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Becoming an Environmental Justice Activist

Kim Allen, Vinci Daro, and Dorothy C. Holland

The people who hug trees don't usually hug people. That is another environmental problem.
—George Garrsion, environmental justice activist

Do I belong in a dump ground? Am I trash too?
—Dollie Burwell, environmental justice activist

White people can be environmentalists and racists at the same time.
—Pastor Wilson, environmental justice activist

We, along with other members of a research team, recently completed a multiyear project that combined ethnographic research on local environmental activism in North Carolina and on the Delmarva peninsula with a national survey. The study, which included observation of twenty local environmental groups, in addition to the sixteen reported upon in this chapter, and a collection of 163 environmental and political biographical and identity interviews from members of these groups, is one of the largest ethnographic studies of local environmental groups to date.[1]

In this chapter, we present an analysis of the interviews and the participant observation research that we did with North Carolina environmental justice activists and groups in the late 1990s.[2] We offer a theoretical perspective and an analysis of the qualitative data on how people become active in the environmental justice movement. To explain environmental action, we emphasize the significance of identities—durable subjectivities and self-understandings, both collective and individual—that develop through cultural activities within "figured worlds" of environmental justice and environmentalism and through dialogues with people and groups both inside and outside the movement. A figured

world is a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation and signification—a horizon of meaning—in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others (Holland et al. 1998, p. 52). An identity forms as one grows into a figured world, participating in meaningful action in that world, and over time developing dispositions, sentiments, and sensitivities relevant to that world.

Against models that attribute the causes of collective mobilization to knowledge, beliefs, and values (e.g., Stern et al. 1999) and models that postulate a threshold of tolerance for resource deprivation or economic conflict beyond which material or structural conditions will provoke collective mobilization (e.g., Skocpol 1979; for a related analysis see Flacks 1988), our framework theorizes the importance of identity and the commensurability of identity and action that emerges in the context of a figured world. Activities, events, practices, personalities, and material and semiotic artifacts are interpreted against the horizons of meaning of these "as if" worlds. Although figured worlds are not prescriptive sets of rules that people are supposed to follow, they mediate behavior: they inform outlooks that become salient and more durable for individuals over time with continued participation in them (Holland et al. 1998, p. 52).[3] They structure the orchestration of social discourses and practices that become resources for the crafting of identity and action, including responses defined, in part, by the standpoints of others in a figured world (Holland et al. 1998, p. 272; Holland and Lachicotte, forthcoming).

Insofar as environmental justice proponents are dialogically engaged—directly and indirectly—with self-identified environmentalists, we consider environmental justice to be a form of environmentalism. Amid the dialogic tensions and bridges between these figured worlds, in which different histories are salient, different social divisions are prominent, different cultural activities are relevant, and different forms of organization are valued, the cultural production of new narratives of blame and responsibility and new conceptions of both "the environment" and environmental*ism* are ongoing. Although at the time of our study dialogues between these figured worlds were generated with more intensity within environmental justice communities than in mainstream or dominant environmental groups, dia-

logue may be evolving to a more two-sided, or multisided, conversation through which mainstream environmental discourse and agendas are being refigured by environmental justice concerns. As is clear from our study, the process of environmentalist identity formation for individual environmental justice activists has been problematic; the expressed ambivalence, contradictory experiences, and internal struggles around whether to consider oneself an environmentalist are evidence of the contested boundaries of environmentalism. The perception expressed by many participants in our study that environmentalism is "occupied"—or already determined—by the concerns of white environmentalists and the interests of wealthy people affects the development of both environmental justice and mainstream environmentalism. In our ethnographic work, we trace the meaning making that shapes the dynamic boundaries between these two environmentalisms, with a focus on how events and activities are made meaningful within the figured worlds of each.

As we emphasize, local groups are conceptual spaces in which identities and actions are shaped and woven into situated practice in connection with the particularities of these figured worlds. For example, environmental justice groups have been organized with a more grassroots, local, and horizontally networked approach than many large national, membership-based, environmental organizations. In addition, race, class and other social divisions figure much more prominently in the narratives and activities of environmental justice than in many other forms of environmentalism. Also distinctive is the influential role that histories of environmental justice efforts play in the development of both collective and individual identities—and in guiding the cultural activities that are valued—in the figured world of environmental justice.

What an "environmentalist" is within these different contexts is contested in many ways, and part of the cultural production of these figured worlds is in response to the stereotypes and negative images of environmentalists that circulate in public discourse. People in our larger study reported encountering, and in some cases concurring with, many negative descriptions of environmentalists before they became active in environmental work, for example: "radicals," "crazies," "starry-eyed," and people who "had the idea they were doing something right but they really didn't know their ass from a hole in the ground." Answering to stereotypes

and negative images of environmentalists such as these was an integral part of developing an environmentalist identity for many of those we interviewed. People who become involved in environmental justice work, too, are often familiar with stereotypes of environmentalists and must answer to these potential identities, additionally complicated by inflections of race and class, as they negotiate new understandings of who they are. In this chapter we explore the identities that are cultivated within the figured world of environmental justice. We show how local environmental justice groups are spaces where people struggle—personally and collectively—to refigure themselves and their actions as meaningful within the figured worlds of both environmental justice and environmentalism.

Figuring the World of Environmental Justice

The environmental justice movement has emerged from more than twenty-five years of collective struggle. Here, in our brief telling of its emergence, we highlight the development of racialized and ecological discourses and recount the significance of meetings of activists and researchers and of legislation and research findings. We identify them not to provide an ostensibly accurate historical account of the movement, but rather to introduce the events that our research participants told us in accounting for redefinitions of cultural meanings of the "environment" and their changing ecological awareness and self understandings in the worlds in which they "live, work and play."

We concur with Cole and Foster (2001), who contend that the environmental justice movement is composed of tributaries of which the civil rights movement is one, the antitoxins movement is another, and Native American struggles, the labor movement, traditional environmentalism, and the findings of academics are others. Yet, unlike these authors, who liken the movement to a river, we treat the movement as a figured world to highlight the contingent and often contentious processes of meaning creation that make it possible to think, imagine, and act as environmental justice activists. For us, the environmental justice movement continues to produce a collective, meaningful world of environmental action—a horizon of meaning against which experiences are interpreted, plans are made and actions are taken.

Environmental justice activists have reshaped environmental politics by producing distinct discourses and practices. For instance, in one well-known version of the movement's origin—the 1982 Warren County protests—activists refigured cultural meanings of the taken-for-granted concepts of racism and environment. In this origin story protestors invented a new phrase to describe their historical experiences of racism—one that connected civil rights era antiracist protests with the governor's decision to bury soil laced with toxic PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) in their community, a county with the highest percentage of blacks and one of the lowest median family incomes. That expression, "environmental racism," reflected an ecological dimension to black people's enduring struggle against racial oppression. Coined in the midst of collective action, it since has become a shorthand reference to racial discrimination in environmental decision-making processes.[4]

What is not highlighted in this often told story is the contingent nature of the collective work that went into figuring a world of meaningful action. During the protests, concepts like racism and images of barking dogs and billy club–waving police that circulated in the public sphere were drawn in, translated, and made meaningful as people struggled to have their concerns addressed. It was not inevitable that the new phrase "environmental racism" would emerge, much less that it would find resonance in struggles since. Yet the Warren County protests and the phrase became seminal in the figuring of the incident.[5]

One of our research participants, activist Glenice Baker, describes the 1991 National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit (Summit I) as another watershed event in the history of the movement. Baker, among others of our research participants, told us how hundreds of Blacks, Native Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans and other people of color spent days developing what became the Principles of Environmental Justice (Appendix A). Before Summit I, she noted that dozens of local groups scattered across the country struggled in isolation. Like many in our study, Baker credits the gathering with firmly establishing environmental justice as a movement and with refiguring the environment. According to her, until then,

> the word "environment" had been more or less co-opted by the environmentalists. But people [racial minorities] began to see their environment completely

differently. And the idea that the environment was, in the holistic sense, you saw it in terms not of wilderness, and not of whales, but the air over your head and the asthma patient down the block and the kid who died, or the old person who died.

Movement leaders defined and solidified several trends at, or soon after, Summit I. For one, environmental justice activists made an explicit decision to organize along a network structure; local campaigns would receive support from regional network organizations rather than a national organization. Using these networks, proponents established the Environmental Justice Fund in 1995, which connects six regional environmental justice networks with a goal of supporting grassroots environmental justice organizing. Some of these networks, such as the Northeast Environmental Justice Network (NEEJN), were created specifically to address environmental justice issues. Formed in 1992, NEEJN is a Boston-based multiracial organization composed of veteran organizers and environmental justice advocates and member organizations. In contrast, other networks like the Atlanta-based Southern Organizing Committee for Economic and Social Justice have over a twenty-five-year old history of social justice work that predates environmental justice activism in the area. Through the efforts of these organizations, as well as statewide and race-based networks such as the North Carolina Environmental Justice Network (NCEJN) and the African American Environmental Justice Action Network, proponents have organized the movement horizontally, rather than reproduced the hierarchical structures of other types of environmental organizations. The movement continues to devote a good part of its effort to developing local grassroots groups through community organizing and to developing networks among them through such events as summits. Because of its rootedness in community and everyday life, the movement has developed what one of our research participants, Conrad Ratcliffe, calls a "homegrown flavor." In his estimation, this local focus is necessary: "Organizations at a state level could not provide the man-hours and those day-to-day grind routine things that we all hope would be taking place in the community or would save us from the industries inside of the communities."

Notably, since the 1982 Warren County protests and Summit I, government actions and legislation, though sometimes characterized by

activists as environmentally racist, have shaped the figured world of environmental justice. Particularly helpful federal legislation includes the Environmental Justice Act, reintroduced in 1993 by Georgia Congressman John Lewis and Montana Senator Max Baucus, and the 1998 Florida Environmental Equity and Justice Act. Also significant have been local proclamations, such as those issued in North Carolina in 1998 for Environmental Justice Awareness Week and Environmental Justice Awareness Month. Moreover, legal precedents utilized in the movement include Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1979 *Bean v. Southwestern Waste* legal decision. The history of the movement is conveyed through these precedents, even though they were not identified with environmental justice when initially issued.

The figured world of environmental justice also incorporates government agencies and bodies, including the EPA's Office of Environmental Justice, formerly the Office of Environmental Equity, and the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC). In addition, environmental justice leaders have drafted position papers for government officials and served as advisors to presidential teams,[6] administrations, and other public officials who, pressured by activists, publish reports such as the EPA's "Environmental Equity: Reducing Risk of All Communities," which was one of the first comprehensive government reports to examine disparities in the siting of environmental hazards. Amid the critical and essential work of local communities' struggles, commitments from a sympathetic Clinton-Gore administration, for example, helped push forward a national environmental justice agenda.

Environmental justice has become further institutionalized both as a concept and a social movement through new forms of state governance. Through public/private partnerships, for example, governments and private foundations have made funds and personnel available to carry out work *in the name of* environmental justice. These contributions have been used to extend the figured world of environmental justice in time and space. For example, the Concerned Citizens of Thornton secured grant money to hire a health educator to travel the county to conduct health education workshops and to teach residents about environmental racism—drawing people into the figured world of environmental justice by encouraging them to reframe health issues as environmental justice issues.

Legislation and funding resulting from environmental justice campaigns have come to populate the public domain, becoming available for environmental justice proponents to recall and refer to as they figure themselves and their worlds. They cite these precedents, as well as previous antiracist struggles, as they conceptualize environmental justice as a distinct world of environmental action. For example, when some in our study compared their 1990s campaign against expansion of the Westchester St. (a pseudonym)[7] landfill in Fayetteville to the 1968 Memphis sanitation workers strike led by Martin Luther King, Jr., and cited Executive Order 12898, they were actively (re)figuring themselves, contemporary events, and their campaign as they constructed interpretations of the movement and its history.

Other inputs into the figuring of environmental justice have come from scholars studying the movement and transnational connections. When researchers like us cite the participation of environmental justice activists in major world forums such as the 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle, the United Nations sponsored 2001 World Conference against Racism, and the 2002 Rio+10 Earth Summit, we author versions of the movement's history that point to how it has become international and pluralistic. Through such gatherings, according to these histories, the movement addresses an array of class, multiethnic and racial concerns within alternative framings of struggle that go beyond the problem of racism. Interpretations built in these transnational relationships build commonalities. For instance, for South African environmental justice activists, environmental justice is explicitly related to the antiapartheid movement and critiques of the country's spatially segregated and unequal development of capitalism. Despite differences in the histories and trajectories of environmental justice movements in South Africa and the United States, activists simultaneously articulate concerns for social justice *and* the environment; for them, the environment is both social and ecological (Checker 2002).

People of Color Relate Differently to the Environment: Naming the Difference

As will become clear later, individual activists' accounts of their paths to environmental justice tend to include personal issues around themes that

are or have been worked out collectively. One of these recurring themes concerns how race is relevant to environmentalism. The now-famous 1987 United Church of Christ commissioned study authored by Charles Lee has become an important cultural resource that highlights a racial dimension to the environmental question. "Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States" was the first national study to correlate waste facility siting with race. It determined that "race" is "the most significant among variables tested in association with the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities." An earlier 1983 study, "Siting of Hazardous Landfills and Their Correlation with Racial and Economic Status of Surrounding Communities," authored by the U.S. General Accounting Office, substantiated this claim by finding that three-fourths of the off-site commercial hazardous waste facilities in EPA Region IV were located in African American communities, although African Americans made up just one-fifth of the region's population. Regardless of whether these and other studies prove racism,[8] research participant Glenice Baker speaks to the significance of them for aiding individuals in figuring new cultural worlds:

> For the first time, people of color began to see the environmental question as their own and a really fantastic redefinition of the meaning of environmentalism took place.

In our interview, Baker recounted an incident that illustrates how environmental justice was forming in dialogue with what she might call "wilderness" or "wild blue yonder environmentalism."

> I remember a Native American, in particular, getting up at a breakout session . . . at the Environmental Justice Conference where a scientist had been talking for hours, and he [the Native American] just got up and said, "You know, your knowledge isn't superior to ours. Because your knowledge only depends on human beings, and ours includes the trees and the animals." And there was dead silence. You almost have to experience [things like this] to see how different it is from previous movements. . . . [Before the environmental justice movement] there were very, very few people of color, with any of the national environmental groups, until this movement started. And now, they're rushing like crazy to hire people of color. . . . Because it's like [the environmental] movement was way out there in the wild blue yonder before this, and now, it's right at the center of the city.

Criticisms like these highlight differences that the African American environmental justice activists in our research noted between the environmentalism of people of color and that of what they see as the mainstream

or dominant form of environmentalism. The apprehension of this difference also stimulated environmental justice activists to initiate dialogues between the two environmentalisms. For example, the 1990 letters to the Group of Ten called for discussions of how environmental issues affect communities of color and an increase in hiring minorities and their assignment on their governing boards.[9] Several of the national environmental organizations responded positively. For example, the Sierra Club's National Environmental Justice Grassroots Organizing Program, formed in 2000, provides organizing assistance, empowerment training, seed grants, and paid staff to work in low-income communities and communities of color. Though contentious, these conversations and ensuing developments illustrate how the movement has developed in productive tension with more hegemonic forms of environmentalism.

Emerging Racialized Identities

Race matters not only in how environmental justice activists have come to understand environmental problems, but also in how they understand themselves in relation to those problems. According to Pulido and Peña (Pulido 1996, 1998. Pulido and Peña 1998), race affects individuals' access to and participation in the environmental movement, with the environmental justice movement being one site where the "people of color" racial identity has gained currency. Although Pulido rightly notes that the people of color racial identity is a collective identity around which many environmental justice activists organize, her work does not fully explore the processes important to making this a salient identity for movement proponents. Several incidents from our research illustrate important exclusionary practices directed at whites. While attending the 2002 Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit (Summit II), one of us (Allen) observed, for example, an incident that occurred during a session planned by the organizers to build solidarity and multicultural organizing.[10] The idea was to engage candid discussions of perceived barriers and conflicts that, according to them, prevented the movement from being a "more cohesive force." Although it did not appear that session organizers had planned to ask white people to leave, this growing sentiment came from those who wanted only

people of color to be present so that, according to them, they could speak frankly about intraracial tensions in the movement. They were adamant that white people representing mainstream environmental organizations should not be privy to such conversations, though a black man who represented the World Wildlife Federation was allowed to stay. As the situation grew tense, Allen watched as many of the white people reluctantly exited; presumably those who remained represented environmental justice, not mainstream groups. Incidents such as these, interpreted from our approach, are part of the unifying but exclusionary process of generating racially marked environmental identities and building racial solidarity.

During our interview, Glenice Baker recounted a similar process of exclusion that occurred at Summit I. It likewise demonstrates the changing understandings of race that are developing in the environmental arena. She recalled how white people, mostly representatives of mainstream environmental groups, were not allowed to participate in the portion of the Summit devoted to drawing up what became the Principles of Environmental Justice. Baker maintains that "there was no hostility toward white people" but that, for people of color, "there was a sense of sort of being chosen almost." She comments further:

> And to me it was very, very different . . . because these people who were involved in this, people of color thing, were Black, Native American, Asian American and Hispanic; a completely new dynamic developed. You know, the whole issue of Black and White has been fought with such tension—every word, so to speak, is a very sensitive word. But this group of people of color had never really worked together, and they were coming together under these new circumstances of a new definition. It was just amazing. . . . A very different dynamic from when you have other people who have had no history of working together. . . . And if you think about it in that sense, you really begin to get some idea, first of all how grassroots it was, and how [differently] people began to relate to one another.

It is during events like Summit I and II that racial identities such as the "people of color" identity and the exclusionary practices that accompany their making became salient to the environmental justice movement's broader identity. In building the movement, people have come together to establish principles and build solidarity on the basis of being a person of color, in the name of environmentalism. Through these cultural processes and practices, the social identity of "environmental justice activist" has been created and claimed by people of color, at least at this historical juncture.

The environmental justice movement is similar to other social movements in that it is composed of what Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to as "communities of practice." Communities of practice are associations and networks of people who carry out activities and engage in practices that they interpret against the evolving, dynamic, and often contested horizons of meaning or figured worlds that emerge in processes of the types we have just recounted (Holland et al. 1998, p. 60). As communities of practice, local environmental groups offer more social immediacy to their members than is available to those individuals whose environmentalism forms primarily in the public sphere, where environmental images and narratives are often fragmented, incoherent, and disconnected from specific actions. Communities of practice are sources of cultural production where general public discourses are interwoven with local particularities and developing bodies of practice. In them, inchoate sentiments are linked with specific actions and become marked by race, class, gender, and other social divisions.[11] Persons involved in communities of environmental practice are often engaged in overt contention locally, and through this collective engagement they develop not only a culturally coherent understanding of a specific environmental problem, but also a coherent understanding of themselves as actors in relation to that problem.

Pathways to Environmental Activism

By sharing how he became involved with a group of environmental justice advocates and learned to experience the environment in a new way, research participant Conrad Ratcliffe provides a sense of how individuals are drawn into the figured world of environmental justice. Like many Northampton County residents in eastern North Carolina, Ratcliffe had grown accustomed to the noxious smells of sulfuric acid from the nearby Champion International Paper Mill. Although he and others suspected that their health was suffering as a result of living near and working in the paper mill, they had grown "desensitized to the mill's stench" and indifferent to operations at the mill that, according to Ratcliffe, were "killing them." Yet through his employment with the North Carolina Student Rural Health Coalition, an organization that works to improve poor people's access to health care, his resignation changed. The coalition

collects and disseminates health statistics on county residents and, with them, validates many of their suspicions. As a paid community organizer for the coalition, Ratcliffe became aware of the "staggering numbers of early deaths in the area," which many residents attributed to the mill. At public meetings and other forums hosted by the coalition, residents aired health problems that beforehand were discussed only privately. A lay minister, Ratcliffe likens his environmental justice work with that of a religious zealot: "It's like carrying the good news, like carrying gospel."

Through his work with the community of practice organized by the coalition, Ratcliffe was introduced to a new explanation for the numbing paper mill stench; he refigured his understanding of the mill to be a case of environmental racism.[12] At meetings, rallies and workshops held across the state he had frequent contact with activists who worked with hog waste, poor sewage, antilandfill expansion and cleanup, and lead abatement, and he credits the coalition and the 1999 summit, organized by the NCEJN, for the opportunity to establish and build relationships with environmental justice activists from across the state. In his meetings and travels, Ratcliffe had seen evidence that for him proved that communities like his suffer from "environmental racism." The movement, through the work of local networks, validates peoples' suspicions in ways that, according to Ratcliffe, made sense: environmental racism is not only the cause of people's poor health but also the reason why Blacks who have suffered from many sources of inequality have heretofore been resigned and inactive about the mill's stench. His ongoing participation in these communities of practice has developed and kept meaningful the figured world of environmental justice, gathering him and others in meetings and summits, and helping shape them as "environmental justice activists" as their lives intersect with this developing figured world.

Dollie Burwell's Path to Environmentalism: Redefining "Environment"[13]

Dollie Burwell's case and the others described in this chapter reveal people undergoing personal struggles over, and changing awareness of, themselves as environmentalists. Their efforts are one of the forces leading to the changing collective identity of the environmental movement

and the development of environmental justice activists as a social identity familiar to people within and outside the movement.

Burwell recalls that she neither readily nor initially saw herself or her community's struggle as contributing to the environmental movement. Although at the time of the initial Warren County protests Burwell acknowledged an ecological dimension to environmental racism, she refused to be identified as an environmentalist. In an interview with Allen, Burwell tells of her refusal to be involved with the Audubon Society's magazine. She declined an Audubon interview because, she says, "I didn't have a clear understanding. . . . I didn't want them to, I thought they saw me as an environmentalist and I didn't see myself as an environmentalist. I saw myself as an activist for justice rather than an activist for the environment."

Only years after the 1982 protests, at the 1991 summit, was Burwell able to resolve the long-standing dilemmas she had with being labeled an environmentalist.

> After the 1991 People of Color Summit where I met with many people . . . Native Americans, Hispanics, and Black people all working on different issues. Some was housing, toxic waste issues, and seeing the passion that people brought to whatever their respective issue was and being a person who sat through those meetings and hammered out the term of environment . . . where we worked, where we played, where we lived. That came out of the People of Color Summit in 1991 and that was the turning point for me understanding. That definition allowed me to consider myself an environmentalist, with that definition where you work, where you play, and where you live. That encompassed those justice issues that were near and dear to me.

After Summit I, Burwell was more comfortable calling herself an environmentalist. Yet these changes did not happen solely on the intimate terrain of self-authoring. They were the result of her ongoing involvement in communities of practice, first the Warren County Concerned Citizens Against PCBs and then later in work sessions at the summit. It was in the Warren County group that she learned alongside fellow members about the dangers of PCBs to human health *and* ground water, plants, and wildlife. It was during her participation in the summit that she and others "hammered out" the Principles of Environmental Justice. Instead of wildlife and "nature," the environment came to mean, "*where we live, work, and play.*" Up to that point, environmentalists were not people like herself, but, "traditionally white males or some wealthier kind of people who can afford to take two or three months and go overseas and protest."

George Garrison's Desire to Remain Distinct from Environmentalists

Our "identity trajectory" interviews began with two structured questions. The first asked the interviewee to respond to the question "Who am I?" The second asked whether the interviewee considered himself or herself to be an environmentalist. Many of the interviewees in both the larger study and the companion environmental justice study spontaneously revealed personal dilemmas in their relationship to the movement. Fully one-third had difficulties with identifying with environmentalism because they feared being considered a "radical." Many other research participants were uncomfortable with claiming to be environmentalists because they felt their level of activism and/or their compliance with their standards of environmentally friendly behavior was too low. Others, especially environmental justice activists, had a different sort of problem with the question of whether they considered themselves to be environmentalists. Along with activists from some of the other streams of the contemporary environmental movement, environmental justice activists face the challenge of being at odds with the popular and media images of "the environmentalist" and environmentalism. They recognized that their views and sentiments set them apart from the mainstream movement and that they either did not wish to, or could not, even if they wanted to, occupy the space of the imaginary environmentalist.[14]

Local environmental justice groups serve as "spaces of authoring" where people can re-figure themselves and their actions as part of the cultural world of environmentalism, but not without effort. Environmental justice communities of practice are not only spaces in which people develop coherent understandings of environmental problems and solutions, but are also spaces in which individuals can work through their differences with the images of environmentalists they have previously formed. We earlier described Burwell's nine-year effort to come to terms with thinking of herself as an "environmentalist." George Garrison, another research participant, answered the question about whether he considered himself to be an environmentalist in this way:

I guess I would say I never considered myself as being labeled an environmentalist. I have never in the traditional sense of the definition of an environmentalist. . . . I have never enjoyed the killing of animals even as a child and watching full forests being cut down or trees being destroyed needlessly. . . . I think that we all have some environmental tendencies. [But] I would not have labeled myself an environmentalist and I still don't because I still see environmentalists as tree huggers, go save the whales! And that kind of a definition for an environmentalist. If we look at environment as holistically, then yes, I am an environmentalist because holistically we are talking about people. My basic theory is that if you say people then you say everything else. [Would you say that you are a strong environmentalist?] No, meaning that I would not be going out to save a whale. I wouldn't be protesting the fishing of whales even if they are about to be extinct. So I wouldn't say. No. [Even with your redefinition of what the environment is?] With my redefinition of what the environment is, I would be a strong environmentalist.

Environmental justice first pays attention to people, and the environment is "what is around" them. Garrison is clear again in a later part of the interview that he does not want to be mistaken for the stereotypical environmentalist. He does not want to be labeled an environmentalist, "Because they [other people] think you are hugging trees. . . . [It's a problem] to be thought of as hugging trees and not people. The people who hug trees don't usually hug people." He then told a story about several environmentalists who had tried to stop his community organization from cutting down some trees to build a health clinic. When their efforts failed, the environmentalists became distraught. In Garrison's eyes, they were willing, at least temporarily, to deny health care to local poor people simply because it would mean several trees would have to be cut. Moreover, he found their intense emotional reaction to the tree cutting unfathomable.

Primarily because they focused on people as victims of environmental degradation, most of the environmental justice activists in our study did not identify with, and did not want others to identify them with, the more biocentric stances of environmentalism. This does not mean, however, that environmental justice advocates are unaware of, or discourage all of the practices of, what they distinguish as the mainstream movement. They recycle and support the avoidance of environmentally harmful products in their homes and businesses. These practices do not demand forfeiting core environmental justice positions and may be recognized as things that black people and poor people have been doing for

a long time. As Garrison put it, "Black people and poor people have been recycling a long time because that is the only way we could have made it." Working in alliances with mainstream environmentalism, environmental justice activists sometimes try to accommodate the sensitivities of mainstream environmentalists, as in the following account:

At the first Hog Round Table some real environmentalists came to the meeting we prepared for them. We had Styrofoam cups to drink out of. We noticed people going outside and coming back in with their mugs. They never said a word but that was enough. From that time on we found paper cups or gave enough mugs.

Still, the differences in the meanings assigned to such issues are quite deep.

S.H.I.T. versus H.E.L.P: Awareness of Inequality and Injustice

In 1992 a local group started an environmental justice project in Halifax County. They wanted to prevent more hog factories from locating in the area. Uncharacteristically for protest efforts there, the group included good numbers of both African Americans and European Americans. According to the humorous account given by Garrison, Help Environmental Loss Prevention (H.E.L.P.) was the name suggested for the group by one of the white members. The black people wanted to call it Swine Habitat Is Terrible (S.H.I.T.), a reminder that hogs produce an amazing amount of feces.

The African American members saw the group as helping people because large-scale hog operations negatively affect people, but the whites wanted to communicate the purpose as one of saving the environment. Actually, Garrison thought the radio announcements for S.H.I.T. and its activities would be funny. But, regardless of the humor, the point that whites often have different perspectives on environmental problems than African Americans is a familiar one. Pulido (1996) and Pulido and Peña (1998), for example, make the point that a person's environmentalism is likely to be closely linked to his or her social position. They emphasize the different life conditions that racially and ethnically marked people typically face and thus the aspects of the environment likely to concern them. As Ratcliffe said, "It [the issue of environmental justice] is about life and

death for the black person, not just a geographical [environmental] problem." Or as Garrison said, in speaking about the threat posed by hog factories, "Most of the whites are concerned about the surface waters because *it is recreation for them.* And those of us who live in rural communities [and have old and shallow wells] are more concerned about the ground water because *it is life for us* and the potential contamination of that from the chloroform that comes out of lagoons" [emphases added].

Most of the environmental justice activists we talked with originally had come to environmental justice from a focus on social and racial justice. Older activists had been involved in the civil rights movement.[15] As already discussed, for activists with a focus on social and racial justice, environmental justice is figured as one among *many* injustices. Ratcliffe had lots to say on the topic:

> With regards to environmental issues with Black folks, it parallels and is deeply connected to other injustices.... It is not the first injustice against them. It is deeply connected and rooted with the rest of the injustices.... But, more so than anything else, injustices on top of injustices is what Black people are dealing with.

Ratcliffe went on to paint a larger picture. Black peoples' actions and inactions are rooted in their experiences of not having the political position to affect decisions that profoundly affect their lives, being treated like objects by doctors and many other professionals who minister to their needs, and having to fit into institutions that provide no respect for their cultural traditions or life experiences. "How the injustice with regards to the environment takes place as a whole [is] because they don't have a fair representation in saying what is going to take place in their county." For example, he pointed out that their water quality standards are low because the decisions are left up to people who do not have to drink the water.

These are the social and cultural milieus in which African American and other people of color develop identities as environmentalists (or not). As Ratcliffe sums it up, "[W]hen we talk about environment from an activist standpoint, then we talk about [social] conditions, not just the trees, river, and streams, but the people and the system that they deal with and they live in, so it is a different ball game." The interviews underscore three defining aspects of environmental justice. First, the

meaning of "environment" and "environmentalist" has been captured by, and is associated with being white. Second, environmentalism, for African Americans in the environmental justice movement, must be embedded within or combined with the recognition that people of color live in a world that is pervaded by racism and racist structures. Thus, a central part of environmental justice activist work is organizing people and raising consciousness about social and material conditions on people's *home ground.* As mentioned earlier, the environmental justice movement, at least in the southeastern United States, with its focuses on racism and helping people learn to stand up to racism, has so far eschewed an emphasis on national level organizing and instead focused on local empowerment and regional organizing. The third distinctive feature of environmental justice concerns the ways that environment is experienced—as a source of danger.

An Environmentalism of Ever-Present Danger

The environmental activism of environmental justice activists addresses real and perceived threats faced in everyday living, working, and playing situations. Referring to this type of environmentalism as an "environmentalism of everyday life," Pulido characterizes environmental justice struggles as principally about economic issues. This environmentalism, she maintains, is a "material and political struggle" mobilized on the basis of collective identity (Pulido 1998, p. 30). Similar to Pulido, we maintain that social position guides people's actions in the environmental justice arena and that it is used in the interpretation and mobilization of collective action on issues of health and well-being that activists are most concerned about. Yet social position does not fully determine what, if any, actions or activities individuals will undertake. Rather, the *meanings* that people *collectively make of* structural positions are aspects of their identities, and those meanings are developed in social action. For environmental justice activists, their activism reflects their concern with everyday living and dying in their environments: environmental degradation reacts upon their bodies and the bodies of others and is experienced as a threat to the body and to the self in the social context of struggling with others.

All environmental activists come into contact with the environment. Their encounters, however, are mediated through cultural activities that tend to vary from one environmental group to the next. For example, for members of the Audubon Society, bird watching, a principle activity of the group, brings them into contact with a variety of plant and wildlife in the outdoors and models the environment as something to be respectfully observed. In stark contrast, for environmental justice activists, key activities that relate one to the environment are living, working, and playing in dangerous, contaminated places. As illustrated by the contrasting images used in the cultural materials of each type of group—for example, of people engaged in bird watching, recycling, "buying green," hiking, on the one hand, and of children playing in the shadow of smokestacks on the other, many of the activities and concerns of environmental justice activists and more typical environmentalists are not shared. In all of these images people are active in the environment, but what the environment is (fragile ecosystem to be protected versus a place of dangerous threat) and what activities develop one's sensitivities to it (leisure activities versus everyday life) differ dramatically.

Several of our ethnographic cases illustrate environmental justice activists' concern with the social and physical consequences of environmental degradation in everyday life. Dollie Burwell, for example, is saddened and outraged that Warren County residents view themselves negatively because they live in a place made infamous for housing a hazardous waste landfill. According to her, many residents have internalized these negative associations, asking, "Do I belong in a dump ground?" and "Am I trash too?" Burwell tells the crowd at an antilandfill rally that the site has to be detoxified so that her children and other county residents can be proud, not ashamed, to live in Warren County. She fears that they will not be able to shed the internalized image of a dump until the state of North Carolina fulfills its promise to detoxify the contaminated soil and residents are able to transform the site into a recreational center and consign the episode to history by commemorating Warren County as the birthplace of the environmental justice movement.[16] For many environmental justice activists, landfills symbolize the demise of community through death and abandonment and evoke a sense of being disregarded.

A downtown rally sponsored by the Westchester St. antilandfill group in Fayetteville captured the sense of an environmentalism of ever-present danger. Jackie Savin, the group's spokesperson, dressed herself in itchy tan burlap bags and draped a black lace veil about her head and face. She wore the homemade dress, she told Allen later, to "show how poor we was down there." Marchers held up signs that read: "Snakes on Westchester St.—Snakes in City Hall," "Your Trash Is in My Backyard," and "Living on Westchester St. Is Living on Death Row." At the mock funeral, a placard perched against a van windshield listed the names of twenty-eight people who had died in the neighborhood. The funeral march organized by Savin was a time for mourning both the loss of a once vibrant community and the deaths of many people who, according to Savin, have "dropped like flies."

The Story of Pastor Wilson: Continuing Developments

Pastor Lawrence Wilson was among those who brought key people and institutions together in the events that developed into the Warren County protests of 1982. His story shows both the latitude that is possible in self-authoring within the environmental justice movement and the constraints imposed on people of color who would act on any nonenvironmental justice identities they might form.

Recounting for Allen his trajectory through the period of the Warren County protests, Pastor Wilson expressed doubt that he would have become involved if the injustice of the landfill had happened to others: "I went down there because I felt like dumping on those Black folk was an injustice. If they want to dump on those rich White folk in Raleigh I probably would never have become an environmentalist." From those sentiments Pastor Wilson had moved over the years to the point of describing himself as a "lover of nature." He gave this description as an answer to the "who am I?" question posed at the beginning of the interview. At the end, Allen returned to the theme of whether he considered himself an environmentalist. He replied, "Yes, when I say I am a lover of nature, it is an identity, I have empathy with those things."

Pastor Wilson attributed his transformation to reading a passage from the bible while he was "moving into the reality" of the Warren County struggle:

As I became involved in the struggle marching all the way from Warren County landfill through Warrenton to Raleigh to the state capitol.... In Jeremiah 30... all of a sudden this struggle is about the salvation of the earth. [How did that happen?] Just a leap that is called empathy. This struggle is not really about a Black community that is being dumped on. Warren County is a predominantly Black community. Warren County is all [about] being polluted. That chapter that I was reading, it shows off what slavery was about.... [I]t really was about the economics of it. What ended up being used are people and the earth. The earth was not supposed to be used [it is supposed] to be related to. But you understand that God so loved the world that God gave his son. Paul goes a lot into that. The earth... it really is about justice for the earth because if you don't have justice for the earth, you are not going to have justice for people because everything becomes a thing to be used rather than a part of it.

In addition to preaching about justice for the earth as well as people, Pastor Wilson approached organizations working to save the earth. These efforts lead to revelations about the multiple ways in which environmentalism is entangled with race. He tried to join the well-known Riverkeepers group in New Bern, North Carolina, which monitors and advocates for the Nevse River. Yet he gradually concluded that it would be very difficult for him to make the contributions to caring for the river that he wanted to make because the other members persisted in treating him as though his concerns were limited to those of environmental justice. Eventually he lost interest in white-dominated environmental groups and concluded that the best opportunity for Blacks to contribute is through the environmental justice movement.[17]

Let me tell you why. The environmentalist movement in this nation has no room for Black folk. [What do you mean?] The Sierra Club is dominated by White [people]. It has not really had a Black agenda. The Riverkeepers in New Bern is a White-dominated environmentalist movement. I have wanted to be a part of it because I really thought I had a contribution to make. It has the blessings of the state to deal with those issues and White folk don't really need Black folk.... [You are saying that environmental racism is an opportunity for Black people to participate in the environment?] In the total environmental issue because... [those issues] have not yet been dominated by the White power structure. Trust me they are not going to get to it. They will touch it, but they are not going to get to it. That is a legitimate role, to become a spokesperson for the environmental racism issue. From where I was, real conversion comes about when you discover the way the earth and the environment have been treated—the issue of injustice. It is a great opportunity. [For a black person to come to that kind of awareness?] Come to the awareness because if they come to that awareness they have the whole. White people can be environmentalists and racists at the same time. If they see the environment being hurt they may not be able to transpose that to see the injustice in racism.

Here Pastor Wilson points out a key way in which he considers environmental justice to differ from mainstream environmentalism. In his view, for the latter there is no inconsistency between a person who takes care to be environmentally friendly and fights fiercely to save the earth, yet at the same time participates in and even promotes racism. In other words, concerns about damage to the environment have no relationship to concerns about the damage caused by systems of racial privilege. But in Pastor Wilson's revelation, these two kinds of injustice flow from the same source.

Possibilities?

The environmental justice movement is now several decades old. Several of those interviewed in our study participated in the original Warren County protests, which figures in movement and academic narratives as the birthplace of environmental justice (for example, Kaplan 1997). Interviews with them and others who entered the movement later, together with additional ethnographic research, shed light on the ways in which the environmental justice movement has developed and continues to develop and transform through the understandings and campaigns of activists and through the events, institutions and networks that are being established. In this chapter we have looked at similarities and differences between environmental justice and other environmental activists through a social practice theory of identity formation, with special attention to the cultural or figured world developed by the movement and to the paths that environmental justice activists have taken in locating themselves within that world.

The history and trajectory of the environmental justice movement as developed by African Americans and other people of color is distinctive within the broad range of environmentalisms that comprise the environmental movement. The cultural activities that mediate environmental sensibilities, as practiced by the full range of local environmental groups we studied, included birding, hiking, and backpacking. These activities provided ways of experiencing the environment that are quite different from those of environmental justice. Within the figured world of

environmental justice, the environment is associated with the daily smells and sights of blight, along with an awareness of ever-present danger and insult to one's body and to the community. Accompanying these threats are the experiences of other forms of injustice and disregard. It is not surprising that the environmental justice movement sees the empowerment of environmentally stressed communities as equally important to the removal of environmental threats. The work of the movement simultaneously addresses people's concerns *and* helps them change oppressive systems under which they live. For these reasons, activists continue to emphasize local and regional organizing instead of concentrating only on building national level organizations.

These differences in salient aspects of the environment and in organizational preferences are intensified by the distance of environmental justice from popular images of environmentalists and by the marking of environmental justice by race and class. Environmental justice activists in our study did not constitute the prototypical environmentalist, nor did they occupy the imaginary space of the environmentalist. Instead, their struggles to define themselves as environmentalists involved accepting the label of environmentalist in spite of their own sense of distance from the concerns and social positions they attribute to "real" environmentalists. In a sense, white people owned the environmental movement. Or, to put it in the words of a person we interviewed, "White people, and their issues, dominate the environmental movement."

In thinking about possibilities for rapprochement between environmental justice and the other strands of the environmental movement, our theoretical approach counsels consideration of opportunities for merging figured worlds. From the vantage point of our research with environmental justice activists, efforts toward transcending the differences are difficult and sometimes asymmetrical. Dialogues, imagined and actual, with "real" environmentalists have driven many of the conceptual developments of the environmental justice movement, including the reworking of the central concept of "environment." As a conceptual touchstone for activists, the modified definitions of environment give a broad scope for projects that address social injustices.

At the time of our research in the late 1990s, environmental justice was not well known within the broader environmental movement in the

sense that its ideas had not been widely circulated either in the mainstream movement or in the public sphere. Few of the people in the twenty other local environmental groups that we studied in our larger project were conversant with the concepts and contributions of the environmental justice movement. In several cases, we witnessed leaders making overtures to environmental justice activists, but not necessarily progressing in the formation of alliances. Environmental justice was even more unfamiliar to those who knew the environmental movement only peripherally through avenues such as mailings, environmental programs on public television, and media coverage of spectacular protests against, for example, the cutting of old-growth forests or declining habitats of favorite wild species.

We did note some alliances among environmental justice activists and other environmentalists. This was true in our research, despite complaints by environmental justice activists that the mainstream environmental movement, including the issues it addresses, marginalizes environmental justice concerns. Local people threatened by large-scale hog factories or leaking landfills were willing to team up across color lines, despite histories of racial tension. For example, two longtime participants in the Warren County struggle are white. Another of the environmental justice groups we studied had both black and white participants and, in fact, was significantly shaped by members' participation in a statewide environmental justice summit organized by George Garrison, among others. These alliances are potential places where more encompassing figured worlds could develop. Pastor Wilson, for example, directed attention to the similarities of people and nature and the injustice that arises when either is treated not as beings deserving respect in their own right but as objects to be exploited. Another of our interviewees came to the conclusion that justice is owed to both people *and* nature from a position critical of capitalism: "Capitalists are hellbent on raising capital with no regard to life or limb."

And, then, there is the Styrofoam cup. Garrison described a change in practice that came about when the members of his group recognized the aversion of "real" environmentalists to the cups. This small, but tangible marker of different sensibilities played a role in a number of other interviews in the study. Seemingly a small thing, recognition of aversion to

Styrofoam on the parts of others can sometimes function as a wedge issue or a disruption of a taken-for-granted indifference. As people take part in the figured world of any environmentalism, they can learn about new ways to care about the consequences of their actions and to care about evaluations of themselves by others in this figured world. Identification as any sort of environmentalist involves investing one's self, taking responsibility, being answerable for one's actions while gaining practical knowledge, and becoming familiar with the social relations and activities of environmental work as it is defined in the communities of practice of which one becomes a part. Alliances provide at least a temporary community of practice where different environmentalisms can be learned and where new forms can be created. This is the most likely positive path for the future. The question is how long the process will take.

Postscript

The ethnographic research that we have summarized here was carried out primarily from 1996 to 2000. During that period national environmental organizations, especially the Sierra Club, had begun to publicize environmental justice movement issues. Academic interest in the environmental justice movement has accelerated as well, producing books (for example, Adams, Evans, and Stein 2002; Bullard, Johnson, and Torres 2004; Camacho 1998; Cole and Foster 2001; Faber 1998; Gottlieb 2001; Stein 2004) to augment the early work of Bullard (1983) and others. Films and videos, including those made by environmental justice groups, have become more available, and churches such as the Episcopal Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, have taken on environmental justice projects. These resources make it possible for students and others to become familiar with environmental justice issues and concepts. New research would tell us whether this broader circulation of the perspective of environmental justice is being incorporated into local environmental groups that have heretofore focused primarily on mainstream activities and concerns. What we saw in our research on individual and local level environmentalism was primarily a one-way conversation. At that time, local environmental justice activists were the ones struggling to understand and modify the relationship between environmental justice and other forms of environmentalism. There were few local environmental groups of other sorts that seemed aware of environmental justice issues and none that were engaged with expanding their vision to accommodate environmental justice issues. Today, should we study local environmental groups, we might see more of a two-way conversation.

Notes

1. We gratefully acknowledge the help of the many people who made this project possible, not the least of which were the local environmental groups that permitted our participation and the individuals whom we interviewed. Kim Allen conducted the research on environmental justice groups and activists in North Carolina and in Washington, D.C., at the 2002 summit. We draw this chapter primarily from her participant observation and interviews, but the additional researchers deserve commendation for the work they did with the twenty other groups and 159 activists that constitute an important basis for our comparison of environmental justice activists with other sorts of environmentalists. The research was sponsored by grants SBR-9615505 and SBR-9602016 from the National Science Foundation (NSF), for which Dorothy C. Holland and Willett Kempton were the principal investigators. Kim Allen first became involved in environmental justice research through an REU (research experience for undergraduates) grant from NSF. And, last but not least, Phaedra C. Pezzullo, Ronald Sandler, and Gretchen Fox made very helpful comments on earlier drafts of the chapter.

2. Of the twenty-nine interviews in the environmental justice component of the larger study, twelve were environmental, political biography, and identity interviews, and seventeen were key informant interviews. The sixteen groups were all of the groups in North Carolina that we were able to learn about through snowball sampling and through attending conferences that brought environmental justice groups together. We consider the study to be a statewide investigation of the environmental justice movement in the late 1990s. As is clear from the dynamic, localized processes of the movement, we do not necessarily expect the *content* of the movement to be the same from region to region. Nonetheless, even though we were unable to fund a companion study of environmental justice groups in the Delmarva region, we were fortunate in having the larger study for comparison of the mainstream groups in the two regions.

In contrast, we do expect the identity formation *processes*, arrived at through analytic induction and described elsewhere (Holland et al. 1998; see subsequent footnote regarding Kempton and Holland 2003) to be common. Davies (1999) reviews the past thirty years of important developments in ethnographic research in anthropology and explains the conditions under which ethnographic research is considered to produce generalizable results.

3. A survey instrument was devised from the ethnographic research with the local environmental groups and their members and administered to three

national samples. Consistent with a social practice theory of identity, Holland, Lachicotte, and Kempton (in prep.) report strong, statistically significant relationships between strength of environmental identities and environmental action. Moreover, indications of an environmental identity turned out to be better predictors of reported action than environmental knowledge, beliefs, and values.

4. For a more detailed account of the Warren County protests, see Pezzullo (2001).

5. In still other versions of the movement's history, but not in those of the people we interviewed, the 1978 antitoxins struggle led by Lois Gibbs at Love Canal is cited as the key event that ushered in the movement (Fletcher 2003). Developments such as those cited here do not merge inevitably as streams coming together to form the environmental justice movement; rather, individuals and groups actively figure the movement by highlighting some aspects and historical events and ignoring others as significant to it.

6. For example, Benjamin Chavis and Robert Bullard were appointed to the Clinton-Gore presidential transition team in the natural resources cluster and Deeohn Ferris coordinated a national campaign that drafted the "Environmental Justice Position Paper" submitted to the Clinton-Gore transition team.

7. Allen promised anonymity to those interviewed and groups studied. Unless otherwise indicated, names are pseudonyms.

8. Subsequent studies have sought to discredit findings from reports such as these, including a 1994 University of Massachusetts study funded by Waste Management, Inc.

9. Moore and Head (1994).

10. Allen is African American; Daro and Holland are European Americans.

11. It is noteworthy that many, if not a majority, of the leaders of environmental justice groups are women, see for example Krauss (1992) and Kaplan (2001). In our interviews and related participant observation research, gender issues and differences did not receive spontaneous attention. When specifically asked about differences, however, people linked women's passion for activism against environmental health hazards to their frequent roles as guardians of their family's health.

12. Kempton and Holland (2003) describe general individual identity processes characteristic of members of all of the environmental groups in the larger study. "Reformulations," where the individual begins to understand environmental conditions and the social and political sources of these conditions in new ways, are an important aspect of most trajectories of identity formation.

13. Burwell's name is used with her permission.

14. Holland (2003) describes another group from the larger study, one composed of hunters and their supporters, that faced somewhat similar dilemmas with the dominant image of environmentalists.

15. Again, we are focusing on environmental justice as conceived by the African American activists we interviewed and the African American communities of practice we studied. White people, albeit in the minority, do participate in environmental justice projects and groups, and, as described in the first part of the chapter, do attend summit meetings and conferences. We lack the space here to describe their perspectives that were often quite different from those of their black colleagues.

16. Since the time of this interview, the Warren County PCB landfill has been remediated. Whether the clean up will bring about the results Burwell had hoped for is yet to be seen.

17. Albeit few, there were some African American participants in the mainstream groups of the larger study. At least one, a middle-class woman in the Delmarva Peninsula area, did not describe her experience as one of being automatically assigned to environmental justice issues.

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5

A More "Productive" Environmental Justice Politics: Movement Alliances in Massachusetts for Clean Production and Regional Equity

Daniel Faber

The self-defined environmental justice movement first emerged in the 1980s, as hundreds of grassroots organizations began to address the disparate social and ecological problems impacting their communities. Plaguing people of color where they "work, live, and play,"[1] unequal exposure to ecological hazards assumed the form of (1) higher concentrations of destructive mining operations, polluting industrial facilities and power plants; (2) greater presence of toxic waste sites and disposal/treatment facilities, including landfills, incinerators, and trash transfer stations; (3) severe occupational and residential health risks from pesticides, lead paint, radiation waste, and other dangerous substances; and (4) lower rates of clean-up and environmental enforcement of existing laws.[2] In the movement's earliest stages of development, environmental justice organizations were largely isolated or loosely connected to one another and focused on local issues. With the 1991 National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit (Summit I), however, recognition developed of the need to build stronger institutional linkages between these local community-based groups. As a result, a number of strategic regionally based networks, as well as national constituency-based and issue-based networks for environmental justice, were created and consolidated during the 1990s.

In the new century, as environmental justice activists confront what are (perhaps) their most difficult set of challenges, a third stage of development is being initiated. With a number of new organizational entities, such as the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the consolidation of the regional and national constituency–based networks, the environmen-