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by Scott Morris
Environmentalism is growing and expanding. It is moving from moss-laden forests and foamy surf into the concrete and steel of cities. It moves like a fog; a thin, veiled vapor that lingers and expands until it permeates our neighborhoods, our homes, our lives.

Environmental Justice strives to take environmentalism further, to fill the dark and ignored corners of our society - the urban ghettos, the poor, rural communities, the exploited reservations - with the mist of environmentalism. The movement, a diverse grassroots collective coalescing into a national force, seeks to open our eyes to the racism and class exploitation that taints environmental protection and policies like a virus. Equality and justice for all, two basic founding principles of our nation, are the rallying cry. All people - rich or poor, black, red or white - deserve to live in an ecologically healthy environment.

The ideals of equality, justice and liberty become meaningless - nothing but simple strings of letters that form words - if they are not carried out into realities. If any among us, in our neighborhood, city, nation or world, live without justice and equity, then none of us truly do.

While most of us surely believe this notion of justice for all, what can we actually do about it? Swamped with school, jobs, family and the everyday bustle, we find ourselves insulated from the realities of injustice. Insidious and unseen blinders constrain our worldview, so that we often fail to act.

But the first simple step to action is all around us and easy to access - education. Knowledge can strip away our blinders and be a catalyst for action. And it can take many forms: first-hand experience, taking a class, reading - anything.

I had such an opportunity in October when I traveled to Guatemala. The country is still recovering from over a decade of civil war, during which the U.S.-backed military government tortured and killed thousands of "subversive" guerrillas. But Guatemala and its people remain proud and determined, although overwhelmingly poor. In a land where two percent of the population owns 80 percent of the arable land, the majority must toil to make ends meet, spending their lives in suffocating poverty and back-breaking labor.

While there, I walked through crowded markets with families selling fruits and vegetables amid halos of droning flies. Mangy and sickly dogs brushed by my legs, too weak to beg for food. Grubby and dusty children, wearing tattered clothing and broad, innocent smiles, played soccer in the potholed streets. I saw crops of corn and coffee planted on steep mountainsides because the fertile valleys were occupied with export crops on their way to the United States.

I also saw, in the capital city, all the signs of affluent western culture - Coca-Cola, Marlboro ads, car dealerships. Huge shopping malls boasted designers stores and fast-food restaurants that we commonly see here - The Gap, McDonalds, Athlete's Foot.

The appalling disparity in wealth, equality and justice I witnessed hit me hard. It was an instant education; I immediately realized the harsh truths of inequality, thanks to the representative extremes played out in Guatemalan culture. There are those who are oppressed, who suffer injustice, who struggle to rise up and fight for equality. And it is up to us to learn to listen, to open our ears to their pleas.

This issue of the Planet is dedicated to those who are demanding to be heard, both locally and nationally. While in a country such as Guatemala injustice and inequality are blatantly obvious, they nevertheless exist here, in our society, and closer than a lot of us think. It is now time for us to listen, by beginning to educate ourselves. This magazine, while by no means comprehensive, is a start; a tool to open our ears and unshield our eyes. The voices and faces are there - it is time we acknowledge them.
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Percent of hazardous waste disposed of improperly throughout the 1970s: 85
Percent of U.S. cities deriving their water on total or part from ground water: 75
Percent of U.S. waterways unfit for swimming or fishing: 40
Number of Hispanic workers affected by pesticide-related illness: 300,000
Number of Hispanics included in upcoming EPA study for pesticide-related illnesses: 0
Number of states contributing to the largest hazardous waste landfill in the U.S., which is in an African American neighborhood: 45
Number of African Americans arrested in a civil disobedience campaign against siting a PCB waste facility outside their community in Warren County, North Carolina: 500
Amount of uranium resources within the borders of the U.S. that are under Native Indian land: 2/3
Percent of land owned by Native Indians: 3
Number of "monitored retrievable nuclear storage sites" on Native Indian land: 15 of 18
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Amount of cancerous discharge in Bellingham Bay that is illegal: 0
Number of municipal incinerators in Houston, Texas located in African American communities: 6 of 8
Number of African and Hispanic Americans that live near at least one toxic waste site: 3 of 5
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Number detonated on Shoshone Indian land: 600
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Number of uranium leases on Native Indian land in 1975: 380
Number on private land: 4
Tons of hazardous waste produced by Whatcom County industries each year: 3,500
Tons stored or deposited within the county borders: 0
Percent of pesticides used in Central America that are banned, restricted or unregistered in the U.S.: 75
Percent of world resources the U.S. consumes: 33
Percent of world population in the U.S.: 5
Average fine under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act in areas with the greatest white population: $335,566
Average fine under RCRA in areas with the greatest minority population: $55,318
Total cost to clean up all Superfund sites: $100,000,000,000

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Special thanks to Harper’s Magazine
They won’t be painting for Long
by Gabriel Cruden

Let’s just say you want to save the world. You want to end racism, classism and sexism. You want to give everyone the right to a clean and healthy environment. Seem unrealistic? It is . . . unless you are Michael Graham-Squire or Brandon Carter and environmental justice is the name of your game. For them, fighting for these ideals is an everyday reality.

Graham-Squire, slim, quiet, yet unbudging in his determination, and Carter, tall, easy-going, but serious about his passions, are two Western students who have chosen not to go about their daily lives in the usual fashion. Instead of waiting for someone else to do something about the environmental and social problems we face, they decided to do something themselves. And not tomorrow either. Today.

Graham-Squire, a senior at Fairhaven College, says he has “always been interested in environmental issues and social justice issues,” but for a long time felt he needed to choose between one or the other. “You can’t be out there fighting for the forest and care about people too,” he says with a grin. An image of this slight fellow positioning himself between a huge, old Douglas Fir tree and a slow, but steadily approaching yellow bulldozer springs to my mind. I begin to see what he means. Where do human concerns and social problems fit in when you only “fight for the forest?”

Carter, who is pursuing a double major at Fairhaven and Huxley, came to environmental justice in a similar way. “I have always been interested in urban pollution issues, which is why I became an environmental science major,” he says. “But then – all of a sudden – it’s all about trees and water.” Once again, where do human social issues such as racism, classism and sexism fit into environmental science? Environmentalism places a heavy emphasis on the wilderness and is generally not viewed through the lens of human social issues. What fills the environmental and human issues gap? The answer is environmental justice.

For both Graham-Squire and Carter, environmental justice fully addresses their seemingly divergent interests in environmental and human issues. It allows them to not only work toward social change, but to do it from an environmentally conscious perspective.

“I think disproportionate impact is the biggest key [phrase] in environmental justice,” says Carter thoughtfully. “It’s who’s bearing the brunt of pollution and the negative externalities of our capitalistic society,” he adds, leaning back in his chair, his hands on his head.

Graham-Squire nods his agreement: “It’s who gets to live in a nice quality environment and who gets dumped on. Environmental justice says that everybody has a right to a safe and healthy environment and that government enforcement actions shouldn’t favor one group in society and ignore other groups.”

With this theory in mind, Graham-Squire and Carter spent the past summer working with the Community Coalition for Environmental Justice (CCEJ) in hopes of turning the theory into a reality. Or, at the very least, to set in motion a process to address issues of environmental justice in the future.

CCEJ is an organization whose primary goal is to build a community coalition which identifies and eliminates environmental injustice, and advocates for and creates environmental justice. Coming from the perspective that environmental justice is a human right, CCEJ is currently focusing its efforts on a residential/industrial area called South Park.

Located in southwest Seattle on the Duwamish River, South Park contains the highest concentration of toxic waste sites in Washington. Graham-Squire and Carter began their work there by helping CCEJ’s research team put together a pollution profile. Upon completion, the pollution profile showed the number of industrial businesses located in South Park as well as the amount of pollution emitted on a neighborhood basis.
Graham-Squire worked on creating this list of polluting industrial businesses in South Park. Carter began by conducting air quality research, focusing on cases of asthma in children.

Both Graham-Squire and Carter spent many hours pouring over reports and sifting through documents from regulatory agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Ecology, and the King County Emergency Committee. They soon learned which businesses were responsible for the release of the most toxins in the South Park neighborhood. One of the worst offenders, and already targeted by residents, is Long Painting Company.

Long Painting Company sits surrounded by residential homes, some just a few feet from the facility, and holds over 6,000 gallons of hazardous and flammable materials on its grounds. The company has been operating without a permit to store hazardous materials since 1992. All that stands between South Park homeowners and Long Painting’s 6-day-a-week schedule of compression painting and sandblasting is an 8-foot-high wooden fence.

"There are a lot of children living in this neighborhood who have to live with paint fumes and particulates in the air," said Penni Cocking, a board member of the South Park Area Redevelopment Committee, in the South District Journal. "Relaxation is often difficult in this environment and some neighborhood residents worry about adverse health effects due to the close proximity between family-occupied homes and light industry."

When Graham-Squire and Carter went door-to-door interviewing residents, they found that approximately 50 percent of the residents felt Long Painting Company was a health hazard and were "very concerned" that Long Painting did not have the necessary permits for storing hazardous materials. "I have to smell the air to see if I can smell paint or solvents coming from Long Painting before I can let my 3-year-old daughter go outside and play," said a father of 3 children who lives near Long Painting.

It should be Long Painting who monitors air quality, not South Park parents. However, Graham-Squire labels Long Painting’s attitude as, "if you don’t like it, move." Ty Long, former owner of Long Painting, was quoted in the South District Journal as saying, "We haul steel, we paint it, we run forklifts around and we are noisy, but I employ about 400 people, and we are a business providing jobs." Incidentally, at age 57, Ty Long died of cancer.

Never mind that, according to Graham-Squire, very few of those 400 jobs belong to South Park residents. Never mind that nearby residents wake up each morning to find a layer of sooty dust on their cars, yards and windows. Never mind that many residents cannot afford to move even if they wanted to.

"People have the impression that poor communities don’t care about the environment or environmental concerns," says Graham-Squire with a sigh, like he has had to explain this before. "Basically, [poor communities] just define it differently. Their concern is not the rain forest and the spotted owls, it’s getting that incinerator to stop burning PVC plastics half a mile away from [them]."

Or, in the case of South Park, to stop Long Painting from releasing excessive amounts of toxins and particulate matter into the neighborhood. But can they be stopped?

One tool for fighting back that Graham-Squire and Carter helped introduce to South Park residents is...
the "Good Neighbor Agreement." With this agreement in hand, residents are able to hold polluting industries accountable for their actions. The agreement is a contract between businesses, the CCEJ and residents, and it lists the residents' demands of industry.

The agreement, which covers issues such as noise, air pollution, hazardous material storage and disposal, emergency planning, parking, arc welding, vibrations, and community reinvestment, seemed reasonable enough to South Park residents, who hoped to get local industries to sign on. However, when Graham-Squire and Carter approached Long Painting with the Good Neighbor Agreement, they "freaked out," says Carter with a grin. "They got real nervous and didn't want to talk to us about it."

"We're hoping to use Long Painting as a springboard," says Graham-Squire. "Boeing is the biggest and most polluting industry, but they're untouchable." At least for now. Meanwhile, Graham-Squire feels "the city owes the residents of South Park a big debt. If they weren't living there, who would be there to call the Puget Sound Air Pollution Authority and complain every week because there is particulate matter in the air?"

So, what are the top three things college students should know about Environmental Justice? "Number one is that you have to expand your view of the environment," says Carter without hesitation. This means recognizing that the environment is more than just Yellowstone National Park. "And number two," he adds, "is that you have to recognize that all the social factors in society are going to affect environmental decisions."

Graham-Squire expands: "If your goal is to have a sustainable ecological society, you're going to have to have a sustainable social structure, which means you're going to have to eliminate classism, racism, sexism - those oppressions in society that keep people from having opportunities." He takes a breath. "If you somehow get to a point in society where you have ecological sustainability and you don't have social equality, there's always going to be some group who gets dumped on or who gets the brunt of environmental injustice."

And number three? "There are just two," says Carter. The rest is up to us. But in the same way that the city of Seattle owes a debt to the residents of South Park, perhaps we all owe a debt to Michael Graham-Squire, Brandon Carter, and other environmental justice activists. Fighting for the rain forest and the spotted owl is important and necessary, but we live on this planet too. Graham-Squire and Carter are striving to create a better world, not just for humans, not just for trees, but for us all.

Gabriel Cruden, a senior Fairhaven student with an interdisciplinary concentration titled "Communication and Alternative Education through the Lens of Nature," is currently studying the courtship and mating behavior of spiders.
Sovereignty's last stand
by Anita White

A tall white sage smudge passes among the rally, and people separate as one at a time, they wave the smoke onto themselves to cleanse out anger. The audience, a mixture of Indians and whites, stand as still as the Indian leaders who are waiting for their chance to speak on the crowded wooden platform.

The rally at the International Peace Arch on the Canadian-United States border has multiple meanings, but the tribes hold one above the others - justice for their land. Across the country,
Indigenous People’s Day is touted as an alternative to Columbus Day. “To us, Columbus Day is not a day of celebration, it represents our loss,” said Bill Simmons, a Choctaw tribal member. “We lost our land and way of life and are still fighting for our sovereignty. We need to heal our land.”

Many people at the rally held signs reading, “Free Leonard Peltier, Justice for Peltier and our land.” An orange banner staked to the ground read, “Bring Peltier home.” Susan Morales-Finckel, master of ceremonies at the rally, said, “The land and Leonard Peltier and the people – they are the same thing. We talk about them together. Today is a way for us to reclaim many things – our sovereignty, our land, our people and our power. Leonard represents the injustice done to our lands; that is why he is part of why we are here today.”

Leonard Peltier is currently serving two life terms for his involvement in a shootout with the FBI on Oglala tribal land. In the early ’70s Oglala tribal infighting, heavily influenced by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and FBI, about land use – particularly uranium mining – caused a final eruption in which one Indian and two FBI agents died.

When tribes were pushed off of their original lands, they inherited the seemingly useless arid and dry regions above what is now called the Grants Mineral Belt. This belt sweeps from Saskatchewan all the way to New Mexico and Arizona. Ironically, it also holds the greatest energy resources in North America. Two-thirds of its uranium and a large volume of its petroleum and coal lie under lands that the Indians now occupy.

During the 1960s the BIA, an agency of the Department of the Interior, interfered with tribal sovereignty by influencing tribal councils to accept mining offers. The BIA worked to meet the needs of the energy and mining companies, not the Indians. The Crow and Northern Cheyenne leased mining rights to 345,000 acres of their reservations in Montana. In Arizona, the Navajo and Hopi leased Black Mesa for coal strip-mining, which they rescinded during the conflict with the Oglala. The Cheyenne, Crow, Western Shoshone and Laguna Pueblo also began canceling and fighting leases on their land at this time.

Many of the tribal representatives at the Peace Arch rally came from areas where the option to manage their own resources and protect their people from pol-
"Slade Gorton is like a hemorrhoid—irritating, but not too deadly."

...olution is still being affected by decisions made in the '60s and '70s. Today, many of the energy resource issues stem from the fight for tribal sovereignty. Sovereignty is the ability of tribes to make their own decisions and govern themselves, separate from any other government.

At the rally, speakers expressed the belief that firmly establishing their sovereignty will alleviate much of the pressure they receive from government agencies to give in to energy companies' demands. Mining companies are attracted to reservations because they are treated as separate nations when it comes to the environmental side of the coin. The Environmental Protection Agency has no jurisdiction on tribal land. Environmental impact statements are not required and the mining companies are under no obligation to disclose what impacts to the people or land their actions will incur. Because many tribes are poor and want a better life, they often make uninformed decisions. Sometimes sovereignty can work against environmental justice.

The Oglala's fight for sovereignty dates back to the signing of the original Indian treaties. The Oglala Indians live on Pine Ridge Reservation, located in South Dakota at the foot of the Black Hills, on top of part of the Grants Mineral Belt. The Oglala are part of the larger Lakota, or Sioux, nation. The original treaty between the Lakota and the United States, signed in 1868, included the Lakota homelands and hunting grounds in the Dakotas, Wyoming and the Black Hills. The U.S. government declared the treaty invalid three years later when miners discovered gold in the Black Hills. The New York Times reported on July 7, 1876 that the War Department was advocating "a policy of extermination of the Indians ... the speedier, the better." Two months after the article, the government released a formal statement ordering the Lakota to relinquish all claim to the Black Hills.

Almost a hundred years later, minerals again became a major issue on Lakota land when uranium strip-mining companies, with the backing of the BIA, began to pressure the Oglala tribe to lease or cede land rights to the Department of the Interior. In 1973 part of the Oglala tribe requested that the American Indian Movement (AIM) come to the reservation to help them keep their land. Prior to this time, AIM had a reputation as a radical and sometimes violent Indian movement due to their involvement in burning the BIA building in Washington, D.C. AIM's original goal of revalidating Indian treaty claims in America apparently changed in the minds of the government when they became involved with the Oglala tribe. According to a 1974 FBI document describing AIM's intentions, their mission changed to "preventing resource exploitation of Indian lands."

The mining companies had the backing of the BIA and the FBI - neither organization wanted AIM on the reservation. "We were on Pine Ridge to stand up for the Oglala land and people," said Morales-Finchel, also an AIM member in the '70s. The Oglala had hoped that the presence of 200 more people would create some media attention and help them keep their land.

But, the day before the shootout, the head of the tribal council agreed to cede over one-eighth of the Oglala reservation to the Department of the Interior. According to a joint report by the U.S. Geological Survey, the Bureau of Mines and the BIA, "numerous potential pay zones" and "relatively shallow drilling depths ... combine to make the Pine Ridge Reservation an attractive prospecting area" for oil, gas, uranium and gravel. Although the studies for this report were completed in the same year as the shootout, the disclosure of the report to the Oglala people came after Peltier's conviction and the AIM members had left the reservation.

The government involvement and support of the mining interests in the case of the Oglala's land happened 20 years ago, but many environmental justice and sovereignty issues involving the tribes are still occurring today.
"I heard about this senator from Washington," said Jim Main, a Gros-Ventres and Assiniboine tribal member at the rally. "Just like they say about the senator in Idaho, Slade Gorton is like a hemorrhoid - irritating but not too deadly," he laughed into the microphone. "I heard he is trying to do us in," he added, directly addressing the threat to their sovereignty.

Gorton is referred to in The New York Times as having "a 25-year gripe about the Indians." The September 1997 article explains that Gorton attached two riders to unrelated spending bills that would change how Indians receive federal funds and force the tribes to waive sovereign immunity from civil lawsuits, or lose up to $767 million in federal funding. These riders would affect the sovereignty of the 554 recognized Indian tribes. According to the Times, Gorton said he consulted with Ben Nighthorse Campbell, the Senate's only Indian. Campbell responded that the riders would pass, "over my dead body."

Locally, Gorton has taken sides between the Lummi Nation and non-tribal resident disputes. Three years ago he attempted to add a rider that would restrict the Lummi from taking any action that would adversely affect non-Indians, or risk losing half of their federal funding. The Times said the tribes believe Gorton's motivation is personal. In the mid-1970s Gorton, as Washington State attorney general, argued and lost a landmark Supreme Court case in which the Court upheld Indian fishing rights.

"We need to be warriors and protect our land now, just as we acted like warriors then," said Morales-Finckel. The sage from the rally has long since burned out, but the distinction between the typical "save the trees and owls" fight of mainstream environmental groups and the Indians' people-based fight is still with the group at the rally. "If one isn't healthy; either is the other. We are not eco-warriors, and we are not terrorists. We are fighting for our Mother and brothers and sisters and the four-legged. Being a warrior is not picking up a gun; just a pen. We began with Pine Ridge, and we will continue to reclaim our health, land and people."

Anita White, a Huxley student who believes life is one great adventure, loves her grandma very much.
A boat carrying state environmental inspectors on a tour of a toxic lagoon begins to disintegrate beneath them, and they are forced to jump ship or be bathed in the hazardous chemicals...

No, this did not happen in some far-off toxic waste dump. It occurred in the middle of an urban community called Altgeld Gardens in southeast Chicago, which over 150,000 people call home.

Altgeld Gardens community activist Hazel Johnson calls the area a “toxic doughnut,” referring to the 50 active or closed commercial hazardous waste landfills, 100 factories, and more than 100 abandoned toxic waste sites that surround the predominantly minority neighborhood. Families struggling to live in Altgeld Gardens, where 70 percent of the population is African American and 11 percent Latino, fear for their health. Given the surroundings, their concerns seem justified.

Altgeld Gardens represents a troubling trend in the United States, where the poor and minorities are disproportionately living amongst America’s industrial waste. The emergence of statistical evidence illustrating this tendency has generated a movement for environmental justice. Environmental Justice is strongly connected to social justice, but holds a tenuous link to the mainstream environmental movement.

Environmental Justice leaders have often challenged the mainstream environmental groups, whose primary membership is middle- to upper-class whites concerned predominantly with wilderness protection. Indeed, establishing a political connection between social justice and environmentalism — the aim of Environmental Justice — has been elusive. An anonymous community leader from Birmingham, Alabama complains, “if it does not hoot in the night, or swim upstream, environmentalists are not interested.”

“For the first time in the history of the world, every human being is now subjected to contact with dangerous chemicals, from the moment of conception until death.” This was the message put forth by Rachel Carson in her book Silent Spring; it was a bombshell that launched the modern environmental movement.

The book discusses how the use of pesticides and other products being developed for our convenience were turning “not just against the insects, but against the earth itself.” Published in 1962, Silent Spring spawned a new era of environmental activism, with concerns on issues such as air and water pollution and toxic waste disposal becoming the central themes.

A legendary campaign in the history of the environmental movement occurred in New York state at a site called Love Canal. The casual dumping of toxic waste was commonplace at Love Canal for decades, yet somehow the waste site was leased for one dollar, and a school was constructed on the site.

Over time, several residents of Love Canal developed health problems and erupted in protest at the realization of toxic chemicals in their presence. Angry residents demanded compensation for damages to their health and property in confrontational protests, while embarrassed politicians fast-tracked legislation to create a federal program to identify and clean up hazardous waste sites. The community’s efforts laid a critical foundation for the modern environmental movement.

Numerous community groups formed to combat local environmental hazards in all parts of the country. While many communities were successful in their efforts to keep polluters out of their backyards, others are forced to live among a disproportionate share of polluting industries and waste sites. The troubling reality is that these communities are poor, predominantly occupied by minorities and have the least amount of political resources in the United States.
"Environmentalism has always equaled wilderness and the great outdoors, and nobody has ever talked about the urban environment."

Many environmental justice advocates are critical of the mainstream environmental movement for failing to identify the inequitable distribution of hazardous waste facilities among the poor and minorities as an issue. Peggy Shepard, urban environmentalist and co-founder of West Harlem Environmental Action, says "Environmentalism has always equaled wilderness and the great outdoors, and nobody has ever talked about the urban environment."

Others are more critical of the mainstream movement as being an elitist movement which serves to protect white, middle- to upper-class citizens. James Noel Smith, author of *Environmental Quality and Social Justice in Urban America*, criticizes mainstream environmentalism as "a deliberate attempt by a bigoted and selfish middle-class society to perpetuate its own values and protect its own lifestyle at the expense of the poor and the underprivileged."

A 1982 protest at Warren County, North Carolina is now widely recognized as having spawned a national movement for environmental justice. Professor and respected environmental justice advocate Robert Bullard writes:

"This mostly African-American and rural county had been selected as the burial site for 30,000 cubic yards of soil contaminated with highly toxic PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls). Oil laced with PCBs had been illegally dumped along roadways in 14 North Carolina counties in 1978; the roadways were cleaned up in 1982."

By Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards, the relocation of the hazardous material to Warren County made little sense. For instance, the water table lies only seven feet below the landfill, 43 feet short of EPA requirements. It seems obvious that the community's demographic makeup played a role in siting the landfill. Indeed, Bullard concludes that the decision to site in Warren County "made more political sense than environmental sense."

Residents staged massive protests in opposition to the landfill, and more than 500 people were arrested, including the leaders of national civil rights organizations. Although the protests failed to stop the project, they did mobilize a broad movement of both environmentalists and civil rights advocates.

The Warren County demonstrations also caught the attention of District of Columbia delegate Walter Fauntroy, who was chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus. Fauntroy initiated a 1983 study by the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) regarding hazardous waste landfill siting in EPA Region IV, the southeast United States. The GAO study depicts a strong relationship between race, socioeconomic status and the siting of hazardous waste landfills. African Americans constituted about one-fifth of the region's population, yet African American communities contained three-fourths of the landfills. It became increasingly difficult to label it all mere coincidence.

Four years later, a landmark study by the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ entitled *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*, took the uncompromising position that race is the most important factor in the location of abandoned toxic waste sites. The 1987 report concludes:

"The proportion of minority members in communities with commercial hazardous waste facilities is double that of communities without such facilities. Where two or more such facilities are found, the proportion of minority members is nearly triple that in other communities. In fact, the best predictor of where to find hazardous waste is to classify communities by race, not income or real estate values."

The study's director, Benjamin Chavis, used the term "environmental racism" in reference to the study's findings. However, Chavis was not alone in his assertion that racist behavior is being perpetuated through the nation's environmental policies.
A 1992 National Law Journal study charges that EPA is guilty of environmental racism in its enforcement of Superfund laws. Upon review of the study the Journal found:

"There is a racial divide in the way the U.S. government cleans up toxic waste sites and punishes polluters. White communities see faster action, better results and stiffer penalties than communities where blacks, Hispanics and other minorities live. This unequal protection occurs whether the community is wealthy or poor."

The Journal reiterated what had been assumed by environmental justice activists for a decade: that minorities and poor segments of society were shouldering a disproportionate share of America’s industrial waste due to the institutionalized racism of a white-dominated society.

On February 11, 1994 President Bill Clinton signed Executive Order 12898, titled "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low Income Populations." The order required:

"Each Federal Agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations in the United States and its territories and possessions."

To achieve this goal, the order calls for the creation of an Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice headed by the Administrator of the EPA, or an appointed designee. The Working Group consists of the heads, or designees of all Cabinet departments, as well as many other executive agencies. It is the Working Group’s responsibility to see that affected federal agencies comply with the order.

"We will develop strategies to bring justice to Americans who are suffering disproportionately," EPA administrator Carol Browner remarked at the signing of the order. "We will develop strategies to ensure that low-income and minority communities have access to information about their environment – and that they have an opportunity to participate in shaping the government policies that affect their health and environment."

While at risk of sounding like Mr. Clinton on the stump, Ms. Browner’s comments and the administration’s targeting of environmental justice are nevertheless welcome tokens for a movement which has identified government as part of the problem.

Environmental justice is still experiencing growing pains, slowly building a cohesive national identity. The events of its past have served to help the movement define itself. Now the fight is to ensure that none of those events repeat themselves, and that environmental justice can be shared by all.

Tim Quiggle is a Political Science major who likes to ride his bicycle and meander through taverns on State Street.
After Sandy, a 21-year-old student of Fine Arts here at Western, had been searching for work this past summer for more than a month, she started to get a little desperate, and began thinking, “Gosh, I’d take just about anything.” She eventually did find work, through a temp agency. The job was nothing she was thrilled about, but then neither was unemployment.

Sandy found work at Bellingham’s Heath Tecna, a builder of airplane interiors for Boeing and other large companies. Her job involved assembling fiberglass parts, bonding pieces together and sanding them down.

Heath Tecna is a relatively young company, only several years old. Coming in the wake of the past several decades of regulation of industrial and workplace environments, the company does have clear procedures for worker safety that it tries to follow, complete with animated cartoons for orientation of new workers, cartoons which portray, among other things, buckets of happy, smiling “friendly” chemicals dancing alongside nasty ones which are supposed to be approached cautiously.

At a plant like this one, exposure to damaging elements, industrial adhesives, solvents, and fiberglass dust, is unavoidable. “There was a book outside the Safety Office we were supposed to look at,” Sandy said, “but I never did... [it was] a 500-page book that had all the chemicals you could be exposed to. Actually it was like six different books, these huge ridiculous things.”

She described a rash she and co-workers used to get up and down their arms after working with the fiberglass. “I tried to talk to people, you know, to say, ‘Look, if it does this to your arms, imagine what it’s doing to your lungs.’

Do workplace risks faced by a white, middle-class college student in Whatcom County, Washington really have anything to do with Environmental Justice (EJ)? Looked at through the filter of “free informed consent,” the question leads us to answer an emphatic yes: when a person consents to a job, for example, or a community consents to a new industry in the neighborhood, the issue arises as to whether such consent was in fact free or adequately well-informed.

Sandy was faced with a “choice” between continued unemployment or work at Heath Tecna; her consent was not really free – she was faced with more of a “non-choice,” a “lesser-of-two-evils” question. It seems rare, in fact, that anyone gets to freely choose their work; wouldn’t it be nice to just walk in anywhere you choose and set up shop? But
Somebody's Gotta Do It: 
Finding Work in a Dirty World 
by Adam Gottschalk

when a particular job involves risking one's health, the connection to EJ is apparent.

Principle Eight, from a set of principles adopted at the first National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit which met in Washington, D.C. in 1991, says the following:

"Environmental Justice affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment" (emphasis added).

This statement stands in direct contrast to the notion that, when it comes to dirty work, "Somebody's gotta do it." Aside from free consent, the question of being well-informed or not is tough to clarify. Melinda Button, Safety-Health coordinator at Heath Tecna, points out "Right-To-Know" laws require that workers be informed of any workplace risks they might be exposed to. As Sandy implied, though, what full-time employee has the chance to sit down and read through six 500-page volumes of chemical indexes? And how likely is it that the average person would really understand what they were reading?

The truth is, even if you can name names and point to possibilities, you still can't be very sure what the risks really are. It is one thing for a government agency to monitor levels of pollution. It is entirely another thing to accurately correlate pollutant levels with their ultimate effects on human health.

Minda Phillips, of the Northwest Air Pollution Authority (NWAPA), agrees that correlating health impacts to emissions is the critical, and prohibitively difficult, step that must
be taken now. Since the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) of 1969, and other related acts, such as the Clean Air Act of 1970, greater efforts have been made to monitor and regulate levels of emissions, from industrial and non-industrial sources alike.

This does not mean, however, that we can be significantly more sure today what man-made elements in our environment are responsible for specific cases of illness and disease. NWAPA knows, for example, that industry in this area (Whatcom, Skagit, and Island counties) is responsible for 96 percent of all sulfur dioxide released. We know, in a general sense, that sulfur dioxide contributes to acid rain and exacerbates asthma and other respiratory illnesses; how many asthmatics in Whatcom County have been adversely affected by industrial emissions? Unfortunately, it is impossible to say — precise and reliable procedures have yet to be invented.

One of the most frightening facts of modem life is that there are tens of thousands of man-made chemicals in everyday use, and only a small fraction of those have been studied to determine their human and ecological toxicities. According to United Nations Environment Program documents, of the 80,000 "artificial chemical compounds" in use in 1992, no information was available on the health effects of 63,000, with complete profiles available for only about 1,500.

The people charged with protecting us (from ourselves?) — government regulators, doctors and others — have effectively decided that "innocent until proven guilty" applies equally to chemicals and production processes as it does to living, breathing men and women.

Button says Heath Tecna has an excellent worker safety program, based on accident statistics compared to other similar facilities. She agrees, though, that the fundamental fact is that safety procedures are necessary only because work at the plant involves very real (if elusive) risks.

The questions pertaining to EJ are equally as much about levels of danger as they are about distribution of such dangers: how and why is it that certain people come to work at Heath Tecna? Do such people have any other options (were their choices really free choices)? Does their awareness of risks really justify being exposed to them?

When Sandy asked a supervisor about the rash she and most others in her department were getting, she was told, "Oh, yeah, it doesn't really go away. You have to just wash your arms with cold water and it makes the itching go away." The cold water trick didn't work for Sandy. "My rash didn't go away for a month after I left. My arms were like always red," she said.

None of her co-workers seemed to worry too much; presumably, they were just happy to have found a steady job. In this case, the problem was not a lack of provisions for worker protection. "They're just lazy," Sandy said. Everyone had Tyvek" suits and dust masks they were supposed to wear; however, Sandy points out that inside those suits, it got to be quite hot in summer and people were less inclined to wear them. Furthermore, she said the rash would appear despite the suits.

Sandy was right to worry about more than just superficial "nuisances" like the rash. She describes one workplace contaminant monitoring session she happened to witness one day.

Inspectors used a special apparatus, attached to individual workers, to measure levels of fiberglass dust and toxic fumes they might have been inhaling. The instrument seemed flimsy to Sandy, and didn't, for example, seem to imitate the human inhalation process. "It was just like a cup," she said. When she asked later about the results of the inspection, she was told everything was fine, but she still wants to know, "Who decides what are acceptable levels?"

When a person is in need of work, or when a locality is need of economic development, creating more job opportunities, and expanding its tax base to pay for infrastructure, the "free" and "informed" parts of consent tend to drop away dramatically in importance.

Whatcom County was in such a position of desperation as it moved into the 1960s. What had been a community traditionally centered on resource-based activities such as farming, forestry and fishing, started to move more thoroughly into manufacturing and industrial activities, the next stage in development.

Today, some of the most important industries in the world, many of which came into being in the '60s, are right here in our vicinity: Georgia Pacific, for example, produces some of the finest grade ethanol anywhere; at one time, Intalco Aluminum was the largest producer of aluminum in the country, producing about 300,000 tons per year.

Intalco is the single largest employer in the county, with some 1,200 workers. When it opened in 1966, area residents were ecstatic. One official for a local economic agency was quoted in 1965 as saying that Intalco "will enable Whatcom County to emerge from mediocrity to its fullest realizations."
What has accompanied the benefits of industrialization here, as anywhere, has been the realization of its negative effects. When people consented to economic development several decades ago, was their consent really free and well-informed? Doubtful. Someone dying to get out of agriculture would probably take anything they could get. Local officials desperate to offer their constituents economic development would probably not scrutinize too closely the potential costs versus the benefits of new industries.

Again, it was only about 1970 that significant federal environmental regulations began to come into being. Those regulations have gotten stricter as more is understood about toxins and pollution. The dangerous thing is that various economic activities are allowed to begin and continue until such time as someone can prove they are damaging.

Only several years after Intalco moved in, the land surrounding the plant became contaminated from fluoride emissions. Intalco did not argue this fact, and proceeded to pay compensation in a number of cases, totaling almost a million dollars. The first to sue was Paul G. Barci. Barci claimed his land had been ruined; ironically (and sadly), Barci had been declared Whatcom County's soil conservation farmer of the year only the year before. Barci and others who find their surroundings and personal health compromised for the sake of economic development become the victims of economic blackmail.

In addition, for the first six years of Intalco's operation, there were no hoods over the pots where alumina is reduced to aluminum by electrolysis. Workers during that time were exposed to a great deal of toxins, including not just aluminum fumes, but also fluoride, carbon monoxide, and benzene-soluble hydrocarbons. A new dry-scrubbing pollution control system installed in 1972 reduced worker exposure a great deal.

Years later, in 1992, a case involving a group of 25 employees, who had worked at Intalco during those first six years without the pot hoods, was finally decided in Washington State Supreme Court in favor of the workers, who had sued for health damages. Many issues brought up during the decade-long legal ordeal have implications beyond the scope of just Intalco or Whatcom County labor safety.

The condition the Intalco workers came down with was dubbed "pot-room palsy" by the occupational medicine experts who examined them. In four separate trials, juries affirmed the position of the workers. The trials set legal precedents by making a concrete connection between aluminum plant employment and neurotoxic effects.

Intalco defended itself by citing the lack of prior studies making such a connection. However, medical experts testified that "there are many cases in occupational medicine where an association between a patient's work conditions and disease has gone unnoticed for years, often because the patient's illness has been misdiagnosed."

Industrial workers are not the only ones being unwittingly exposed to toxic threats. Industries of all kinds that have been relying more heavily on chemical regimes to achieve their desired produc-

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Tipping the scales of justice
by Christopher Schwindt

Exactly how is the "Environmental Justice" movement defining its agenda? Is it a coherent force, or is it an umbrella title for a hodgepodge of issues and actions? Could the movement be a misguided effort, diverting attention from underlying social and economic problems? Or is it just a platform—a source of power and recognition—for individual community members trying to protect their interests?

One criticism of Environmental Justice is that it is too concerned with racism and classism as the source of so-called "environmental inequities." If these forces do not enter into environmental decisionmaking process in some identifiable way, then environmental justice groups may be seeking the wrong kinds of solutions.

"Regardless of whether any particular case fits the definition of environmental racism, the fact remains that environmental problems—from a minority perspective—are rather trivial in comparison to the larger economic and civil liberty issues: solve these and you have solved most, if not all, of the environmental inequities," stated Kent Jeffreys to a Congressional Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights in March 1993. Jeffreys was representing the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a non-profit public interest group "dedicated to the principles of individual liberty and property rights."

"Legislation is unlikely to solve all of the problems; Jim Crow environmental laws don't exist, so they cannot be repealed. All government actions are likely to become skewed in favor of politically powerful groups," Jeffreys observed.

Jeffreys also suggested that the exorbitant amount of money spent on some Superfund cleanup projects could be better used in minority communities for health clinics, scholarship funds or public parks. With a limited amount of governmental resources available for improving the quality of life, he suggests it could be more effective to improve basic public services and increase opportunities in disadvantaged communities than it would be to clean up all traces of industrial pollution.

Jeffreys also indicated that Environmental Justice activists may be overlooking the health benefits of employment in potentially polluting industries: "Increases in income may more than offset increases in pollution exposure [in reduced mortality rates]. After all, one of the most unhealthy conditions known to health researchers is unemployment. Simply creating jobs in minority communities may correct for any past environmental degradation."

While some in the movement may construe Jeffreys' position as "economic blackmail," others may see it as "economic opportunity taken" in a competitive labor market. No one would disagree that all employees should be safeguarded from undue risks and hazardous exposures. But 'risk' is often a matter of degree, involving many complicated and unknown factors. In some cases risk will be hard to define and identify, in others, like chronic exposure to pesticides or death-defying stunt work, it will be more clearcut.

There have certainly been cases of worker abuse and wrongdoing on the part of employers in exposing employees to risk. Minorities and the poor have often been the victims of such abuses. Bringing these instances to public attention and going after the offenders in the legal and legislative arenas is an important effort, to which the Environmental Justice movement has no doubt contributed. But it is unreasonable to call for the elimination of all polluting or hazardous industries, as some groups have done.

"Environmental Justice" needs to be more moderate in its rejection of risky employment and the opportunities it can represent, especially for initially disadvantaged communities.

The world does not contain the resources to rapidly raise the standard of living for all people to the standard we enjoy. Therefore, there will always be some people for whom employment in a hazardous industry, even at great personal risk, represents a real increase in their quality of life. That is why some Mexicans are willing to travel 1,000 miles to pick fruit under hazardous conditions for minimal pay. This opportunity still represents a net increase in their quality of life.

It may be a worthy and achievable goal to eliminate this kind of situation where we can, such as in our own country. But to do so requires raising the quality of life for all citizens to the point where work in a hazardous occupation
will no longer be an attractive option.

If such conditions were achieved, then hazardous industries would either have to raise their prices to attract labor and reduce risks, or operate out of countries where the standard of living is lower, in which case the "injustice" would still exist elsewhere.

Raising everyone's standard of living would appear to be a massive, long-term social project, involving considerable redistribution of the private wealth of this country, among other revolutionary changes. Does Environmental Justice aspire to such lofty goals?

The burdens of environmental risks are unequally carried by minorities and the poor, according to Environmental Justice proponents. Environmentally hazardous areas are disproportionately associated with poor and minority communities. Creating a more "equitable" distribution of environmental risks has been suggested as a possible solution to this kind of environmental inequity.

However, this may be a short-term remedy, at best. Evidence that market dynamics, or economic forces, are the real reason poor and minority communities are located near environmentally hazardous areas has been raised by critics such as Vicki Been, a professor at the NYU School of Law. In an article in the Yale Law Journal, she poses the important question, "Which came first – the people of color and the poor, or the LULU?" neighborhoods, and thus may soon be left to people of color or the poor, recreating the pattern of inequitable siting."

Been's article also questions the failures of some studies that strive to illustrate inequitable distributions of LULUs. She shows how these studies fail to consider what the neighborhoods were like before the facilities were located. The studies also fail to track the demographic changes in these areas over time. Therefore, they ignore the possibility that aspects of our free market system other than "site location decisions" are the cause of inequity. "The distribution of LULUs would then look more like a confluence of housing discrimination, poverty, and free market economics. Remedies would have to take those forces into account."

If activists do not propose changing our free-market system in some fundamental way, their solutions to the problems of inequitable distribution are likely to fail in the long run. Assuming the hazardous wastes we have, as well as our vital industrial facilities, must be located somewhere, the market will allocate these burdens along the path of least resistance. Logically, disadvantaged communities may be "targeted." Are any Environmental Justice groups promoting economically driven, market-based solutions to change this?

Forcing a reduction of pollution might bring its "true" costs to bear. Perhaps this would be ideal, and it certainly fits with a long-term environmentalist vision of sustainability, but what should we do in the meantime? What is our immediate focus, given a limited resource base? Would it be more helpful to begin to regulate the marketplace in some way, or to pump vast sums of money into social projects for disadvantaged communities?

It is hard to believe that hazardous industries would target minority communities due to prejudicial motives. Of the many different criteria that go into the choice of where to site a hazardous waste facility, is racial discrimination really one of them? Chemical Waste Management, Inc. is one of the nation's largest owner/operators of such facilities, and has been strongly criticized by environmental justice advocates. Charles J. McDermott, CWM's Director of Government Affairs, described the circumstances of their siting decisions to the March 1993 subcommittee meeting.

McDermott first noted that 76 percent of their waste disposal facilities "Legislation is unlikely to solve all of the problems; Jim Crow environmental laws don't exist, so they cannot be repealed."
Environmental Justice is about the life and death struggles that poor communities and communities of color face everyday. This includes some of the least powerful and most disadvantaged groups in our society: poor mothers, inner-city families, farm workers, blue collar workers and recent immigrants. Despite a lack of resources, these groups are demanding a safe and healthy environment in which to live, work and play. To accomplish this requires fundamental changes in our economy, land use planning, and environmental policies.

“Environmental Justice is a misuse of scarce resources. It is better to spend money on social services than to clean up Superfund sites.”

This is not an "either-or" issue. Everyone deserves to have basic social services and a quality environment. According to a 1992 National Law Journal study, it takes longer to clean up Superfund sites in minority communities and the cleanup standards and fines are lower than in white communities. Superfund was created to insure that businesses pay the cost of their own pollution. Industries themselves should be accountable for what they produce instead of making pollution a socialized cost. Superfund uses public funds only in the absence of any liable parties.

“Racism and classism don’t enter into environmental decision-making.”

Although we live in a rich multicultural country, a small group controls wealth and power. Environmental decision-making is dominated by industry, mainstream environmental groups and government organizations - none of whom typically represents the interests of poor and minority communities. Environmental decisions do not have to be intentionally racist to be damaging. Whether intentional or not, practices that result in a disproportionate burden on already disadvantaged groups represent an injustice.

“People choose dangerous work environments in a ‘free market’ to increase their quality of life.”

We all work to increase our quality of life and the life of our family; however, some work, such as farm work involving pesticides, actually decreases one's quality of life. Agricultural pesticides weaken the immune system, decrease life expectancy, and cause cancer and birth defects. A child born without a spine did not choose to have their mother work in fields covered with pesticides; most often the mother has no alternative because it is the only job she can find. There is nothing "free" about a job market that forces people to choose between unemployment and unhealthy work.

“Environmental Justice decreases the number of jobs by calling for the elimination of polluting industries.”

We don't need to eliminate industry. Instead, we need to eliminate polluting industrial practices. Unhealthy jobs exist because of inequalities in society. Even if you are poor, you still have a right to a safe work environment just like everyone else. We can have safe work environments for all if we decide that it is the right thing to do.

“Environmental Justice activists want to put landfills and incinerators into rich white communities.”

The point is not to make white communities bear an unequal cost of waste disposal. The point is to have an equal distribution of these sites and a fair process for deciding where they will go. If certain industries aren't desirable in rich white neighborhoods then they should not be allowed in any neighborhood. This means focusing on waste and pollution prevention.
Poor people do care about the environment. They just define environment broadly to include where they live, work and play. They are more concerned about the cement kiln up the street that is burning PVC medical waste than about saving ancient forests. It is more likely that wealthy and middle-class people are the ones who do not care about poor people’s environments.

If people don’t like living next to an incinerator or polluting factory, they can choose to move.

Unfortunately, most people do not have the option to move away from pollution because they either cannot afford to live anywhere else or they face discrimination in finding housing in cleaner neighborhoods. People should not move farther from pollution – the pollution should be stopped.

Environmental Justice isn’t ‘true environmentalism’ because it is very anthropocentric.

Humans cause all of our environmental problems by the way we live and organize our social and economic systems. The only solutions that get at the root of the environmental problems are solutions that deal with people and the environmentally destructive systems we have created. Environmental Justice is wider in scope than ‘biocentric’ views because it asks what makes a safe and healthy environment for humans and all other living things.

Environmental Justice activists are just ‘Not In My Backyard’ (NIMBY) proponents. They don’t see that polluting industries will simply move elsewhere.

A basic premise of Environmental Justice is that pollution should not occur in anyone’s backyard. Regional networks such as the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice build grassroots coalitions and address regional problems instead of fighting isolated battles.

Environmental Justice is only an issue for people of color.

We will never have an ecologically or socially sustainable society until we have a just society. Therefore, Environmental Justice is something everyone should be working for. It is up to each one of us to examine how we contribute to (and benefit from) racism and unequal power.

by
Michael Graham-Squire
and
Brandon Carter
BITTER HARVEST
Three teenage boys on bikes eye me curiously as I drive to the end of the dead-end road, slowly turn around in the cement lot of a berry processing plant, cruise back down the road a short distance, and stop. I have driven through miles of farmland in Whatcom County under cloud-filled skies, looking for a migrant worker camp. I wasn’t sure exactly what I was looking for, how would I recognize such a camp?

At the end of the road lies a rag-tag assortment of small older houses, cars and trailers, seemingly incongruous next to the clean, spare lines of a relatively new two-story office building. I watch as the kids - now three boys plus one girl - circle the cement lot on their bicycles. One boy approaches; “Hi, I’m Robert.”

“Yes, we live in that house,” he says, pointing to a small yellow house nearest the office building, “...two families live there. We’re staying here until February and then we’ll go home to Texas,” he says with longing in his voice.

Robert’s mother and the parents of the other children are out working in the fields today, as on most days. They are among the several thousand Hispanic migrant workers who come to Whatcom County every year in search of agricultural work. This kind of work is consistently rated as one of the three most dangerous occupations in the United States. Workers endure many occupational and environmental hazards, including exposure to the elements, exposure to a wide range of chemicals, illnesses caused by impure water sources and substandard housing, and accidents involving farm equipment.

Migrant workers usually work during the busiest time of the seasons, harvesting fruit crops such as berries and apples. This type of agricultural work involves long hours, back-breaking drudgery, and low pay. Growers seek to operate under the lowest costs, so they often hire legal or illegal immigrants. These are the people who usually have no other employment options; they must work these jobs in order to feed their families, in order to simply survive.

Americans want low-cost, cosmetically attractive produce, so many growers use a variety of pesticides. Although some studies have shown that using high amounts of chemical inputs such as pesticides may not be cost efficient or environmentally wise in the long run, most farmers nevertheless need to use them to keep up with the economic realities of the present. The end result is that the people in contact with the produce in the field are often subjected to pesticide exposure.

Illnesses related to pesticide exposure can include cancer, miscarriage, birth defects,
viral infections, gastrointestinal disorders, dermatitis, chronic migraines and musculoskeletal problems. In addition, migrant farm workers commonly suffer from ‘Third World’ health afflictions such as parasitic diseases, salmonella, polio and yellow fever, according to Fields of Toil, by Isabel Valle.

Impediments, such as poverty, frequent mobility and low literacy, block social services access and cost-effective health care. Many workers risk losing their jobs if they take a day off for health reasons; so in turn they often postpone health care.

Numerous governmental regulations are in place to protect workers and their families from pesticide exposure. However, environmental injustice is still perpetuated for a variety of reasons – lack of adequate communication between farm workers and their supervisors, fear on the part of the migrants to come forward with complaints, carelessness on the part of workers, and sometimes blatant disregard for worker safety on the part of the farm owners. Whatever the reasons, this type of environmental injustice operates on a group of people who commonly lack the resources or power to improve their situation.

“Overall, local farmers show concern for workers,” said one Whatcom County agricultural extension agent. The state government enforces certain worker safety issues related to pesticide use. Applicators – either growers or contracted companies – need a license, for which they must pass an exam and participate in recertification education. Applicators of pesticides must also utilize protective wear when applying pesticides. Labels give information as to the minimum re-entry period after pesticide application, and bilingual signs must be posted notifying workers about the hazard and when they can re-enter the area.

Although some growers feel that governmental regulations are burdensome at times, most recognize the need to protect their workers from exposure. “We do not allow workers in the fields after spraying,” says local berry grower Curt Maberry. “[Migrant workers] provide a much needed service in the county.”

Despite the best of intentions, workers on some farms are being exposed to pesticides. “Probably 50 percent of workers are exposed, but only one percent gets reported,” says Jesus Rodriguez. Rodriguez, a former farm worker himself, works at Sea Mar, a low-cost health clinic with offices in several cities around the region. “Workers’ illnesses are often misdiagnosed,” he adds, “because the symptoms are similar to cold symptoms, and because many doctors are not trained to recognize pesticide poisoning.” Poisoning symptoms can include headaches, vomiting, excessive sweating and muscle cramps.

Raul Ramirez, an Americorps volunteer who works with migrant farm worker populations in eastern Washington, agrees that workers are often misdiagnosed. He also states that “many workers don’t recognize the symptoms of poisoning and therefore don’t seek medical attention.” Again, they often just think they are suffering from a flu. “Workers often don’t know where to go for treatment, and some do not seek medical care because they are afraid of getting fired, or of being reported if they are here illegally.”

There were only four incidents possibly related to pesticides in Whatcom and Skagit counties in 1995, the most recent year for which data is available, according to the Office of Toxic Substances (OTS), part of the State Department of Health. During 1995, OTS received 150 referrals from poison centers or doctors, and 200 from the Department of Labor and Industries. Less than 14 were from Whatcom and Skagit counties combined, and only four of the incidents were classified as potentially related to pesticide exposure. As Rodriguez pointed out,
these reported incidents probably reflect only a tiny percentage of the actual number of pesticide-related incidents that actually occur.

Ramirez, who has worked with farm workers for the past three years, has been working with Americorps since February. He teaches farm workers techniques to avoid pesticide exposure. During hour-long sessions, workers learn about poisoning symptoms, first aid, reading pesticide labels, proper clothing, and hazards from pesticide drift and residues.

Ramirez first approaches growers about the benefits of worker training and tries to convince them to sign up for the program. "Many are willing to participate," he says, "but some want to know who I am really working for." This kind of skepticism is not surprising, since growers often feel persecuted by governmental regulations. However, Ramirez notes that the program does seem to be having some beneficial impacts. "I’ve seen 420 workers so far, and I have noticed some changes in behaviors."

"These people, they don’t got heart," says Eulalia Cardenas, Robert’s mother, referring her employers. Eulalia is a small, dark-haired woman with a friendly smile. She and another family pay $700 a month to live in a small house, owned by the grower for whom she works, at the migrant camp. Altogether, 13 people live in the house. Eulalia often has a difficult time finding enough money to feed her family, even though she and her two oldest boys work in the fields. "We are just trying to live the best we can," she sighs. Since arriving in Whatcom County in June, "living" has included working 16-hour days with no overtime pay during harvesting season, and recently working from dawn until dusk cutting down the dying raspberry plants now that the season has ended.

Farm worker housing is often substandard or non-existent. Migrant farm workers move frequently, following the seasons. If labor camp housing is not available for the workers, they are often forced to sleep in their vehicles or to camp out in the open. Often, as in the case of the Cardenas family, housing is situated near the fields, thus workers and their families are often subjected to pesticide residues.

"They don’t tell us nothing," says Eulalia when I ask whether the growers inform the workers when the fields are sprayed. "Should I worry about this?" she asks me, pointing. I follow the path of her finger, which leads 20 feet from where we are standing. There sits a machine used for pesticide spraying. It has a big red triangle on the side, and a sign reads "Caution - chemical pesticides - hazardous for humans, animals . . ." The sign is printed only in English.

As citizens and consumers of agricultural products, we should all be aware of the potential risks of pesticide exposure borne by the people who toil so that we can eat. We should encourage farmers to maintain safe work and living environments for migrant workers, and we should encourage the government to maintain and enforce regulations designed to protect workers. We should also promote more research into pesticide-related illnesses, and support farmers who utilize integrated pest management and organic practices.

This type of environmental injustice is perpetuated — however unknowingly — by our choices as consumers. We may find ourselves unwittingly ignoring the people who suffer from this injustice, since we may not encounter them in our neighborhoods or stores. Some may even discount them as mere immigrants who are "lucky" to be living in this country at all. But perhaps we should ask ourselves: what would we do if it was our brother, sister, parent, child, or friend working out there?

Valerie Graber is a graduate student in Anthropology, with an interest in the relationship between consumerism and environmental problems. She plans to spend next quarter investigating the oxymoronic phrase “anthropological journalism.”
The realities of replanting

by Scott Morris

We had bad news for the tree-planting crew waiting for us at the gate. They would not get paid today.

I had accompanied Milton Goodknight, a forester for the state’s Department of Natural Resources, to a clearcut in the mountains east of Acme that was slated to be planted this past April. A cold blast had brought snow early that morning, effectively ending any planting for the day before we could even get started.

This crew had left their hotel in Burlington at 6 a.m., picked up the bags of seedlings from the refrigerators at the DNR’s regional office in Sedro-Woolley and put them in the U-Haul trailer behind their van. They were at the gate on the logging road outside of Acme by 8 a.m., ready to work. Although they get paid by the hour, the only hours that count are when they plant.

Milton informed the crew boss, Eloy Guerra, who took the news in stride.

By 10 a.m., we were all back in the DNR parking lot. While Eloy went in to see if there was another unit at lower elevation that they could plant to at least salvage the afternoon, I talked with his crew.

I won’t mention any of their names, though, because some of them might not have had their green cards, despite their assurances to the contrary. This crew, like most tree-planting crews in the Northwest, was exclusively Latino, from Mexico and Central America. None but Eloy spoke much English. I spoke to them in Spanish.

“This work should be paying us well,” one man said, “because in the mountains, enduring the rain until everything is soaked—”

“It is very hard work,” his co-worker chipped in.

“You have to walk quite a lot, not even eating,” the first man said.

“Even the 45 minutes it takes to walk between units,” another said, “we don’t get paid until we begin planting the other unit.”

I asked them if it was worth it for them to plant trees. “In comparison to what we earn in our countries, yes,” one man said. He said last year he earned between $4,000 and $5,000 and he was able to send roughly $3,000 back to his family in Mexico.

All agreed that in recent years tree-planting wages have gone down. In the 80s, most contracts paid workers 10 cents per tree, which this crew said worked out to about double the pay now.

These wages are still relatively high compared to other migrant workers on the West Coast. Ironically, as more Latinos have moved up from California’s agricultural fields, the labor squeeze has pushed wages down. Hiring illegal aliens has further tightened the squeeze.

“For the contractors,” one of the crew told me, “it behooves them to hire illegals because they can pay them less.”

“Almost all of them do it,” the crew agreed, laughing and nodding their heads.

“We need to form a union,” one of them said in a more serious tone.

Two weeks later I went to another site with Milton and a different crew. Benny Alvardo, the crew boss, was also the contractor. Milton said it is rare for the contractor to come out with the crews.

But this was old hat for Benny. He had been planting trees for 17 years, ever since immigrating from Michoacan, Mexico. Last year, he put together $20,000 and became his own boss for the first time. He won this 250-acre DNR planting contract by bidding lower than any other contractor. He said he bid $45.50 per acre, which means he promised the DNR he could plant the 2.50 acres for a fee slightly more than $11,000.

Benny admits, however, that the low-bid system, coupled with an increased migrant labor force, has worked together to dramatically decrease the amount of money tree planters can make.

Eloy Guerra said a typical winning bid for planting contracts in the late 80s used to be $80 to $100 per acre, double the amount of today’s contracts. But contractors have had to cut corners to win contracts, which has meant less pay for the crew members, even though the work is still as difficult as ever.

“Most Americans don’t want to work this hard,” Milton said. The day before, Milton told me, his voice full of reverence, Benny’s crew planted 7,000 trees with only seven men, covering 30 acres on a steep, 60 to 70 percent slope.

The mountains aren’t getting any flatter, but the wages are.

Scott Morris is a journalism major who did a stint in the Peace Corps in Guatemala to learn the Spanish necessary to write this article.
are currently located in communities with a white population equal to or greater than the host state average. He admitted, however, “It is true that we have some facilities located in predominantly minority communities. A few of them, in fact, are often held up as examples of discriminatory siting.”

He then explained how the Emelle landfill location in Sumpter County, Alabama, was picked from an EPA-produced list of the ten most desirable counties for a hazardous waste landfill. The most important criteria for a desirable site were sparse population, access to transportation, relative aridity, and the right geological conditions.

As in most of rural Alabama, the people of Sumpter County have been predominantly black and painfully poor. However, Sumpter County was the only “finalist” site located east of the Mississippi, where there was a need for more disposal capacity. Additionally, it lay atop several hundred square miles of dense, natural chalk 700 feet deep – a natural barrier to possible emissions.

McDermott also disclosed some of the benefits of the site to the county – benefits unforeseen before operations started: “Over time, the landfill brought revenue into the county which has improved the schools, built the fire station and the town hall, [and] improved health care delivery . . . Three hundred people are currently employed at the facility, 60 percent of whom live in Sumpter County.” In a case like this it seems as though a waste facility might actually provide a net benefit to a disadvantaged community, despite allegations to the contrary.

Do Environmental Justice groups seek comprehensive long-term solutions, or quick fixes? The environmental justice agenda could be criticized for its lack of scope and definition. Although there are certainly some themes within the movement, it lacks a single focus.

One group known for environmental justice activism is the Gulf Coast Tenants Association. They presented their “calls to action” to Congress during the same 1993 hearings.

They have a number of focused demands: “Declare a moratorium on siting of poisoning facilities in the South . . . Stop the destruction of black farmers and all small farms. We demand that black land loss be stopped and reversed.”

But their agenda includes a mélange of other social issues as well: “Restore the sovereignty of native lands and respect and implement treaties with native people . . . Launch a massive housing construction program . . . Create equitable, adequately funded public schools for all . . . Provide full and adequate health care for all . . . Stop the drug trade . . . Place restrictions on corporations that move to other countries.”

Many of their demands are already being addressed in various ways, but these are not easy problems to deal with. To make a broad demand without offering a realistic and workable solution accomplishes little in the long run, but may evoke a quick-fix political gesture. The movement seems to lack detailed, reasonable and well-thought-out plans to accomplish their objectives, while respecting the rights of property owners and the limitations of government.

This is not to say that identifying and drawing attention to these problems is not important or has not been fruitful. The EPA now has an Office of Environmental Equity dedicated to addressing environmental inequities, and there are policies in place designed to thwart environmental racism. The existence, popularity and power of Environmental Justice as a movement is itself a deterrent to perpetrators of injustice. But there are limits to what can be accomplished with a popular, emotional outcry.

A movement that started out as a loose network of groups working on many diverse, localized, and smaller-scale issues has quickly become a large-scale movement with a global agenda of social issues. There is bound to be conflict between these two levels of operation. If not adequately resolved, the likely result will be contradictory policy recommendations.

How will the Environmental Justice movement resolve grassroots passion with the need for a focused agenda offering realistic, long-range solutions?

That is one challenge for the future of Environmental Justice. There will certainly be others. By examining criticisms and questions like the ones raised here, hopefully the Environmental Justice movement will be able to refine its agenda, find innovative ways to solve problems, and make real progress towards a more equitable and environmentally sound world.

Christopher Schwindt wants to be an attorney specializing in environmental law.
tivity levels can be harmful not just to those inside the factory walls, but to the people and places surrounding them.

The companies in Whatcom County that employ the most people and bring in the most income are also the ones most likely to be listed in the EPA's Toxic Release Inventory. In fact, Whatcom County is ranked seventh among Washington counties in terms of total toxic releases at one-and-a-half million pounds per year. We are not, however, the seventh most populous county in the state. Do we bear a disproportionate burden of risk? Again, it is hard to say for sure because the actual effects are so difficult to assess.

When Georgia Pacific (GP) first started operations, it let out more than 100,000 pounds of toxic waste per day into Bellingham Bay. This figure has since dropped to compliance with EPA standards of 24,000 pounds - but is that really very comforting? Is that a fair trade for the 860 well-paying jobs GP provides?

There is little question that GP is largely responsible for making the Bay the second most polluted body of water in the state. In 1980, GP was fined $250,000 after a Department of Ecology suit over excessive discharges - the largest such fine ever.

There have been several incidents over the years of GP workers and members of the general public being hospitalized because of accidental emissions of chlorine gas (in low concentrations) and ferric chloride gas. One victim of such an emission in 1987, Mark Stratton, justifiably asked, If they have these things that are such a potential risk, what are they doing in the middle of town?

The risk was further emphasized that same year when, during a chlorine gas transfer from a rail tanker, a leak occurred. Luckily, one worker on hand acted quickly and closed the necessary ports to prevent catastrophe. GP honored the worker for valor, saying, "Much of Bellingham's population could have been wiped out by as much as 55 tons of deadly chlorine gas." Officials at the Western Pulp and Paper Workers Union said the accident was a result of "longstanding and total disregard by management for the safety of the workers and the community in the interests of boosting production."

One danger, which many involved in EJ have noted, is that in the process of developing economically, communities (and nations) proceed to hand off the undesirable externalities of their economies to those in less developed stages.

One example is hazardous solid waste disposal. A number of EJ studies have shown a correlation between concentrations in a given area of hazardous waste disposal facilities and the likelihood of environmental injustices. Whatcom County industries produce 3,500 tons of hazardous waste per year, but the disposal facilities used are in other states and counties - the burdens of other communities invisible to us.

Another case is that of industry location. It is a real possibility that Intalco, for example, will relocate to a developing country soon, in order to cut down on operating costs.

Many of the same risks that Whatcom County and its workers have faced will persist - it just won't go on in our own backyards anymore. Is that fair? Should anyone have to risk their health and environment just to make ends meet in the short-run? Can we achieve what we want, what we really want - not wages or a job, but the things that those allow - without having to poison ourselves or our neighbors?

When Sandy was looking for work last summer, part of her problem was her level of education: she had no degree yet. She said that Heath Tecna hires a number of undergraduates in a similar position to hers. She also mentioned that there were a good number of immigrants working at the plant. At least one such worker had a contract with the company to get his GED. Is it right that education should determine the level of risk a person has to endure?

As graduates of Western, most of us will probably have a greater choice in the workplace than, say, an immigrant without even the equivalent of a high school education. We will have a responsibility, then, to consider the impacts of our employment choices, and the impacts of the choices we make for the further development of our communities. Just because we may not have to work on the pot-line at an aluminum plant does not mean we should totally disregard the plights of those who do, or disregard the broader impacts of industrial processes and economic development.

In fact, people say a bachelor's degree is not necessarily worth all that much anymore. Who knows where we'll end up looking for a livelihood? We might just find ourselves applying for work and being faced by an interviewer who asks us something like, "You're not sensitive to chemicals, are you?"

God forbid.

Adam Gottschalk likes to ask questions, and hopes to continue being a large pain in the ass until we see some serious changes in this corner of the hiposphere.
Demonstrators protest the disposal of PCB-laced soil at a dump in Warren County, North Carolina in 1982. Over 500 members from the predominantly African American community were arrested.

To insure that everyone has a safe and healthy environment in which to live, work and play

To make sure that poor and powerless groups in society do not bear the costs of our unsustainable and polluting lifestyle

New Associated Students Club
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