

Environmental Justice in a Moment of Danger

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We are living through and in a precarious environmental and political crossroads, with the warmest years ever recorded, active assaults on the rights of the disenfranchised, and accelerating authoritarianism. At the same time, important social movements for environmental and climate justice are mobilizing large numbers of people with a broad global impact outside of their local contexts. Oil pipeline protests on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, responses to reports of mass lead poisonings in Flint, mobilizations against police killings of African-Americans, and impassioned entreaties and testimonies of small Pacific Islands and Arctic indigenous voices in response to rising flood waters from climate change comprise a snapshot of the thousands of protests in the United States have foregrounded the convergence between “environmentalism” and “social injustice/inequality.” Environmental justice activists in the US make common cause across the globe, and mourn as their own the victims of environmental violence and assassination, like Berta Cáceres in Honduras, Ken Saro-Wiwa in Nigeria, and Chico Mendes in Brazil. Rachel Carson Center support enables me to complete *Environmental Justice in a Moment of Danger*

It is precisely in this moment that understanding environmental justice is essential. Like Lipsitz, I use *moment* from Walter Benjamin’s *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, in which he writes, “to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was,’” but to “seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.” Environmental justice movements, both in the US and across the world, offer an important guidepost for troubled times, because these movements and the people who make them have long-standing political commitments, and, crucially, have done important *ideological* work grounded in everyday and long-lasting struggles for justice.

This book begins with a revisionist history of the environmental justice movement in the US, focusing on how it has globalized and changed over time. The book uses short, synthetic histories of selected environmental justice struggles. It takes *particular* case studies as emblematic of larger political and cultural conflicts and moments of danger: crises of modernity (technology, media, science), winding down of American Exceptionalism, environmental stressors (climate change) in the face of authoritarianism and resurgent racism, rampant gender inequality, and attacks on Indigenous communities, and includes different struggles: for climate, environmental and health justice and against pollution and extraction in their myriad iterations.

Each chapter is focused on keywords, and case studies. Because the details of every example is important and particular, keywords give shape and structure to link cases and places that are endlessly distinct from one another (i.e. Flint, Central Valley, Hurricanes Katrina and Maria, and Standing Rock/ Keystone XL), but also indelibly connected. Activists make connections between movements because their shared analytic allows distinct actors to name capitalism, colonialism, and racism as their shared enemy. Thus, keywords make it possible to see how many threads are interwoven into the fabric of environmental justice struggle.