

Review: Power, Justice, and the Environment: A Critical Appraisal of the Environmental Justice Movement

By David Naguib Pellow and Robert J. Brulle (Eds.)

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Pellow, David Naguib and Brulle, Robert J. (Eds.). *Power, Justice, and the Environment: A Critical Appraisal of the Environmental Justice Movement*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005. x, 339 pp. ISBN: 0-262-66193-4 (paper); US\$25.00; ISBN: 0-262-16233-4 (hardcover); US\$62.00. Printed on recycled paper.

The Environmental Justice Movement (EJM) grew out of the civil rights movement and was joined in the 1970s by a variety of social justice movements. The movement is a political response to social inequalities, undertaken by communities of poor, white and nonwhite working class people, who often experience the worst consequences of environmental degradation. "Environmental justice" looks at the natural environment in terms of social inequity, for example, the high incidence of asthma in low-income areas that is linked to environmental pollutants. The main goal of the EJM is for "communities marginalized by race, ethnicity and poverty to gain political power to effectively protect their health and defend and manage their territories and resources" (p. 265). As such, the movement is as much about social justice as ecology, and the objectives of social justice movements are not always compatible with environmental sustainability. Sustainability can be difficult to achieve in areas of poverty, racial discrimination, high population growth, and systems of weak governance.

It is at the local community level that the EJM has had its greatest successes.

Warren County, North Carolina, is considered to have been the site of the first environmental justice mobilization in 1982. The disposal of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in a landfill located in a predominantly black community generated a protest. While the protest failed, it served to raise consciousness. The movement has grown to cover a wide range of issues, including food quality, health, indigenous land rights, and toxic disposal sites, and has laid a foundation for environmental and social justice politics in the twenty-first century.

The EJM's multi-issue focus, involving different ethnic and racial communities and a multitude of social and environmental movements, risks diffusing the movement's effectiveness. Yet few have looked at the movement critically to find out what has and has not worked. The book's

goal is to examine the movement's tactics, strategies, organizational structure and resource base, and document the successes and failures in gaining political power. The editors also want to rethink the movement's tactical and ideological bases and "redefine environmentalism as much more integrated with the social needs of human populations" (p. 3). Environmental protection cannot ignore the issue of social equity.

The book grew out of presentations at the 2002 American Sociological Association annual meeting in Chicago. The authors, a group of scholars, activists and practitioners, hope to initiate a dialogue among those working in the area of environmental justice. The eighteen chapters cover areas of environmental equality and justice, strategies for environmental justice activism, and the challenge of globalization. Many of the articles have a sociological bent to them and some writing is steeped in sociological theory. Still, lay readers may still get a lot out of the book. Recommended for environmental studies collections and those with an interest in environmental justice.

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