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Holistic Health & Healing: "Environmental Racism & Ecological Justice"

Dwight N. Hopkins

The environmental movement in the U.S. is comprised of at least two major sectors. One is known to the public because of its emphasis on the preservation and conservation of mother earth; and Greenpeace is usually the face of this grouping. The second important dimension of environmental concerns is the struggle against environmental racism and for ecological justice. Here, poor and working class communities of African Americans, Latino-Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans have taken the lead against sickness in human bodies, social relations, and nature.

The Greenpeace wing of the movement has consistently fought for the healing of the planet. It teaches us that "... environmental degradation caused by massive pollution of air, water and land threatens the very life of the earth. Rapid depletion of non-renewable resources, indeed of species themselves, the thinning of the ozone layer, exposing all living creatures to the danger of radiation, the buildup of gases exacerbating the greenhouse effect, increasing erosion by the sea – all these are documented by scientific research".¹

The primary foci of the earth-emphasis environmental wing have been historically "wilderness and wildlife preservation, wise resource management, pollution abatement, and

population control". Preservation examples include the spotted owl and the snail darter. The leaders and followers of this movement have mainly been middle and upper income whites with above average education and easy access to political, cultural, and economic resources.²

For instance in April 2007, roughly one thousand scientists from about seventy-four countries constituted the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The final report discovered the dire impact of global warming on the earth's ecosystems. Increased populations and growing urbanization coupled with adverse climate changes will eventually result in hazardous flooding, drought, and slow extinction for up to twenty to thirty percent of plant and animal species.³ More than ever, mother earth is sick with acid-rain pollution. The greenhouse effect is increasing; the fact that carbon dioxide traps the sun's heat in the atmosphere and consequently warms the earth. Industrial pollution is part of the problem. What many people don't know is that carbon dioxide remains in the atmosphere for about two hundred years. The increase in temperatures and sea levels will give rise to mass famine and damaging flooding. It is possible that in the year 2040, sea ice in the Arctic might disappear totally, preventing polar bears from hunting sea animals on which to live. For us humans, a radical climate change will drastically lower rainfall in the western United States and global storms will intensify.⁴

Environmental Racism & Ecological Justice

Clearly, the conservation and preservation wing of the environment effort is most widely known in America. That is why many people are surprised to hear that African American communities have been struggling against environmental racism and for ecological justice long before the formal launching of the struggle in the 1980s. Among black folk, environmental racism symbolizes profound illness of both the earth and humans in people of color neighborhoods. Holistic disease requires ecological justice, i.e., holistic health and healing.

For example, Thomas Calhoun Walker was a black man and the Advisor and Consultant of Negro Affairs for the Virginia Emergency Relief Administration in Richmond, VA. During WWI, Walker was the architect of environmental initiatives for blacks, including providing black children with access to swimming pools and parks, eliminating rats on wharves, promoting gardening among blacks, and stressing hygienic homes.⁵

Likewise few realize that many of the urban rebellions in the 1960s derived from black folk's anger about lack of garbage collection and sanitation services. And the famous riot at predominantly Texas Southern University in Houston in 1967 erupted partially because community people protested an eight year old black girl's drowning at a city garbage dump. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated because he was helping black working class garbage workers in Memphis, Tennessee who went on strike for a holistic healthy environment. They sought increased wages, the same pay scale as white city workers, and a quality work environment.⁶

However, not all agree that the black community initiated the ecological justice dimension of the environmental movement. Some point to the United Farm Workers struggle against pesticide poisoning in the 1960s. And others mark the 15th century European occupation of Native American lands as the start of environmental justice struggles.

Yet general consensus cites the formal launching of the environmental racism and ecological justice movement in the year 1987. That year the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice (UCC-CRJ) published the landmark study *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A National Report on the Racial and Social-Economic Characteristics of Communities with Hazard Waste Sites*. Rev. Benjamin Chavis (a UCC black clergyman) headed the Commission whose report substantiated the reality of 'environmental racism'. Having created this new phrase "environmental racism", the report suggested:

"the existence of clear patterns which show that communities with greater minority percentages of the population are more likely to be the sites of commercial hazardous waste facilities. The possibility that these patterns resulted by chance is virtually impossible, strongly suggesting that some underlying factors, which are related to race, played a role in the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities. Therefore the Commission for Racial Justice concludes that, indeed, race has been a factor in the location of hazardous waste facilities in the United States."⁷

The UCC-CRJ (1994) updated study found that the situation had worsened. More Black and brown people were disproportionately living near hazardous waste areas. In seven years, there had been a six percent increase of people of color located near toxic disposal sites.⁸

After releasing their landmark 1987 report, the UCC assembled the historic First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C. in October 1991. The Summit assembled indigenous peoples, civil rights activists, labour organizers, anti-toxic veterans, and academics. A final conference report directly accented the role of race in environmental analysis:

"environmental inequities cannot be reduced solely to class - the economic ability of people to "vote with their feet" and escape polluted environments. Race interpenetrates class in the United States and is often a more potent predictor of which communities get dumped on and which ones are spared. There is clear evidence that institutional barriers severely limit access to clean environments. Despite the many attempts made by government to level the playing field, all communities are still not equal".

As the head of the UCC-CRJ, Ben Chavis understood the Summit as a key process for people of color to organize self-empowerment and self-determination focused squarely on environmental justice. U.S. minority populations were claiming their own voice and their own agency within the larger environmental effort.⁹

This Summit produced a major document called the "Principles of Environmental Justice". The seventeen principles are the plumb line for the environmental racism and ecological justice thrust.¹⁰ With this statement, it becomes crystal clear that ecological justice combines nature with social justice. Both require healing. The ecological justice movement does not treat the problem of oppression and social exploitation as separable from the rape and exploitation of the natural world. Instead, it argues that human societies and the natural environment are intricately linked and that the health of one depends on the health of the other. It understands that if the human environment is poisoned, if there are no opportunities for economic survival or nutritional sustenance, or if there are no possibilities to be sheltered, then we have an inadequate environmental program.¹¹

Environmental justice activists target the prevention of siting waste facilities in working class and people of color communities. They also broaden their organizing efforts to clean up the toxic impact on mother earth. For instance, local communities fight for their participation in decision-making on environmental health issues; oversee implementation of governmental and industry policy and guidelines; clean up poisonous industrial areas; and organize to end dangerous practices harming workers on the job. Moreover, the "movement for environmental justice is also about creating clean jobs, building a sustainable economy, guaranteeing safe and affordable housing, and achieving racial and social justice".¹²

Five Strands within Ecological Justice

The current state of the ecological or environmental justice organizing results from five strands that have coalesced around environmental racism and for a healthy ecology.

The 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s civil rights struggle is probably the major foundation upon which the ecological justice movement is built. In fact, the black church and black community opposition to a PCP dump in Warren County, North Carolina in 1982 shows a direct tie between civil rights movements and environmental justice movements. It is this history of organizing, sacrificing, and strategizing that grass roots civil rights and church leaders (led by the UCC) bring directly into the ecological justice process. The Warren County protest was initiated by black church women.¹³ Likewise, some of the Chicano student leaders of the 1960s Latino civil rights organizations are part of the historical foundation of environmental anti-racism efforts.

After the civil rights struggles of blacks and Latinos, grassroots anti-toxic activists have brought their wisdom and experience to the ecological justice process. These veterans gathered momentum in the late 1970s in opposition to the construction of incinerators, landfills, and waste facilities. A large representation of women exists here because women were often the ones who rallied to protect the health and lives of their children.

Both the civil rights and anti-toxic waste organizers came to understand that their local and specific efforts were linked to a larger systemic and structural problem, complicated by race and the wealthy class.

Thirdly, academics have joined the environmental justice struggle by contributing vital research and providing systemic and structural analyses, publications, lobbying, and networking. The United Church of Christ helped to organize academics into conferences to focus on environmental racism.

Fourth, Native American activists have perhaps the longest history of combating environmental racism and building ecological justice. This began 500 years ago with the arrival of European Christian colonialists. In fact the formation of the American Indian Movement (AIM) was influenced by environmental and land demands. A key contribution in the environmental racism/ecological justice philosophy is Native American's stress on self-determination; that is to say, oppressed communities must speak for themselves.

And, after American Indians, a fifth strand of the ecological justice organizing has been the labour movement. The United Farm Workers (headed by Cesar Chavez and comprised mainly of Latino farm labourers) built a national network emphasizing both the banning of pesticides and worker input in the decision making process on their jobs.¹⁴

Concrete Examples of Environmental Racism

What these five different strands of ecological justice activists recognize is that environmental racism is a profound illness impacting the holistic body of creation. Such life threatening sickness disproportionately targets people of color and working class communities. To bring about the needed health and healing work, one has to have a deep appreciation for the depth of the attack on mother earth and social dying caused by unchecked individualistic human greed. Examples of environmental racism expose the broad scale nature of the suffering and sickness. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. argues that:

Millions of African Americans, Latinos, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans are trapped in polluted environments because of their race and color. Inhabitants of these communities are exposed to greater health and environmental risks than is the general population. Clearly, all Americans do not have the same opportunities to breathe clean air, drink clean water, enjoy clean parks and playgrounds, or work in a clean, safe environment.

"Environmental racism is racial discrimination in environmental policymaking. It is racial discrimination in the enforcement of regulations and laws. It is racial discrimination in the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic waste disposal and the siting of polluting industries. It is racial discrimination in the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in communities of color. And, it is racial discrimination in the history of excluding people of color from the mainstream environmental groups, decision-making boards, commissions, and regulatory bodies.¹⁵

In some cases, environmental racism and the resulting sickness it cause are intentional and deliberate policy practices on the part of global financial institutions. For example, Lawrence Summers, chief economist at the World Bank in 1991, released an internal memo that targeted Third World countries, or, in his words "Less Developed Countries". The memo indicates that the primary intent of the World Bank is to make profits for monopoly capitalist corporations at the expense of the health of working class people and poor countries in the world. Summers begins his memo with the phrase "dirty industries", indicating his awareness of how pollution causes sickness for the earth and for human beings. Because the memo gives an insider's view on the dire implications for health and death, we quote an extended excerpt:

"Dirty" Industries: Just between you and me, shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging MORE migration of the dirty industries to the LDCs [Less Developed Countries]? I can think of three reasons:

- 1) The measurement of the costs of health impairing pollution depends on the foregone earnings from increased morbidity and mortality. From this point of view a given amount of health impairing pollution should

be done in the country with the lowest cost, which will be the country with the lowest wages. I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that.

- 2) The costs of pollution are likely to be non-linear as the initial increments of pollution probably have very low cost. I've always thought that under-polluted areas in Africa are vastly UNDER-polluted; their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low compared to Los Angeles or Mexico City.
- 3) The demand for a clean environment for aesthetic and health reasons is likely to have very high income elasticity [i.e., meaning in the developed countries of the northern hemisphere]

The problem with the arguments against all of these proposals for more pollution in LDCs (intrinsic rights to certain goods, moral reasons, social concerns, lack of adequate markets, etc.) could be turned around and used more or less effectively against every [World] Bank proposal...¹⁶

Larry Summers and the World Bank are plainly considering causing illness and death in the poorer countries of the world in order to make more profits. He calmly offers proposals to dump toxics and pollution in the Third World because the developed countries have high incomes that would cause opposition. And he concludes by rationally calculating how arguments against his proposals for more pollution in Third World countries can be used against the World Bank.

Likewise, in 1975 the Trilateral Commission released its report titled *The Crisis of Democracy*. While the World Bank memo deals with poor people and countries of color inter-

nationally, the Trilateral Commission focuses on people of color and other former silent communities within the U.S. Yet, the same intentional calculations are at play. The report shares a definition of capitalist elite democracy.

The vulnerability of democratic government in the United States [thus] comes not primarily from external threats, though such threats are real, nor from internal subversion from the left or the right, although both possibilities could exist, but rather from the internal dynamics of democracy itself in a highly educated, mobilized, and participant society ... Previously passive or unorganized groups in the population – Blacks, Indians, Chicanos, white ethnic groups, students, and women – [have] now embarked on concerted efforts to establish their claims to opportunities, positions, rewards, and privileges, to which they had not considered themselves entitled before.¹⁷

External factors do not threaten American democracy. Rather, the people, the citizens of the United States are the threat. Clearly the monopoly capitalist representatives on the Trilateral Commission see democracy from their class perspective. That is why the report states that the "vulnerability of democratic government in the United States [thus] comes not primarily from external threats..., but rather from the internal dynamics of democracy itself". These global capitalists lords are talking about how everyday Americans can threaten bourgeois democracy, the democracy of the monopoly capitalists themselves. Clearly in the eyes of the Trilateral Commission, democracy is not an objective, universal principle, but one deeply ensconced in class interests; that is to say, democracy in America is one of class struggle.

The World Bank represents monopoly capitalists' financial institutions. The Trilateral Commission represents major capitalist governments. But a similar approach is found among experts of environmental systems. For instance, Cerrell

Associates, a consulting firm for toxic waste companies, wrote a report suggesting toxic waste companies intentionally “target small, rural communities whose residents are low income, older people, or people with a high school education or less; communities with a high proportion of Catholic residents; and communities whose residents are engaged in resource extractive industries such as agriculture, mining, and forestry. Ideally, the report states, ‘officials and companies should look for lower socioeconomic neighborhoods that are also in a heavy industrial area with little, if any, commercial activity.’¹⁸ Moreover other criteria for dumping toxic waste included being near highways, and far from schools, nursing homes, and hospitals, which communities of color lack; areas with cheap land values; commercial zoning; and unemployment. The overarching purpose of the report was to advise toxic companies how to bring about toxic sickness in communities that would not cause public opposition. These recommended guidelines for dumping poisonous wastes fit existing California hazardous sites largely populated by Latinos, and fit east coast urban sites, largely populated by blacks.

Given similar world views of the capital industry, governments, and private consultants, it should not surprise anyone that the “most polluted urban communities are those with crumbling infrastructure, ongoing economic disinvestment, deteriorating housing, inadequate schools, chronic unemployment, a high poverty rate, and an overloaded health-care system”.¹⁹

The expend ability of people of color ends not with capital, policy, and consultants, but also extends to the practice of the U.S. government’s own regulatory agencies. The *National Law Journal*, a leading legal publication, conducted a comprehensive analysis of every U.S. environmental lawsuit from the last seven years. Evidence shows that the U.S. government penalizes at a much higher rate pollution-law violators in white communities than in people of color communities. In fact, there is a 506 percent disparity between white and black communities. Similarly the *Journal* examined the 12 year history of the

federal government’s Superfund, an account that provides funds to clean up toxic sites throughout the U.S. The review of all residential toxic waste sites showed that “the government takes longer to address hazards in minority communities, and it accepts solutions less stringent than those recommended by the scientific community. This racial imbalance, the investigation found, often occurs whether the community is wealthy or poor”.²⁰ Indeed, sicknesses resulting from environmental racism is about race, as it cuts across class divides within the African American community.

Even studies by official regulatory offices document how African American and Latino communities in California experience closer proximity to toxic industries and the most workers in poisonous work environments, and endure an overall life of unhealthy factors yielding illness of the body and decreased quality of life.²¹

Robert D. Bullard, author of the groundbreaking text, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (1990), likewise discovered how race trumps class in environmental racism.

People of color are exposed to greater environmental hazards in their neighborhoods and on the job than are their white counterparts. Studies find elevated exposure levels by race, even when social class is held constant. For example, research indicates race to be independent of class in the distribution of air pollution, contaminated fish consumption, location of municipal landfill and incinerators, abandoned toxic-waste dumps, and lead poisoning in children.²²

Lead poisoning, for instance, impacts children of color at all class levels regardless of their parents’ salary and educational status.

The Agency for Toxic Substances Disease Registry concluded “that, for families earning less than \$6,000,68 percent

of African American children had lead poisoning, compared with 36 percent for white children. In families with income exceeding \$15,000, more than 38 percent of African American children suffer from lead poisoning, compared with 12 percent of whites".²³ Regardless of household income, black children are two to three times more likely than white children to have sicknesses derived from lead poisoning.

What accounts for this across class illness? Disproportionately, white citizens can leave toxic areas that cause death and not healing. Working class and poor African Americans and even many black professionals and upper income households remain stuck in lethal situations due to residential segregation, bank redlining, and housing discrimination. When white families left, blacks moved into harmful situations of stockyards, warehouses, factory pollution, noise, dirt, and railroad tracks. Children grow up exposed to the stench of unhealthy land, water, and air and harmful noise levels.²⁴ Factually, "An African American who has an income of \$50,000 is as residentially segregated as an African American on welfare".²⁵

Physical illnesses and death are closely linked to psychological and mental stress related diseases in areas of concentrated toxicity. Blacks are disproportionately situated in these conditions than whites and, therefore, experience higher levels of stress-related sickness and deaths. "For example, studies of both iron and steel foundry workers and laundry and dry-cleaning industry workers show an increase in the incidence of stress-related mortality and morbidity among blacks as compared to white workers."²⁶ Consequently, talk of healing from environmental racism has to be a holistic approach encompassing the physical, emotional, and spiritual levels of illnesses among blacks.

Native American and Latino-Hispanic communities are similar. Janet Phoenix (M.D., M.P.H., Ph.D. in children's health) has studied Navajo teenagers and discovered that they have organ cancer seventeen times the national average. She

concluded also that black children are fifty percent of the nation's youth who suffer from lead paint poison.²⁷ Dr. Phoenix sites the following symptoms of lead poisoning among children of color: behavior challenges, restricted vocabulary, low attention span, "fatigue..., loss of appetite, irritability, sleep disturbance, sudden behavioral change..., development regression... clumsiness, muscular irregularities, weakness, abdominal pain, persistent vomiting, constipation, and changes in consciousness. Lead exposure is particularly harmful to children. It damages their developing brains and nervous systems." which can give rise to emotional disturbances, learning disabilities, and attention disorders.²⁸ Environmental racism is a severe disease affecting minority children.

Native American nations (called reservations) are receiving increased attention by industrial toxic corporations. The latter view the former as spaces to avoid some of the tougher environmental regulations promulgated by state governments. The weaker federal policies have less bite when applied to Native Americans because of the particular status and nominal sovereignty of Indian nations.²⁹ Federal governmental office also are forging ahead to cause sickness and death for Native Americans. Winona LaDuke, co-chair of the Indigenous Women's Network claims that the "U.S. government recently solicited every Indian tribe within U.S. borders to host a possible nuclear waste storage facility. Officials entice tribes with 'no strings attached' grants of hundreds of thousands of dollars. The federal office of Nuclear Waste Negotiation states its mission as finding 'a state or Indian Tribe willing to host a repository or monitored retrievable storage facility for nuclear waste ...'"³⁰ Given the low wealth and financial base in Indian territories, federal bribery can be enticing. The federal government is persistent because, at least for one reason, two thirds of all U.S. uranium is under Indian territory. Yet the immediate financial rewards are overshadowed by the health risks. One of the elements that results from the uranium production process remains radioactive for a minimum of 16,000 years.³¹

Latino and Hispanic farm workers are intimately interwoven in the entire pesticide production and application. They mix, load, and apply health and life threatening pesticides. Brown people are also the flaggers in the fields, the labourers who guide and direct airplanes that spray pesticides over fruit and vegetable fields.

The highest exposure is from grapes, citrus fruit, peaches, apples, and other tree fruits that grow with a lot of leaves, or from crops that are sprayed often and close to harvest such as strawberries and tomatoes Farmworker children are also at high risk of pesticide exposure whether or not they work in the fields alongside their parents. Frequently, young children, including infants and toddlers, are taken to the fields by their parents because childcare is not available. The fetus is exposed as well when pregnant women work in the fields...³²

Even children not brought to the fields are exposed to the clothing and footprints of their parents' shoes and work outfits. Pesticides cause skin diseases, cancer, male infertility, abortion, birth defects, and neurological disorders. In fact, some pesticides sprayed on fruit and vegetables contain a chemical similar to nerve gas. Though there are obvious immediate negative health outcomes, some of the long term deadly impacts of these pesticides become evident 10 to 20 years after exposure.

Over 95 percent of migrant farm workers are people of color, and 92 percent are Latinos and Hispanic labourers. Everyday thousands of Spanish speaking workers and their children are sprayed, infected, and poisoned by the pesticides that go on the fruit and vegetables we eat throughout America.³³

Like other people of color, Latino health is subject to hazardous dump areas. "California has three Class I toxic waste dumps – the dumps that can take just about toxic substance known to science." One is in Kettleman which is 95 percent Latino, and the largest toxic waste dump west of Alabama. The

second one is in Buttonwillow with majority population being Latino. And the third is in Westmorland with a 72 percent Latino population.³⁴ Chemical Waste Management, the company that owns these California toxic waste dumps also owns the largest one in the country, found in Emelle, Alabama. Some suggest that this dump is the largest in the world. The population here is 95 percent black. Chemical Waste Management also owned a toxic incinerator on Chicago's southside, with a 55 percent black community and 24 percent Latino; and one in Sauget, Illinois with a 95 percent black population; and also one in Port Arthur, Texas, comprised of 80 percent Latino and black residents.

Charles Lee, a Chinese American and the lead author of the landmark UCC-CRJ report that coined the phrase "environmental racism", sums up the critical state of toxic health among communities of color:

Three out of every five African Americans and Hispanic Americans lived in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites African Americans were heavily overrepresented in the populations of metropolitan areas with the largest number of uncontrolled toxic waste sites. These areas include: Memphis, TN (173 sites); Cleveland, OH (106 sites); St. Louis, MO (160); Chicago, IL (103 sites); Houston, TX (152 sites); and Atlanta, GA (94 sites). Los Angeles, CA, has more Hispanics living in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites than any other metropolitan area in the United States. Approximately half of all Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans lived in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites.³⁵

Devastation is an understatement when applied to people of color's holistic health; that is to say, environmental and social wellness. Environmental racism undergirds decisions on contaminated fish consumption, air pollution, hazardous toxic sites, urban incinerators and landfills, lead poisoning in

children, Native American land rights, the use of technologies in sustainable development, and farm workers' proximity to pesticides.³⁶

Black Environmental Liberation Theology

Framing environmental racism within the context of holistic environmental and social sickness suggests the important need of holistic healing, especially for communities of color. Perhaps one move in this direction is the creation of a Black Environmental Liberation Theology. James H. Cone hints at this direction when he laments the divide within the U.S. between the conservation/preservation and environmental racism/ecological justice wings of the environment movement. Cone writes: "Justice fighters for blacks and the defenders of the earth have tended to ignore each other in their public discourse and practice. Their separation from each other is unfortunate because they are fighting the same enemy - human beings' domination of one another and nature Connecting racism with the degradation of the earth is a much-needed work in the African-American community, especially in black liberation theology and the black churches".³⁷

This challenge from James H. Cone, the father of black theology of liberation, to link racism and degradation of the earth with black liberation theology can be informed by the biblical witness to help tie together these concerns. Romans 8 19-23 reveals that the work of Christ includes the redemption of the entire universe, that creation might be freed from decay and share in sacred freedom. Ephesians 1: 1-10; and Col. 1: 15-20 point to Christ kneading together and unifying all that is in heaven and in earth and bringing the entire creation back to God's bosom. And we know Luke 4: 18 ff speaks to Jesus' mission with the oppressed and Mt. 25:31 ff has the only test to enter heaven. How we spend our earthly lives serving the lowly and healing earth is actually serving Christ. Therefore there "is a unity between the hope for the inward liberation of the children of God and the hope for the liberation of the entire physical creation from its bondage and oppression".³⁸

Psalm 24: 1-2 reads: "The earth and everything on it belong to the Lord. The world and its people belong to the Lord. The Lord placed it all on the oceans and rivers". To have holistic healing of the environment and social ills, we must unveil the fallacy in the ideology and theology that say monopoly capitalists corporations, world financial institutions, and governments can own nature and the labour of working people. How is it possible for these mega-toxic and deforestation entities to own privately that which was created and still remains in God's hands? It is sin to monopolize the environmental wealth and resources from earth given to all of creation. So healing can begin on one domain at least - the theological level. Liberation theology can undergird ecological justice.

Indeed, Dianne D. Glave, an African American scholar and a leader in the environmental racism and ecological justice movement, is the first person to advance a Black Environmental Liberation Theology (BELT). In this manner, here is a direct response to the above-mentioned challenge of James H. Cone. Glave directly references Cone's quote that condemns the racism in the traditional environmental movement and the failure of black theology of liberation to take up environmental justice. Glave unites the environmental efforts with the ecological justice sectors. Hence she attempts to provide a working model for what she calls a "black environmental liberation theology (BELT), a strand of black liberation theology".³⁹

Moreover, she claims the following in her constructive BELT:

Black liberation theology, which decries the oppression of African Americans based on biblical principles - is the foundation of BELT, a nascent theology based on environmental justice history and activism by African American Christians. Like black liberation theology, BELT is both a theology and an ideology that is actualized by shielding contemporary African Americans exposed to toxins and pollution

from landfills, garbage dumps, and auto mechanics' shops, and sewage plants.⁴⁰

For Glave, BELT is built on three sources: the Bible, history, and grassroots organizing. Glave quotes Galatians 3: 28 as a biblical basis for her BELT. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus". She complements this texts with Psalm 82: 3-4 where it sides with the oppressed. "Defend the poor and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy; Free them from the hand of the wicked". Yet her foundational biblical text is the Genesis story, where she finds that the earth belongs to God and Adam and Eve were only given stewardship and not dominion over God's earth.

Regarding the historical basis of BELT, Glave cites "the history of environmental justice by the African American church and Christian organizations. Church environmental justice activists, part of the long history of civil rights in the African American community and an underpinning of BELT, struggled to reverse twentieth-century environmental racism". A prime example was the Memphis black garbage workers' strike. Glave argues that King's April 3, 1968 "I've Been To The Mountain Top" speech serves as a "template for the justice of black liberation theology and BELT".⁴¹ This address the night before his murder situated the garbage workers' struggles within an ecological lense and as environmental demands. King's words also expose various forms of white racial discrimination as attacks against nature.

Glave uncovers a history of black church involvement in environmental justice in Rev. Ben Chavis' talk at a national environment conference. Chavis' offered a theological interpretation of race and the environment: "The fact that we [African Americans] are disproportionately dumped on", says Chavis, "is just consistent with being in America And the demand that God puts on us is that we will face up to the contemporary responsibility that God has given us to not let

God's creation be destroyed by sin... Environmental injustice is sin before God".⁴²

And regarding her third source for BELT, Glave pinpoints local grassroots activists as they fight against environmental racism. It is this material sector, writes Glave, that defines BELT. Here too she notes especially the role of everyday church folks struggling along side clergy and community leaders.

Glave acknowledges that BELT has its origin in black theology of liberation. To transform BELT into what she calls a theology incorporating twenty-first century action, she advances a twelve-point environmental justice agenda for action.⁴³ With her creation of BELT, Glave has advanced not only black theology of liberation. More specifically she provides one way to heal the holistic illnesses caused by environmental racism. Her BELT offers the balm to heal the body, mind, emotions, and feelings of those forging ecological justice on the ground. She acknowledges the component parts of progressive black church leadership, justice biblical warrants, public policy, people of color coalitions, tactical alliances with mainstream environmental groups, and the plumb line of grassroots efforts. "In response to African Americans being inequitably exposed to toxic chemicals and waste, the church is called to further expand grassroots and national reform looking at BELT – justice, grassroots activism, spirituality, and organization – all based on the Bible. Combined, the history and theology can be a 'spearhead for reform' for African Americans embattled by environmental racism in the future."⁴⁴ BELT is part of faith, health, and healing in African American life.

Notes

1. K.C. Abraham, "A Theological Response to the Ecological Crisis", in *Ecotheology: Voices From South And North*, ed. David G. Hallman (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994),66.
2. Robert D. Bullard, "Anatomy of Environmental Racism and the Environmental Justice Movement", in *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*, ed. Robert D. Bullard (Boston, Mass.: South End Press, 1993), 22.

3. *Newsweek* (April 16, 2007): 46.
4. *Newsweek* (April 16, 2007): 65 and 66.
5. Dianne Glave and Mark Stoll, "African American Environmental History: An Introduction", in *To Love the Wind and the Rain": African Americans and Environmental History*, ed. Dianne Glave and Mark Stoll (Pittsburgh, Penn.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 1-2.
6. The U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (1968) documented these causes of civil disobedience in black areas. Robert D. Bullard, ed. *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 9-10.
7. Vernice D. Miller, "Building on Our Past, Planning for Our Future", in *Toxic Struggles: The Theory and Practice of Environmental Justice*, ed. Richard Hofrichter (Philadelphia, Penn.: New Society Publishers, 1993), 128.
8. Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 55.
9. Vernice D. Miller, 129.
10. For the "Principles" document, see *Toxic Struggles*, 237-239.
11. Dorceta E. Taylor, "Environmentalism and the Politics of Inclusion", in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 57.
12. "Introduction", in *From the Ground Up*, 17.
13. Dianne D. Glave, "Black Environmental Liberation Theology", in *To Love the Wind and the Rain*", 194-195.
14. Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up*, 20-28.
15. Rev. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr., Foreword, in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 3.
16. Robert D. Bullard, "Anatomy of Environmental Racism and the Environmental Justice Movement", in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 19-20.
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20. Marianne Lavelle and Marcia A. Coyle, "Unequal Protection: The Racial Divide in Environmental Law", in *Toxic Struggles*, 136-137.
21. Cynthia Hamilton, 70.
22. Robert D. Bullard, "Anatomy of Environmental Racism", *Toxic Struggles*, 26 and 27.
23. Ibid.
24. Cynthia Hamilton, 71.
25. Robert D. Bullard, "Anatomy of Environmental Racism", *Toxic Struggles*, 26-27.
26. Beverly Hendrix Wright and Robert D. Bullard, "The Effects of Occupational Injury, Illness, and Disease on the Health Statu of Black Americans", *Toxic Struggles*, 156 and 159.

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28. Janet Phoenix, "Getting the Lead Out of the Community", in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 77.
29. Robert D. Bullard, "Anatomy of Environmental Racism", *Toxic Struggles*, 32.
30. Winona LaDuke, "A Society Based on Conquest Cannot Be Sustained", in *Toxic Struggles*, 105.
31. Winona LaDuke, Ibid., 103. She also writes: "Over fifty million indigenous populations inhabit the world's remaining rain forests; over one million indigenous people will be relocated to allow for the development of hydroelectric dam projects in the next decade; The United States has detonated all its nuclear weapons in the lands of indigenous people... ; Two-thirds of all uranium resources within the borders of the United States lie under Native reservations... ; One third of all low-sulphur coal in the western United States is on Indian land, with four of the ten largest coal strip mines in these same areas; Fifteen of the current eighteen recipients of nuclear-waste research grants ... are Indian communities; and the largest hydroelectric project on the continent, the James Bay project, is on Cree and Inuit lands in northern Canada", p. 99.
32. Marion Moses, "Farmworkers and Pesticides," in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 165, 166, and 167.
33. Marion Moses, Ibid., 162.
34. Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up*, 2 and 3.
35. Charles Lee, "Beyond Toxic Wastes and Race", in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 49,
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37. James H. Cone, *Risks of Faith: The Emergence Of A Black Theology Of Liberation, 1968-1998*, 138 and 139.
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41. Ibid., 193.
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