

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

MILESTONES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS: 1964-2014

**A Report Prepared in Commemoration of the
Twentieth Anniversary of the Environmental Justice
Executive Order 12898**

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ABOUT THE MICKEY LELAND CENTER

The Mickey Leland Center for Environment, Justice and Sustainability at Texas Southern University conducts research, analyzes policy, and designs innovative program practices and community initiatives. Its aim is to cultivate a new type of leadership to address the environmental and health challenges, as well as, be responsive to populations and communities at greatest risk with the goal of facilitating their inclusion into the mainstream of environmental decision-making. The Center has four major components: (1) Education and Training, (2) Research and Policy Analysis, (3) Community Engagement and Technical Support, and (4) Information Clearinghouse. The Center uses the community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach and provides a range of technical assistance and support services on a range of environmental justice, transportation equity, fair/smart growth, and related issues to at least five low-income and people of color groups.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is a compilation of several previous reports. In preparation for the four-day Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, held in Washington, DC in October 2002, the Environmental Justice Resource Center (EJRC) compiled the [Environmental Justice Timeline/Milestones - 1964-2002](#) report, one of the first comprehensive documents to chronicle accomplishments of the Environmental Justice Movement. The milestones were later updated in the 2007 United Church of Christ [Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty – 1987-2007](#) report and in 2010 in [Environmental Health and Racial Equity in the United States: Strategies for Building Environmentally Just, Sustainable, and Liveable Communities](#) (American Public Health Association 2011).

February 11, 2014 marked the 20th anniversary of the historic [Environmental Justice Executive Order 12898](#) "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations" signed by President Clinton. This report was prepared and released as part of the 20-year commemoration.

This Executive Order attempted to address environmental injustice within existing federal laws and regulations. It also reinforced the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#) signed by [President Lyndon B. Johnson](#) on July 2, 1964, nearly five decades ago. [Title VI](#) of the Civil Rights Act has special significance to environmental justice in that it prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in all programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance. Title VI itself prohibits intentional discrimination. The Environmental Justice timeline in this report begins in 1964, timed with the passage of the Civil Rights Act.

The Executive Order also incorporated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), a 1969 law that set policy goals for the protection, maintenance and enhancement of the environment. NEPA's goal is to ensure for all Americans a safe, healthful, productive and aesthetically and culturally pleasing environment. It called for improved methodologies for assessing and mitigating impacts, health effects from multiple and cumulative exposure, collection of data on low-income and minority populations who may be disproportionately at risk, and impacts on subsistence fishers and consumers of wild game. It also encouraged participation of the impacted populations in the various phases of assessing impacts, including scoping, data gathering, alternatives, analysis, mitigation and monitoring.

The [EJ Executive Order](#) after twenty years and three U.S. presidents has never been fully implemented. It was signed in 1994 on the second day of the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) "[Health and Research Needs to Ensure Environmental Justice](#)" in Arlington, VA. And after lying dormant for nearly a decade under the George W. Bush administration, the EJ Executive Order received some new life in 2010 under the Obama administration—with the reinvigoration of the [Interagency Working Group](#) (IWG) that called for updating more than a dozen agencies' EJ strategic plans and [Plan EJ 2014](#), a roadmap that will help EPA integrate environmental justice into its programs, policies, and activities. The goals of the plan are to: Protect health in communities over-burdened by pollution; empower communities to take action to improve their health and environment; and establish partnerships with local, state, tribal and federal organizations to achieve healthy and sustainable communities.

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During its 44-year history, the U.S. EPA has not always recognized that many government and industry practices (whether intended or unintended) have adversely and disproportionately impacted poor people and people of color. It took an entire movement and decades for the government to acknowledge this fact and three decades to begin implementing equal protection and dismantling institutional racism. The EPA is mandated to enforce the nation's environmental laws and regulations equally across the board. It is required to protect all Americans—not just individuals or communities who have money to hire lawyers, lobbyists, scientists, and experts. The right to health and a clean environment is a basic human right.

The nation is not color blind even though Barack Obama was elected as the country's 44th president and Lisa P. Jackson was appointed as administrator of the U.S. EPA, the first African American to hold these offices. Because of the persistent challenges created by institutionalized racism, environmental justice advocates continue to employ a racial equity lens—applied to public health, exposure to harmful chemicals, pesticides, toxins in the homes, schools, neighborhoods, and workplace, faulty assumptions in calculating, assessing, and managing risks, zoning and land-use practices, and exclusionary policies and practices that limit participation in decision making. Many of these problems could be eliminated if the existing environmental, health, housing, transportation, land use, and civil rights laws were vigorously enforced in a nondiscriminatory way.

In 1994, only four states (Louisiana, Connecticut, Virginia, and Texas) had a law or an executive order on environmental justice. Twenty years later, all 50 states and the District of Columbia have instituted some type of environmental justice law, executive order, or policy, indicating that the area of environmental justice continues to grow and mature. However, we know all states and their environmental justice laws are “not created equal.”

The last two decades have seen environmental justice become a household word. Out of the small and seemingly isolated environmental struggles, emerged a potent grassroots community driven movement. Many of the on-the-ground environmental struggles in the new millennium have seen the quest for environmental and economic justice become a unifying theme across race, class, gender, age, and geographic lines. Nevertheless, there are still individuals, even some in the U.S. Congress, who still refuse to acknowledge the fact the country has an environmental injustice problem that needs attention and action.

After more than two decades of intense study, targeted research, public hearings, grassroots organizing, networking, and movement building, environmental justice struggles have taken center stage. Yet, all communities are still not created equal. Where you live can impact your health and quality of life. Zip code is still the most potent predictor of health. Some neighborhoods, communities, and regions have become the dumping grounds for all kinds of toxins. Today, too many low-wealth and people of color communities have too few residential amenities such sidewalks, bike lanes, parks and green space, full-service grocery stores, accessible public transit, health care, and quality schools.

Some progress has been made in mainstreaming environmental protection as a civil rights and social justice issue. We now see an increasing number of community-based groups, environmental justice networks, environmental and conservation groups, legal groups, faith-based groups, labor, academic institutions and youth organizations teaming up on

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environmental justice and health issues that differentially impact poor people and people of color. Many of these groups have adopted a racial equity lens to analyze and frame the issues, mobilize constituents, shape public policy, and craft legislation and legal strategies to dismantle institutionalized barriers to opportunity, including environmental racism.

Environmental racism and environmental justice panels have become “hot” topics at national conferences and forums sponsored by law schools, bar associations, public health groups, scientific societies, professional meetings, and university lecture series. In just a short time, environmental justice advocates have had a profound impact on public policy, industry practices, national conferences, private foundation funding, and community-based participatory research (CBPR) where community and “expert” are equal partners.

Environmental justice research, writing, and publications have flourished over the past two decades. Today, there is a rich body of work that supports an array of disciplines from the social and behavioral sciences to physical sciences to law and legal studies. Environmental justice courses and curricula can be found at nearly every college and university across the country. It is now possible for students to receive a baccalaureate and advanced degree in environmental justice. Similarly, environmental justice is now an acceptable discipline whereas college and university professors can select as a major research concentration, and receive tenure and promotion.

Environmental justice groups have been successful in blocking numerous permits for new polluting facilities and forced government and private industry buyout and relocation of several communities impacted by Superfund sites and industrial pollution. Environmental justice and health equity concepts and principles are making their way into initiatives that are moving the nation toward a “green economy,” green buildings and healthy schools, clean and renewable energy, smart growth, and just climate policies.

Although permitting and facility siting still dominate state environmental justice programs, a growing number of states are beginning to use land use planning techniques, such as buffer zones, to improve environmental conditions, reduce potential health threats, and prevent environmental degradation in at-risk communities. States are also incorporating environmental justice in their brownfields, Supplemental Environmental Projects, and climate policies. Some states rely on enforcement procedures in environmentally burdened communities, while other states use grants and community education.

Movement Building

Clearly, a lot has happened in twenty years since those of us who were summoned to the White House to witness the signing of Executive Order 12898 on that cold snowy day in February. We have made progress, but much more work still remains. The last two decades have seen some positive change in the way environmental groups in the United States relate to each other around health, environment, economic, and racial justice. An increasing number of community-based groups, networks, university-based centers, environmental and conservation groups, legal groups, faith-based groups, labor, and youth organizations have formed partnerships and collaboratives to address environmental and health issues that differentially impact poor people, people of color, and children. The number of people of color environmental groups has grown from 300 groups in 1992 to more than 3,000 groups and a dozen networks in 2014.

Research and Policy Advancements

Because of research, policy work and grassroots mobilization, we know much more today than we did two decades ago. From 1990-1993, [Dumping in Dixie](#) topped the list of only a half dozen environmental justice books in print. In 1994, five additional environmental justice books were added to the list. Environmental justice research, writing, and publications have flourished over the years. Today, there are hundreds of environmental justice books covering a wide range of disciplines spanning the globe. Environmental justice courses and curricula can be found at nearly every college and university in the U.S. This was not always the case.

Despite this progress, frontline communities and their leaders are demanding that environmental justice be made a centerpiece in closing the gap in [climate action plans](#), [energy policies](#), [transportation initiatives](#), and [disaster management](#) which still leave too many low-wealth communities and people of color behind.

Expanding the “Pipeline” of New Leaders

Community-based organizations play an important role in providing a space and training ground for growing youth leaders. The key to a successful movement rests with how effective organizations and institutions solve “pipeline” challenges. An expanding “[pipeline](#)” of diverse scholars, scientists, researchers, policy analysts, and community leaders is leading on environmental justice, including climate change and vulnerable communities. Much more is needed. Not surprising, resources continue to be a major barrier to building, supporting, and sustaining strong national youth and student leadership across various environmental and climate justice and health equity movements that uses a racial equity lens.

Bringing young people into the movement to address environmental and climate justice, health equity and racial justice at every level, from activists to analysts to academics, can only strengthen the movement—and make us a stronger and fairer nation. Today, much of the youth work takes place within an intergenerational form (community-based organizations, networks, centers, legal clinics that have a youth focus or youth component) and youth-led form (organizations founded by and led by youth), are important and complementary.

University-Based Centers and Academic Programs

University-based centers and academic programs serve as important venues to train, educate, and mentor students, faculty, and researchers in the environmental justice, health, and racial equity fields. In 1990, there was not a single university-based environmental justice center or a program that offered a degree in environmental justice. In 1994, there were just four university-based environmental justice centers. It is no accident that all of these early environmental justice centers were located at historically black colleges and universities ([HBCUs](#)). Today, there are [dozens](#) of university-based environmental justice centers and 22 legal clinics that list environmental justice as a core area, and six academic programs that grant degrees in environmental justice, including one legal program.

National Awards, Honors and Recognition

The Environmental Justice Movement has seeded a number of social movements that use a racial equity lens, including healthy homes, reproductive justice, transportation equity, smart growth, regional equity, parks justice and green access, green jobs, food justice, and climate justice. Prior to 1994, only a couple of EJ leaders had won national recognition and environmental awards for their work. In the past two decades, more than two-dozen environmental justice leaders have won prestigious national awards, including the Heinz Award, Goldman Prize, MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship, Ford Foundation Leadership for a Changing World Award, Robert Wood Johnson Community Health Leaders Award, and others. For example, [Hilton Kelly](#), who directs Community In-power and Development Association (CIDA), won the 2013 Goldman Prize for his environmental justice work in addressing pollution near oil refineries in Port Arthur, Texas. And in 2014, [Kimberly Wasserman Nieto](#) of the [Little Village Environmental Justice Organization \(LVEJO\)](#) won the Goldman Prize for her collaborative work in shutting down the [Fisk and Crawford coal plants](#) in Chicago.

Funding Challenges

The number of foundations that have funded designated environmental justice programs has been shrinking since the 2002 Environmental Justice Summit. However, there are hopeful signs from a number of foundations that are funding multidisciplinary work that intersects environment, health, and racial equity. Much of this funding is filtered through portfolios of smart growth, transportation equity, clean and renewable energy, green jobs, chemical policy reform, green chemistry, green products, parks and green access, green buildings, healthy schools, food security and food justice, sustainable agriculture, sustainable communities, equitable development, brownfields redevelopment, worker training, worker safety, health disparities, reproductive health and justice, immigrants rights, human rights, disaster response, regionalism and regional equity, climate change, and climate justice, all of which fall under the broad category of environmental justice.

Strategic foundation support has enabled the success of the [Environmental Justice Movement](#). Yet, the movement is still under-funded after three decades of proven work. This is true for private foundation and government funding. Overall, foundation and government funding support for environmental justice has been piecemeal. Environmental funders spent a whopping [\\$10 billion](#) between 2000 and 2009. However, just 15 percent of the environmental grant dollars benefitted marginalized communities, and only 11 percent went to advancing "social justice" causes, such as community organizing.

Government funding of environmental justice has been spotty and unpredictable. Funding has come primarily from two federal agencies—the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences—two federal agencies that community leaders established working relationships with in the early 1990s. Relationships matter in the funding world. Economic recessions in the 2000s combined shrinking foundations portfolios and government cutbacks over the years hit environmental and other social justice organizations especially hard—actions that heightened inequality.

Overall, constrained funding has made it difficult for building organizational infrastructure, community organizing, leadership development and participating effectively in the policy arena. Clearly, much more is needed to ensure that all Americans enjoy healthy, livable and sustainable communities.

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE EXECUTIVE ORDER AFTER TWENTY YEARS AND THREE U.S. PRESIDENTS

The Environmental Justice Executive Order has survived three U.S. presidents (Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama). The vast majority of environmental justice leaders two decades ago preferred to have environmental justice codified in law. However, that did not happen. As part of the commemoration, reactions were solicited from leaders representing diverse stakeholder groups from activists to academics. We asked the following question: "What is the state of the Environmental Justice Executive Order and the Environmental Justice Movement?" The responses are presented in the following section.

Voices from the Frontline

The focus of the environmental justice movement is now just and sustainable development. This means using our unlimited mental and creative resources, not our limited natural resources. If this is true, as I believe it to be, then we need to develop more constructive ways to unleash these phenomenal mental and creative resources in our communities, and quickly. Currently, in the US and around the globe we waste human potential as wantonly and comprehensively as we lay waste to our environmental potential, and this is no surprise, as both actions are directly related. We need to understand that while there is growing human inequality, there will never be environmental quality. (**Julian Agyeman, Ph.D., FRSA**, Department of Urban and Environmental and Policy Planning, Tufts University, Medford, MA)

The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law has promoted environmental justice for many years. The most recent example of its work in this area grew out of a request from fair housing advocates in Texas who are monitoring implementation of a disaster recovery program funded by HUD. They reached out to the Lawyers' Committee for assistance in appraising housing proposals in Port Arthur TX to replace low income, predominantly African American public housing projects which abutted an area with dozens of petrochemical refineries that had steadily expanded over the years to become the largest concentration of refineries in the country. Indeed, in 2009, Port Arthur was named an "Environmental Showcase Community" by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") which concluded that relocation of the residents of low income predominantly African-American public housing projects damaged by Hurricane Ike should be a high priority because of the environmental dangers posed by the refineries. Working with the organizations that are monitoring the disaster recovery program, the Lawyers' Committee is providing legal assistance to ensure replacement housing is environmentally safe. (**Barbara Arnwine**, President and Executive Director, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, Washington, DC)

While there has been some progress in environmental justice, much remains to be done. The federal legal foundation is still very weak, based as it is on Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin, by recipients of federal financial assistance. There are almost no federal discrimination protections on the basis of low income, which the EJ Executive Order addresses. There needs to be a statutory basis for EJ protections, which includes low income. (**Marc Brennan**, The Evergreen State College, Olympia, Washington)

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The Executive Order on EJ is a sham. The only thing the EO has produced is jobs for the people at these federal agencies tasked to create the illusion that they are working to achieve environmental justice. I have witnessed heartless and clueless representatives of federal agencies visit hardcore EJ communities and board their plane back to DC untouched, unmoved and, despite numerous attempts on our part, were never heard from again. I have witnessed good people at federal agencies that wanted to truly help. But, before they could do anything significant they were removed from their position, or lost their job. The only ones celebrating the 20th anniversary of the EO is the federal government for succeeding to put on the biggest fraud and sin against EJ communities everywhere. (**Suzie Canales**, Executive Director, Citizens for Environmental Justice, Corpus Christi, TX)

Here in Oregon, our legislature passed a law requiring all natural resource agencies to include EJ in their official actions, and created the EJ Task force to report on whether they do so. Without E.O. 12898, environmentalists do not recognize EJ. Without E.O. 12898, sustainability advocates do not include equity. There is a color line between environmentalism, sustainability and environmental justice -- and the color of that line is not green. E.O. 12898 is an essential foundation for recognizing the single, unified nature of these struggles. I was the founding chair of the Oregon EJ Task force. (**Robin Morris Collin**, Norma J. Paulus Professor of Law and Director of the Certificate Program in Sustainability, Willamette University, Salem, OR)

The most immediate mission of the EJ movement is to dismantle the mechanisms by which capital and the state disproportionately displace ecological hazards onto poorer communities and people of color. One of the movement's most important accomplishments has been President Clinton's Executive Order (12898) on Environmental Justice. Despite bringing some substantial improvements to many communities, however, the Executive Order is primarily about "identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs, policies and activities on minority populations and low income populations" rather than eliminating the root causes of such ecological hazards. But the struggle for environmental justice is not just about distributing environmental risks equally but about preventing them from being produced in the first place so that no one is harmed at all. What is now needed for the 21st Century is a richer conception of environmental justice oriented toward a major transformation of the U.S. (and global) economy. Such a conception includes the phase-out of toxic chemicals and fossil fuels in favor of clean production and energy systems, efficient public transportation, affordable housing and vibrant communities, green jobs and full employment at a living wage, and more precautionary and sustainable approaches to environmental policy. In this sense, the Executive Order is a necessary ingredient but in-and-of-itself insufficient for achieving true environmental justice. The challenge confronting the EJ movement is to help forge a truly broad-based, multi-issue, multi-movement approach which emphasizes social and eco-justice for all Americans and people around the world...both present and future generations. (**Daniel Faber, Ph.D.**, Director, Northeastern Environmental Justice Research Collaborative Northeastern University, Boston, MA)

Twenty years ago President Clinton authorized the federal government to address environmental justice in its programs and policies. President Obama renewed that authority when he came into office. While Clinton's Executive Order and Obama's reauthorization provide a framework for addressing environmental injustice, that framework has not resulted in concrete changes in environmental justice communities. Rather, it is the communities themselves working together as part of the environmental justice movement that have brought about the pollution reductions, clean green jobs, sustainable community plans, and

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environmental benefits that communities experience. The federal government has much more to do to catch up to progress communities have made and to follow through on its commitment to environmental justice. (**Caroline Farrell**, Executive Director, Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment, Delano, CA)

The Executive Order's longevity is a major landmark. After 20 years, environmental justice is a familiar phrase in the nation's capital, the fifty states and around the world. Community advocates achieved this milestone but their fight for it at home goes on. Now, we need legislation that fills the gaps and a Marshall Plan that ensures clean, healthy and prosperous neighborhoods for everyone. (**Deeohn Ferris, J.D.**, President, Sustainable Community Development Group, Washington, DC)

The EJ movement has been the conscience of the environmental movement. The EJ movement has been about making a way when there has been no way. Through the unceasing activism of affected communities and stalwart supporters of these communities, the EO 12898 has been utilized to move federal (and other) stakeholders to make EJ central to their decision-making. Much more work needs to be done by the other agencies in the Interagency Working Group (IWG) on EJ. Hopefully, this anniversary will spark a greater commitment by the other agencies in the IWG to comply with the EO 12898. Congratulations, on this anniversary, to all the EJ activists and supporters who have seriously struggled with making the EO 12898 work within the agencies and for the affected communities. (**Leslie Fields**, National Environmental Justice Director Sierra Club, Washington, DC)

It has been twenty years since President Bill Clinton issued his executive order on environmental justice. The executive order itself reflected the growing strength of a movement centered among the poorest and most racially unequal communities in the nation. Regrettably, little has changed with regard to the practices of the federal government since the order was issued. Nevertheless, the environmental justice movement has achieved remarkable successes at the local and regional level – mobilizing hundreds of thousands of people to close coal fired power plants, to stop oil refinery projects, to expand clean energy infrastructure, to expand green space, urban gardens, and sustainable agriculture, to safeguard and expand public transportation. Most importantly, they have enhanced US democracy, but creating spaces where those most affected by pollution, toxic emissions, and climate change impacts can have their voices heard in a meaningful way. This is the incredible foundation on which the environmental justice movement will continue in its efforts to protect the health of our children and our communities, to address the systemic inequality that continues to plague our country, and ultimately to save our planet. It is my hope that President Obama will give new meaning to the Executive Order in his final years in office, by ordering its effective implementation in all federal departments. Si Se Puede! (**Bill Gallegos**, Executive Director, Communities for a Better Environment, Oakland, CA).

The President's Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice is greening Los Angeles. Federal agencies are not just talking about the EJ Executive Order, they are taking action. The National Park Service recognizes there are unfair disparities in park access for people who are of color or low-income people, that these disparities hurt human health, and that park agencies need to promote equal access to parks and active living for all, citing the EJ Order. NPS has published a strategic action plan, and a science plan, for Healthy Parks, Healthy People. NPS recommends new national recreation area lands in the San Gabriel Mountains and Valley to promote

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environmental justice and health. The Army Corps of Engineers proposes greening the Los Angeles River to promote environmental justice and health, citing the EJ Order.

Andrew Cuomo, who was then Secretary of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, withheld federal funding for a proposed warehouse project in the heart of downtown Los Angeles unless there was full environmental review that considered the park alternative and the impact on people who were of color or low income. Secretary Cuomo cited the EJ Order and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, acting in response to an administrative complaint filed by diverse allies. The site could have been warehouses. Instead, today it's the Los Angeles State Historic Park. Attorneys, activists, and agencies are working together for healthy green land use, equitable development, and planning by and for the community under the EJ Order. Let's do it! (**Robert Garcia**, Founding Director and Counsel, The City Project, Los Angeles, CA)

The Environmental Justice Movement in the United States included the voices of American Indian and Alaska Native nations and their grassroots indigenous communities and families to stand fast in defense of the vital life cycles of Mother Earth. After twenty years since the EJ Executive Order 12898, with the perseverance of tribal governments and Native environmental organizations, "Indian" policy in environmental protection, public health, protection of sacred areas and conservation of natural resources within indigenous lands and territories were strengthened and further developed. The link between environmental justice, treaty rights with a rights-based approach in organizing; applied along with the demand for the U.S. to fulfill its fiduciary and trust responsibilities to federally recognized tribes to build their tribal infrastructure for environmental protection was the broad voice of victory of many Native Nations. The twenty years of the Native-based environmental justice movement was largely led by grassroots Indigenous peoples with many victories, but remaining challenges in the crosscutting issues of continued struggles for energy and climate justice; food sovereignty; water rights; economic justice and for the full implementation by the U.S. of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The next twenty years, we must link social and environmental struggles, bring together rural and urban communities, and combine local and global initiatives so that we can unite together in a common struggle. We must use all diverse forms of resistance. We must build a movement that is based on the daily life of people that guarantees democracy at all stages of societies. (**Tom Goldtooth**, Executive Director of the Indigenous Environmental Network, Bemidji, MN)

The EJ Executive Order helped focus agency and public attention on the incidence of race-based environmental inequality, and provided greater basis for redress of the most egregious cases of environmental racism. However, it is important to remember that capitalist economies are predicated on the distribution of social goods and bads by wealth. Just as housing, food, and higher education, environmental hazards and amenities are, and will continue to be, distributed by economic class. And as long as class remains correlated with race, environmental hazards will continue to be distributed disproportionately to people of color. The EJ Executive Order was an important milestone on what will be a very long road to environmental justice. (**Kenneth Gould, Ph.D.**, Professor of Sociology, Brooklyn College-CUNY, Professor of Sociology and Earth and Environmental Sciences, CUNY Graduate Center, Brooklyn, NY)

In 1994, when President Bill Clinton signed EJ Executive Order 12898 many of the grassroots activists felt 'environmental justice' (EJ) was finally being recognized and substantive actions

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would be taken to clean up communities and relieve suffering caused by environmental insults of various kinds. Executive Order 12898 paved the way for justice but didn't guarantee it. Undoing past wrongs, such as cleaning up dumpsites, changing siting habits, and changing lax rules and regulations to better protect communities, in many cases hasn't happened. Environmental Justice has been steered by the political tide over the tenure of the past three Presidents while many state and local authorities continue to dig their heels in even deeper to avoid adequately addressing EJ issues. Even though some states have so-called EJ staff, they have not worked to sufficiently alleviate suffering and bring about justice in struggling communities. We lost a great deal of momentum for EJ during the Bush Administration, which made the states bristle against effectively addressing EJ even more. During the Obama Administration, we are trying to regain the momentum we once had, and try to move more aggressively to work on a backlog of EJ issues. However, even in the Obama administration the rise of the Tea Party is working to hinder EJ activities, block the strengthening of environmental laws, and strike against any efforts toward sustainability and/or environmental justice. Our efforts need to be re-doubled. ([Rita Harris](#), Sierra Club EJ Program, Memphis, TN)

The Executive Order on EJ was an historic act that helped to awaken the consciousness of our federal government to the long-standing suffering in low-income communities and communities of color across the country facing environmental racism and economic injustice. Unfortunately, twenty years later we still have communities across the country that are unnecessarily exposed to toxic pollution that threatens their health and quality of life. Many of these communities also lack basic environmental benefits too like a healthy home free of toxins, access to open spaces like parks, the availability of healthy foods, and safe and affordable public transportation. So on this anniversary, our collective struggle for justice continues and our voices grow louder and stronger. ([Al Huang](#), Senior Attorney and Director of Environmental Justice, Natural Resources Defense Council, New York, NY)

Even now 20 years after the signing of the 'Environmental Justice Executive Order', communities in Louisiana's Cancer Alley are still fighting for justice and a safe future for their communities. ([Daryl Malek-Wiley](#), Sierra Club Environmental Justice & Community Partnership Program, New Orleans, LA)

As a relatively new EJ community activist and advocate, I am so impressed and grateful to those who have blazed the trail over the past twenty years --- you've set an awfully high standard for us new comers! As we all share in the joy of this well-deserved celebration, may we be committed to utilizing all of the accomplishments to inspire and empower our work in the days ahead. Special thanks to all of our courageous, hard-working, committed EJ pioneers. ([Margaret J. May](#), Executive Director, Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council, Kansas City, MO)

The President's 1994 Environmental Justice Executive Order is the high water mark in federal policy making regarding Environmental Justice in the U.S. It is also a testament to the rapid rise, potency, and enduring nature of the Environmental Justice movement. The Executive Order is indeed the culmination of the progression of potent and rapidly unfolding events. From the 1982 Warren County, North Carolina, protests, to the 1987 United Church of Christ report, *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*, to Robert Bullard's 1990 book, *Dumping in Dixie*, to the 1990 Michigan Conference, to the 1991 National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit that produced the *17 Principle of Environmental Justice*, to Bunyan Bryant and Paul Mohai's 1992 book, *Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards*, to the U.S. EPA's 1992 report, *Environmental Equity: Reducing Risks for All Communities*, to the 1994 Executive Order, a

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high water mark was achieved within a twelve-year span and has endured as the foundation of Environmental Justice Policy in America under three Presidential Administrations. (**Paul Mohai, Ph.D.**, School of Natural Resources and Environment, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI)

The 20th Anniversary of the Executive Order highlights how profoundly the environmental justice movement has transformed the face of U.S. environmentalism. As we look toward the future to address monumental environmental challenges like climate change, environmental justice activism must continue to reshape and connect the broader agendas of sustainability and social equity. (**Rachel Morello-Frosch, Ph.D., M.P.H.**, Professor, Director Doctor of Public Health Program, Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Management & School of Public Health, University of California, Berkeley, CA)

Hope Diminished, the Executive Order on Environmental Justice¹²⁸⁹⁸ initially resonated among Environmental Justice Organizations, People of Color, and low-income communities as a sign of Hope and Justice for communities over-burden with environmental toxins and disproportionately impacted by polluters. Sadly, the EO pits Low-income communities, People of Color, with little to no resources against Corporate America; with the EPA taking a mediator position, in which case, the low-income communities and People Color are left to take on challenges beyond their immediate capacities, in terms of resources, technical support, scientific evidence, legal representation, and time. It is often a battle of divine hope and intervention from above that keeps the struggle a live. Environmental Justice communities deserve a level playing field for the insurmountable obstacles facing their daily lives. (**Juan Parras**, Executive Director, Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services, Houston, Texas)

The issuance of the Executive Order in 1994 reflected the culmination of organizing, raising awareness, and breaking through to policymakers. But it really just set the stage for the next twenty years of work that has followed. Progress has been slow but steady – and our goals keep moving. In California, for example, EJ groups have certainly tackled disparate exposures to hazards and poor air but they have also moved the needle on such cutting edge issues as transit equity, access to parks, and the very nature of the state's response to climate change. And it is the recipe that brought us the Executive Order in the first place – strong community organizing, a solid base of research, and a sophisticated ability to play the inside *and* outside games – that will allow the environmental justice movement to continue to meet the challenges ahead. (**Manuel Pastor, Ph.D.**, Professor, Sociology/American Studies & Ethnicity, Director, Program for Environmental and Regional Equity, Director, Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration, Los Angeles, CA)

This year we celebrate one of the EJ movement's many proud achievements. We must also recognize that there is much more work to be done. I am eternally grateful for the leaders who have built this great movement and I join them with enthusiasm and renewed hope and commitment as they continue to move us forward. (**David N. Pellow**, University of Minnesota, Minnesota Global Justice Project, Minneapolis, MN)

President Clinton's Executive Order on environmental justice was a handful of words that launched a thousand ships: federal and state agencies scrambled to figure out how to address it, polluters had a new uncertainty in their forward planning, and communities of color had a new tool with which to seek to gain redress against exposure to hazards. And yet to this day the executive order's potential to bring environmental justice is still far from being realized. Twenty years on, it's time for government and society to rededicate themselves to achieving

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environmental justice, locally, nationally, and globally. (**J. Timmons Roberts, Ph.D.**, Ittleson Professor of Environmental Studies and Sociology Brown University, Providence, RI)

The many communities I serve are hoping to have the process result in strong policy guidance, standards and recommendations that can be enforced. Environmental justice communities are tired of being 'sacrifice zones' or 'kill zones' where the air, water and community are not protected. President Obama recognized this problem in his State of the Union and promised to do more to protect communities. (**Michelle Roberts**, Co-Coordinator, Environmental Justice & Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform, Washington, DC)

The Obama Executive Order on Environmental Justice reiterates the mandates of the first Clinton Executive Order and implies that environmental impacts and exposures on communities of color and low income are of critical concern. However, it represents a lost opportunity to have assessed the effectiveness of the prior order and to provide a stronger mandate for achieving, evaluating, and reporting progress by federal agencies on achieving environmental justice in the most vulnerable communities. It reveals a lack of vision for how those localities that bear a disparate burden of industrial pollution and our consumerism, can achieve the goal of healthy, sustainable, livable communities in which we live, work, play, pray and go to school. That goal is at the heart of our democracy and of the American Dream. (**Peggy M. Shepard**, Executive Director, Co-Founder, WE ACT For Environmental Justice, Heinz Award Recipient, New York, NY)

The signing of the EJ Executive Order marked a moment in time when the federal government signaled that social inequalities arising from environmental decision-making could no longer be ignored. The Executive Order was a triumph for activists who worked tirelessly to make their concerns about environmental impacts in their communities known and considered in the policy-making process. Despite limits on what can be achieved with an Executive Order, the EJ Executive Order fundamentally changed the way in which people thought about the environment in low-income and minority communities. (**Dorceta E. Taylor, Ph.D.**, University of Michigan, School of Natural Resources and Environment, Professor, Environmental Justice Field of Studies Coordinator, Ann Arbor, MI)

I can clearly remember that day in Washington, DC, when we finished the proposal to present to President Clinton. It all came down to the Power of the Pen, after hours of drafting and redrafting the language, it all came down to the President when he placed his signature on Executive Order 12898. This was an historical moment captured in time that has helped changed the course of history in our fight for Environmental Justice through the "Power of the Pen." (**Rev. Charles N. Utley**, Community Organizer and Campaign Coordinator, Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League/Hyde Park Improvement Committee, Augusta, GA)

It's hard to believe that the Environmental Justice Executive Order is reaching its 20th year. As a community that started organizing itself to protect its children from environmental exposures at a local school, we did know that what we were fighting for was environmental justice. The Executive Order and Principles allowed our community to build their vision for our community. This vision included shutting down the dirty coal power plants in Chicago, demanding the clean-up of a Superfund site in our community and better public transit options. In 2012, we won the shutdown of the plants, building of a new park on the capped superfund site and implementation of a new bus line. While these campaigns were long, it shows the power of organizing for environmentally just communities. (**Kimberly Wasserman**, North American

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Goldman Prize Recipient, Community Trainer, Little Village Environmental Justice Organization, Chicago, IL)

As I reflect, it is significant to note that it has been twenty years since the signing of the Environmental Justice Executive Order. Since that time, on the one hand, much has changed; and then on the other, nothing has changed. The Executive Order brought serious attention to the disproportionate exposure of minority and poor communities to environmental pollution. That order triggered a response from federal agencies, by charging them to include environmental justice as a part of their missions. In addition, it created a mechanism for working together to address environmental justice issues through inter-agency working group (IWG). The executive order raised the importance of protecting the environmental health of minorities and the poor to the highest level in our government – the office of the President. Since that time, there has been an explosion within the research community, creating a huge body of literature and developing a unique field of study we have come to know as Environmental Justice; while turning the pursuit of its study and addressing its issues into the EJ Movement. The executive order made environmental justice a legitimate parameter within our government and resulted in the development of a structure and the creation of a process from within government to provide resources to agencies to address “disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and low income populations.” We still have a long way to go. (**Beverly Wright, Ph.D.**, Executive Director, Dillard University, Deep South Center for Environmental Justice at Xavier University, Heinz Award Recipient, New Orleans, LA)

As a member of the NYC Environmental Justice Alliance, UPROSE benefits locally from the technical/policy expertise and organizing support of our citywide collective. In Sunset Park, Brooklyn, our EJ work began by organizing to stop the onslaught of environmental burdens hoisted onto the lungs of our loved ones, but during the journey we successfully doubled the amount of open space, stopped the siting of power plants, made avenues pedestrian friendly, increased surface transit, retro-fitted diesel trucks, planted hundreds of trees, helped pass legislation addressing Brownfields, Solid Waste and Power Plants, got our young people into college and graduate school and built an intergenerational movement committed to addressing climate change and community resiliency- the work continues. (**Elizabeth C. Yeampierre, Esq.**, Executive Director, UPROSE, Brooklyn, NY)

A TWENTY-POINT PLAN FOR ADVANCING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

As the nation grows smarter, greener, and sustainable, we also need to become more just to address longstanding disparities and inequalities. There are no silver-bullet solutions to these challenges. Nevertheless, there are some concrete action steps that can be taken to build, strengthen and support the Environmental Justice Movement going forward.

Strategy 1: Support efforts of the larger Environmental Justice Movement and its member organizations to “re-invent” themselves, refine their message, and articulate a proactive vision.

Environmental justice organizations, networks, and university-based centers and programs need to better articulate their broad and diverse scope of work that falls under the environmental justice umbrella. Reinvention alone is not enough as long as institutionalized racism remains ingrained in the fabric of American society. Unfortunately, the Environmental Justice Movement and individual environmental justice organizations in the 21st century must still combat artificial barriers that block opportunity.

Strategy 2: Assist organizations build economically vibrant and socially just communities with emphasis on health and well-being of families and children.

Build networks, partnerships, and collaboratives that create trusting and nurturing relationships. Influence public policies that support safe, healthy, sustainable, and socially-just communities. Support launching initiatives to clean up and redevelop degraded and vacant land exemplified by the following: use economic incentives to attract clean technology businesses; support job training and retraining the workforce that develops and produces “green jobs” for clean technologies; use zoning ordinances and other land-use tools to ensure healthy housing, adequate green space, and access to healthy foods and quality health care; and support transportation equity that ensures efficient and health-enhancing transit, safe biking, and walking routes.

Strategy 3: Support programs and strategies that strengthen the capacity of organizations to analyze and solve place-focused problems at the national, regional, statewide, and local community level.

Nongovernmental organizations need support to grow a movement and leaders that emphasize solution-oriented, place-based strategies and approaches such as “Sustainable Development Zones,” “Green Impact Zones,” and “Health Impact Zones” to transform dying, redlined, and burdened neighborhoods into thriving centers of social connection, economic activity, and health-enhancing environments.

Strategy 4: Foster strong collaborations, alliances, and multigenerational networking. Assist with multi-generational, multidisciplinary, cross-issue collaboration, networking, and training opportunities for young people and emerging leaders who are transitioning to greater leadership roles.

Broaden support for organizations that are in the process of leadership transition and expansion and collaborate with organizations to access organizational development consultants, researchers, scientists, educators, health professionals, and other “experts” with specialized training.

Strategy 5: Support youth and student work that intersects with a broad range of organizing areas across the broader environmental, health, and racial equity fields.

Investing in youth and student organizing around environment, health, and racial equity provides an opportunity to connect youth leadership and young people to the broader goals of social change. Every successful social movement in the U.S. has had an active and informed youth and student

component. Community-based organizations and university-based programs provide an important training ground for future leaders, technical experts, and professionals.

Strategy 6: Invest in work that intersects environmental health and reproductive health.

Encourage multi-sector approaches that seek to change policies and practices designed to reduce toxic exposure and environmental degradation on women, children, and families. A number of groups are working on campaigns to regulate, disclose, and ultimately eliminate toxic ingredients in consumer products, including cosmetics, cleaning and household products, and toys/products for infants and children. Groups are also calling for the elimination of toxic chemicals from consumer goods because of their long-term, cumulative impacts on human health and reproduction.

Strategy 7: Invest in long-term campaigns and programming. Demonstrating improvement in health outcomes takes time.

A long-term commitment is necessary to change the conditions in underserved and environmentally-burdened communities. Support long-term campaigns, organizing, educations/training, community-based participatory research, and policy infrastructure to enhance networking and collaborations nongovernmental organizations within the Environmental Justice Movement and with other organization allies working on similar topics and initiatives.

Strategy 8: Broaden the base of foundations and government funding of environmental justice and health equity work that extends beyond funding “silos.”

Environmental justice is integrative and holistic in its approach—encompassing a broad array of solution-driven protocols, including “anti-toxics” campaign, pollution prevention, precautionary principle, chemical reform, green chemistry, green products, food security, green jobs, green economy, etc. Incentives are needed to promote investment in clean technologies and healthy products, including renewable and non-polluting energy, safer chemical and materials, organic and sustainable agriculture, and sustainable fish harvesting, by using revenues from taxes levied on especially damaging consumer products and technologies.

Strategy 9: Help local governments, particularly public health departments, build and prioritize healthy communities’ initiatives.

Cities and counties must reorient their planning and operations, establish new methods of collaborating across sectors, and focus much more on prevention. Public health, medical, and social scientific research should continue to establish the link between health and community conditions, assess the effectiveness of existing policies, and help identify the priorities within and across communities.

Strategy 10: Strengthen the collaborative work on climate justice, public health, and vulnerable communities.

Climate justice looms as a major environmental justice issue. Investments are needed in the growing Climate Justice Movement since the most vulnerable populations will suffer the earliest and most damaging setbacks because of where they live, their limited income and economic means, and their lack of access to health care. Yet, low-income people and people of color contribute least to global warming. Unless appropriate actions are taken to mitigate its effects or adapt to them, climate change will worsen existing equity issues within the United States.

Strategy 11: Leverage public and private resources to support translations of environmental health and racial equity research. Information is power. Foster translation of research and technical reports and documents to highlight the link between community conditions and individual health and to provide insights about the effectiveness of different approaches. Getting “community-friendly” research materials in the hand of local leaders can sometimes make the difference between victory and a loss.

Strategy 12: Increase organization capacity and access to scientific data, policy analysis, and communications expertise. Support translation of on-the-ground experiences of communities working on an array of campaigns. Nongovernmental organizations that represent low-income communities and people of color need rigorous research and scientific data, economic analysis, and the ability to communicate their work to constituencies in larger policy arenas.

Strategy 13: Document and disseminate “success stories.” Environmental justice leaders have always subscribed to the principle of “people must speak for themselves” and telling their own stories. In order to be authentic, “success stories” need to be told through the voices of the individuals who produced the successes. Vulnerable and environmentally-burdened communities need to sense that change is possible in their lifetime. Stories about advocacy and policy change need to highlight how change can happen and the ways it can make a difference.

Strategy 14: Help frame proactive communications and media campaigns. Stories about environmental, health, and racial equity need to emphasize communities, organizations, and people “overcoming” challenges and creating change. They also need to highlight the connection between health and protective factors in the social, physical, and economic environments. Media stories need to provide possibilities for replication.

Strategy 15: Maintain a focus on racial equity and eliminating environmental and health disparities. Apply a racial equity lens to grantmaking. Achieving racial equity remains a core tenet of the Environmental Justice Movement. Community advocates need to be involved in decision making about the specific environmental and health challenges confronting their communities, the approaches to address them, and broader societal issues, to ensure that new policies and practices are equitable and overcome previous barriers to full inclusion and participation.

Strategy 16: Help align formal and informal systems that support environmental justice, healthy communities, and racial equity and promote optimal health outcomes for vulnerable families and children. Build innovative education, training and learning partnerships between schools, families, grassroots groups, communities, government, and the business community that strengthen the conditions for healthy communities. Programs should be relevant to community needs, support community change agendas, should be designed to document and better understand local issues, and provide diverse stakeholders with information needed to bolster efforts seeking policy change.

Strategy 17: Support movement for “toxic-free” neighborhoods and healthy schools. Healthy people and healthy environments are related. Advocates are fighting to get access to affordable housing in “toxic-free” neighborhoods and healthy schools. They are working on strategies to address the root causes of environmental risks, eliminate racial and ethnic

disparities within geographic areas, and increase public sector investments in prevention, and health promotion.

Strategy 18: Increase the percentage of grant dollars devoted to advocacy, community organizing, and civic engagement. Nongovernmental organizations need sustained resources to respond effectively to current challenges. As the nation grows smarter, greener, and sustainable, we also need to become more just to address longstanding disparities and inequalities. There are no silver-bullet solutions to these challenges. Nevertheless, there are some concrete action steps that can be taken to build, strengthen and support the Environmental Justice Movement going forward.

Strategy 19: Increase general operating support and multi-year grants. The vast majority of environmental justice and health equity work is cross-disciplinary, holistic, and in most instances “fit” into several categorical program areas. In general, organizations prefer multi-year, reliable core support to project support, where the strategic goals of the funder and the nonprofit organization are substantially aligned. Reliable, predictable, and flexible multi-year core support allows organizations to carry out their mission and respond to new challenges and opportunities.

Strategy 20: Invest in community-university partnerships (CUPs) that advance the new “corporate environmental justice performance scorecard” and related Health Impact Assessment tools that assess the potential human health risk of toxic emissions at industrial sites. The time is right for achieving the goal of clean and safe environments for all Americans. More community-university partnerships (CUPs) are needed to support the health and racial equity goals of the Environmental Justice Movement. There is a need to use Health Impact Assessments (HIA) to minimize adverse health outcomes. More emphasis should be on planning for good health, rather than managing risks, prevention, and precaution.