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**Environmental Racism**

**http://deohs.washington.edu/environmental-justice**

Reverend Benjamin Chavis, the Executive Director of the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ during *the Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States* report in 1987 and a well recognized environmental justice (EJ) advocate, refers to “environmental racism” as racial discrimination in:

1. Environmental policymaking
2. Enforcement of environmental laws and procedures
3. Targeting of communities for the siting of waste disposal and polluting industries
4. Excluding people of color from decision making boards

Some people consider racism an important aspect of the Environmental Justice Movement (EJM) because it illustrates a foundation in the Civil Rights Movement.

The Civil Rights movement gave headway for activists to begin using the word 'environmental racism,' framing racism as a causation of environmental inequities . This perspective of "characterizing the absence of environmental justice as environmental racism sharpened the appeal of the cause (Getches and Pellow in Mutz et al., 2001 ) ," motivated communities of color to fight for environmental protection under the decree of social justice.

Thus, activists began viewing environmental injustices as an extension of institutional racism. Institutionalized racism can be viewed as political practices, cultural norms, and power structures that knowingly, or even unintentionally, affect groups of people disproportionately (Pena, 2005).

EJM calls not only for an end to environmental inequities, but for an end to discrimination in housing, land, education , and employment along with equal access to the political processes where these decisions are being made. A full understanding of environmental justice requires knowledge of various causes of injustice, which may be rooted in discrimination.

**After reading the article and understanding the definition of environmental racism, we follow up with a question for classroom discussion:**

**How can we think about the reality of environmental racism as a form of structural or institutional racism in this country? What strategies can we use to approach the concept of ‘Sustainability’ within communities that have been historically oppressed in such fundamental ways?**