indicate that non-Whites tend to be burdened disproportionately to Whites.”
- black people are exposed to about 1.5 times more particulate matter than white people, and that Hispanics had about 1.2 times the exposure of non-Hispanic whites. The study found that people in poverty had about 1.3 times more exposure than people above poverty.

JUST ONE TAKE-AWAY FROM THE ARTICLE:

[Environ Health Perspect.](#) 2012 Dec; 120(12): 1699–1704.
Published online 2012 Aug 10. doi: [10.1289/ehp.1205201](https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.1205201)
PMCID: PMC3546368
PMID: [22889745](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22889745/)

Research

Environmental Inequality in Exposures to Airborne Particulate Matter Components in the United States

[Michelle L. Bell](#) and [Keita Ebisu](#)

But as with many federal government functions, a state cannot simply rely on the federal government to fix LOCAL problems:

- The EPA rejects 9 out of 10 civil rights claims brought to its agency, DESPITE the fact that the EPA HAS established, and has PROVEN, that environmental racism occurs all across the United States.
- ***+++ governmental response to Environmental Racism falls under Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act+++***
- Furthermore, the EPA under the current administration is having its budget dismantled, and just this past week it is being ordered to end various programs that discuss the issues of “environmental racism.”
- The State of Oklahoma as a whole has no specific outlet that addresses, or even acknowledges, environmental racism nor pursues environmental justice, although due to certain federal funding requirements at least one agency (ODOT) does at least mention environmental justice as part of its “Title VI” office, and ACOG recently issued an Environmental Justice Response Plan as well as a requirement tied to federal funding opportunities (<http://www.acogok.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Environmental-Justice-Plan-2020.pdf>)

Contaminated Superfund Sites in Oklahoma:

- Eagle Industries (Oklahoma County)

a. Roughly two acres of land located at 10901 S.E. 29th Street in Midwest City, Oklahoma County, Oklahoma. 20.8% of Midwest City identify as Black or African American, while only 7.8% of total Oklahomans identify as Black or African American.

- Mosley Road Sanitary Landfill (Oklahoma County)

a. 72 acres of land in Oklahoma City, While not currently on the Superfund National Priorities List (NPL), this site is located in an area with a higher than state average African American or Black population.

- Double Eagle Refinery Co. (Oklahoma County)

a. 12 acres of land located at 301 N Rhode Island, Oklahoma City, OK 73152. The EPA has taken this site off the Superfund NPL, and current 5 year reviews are confident that it is being well managed. The site is not currently a candidate for reuse. This site is located in an area with a higher than state average African American or Black population.

- Fourth Street Abandoned Refinery (Oklahoma County)

a. This 27 acre site was in use from the early 1940s through the early 1960s as an oil refinery. It is not currently on the NPL and is receiving ongoing maintenance. This site is located in an area with a higher than state average African American or Black population.

- Henryetta Iron and Metal (Okmulgee County)

a. This site was primarily used as a scrap-metal yard, but is no longer in use. This site is located in an area with a higher than state average Native American population.

Contaminated Superfund Sites in Oklahoma, continued:

- Sand Springs Petrochemical Complex (Tulsa County)

a. 235 acres of property in Tulsa County. The most recent Five-Year Review, conducted in 2020, determined that the site is currently being managed to EPA standards. This site is located in an area with a higher than state average African American or Black population.

- Tulsa Fuel and Manufacturing (Tulsa County)

a. This site operated as a zinc smelter from 1914 until 1925. Current efforts to monitor the site are ongoing, and the EPA intends to remove it from the NPL. A cooperative of local businesses installed a honey bee hive on the site, and there are currently talks of the viability of seeding pollinator flowers on the site. This site is located in an area with a higher than state average African American or Black population.

- Tenth Street Dump/Junkyard (Oklahoma County)

a. The site operated as a salvage yard, city landfill, and automobile junkyard, and in the process contaminated the soil with hazardous chemicals. The site was taken off the NPL in 2000, and is still being monitored and maintained. The site is currently under a Five-Year Review. This site is located in an area with a higher than state average African American or Black population.

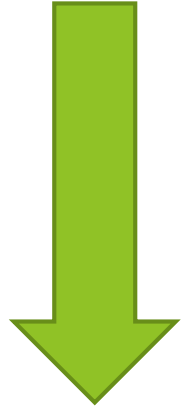
- Tar Creek (Ottawa County)

a. Clean up efforts remain ongoing in residential areas, source material, and surface water and sediment. The Tar Creek has disproportionately affected Native Americans in Oklahoma, specifically the Quapaw Nation in Oklahoma.

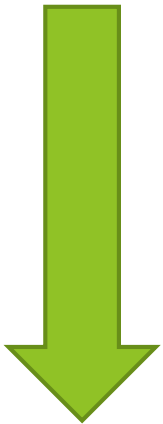
- Oklahoma Refining Co. (Caddo County)

a. 160 acres in operation as a refinery until 1984. This site contaminated surface water, groundwater, soil, and sediment. Several Five-Year Reviews have been conducted and concluded that the current measures meet EPA Standards. This site is located in an area with a high Native American population.

African-Americans are exposed to “particulate matter” at a rate 50% higher than whites.



Particulate matter drives multiple health issues INCLUDING COVID-19 severity.



Harvard University study reveals African-Americans are dying more often, and suffering greater symptoms, than whites, specific to Covid-19.

“The association between PM2.5 and health including pregnancy outcomes, respiratory diseases, cardiovascular diseases, neurocognitive disease in the United States and worldwide is well established. A recent study by our group also documented a statistically significant association between long-term exposures to PM2.5 and ozone and risk of [acute respiratory distress syndrome] ARDS among older adults in the United States. Numerous scientific studies reviewed by the US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) have linked PM2.5 to a variety of health concerns including: premature death in people with heart or lung disease, non-fatal heart attacks, irregular heartbeats, aggravated asthma, decreased lung function, and increased respiratory symptoms such as inflammation, airway irritations, coughing, or difficulty breathing.”

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https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/covid-pm/files/pm_and_covid_mortality.pdf

Conclusions:

- Environmental racism is real, and it exists right here in Oklahoma.
- ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE requires a robust response across an entire government structure to stand any chance of success due to its far-reaching scale and impacts.
- Oklahoma's state government is not fully engaged in this issue, and it cannot simply rely on the EPA or the federal government to achieve environmental justice for impacted communities in Oklahoma.
- The issue of environmental justice falls under "Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act," and the State of Oklahoma could create a more robust framework for addressing environmental racism by beefing up its agency responses (ODOT, for example, at least names "Environmental Justice" on its website for its Title VI Office.
- The establishment of an over-arching commission/ authority/ or other such Oklahoma state government agency dedicated to solving racial disparity/equity matters that have been objectively proven to exist in the State of Oklahoma should include a specific mandate to include the issue of environmental justice as part of its charge.