

**Masters in Environmental Studies**  
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# **Class 2: Racialised natures**

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# This class

- Three concepts:
  - Environmental racism
  - Environmental justice
  - Othering

*“...the uncontrolled growth of weeds and their emerging dominance in the landscape do appear to symbolize disorder, decay, and the absence of control that accompany years of political and fiscal neglect. Socially speaking, the significance of weeds is not what they do but, rather, what they represent; the same can be said for the abandoned autos, heaps of garbage, discarded needles, condoms, and drug paraphernalia, and broken glass that are pervasive throughout the park” (Brownlow, 2006, p.242)*

Why, according to Brownlow, have disorder and decay fallen upon Cobbs Creek?

## **READING QUESTION**

# Disorder and decay in Cobbs Creek

- Why?
  - A key factor/ key change that brought about disorder and decay
- **Loss of social (community) control**  
mechanisms that ensured park security for everyone
- What **reasons** produced this phenomenon?

## Racism: racism-induced and racism-related decisions

1. Decisions of a man in power (Rizzo)
2. Public Administration neglect of park, community, and its services
3. Change in gang culture

# 1. Decisions of a man in a seat of power

- Frank (“The Big Bambino”) Rizzo: Police Commissioner turned Mayor
  - Cuts park budget by 50%
  - Reduces mounted Park Guard
  - Removes park benches



Copyright: Bill Achatz/AP

## 2. Result of neglect (of racist-origins)

- Budget cuts started with Mayor Rizzo but continued: since early 80s (i.e. 3 decades=no increase)
- steady decline in budgetary spending on the park further compounded the problem
- budget cuts followed almost exact pattern as **exodus of whites** from the area (racism within Philadelphia's powerful decision-making institutions)

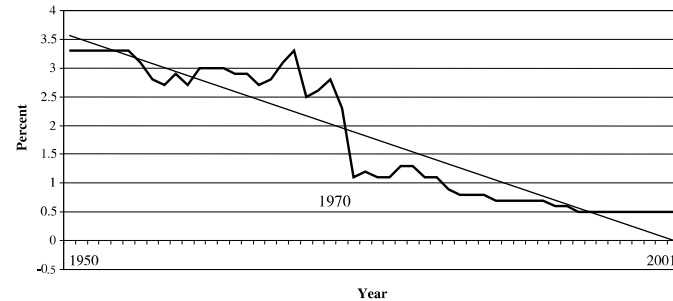


Fig. 9. Fairmount Park budget as a percent of Philadelphia's operating budget, 1950-2001.

*A. Brownlow / Geoforum 37 (2006) 227-245*

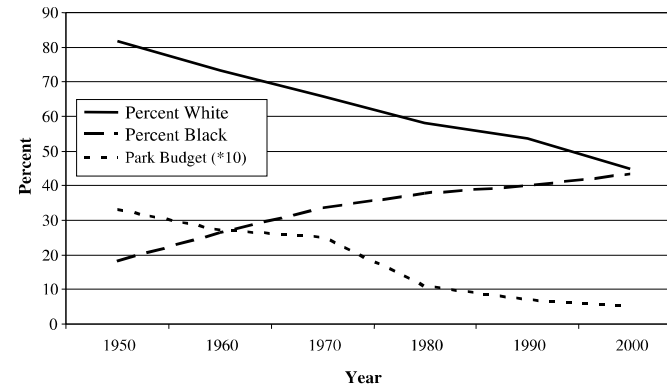


Fig. 10. Population and Park Budget Trends: 1950-2000. (Budget numbers multiplied by 10 for purposes of illustration).

### 3. Change in gang culture

- John: *“The park was sort of that neutral ground because everybody came to the park, and you had picnics out there and all kinds of things in that community – cook outs”*



Fig. 4. Ecology of Disorder II (kudzu in Cobbs Creek).

#### The 50s: the “organic” gangs

- “Homegrown” gangs’ informal agreement over park’s neutrality

#### Late 60s – early 70s: Black Power

- Cobbs Creek’s early gangs (and informal security) quietly disappear

#### Late 70s: the power vacuum

- Decline of black identity movement
- Outmigration

#### The 80s: end of the agreement

- Violent gangs: no agreements, unwritten or otherwise

# The bigger picture

- Must analyse loss of social control mechanisms from **wider perspective** of evolution of power relations within city's history
  - civil rights movement, racial struggles, economic decay, etc.
  - racist and racially explosive period: *significant*, if *disproportionate*, roles
- Rizzo's decisions to dismantle local social control mechanisms in Cobbs Creek: a form of **social control**
  - means to control social organization and activity of politically active
  - by removing primary public arena (*the Park*) of intercourse and exchange

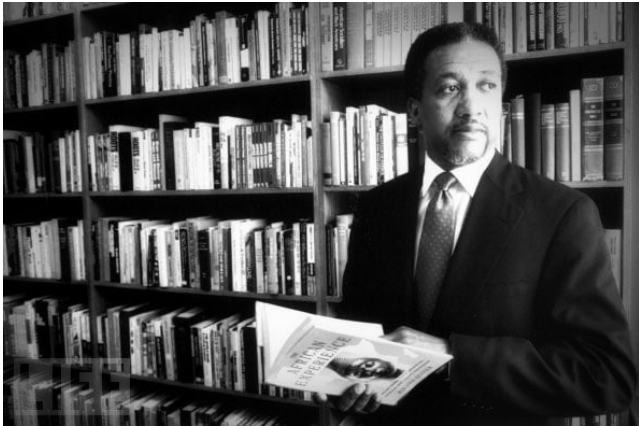


# Argument 1

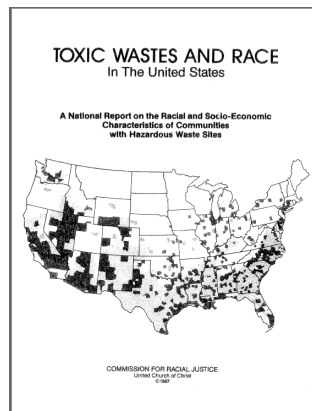
## *Racism produces environmental degradation*

- Because: it offloads environmental 'bads' to non-white communities, by both depriving them of resources and reducing their own capacities to maintain a healthy environment
- Evidence:
  - The racist-motivated actions of Mayor Rizzo
  - The changes in gang culture

# Environmental racism



Source: <http://blackkudos.tumblr.com>



The term: Reverend Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. –  
The UCCCRJ report (1987)

Jepson, 2007: “intentional or unintentional...

- ...racial discrimination in environmental decision-making, ...
- ...systematic exclusion of people of color from the mainstream environmental movement, ...
- ...negligent enforcement of environmental protections, laws and regulations along racial lines, ...
- ...and disproportionate distribution of environmental burdens on racial and ethnic minorities where they live, work, and play”

## Environmental justice

EJ: concept closely related to environmental racism

- Normative dimension out of environmental racism
- What should be done then to avoid environmental racism?

❑ Watch Environmental justice:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dREtXUij6\\_c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dREtXUij6_c)

❑ Watch Justice Matters:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKqR0e54qhA>

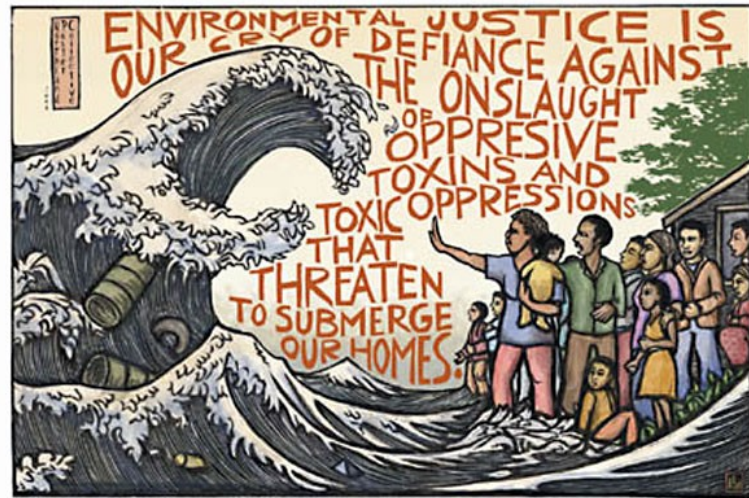
❑ *ACTIVITY: So: what is environmental justice?*

1. **Direct paraphrasing** (in layman's words): explain environmental justice to your mom who calls you today to ask how are things!
  - What it involves? Its objective?
  - Its key elements or dimensions?
2. Present in class

# Justice

Justice as fair treatment  
(Waskey, 2007):

- Justice = a system of rewards and punishments that are designed **to fit the actions** of those receiving justice



Source: [http://www.columbia.edu/cu/EJ/EJ\\_ricardolevinsmorales.jpg](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/EJ/EJ_ricardolevinsmorales.jpg)

# Elements

1. Not only race: but also, gender, class (income), etc.
2. Not only distribution: but also, procedural; representational
3. National and international levels
4. Not only burden of uneven goods, but also uneven access to goods

# Environmental justice: not only race

- Expanding scope
  - Initially: race
  - Robert Bullard: “*Racism trumps class*”
- Expand to cover lower socio-economic groups and other minorities (First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, 1991)
  - Socio-economic status; class; other vulnerable groups: women, children and poor

Robert Bullard:

- “*even middle income African Americans are more likely to live in polluted neighbourhoods*”
  - Study: “*African Americans making \$50-60k income are more likely to live in polluted neighborhoods than White Americans who make just \$10k/y*”
- “*minority neighborhoods (regardless of class) carrying a greater burden of localized costs than either affluent or poor white neighborhoods*”

# Three dimensions of EJ (Schlosberg, 2007)

## **Distributive EJ:** equal distribution of risks and benefits

- E.g. environmental racism = toxic environments disproportionately for African Americans; or for poor

## **Procedural EJ :** fair and meaningful participation

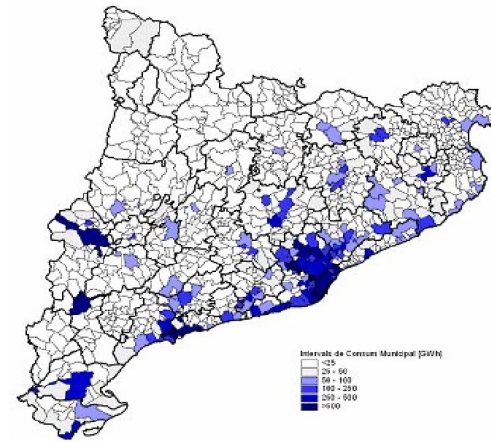
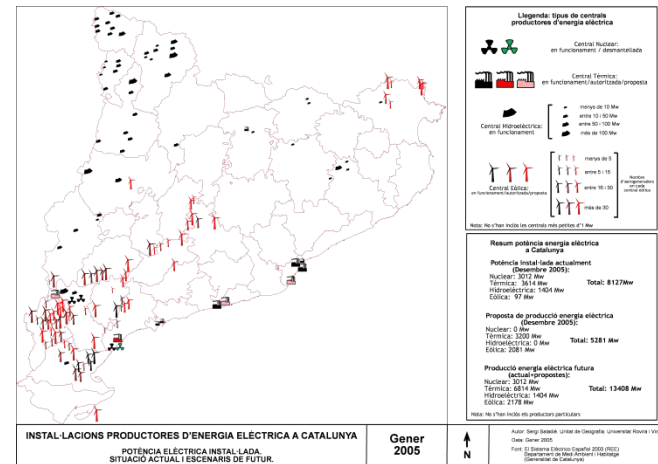
- Outright *exclusion*: e.g. Franco-era hydro-electric projects – e.g. Riba-roja Ebre
- *Participatory exclusions*: e.g. water basin plans (water allocation) – e.g. CHE

## **Recognition EJ:** ways of life, local knowledge, cultural difference

- ‘Where Green Ants Dream’: recognise aborigine cultural conceptions of space (for animal activity not to be disturbed) as equally valid as mining interests

# EJ at national level

- National aspect: “*not only within cities, but also urban-rural divide*”
- Terra Alta wind farms:
  - Protests at macro-concentration
  - Inequities: energy generation **vs.** energy consumption
    - A neo-colonial relation between a centre and “extractive” periphery
  - Procedural aspects: behind closed-doors agreements





# International dimension

- *“And even see that injustice on a global level”: small island nations forced to directly confront consequences to rising sea-levels but haven’t played any significant role in the industries that are causing climate change”*



Source: KYODO/ [www.japantimes.co](http://www.japantimes.co)

## Tuvalu:

- Possibly first country (nation) to disappear because of climate change effects
  - SLR – lies only 2m above SL
- GDP: 135/175 (World Bank)
- Per capita CO2 emissions (in metric tn, 2014) (knoema.com) = “0”
  - Tuvalu = 0.06
  - Spain = 5.31
  - China = 7.82
  - USA = 16.63
- Pacific Islands region = 0.03% of global CO2 emissions (germanwatch.org)

# Uneven goods

- Uneven bads but also uneven goods
  - “*poor urban planning policies...but those trees get planted in the neighbourhoods that are already green*”
  - “*benefits of programmes enjoyed by communities that are doing just fine*”
- Unequal *distribution* of environmental goods
- Heynen et al., 2006:
  - “*inequitable distribution of urban canopy cover within Milwaukee*”
  - “*those ... with higher median household income, non-Hispanic White residents, and low housing- vacancy rates are more likely to have greater total canopy cover*”

## Activity 3. Further dimensions of environmental justice

Watch the two videos

- Yaron Answers:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GskESen\\_Ln8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GskESen_Ln8)
- Beyond Flint:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOFzuFAfQ8U>

Get into four groups and discuss the question

(Make notes/ keep focus during video)

- **Question:** *“How does capitalism address the need to protect the environment?”*
- **Solutions:** *how to protect the environment within capitalism?*

# EJ: Beyond EPA

- South Bronx:
  - 25% of Manhattan’s waste;
  - disproportionate asthma cases;
  - asthma: *“can’t do stuff that other people do in life”*
- ***“None else is being asked away [sic] if you should breathe or do you want a job”***
- Beyond equitable distribution of environmental risks and benefits, and fair and meaningful participation in environmental decision-making (EPA), Schlosberg (2007) adds:
- *“...capability of communities and individuals to function and flourish in society”*

**Othering**

# Environmental racism: in research

- Strong quantitative and geospatial approaches to “prove” statistically racial discrimination
- Critics:
  - Assume racism and discrimination are discrete, **overt acts** that can be **measured**
  - Study racism as an **ideology** operating in a particular political economic system
- Racism as ideology: premised on practice of ***othering***

# Activity

- Watch this video: John Pilger - Imperialism in Australia  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3qItZbRAcg>
  - **Warning: there is explicit mention of cruelty and extreme violence**
- Read the two texts: “Othering”
  - Discuss: What is “othering”?
  - What does “othering” do?

# OTHERING 101: WHAT IS “OTHERING”?

- *By “othering”, we mean any action by which an individual or group becomes mentally classified in somebody’s mind as “**not one of us**”.*
- *Rather than always remembering that every person is a complex bundle of emotions, ideas, motivations, reflexes, priorities, and many other subtle aspects, it’s sometimes easier to dismiss them as being in some way **less human, and less worthy** of respect and dignity [and equal rights], than we are.*

<https://therearenoothers.wordpress.com/2011/12/28/othering-101-what-is-othering/>



# Othering (Gabriel, 2012)

- A "**modern opposition** of the **relation** between a **Self** and an **Other**" (Noble, 2015):  
**othering** (creation of an "other")
- Othering: dominant ideology of colonial culture (Rieder, 2008)
  - **Explain** East (*Other*) to the West (*Self*); e.g. Muslim early encounters
  - Binary relation: European Self vs. non-European Other
  - Establish **own identity** through opposition to and vilification of Other
- **Deny** Other those characteristics that define the Self
  - E.g. reason, dignity, love, pride, heroism, nobility, human rights
  - Ready for: exploitation, oppression, etc. – denying essential humanity
- Said: Western identity and culture forged by othering logic
  - Dehumanizes or **devalues** other people
  - E.g. primitives, uncivilized, orientals, blacks, non-believers, women
  - Denying Other her **own voice**, i.e. opportunity to speak for herself
  - Instead: attributing qualities, opinions **of own culture** and identity

# Argument 2

*Othering produces environmental injustice* (and transformation)

- Because: it allows mobilising resources that facilitate distributive/ procedural/ recognition injustice
- (Related to the use of/ access to nature and natural resources)
- Racism as ideology: premised on practice of ***othering***
  - Othering serves to justify (“explain”) reasonableness of racism

# Terra Nullius



Collection of the Philosophical Institute of Victoria Hulton Archive—Getty Images

- Captain Cook: Australia *Terra Nullius*
  - “land belonging to nobody”
  - White colonisers have right to occupy
- Aborigines not human - “part of nature”
  - “Noble savage”
- **No human communities:**
  - No established **political system** or existing **code of law**
  - No recognisable **tenure** in land
- As **inhabitants = animals**, the place is **unpopulated**, i.e. the land can be occupied
- **OTHERING:**
  - Denying humans (aborigines) that they are humans (links to racism)
  - Denying them their rights (to land)

## Terra Nullius: well...



IMAGE: ABORIGINES USING FIRE TO HUNT KANGAROOS BY JOSEPH LYCETT, APPROXIMATELY 1775-1828. (NLA NLA.PC-AN2962715-S20)

But this was a very humanised world

- Aborigines **manipulated landscapes/ ecosystems with fire for hunting**
  - Make access easier through thick and prickly vegetation
  - Maintain vegetation to encourage new growth and attract game
  - Encourage development of useful food plants (cooking, warmth, spiritual reasons)
- **Aboriginal burning changed Australia's climate** (study):
  - By burning (altering vegetation), Aborigines altered the local climate
  - They extended the dry season and delayed the start of the monsoon season

## Terra Nullius: agriculture



Painting by Eugene von Guérard

Ashcroft, 2009: What justifies take over of lands?

- **No agriculture:** European mind = unable to comprehend owner's relationship with land
- Rights of occupation established by Bible; according to John Locke:
  - *“God gave the World to Men to make use of it ... [and] the Earth...for the support and comfort of their being”*
  - Where there has been no improvement of nature, men had **not acted according to Genesis**
  - Where **no evidence of “use”** such as agriculture, buildings, monuments, and temples, it was assumed that people did not have a concept of landed property, hence could not be seen as **possessors**

## Terra Nullius: imposing agrarian ecologies



Published by Kerry and Co, Australia, 1884-1917, MAAS Collection, 85/1284-1628

- Establishment of settler colonies in Australia, which impose the **domination of agrarian culture, stealing the land** belonging to **hunter-gatherers**

# Othering and violent land dispossession (environmental justice)

- Australia seen as “Terra Nullius” because Aborigines are (othered as) not humans, which justifies the violent dispossession of their lands
  - distributive injustice re: resource allocation (who gets what)
- Aborigines have...
  - ...neither voice in the process of deciding what to do with those lands (procedural EJ)...
  - ...nor recognition of their rights to land (recognition EJ)

# Take-away points

- Environmental racism – environmental justice
  - Not only race; socio-economics, class, gender, religion too
  - Distributive, but also procedural and representational
  - Uneven bads; but also uneven goods
  - At both nat'l and int'l level
- Othering: helps forge an *ideology* for environmental discrimination and injustice (i.e. to justify these)
  - E.g. colonialism: discrimination naturalised through othering that permitted (justified the use of force and) resource dispossession