



**GROUNDWORK**  
**USA**

# Environmental Justice Timeline

# The Indian Removal Act & Trail of Tears

Andrew Jackson, then president of the United States, signed the Indian Removal Act into law. American colonists wanted the Native Americans' ancestral homelands for themselves, and "Indian removal" was Jackson's top priority. Many tribes, including the autonomous nations of Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee, and Seminole, resisted relocation by filing a series of lawsuits and attempting to make treaties with the U.S. government.

The Indian Removal Act allowed the U.S. government to forcibly remove nearly 50,000 people from their lands east of the Mississippi River. The series of forced removals became known as "death marches" because over 10,000 people died from hunger, disease, exhaustion, exposure, and violence. The forced relocation of the Cherokee Nation is known as the Trail of Tears: 4,000 people died during the journey to western lands.



POPULATION OF AN INDIAN VILLAGE MOVING.—Drawn by JOHN S. BROWN.—(See Page 105.)

# The Great San Francisco Earthquake & Fire: Chinatown

After the Great San Francisco earthquake and fire, people suspected to be looters were shot, and minorities—especially from Chinatown—were preferentially targeted.

One man was suspected of looting his own store and stabbed with a bayonet. Another was stoned to death for trying to salvage items from his home. Authorities claimed that only 300 people died. It took decades for Gladys Hansen, the city's archivist, to prove that over 3,000 people had died.

In addition, 15,000 Chinese residents lost everything in the earthquake and fires. They were the only ethnic group to be relocated to refugee camps outside the city. After years of struggle, they eventually returned and rebuilt Chinatown.



# The Ludlow Massacre

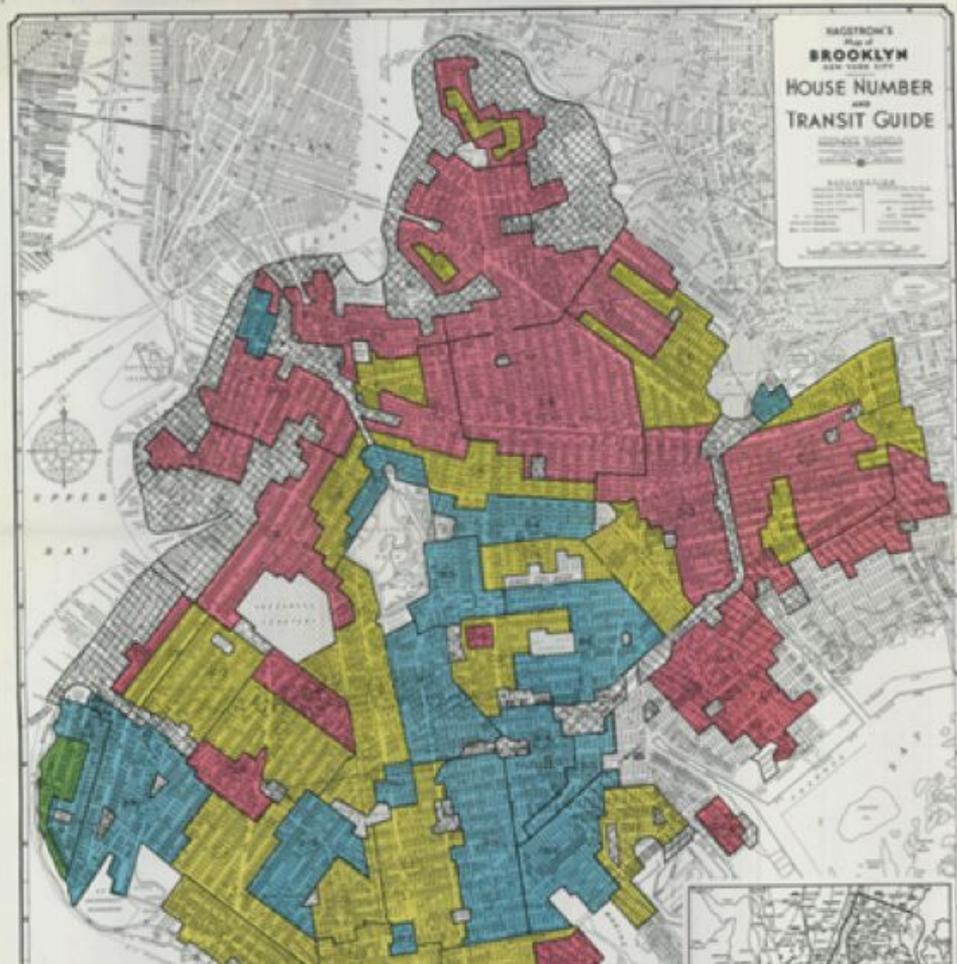
Colorado coal miners began to organize and strike for better pay, health, and safety regulations with the help of the United Mine Workers of America. Miners were evicted from their company-owned homes and so built tent colonies to live in, such as the Ludlow colony.

During the Ludlow Massacre, Rockefeller-owned Colorado Fuel and Iron Co. (CF&I) paid militia to surround the Ludlow colony with guns and later set fire to it. The miners attempted to protect themselves, and a gun battle occurred. At least 66 men, women, and children were killed in the attack and the rioting that followed. After Ludlow, support for unions rose and stricter labor laws were enforced.



# Redlining

*Redlining* is the systematic denial of various services by federal government agencies, local governments, and the private sector either directly or through the selective raising of prices. This term originates from practices of the the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), a government-sponsored corporation that was charged with expanding home ownership, among other duties. The HOLC created maps that graded areas based on their “residential security” and were used by banks for many years to offer or deny home loans to prospective buyers. Areas were graded A through D, with the most affluent, white areas graded A outlined in green, and areas with high populations of poor or Black people graded D outlined in red. On most maps, the presence of Black people, regardless of income, automatically designated an area to be redlined. Original documentation shows that particular attention was paid to the percentage of Black people that lived in an area.



# The Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike

Two Memphis garbage collectors, Echol Cole and Robert Walker, were crushed to death by a malfunctioning truck. Twelve days later, frustrated by the city's long pattern of neglect and abuse of its Black employees, 1,300 Black men from the Memphis Department of Public Works went on strike with the help of their local union to protest unfair working conditions and to demand better pay.

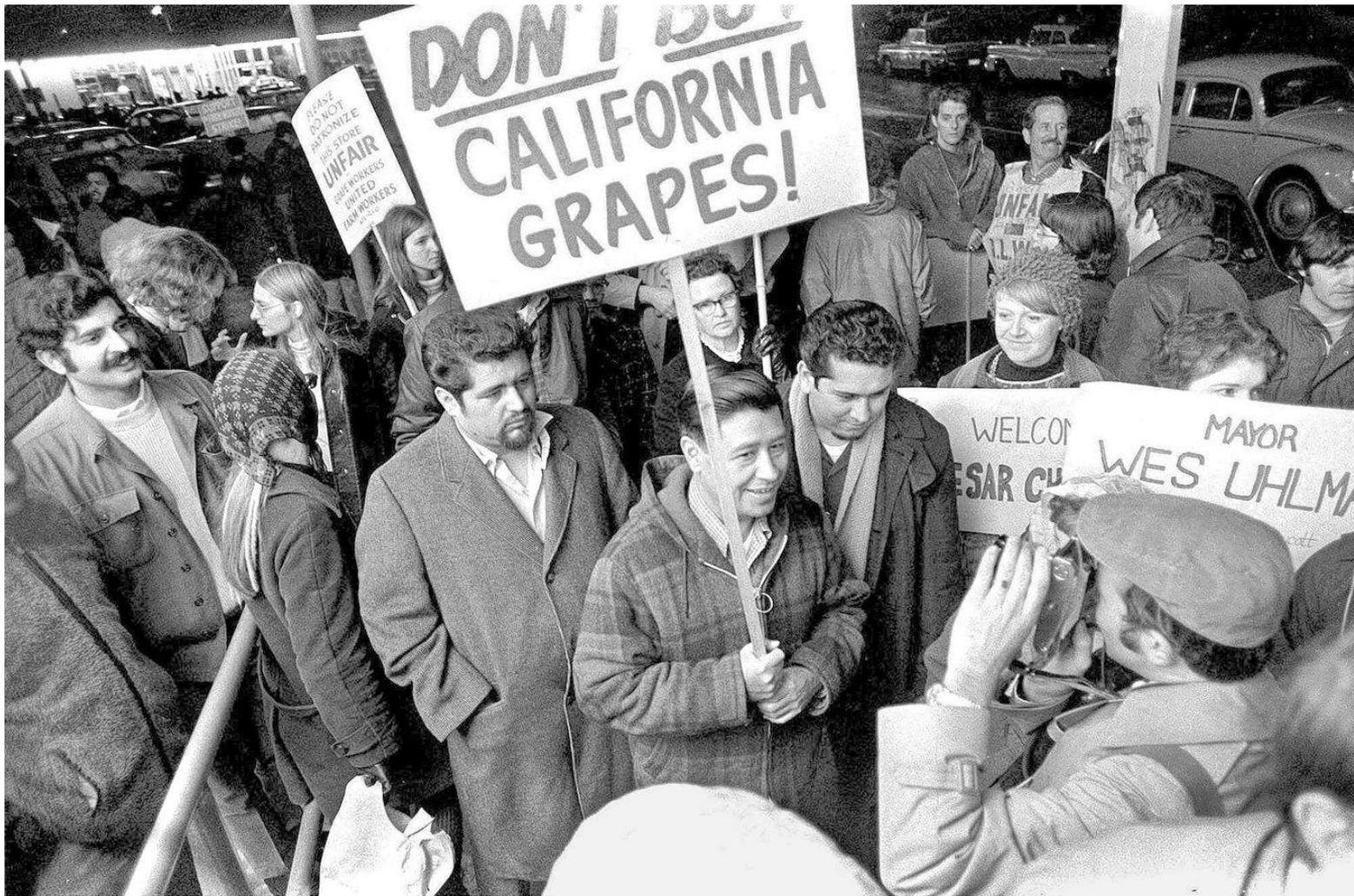
A month later, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. himself began participating in marches. Protests were met with pepper spray, tear gas, and even the shooting of a 16-year-old boy by the police. It wasn't until after Dr. King was assassinated that a deal was reached with the city in which the city council agreed to recognize union workers and guaranteed better wages.



## Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, & the United Farm Workers

Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta founded the National Farm Workers Association (which later became the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, or UFW) in California to protect Latino and Filipino farm workers from harmful pesticides poisoning them and their families, as well as unfair working conditions.

The issues of child labor, sexual harassment, and pesticide poisoning were all integral to the UFW battles. Decades later, tens of thousands of farm workers have won UFW contracts with higher wages, family health coverage, pension benefits, and other protections.



# Green Revolution & Chemical Pesticides

After the end of the Vietnam War, the chemical companies that created detrimental chemical warfare, including Agent Orange, shifted to making agricultural chemicals to increase crop yields. Chemicals, such as glyphosate and atrazine, that are still being used today have caused adverse effects on human health & the environment. Increased use and exposure have caused cancer, digestive disorders, and hormone imbalance for millions of people because these toxic chemicals are embedded in our food, drinks, and household products. Dewayne Johnson, a school groundskeeper, won a historic lawsuit against the chemical company, called Monsanto, which was bought out by Bayer. Since then there has been a Roundup class action settlement requiring Bayer to pay more than \$10 billion to settle tens of thousands of cancer claims; meanwhile, it has continued to sell the product without adding warning labels about its safety.



# Love Canal

Love Canal is a small neighborhood in Niagara Falls, New York, that was the site of an infamous environmental disaster. The neighborhood was home to a 70-acre landfill for over 30 years before that land was then developed for a school to accommodate the growing neighborhood. New residents and families of schoolchildren were not notified of the land's history until after health concerns were documented along with protests. This instance resulted in CERCLA, an act passed by Congress, which determined remediation and cleanup plans for contaminated or "Superfund" sites.



# The Warren County Protest

African American residents and civil rights leaders protested the decision to locate a PCB landfill site in Warren County, North Carolina. This resulted in over 500 arrests.

The landfill was built to contain illegally dumped PCB-contaminated oil that was sprayed along 210 miles of roadway in North Carolina. The Warren County site, chosen from 90 sites under consideration, had the highest percentage (64%) of African American residents of any county in the state. The studies that followed linked race to close proximity with hazardous and toxic waste facilities.

The term *environmental justice* emerged around this time.



# Cancer Alley

Cancer Alley is an 85-mile stretch along the Mississippi River in Louisiana, between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, where many African American and low-income communities are located. The river is lined with roughly 150 petrochemical plants contributing to carcinogenic air pollution. According to the EPA's National Air Toxics Assessment, residents' risk of getting cancer from air pollution in these communities is 95% higher than most Americans'. After almost 10 years of struggle, the residents of St. Gabriel, a city considered "ground zero" for Cancer Alley, voted to incorporate, giving the community power to control zoning laws and thus to refuse placement of new petrochemical plants within the community's borders. Nearby communities attempted to do the same but were thwarted by the petrochemical industry stakeholders.



## Influential Publications

Three important publications were released: 1) *Siting of Hazardous Waste Landfills and Their Correlation with Racial and Economic Status of Surrounding Communities*, by the U.S. General Accounting Office; 2) *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A National Report on the Racial and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites*, by United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice; and 3) *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*, by Robert D. Bullard. These all documented race as a factor in the placement of hazardous waste sites.

W301

# DUMPING IN DIXIE

*Race, Class, and  
Environmental Quality*

**Robert D.  
Bullard**



Westview Press

# National POC Environmental Leadership Summit

Inspired by the civil rights movement and excluded by mainstream environmentalism, many BIPOC activists started fighting against environmental racism in their communities. These environmental justice activists created the National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington, DC, to come together and establish the Environmental Justice movement and build solidarity. During this conference they formed alliances and networks to support each other and wrote the Principles of Environmental Justice. These principles became the founding document of the Environmental Justice movement and articulate the goals and values of the movement.



# Indigenous Peoples Sue Chevron

Luis Yanza and Pablo Fajardo led indigenous people of the Amazon in an unprecedented legal battle against Chevron and Texaco for dumping millions of gallons of crude oil and drilling wastewater directly into the Ecuadorian Amazon. Inhabitants demanded that Chevron pay for a complete cleanup of the ecosystem, and monitoring and improvement of the inhabitants' health.

Yanza and Fajardo celebrated a major victory when an appeals court that ordered Chevron to pay \$18 billion in damages to 30,000 indigenous plaintiffs. However, Chevron refused to pay and is fighting the decision in court.



## Bill Clinton Signs E.O. 12898

The United States government began to recognize environmental justice during the Clinton era, with the signing of Executive Order 12898.

It states that “each federal agency must make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health, environmental, economic and social effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations.”



# Hurricane Katrina Aftermath

After the horrifying events of Hurricane Katrina, displaced residents—especially people of color—faced slow responses and lack of adequate government aid from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). FEMA notified displaced families of termination of temporary shelter benefits before the agency had sent them an initial determination of eligibility; people living in FEMA trailers were exposed to toxic formaldehyde from the building materials and did not have adequate ventilation; and tensions rose between the displaced families and residents who lived next to FEMA trailer parks.



# Dakota Access Pipeline Protests

Grassroots movements formed worldwide for over a year to oppose the Dakota Access Pipeline, a 1,172-mile-long underground oil pipeline, which would endanger the drinking water supply for millions of people, destroy sacred sites, and threaten ancient burial grounds.

Standing Rock Sioux elder LaDonna Brave Bull Allard established a camp as a center for cultural preservation and spiritual resistance to the pipeline; over the summer, the camp grew to thousands of people. To remove protesters, law enforcers used attack dogs, tear gas, riot gear, military equipment, bulldozers, water cannons in freezing weather, and eviction. After years of protests and legal battles it is still an ongoing issues but efforts to stop the pipeline remain strong.



# Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, & Maria

There is nothing in recorded history that resembles what hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria inflicted on the Caribbean islands. In just one month, trees were stripped bare, houses flattened, and boats strewn like toys.

Just two weeks after Hurricane Irma, Category 5 Hurricane Maria became one of the most intense Atlantic hurricanes ever recorded to make landfall, striking southeastern Puerto Rico with winds up to 155 mph. The storm wiped out 100 percent of the island's power, caused \$90 billion in damage, and displaced 200,000 people to the mainland. Aid from the federal government was slow to reach the island, and recovery efforts, which are still ongoing, have largely depended on the efforts of community organizers, nonprofits, and foundations.



# Permafrost

Newtok is an indigenous village near the Bering Sea coast in Western Alaska. For over 25 years, residents of Newtok have lived with impacts of climate change and the promise of relocation by the U.S. government. Over the decades, climate change has melted the permafrost on which most of the village structures are built. Sea ice, which usually protected the coast from dangerous storm surge, has also melted, increasing flooding and erosion and making the village unstable to live in. The federal government made the decision to relocate Newtok residents to the new village of Mertarvik, but it took 25 years before the residents finally began moving. The relocation was delayed, partly because the government has no comprehensive policy or funding to relocate communities impacted by climate change.



# Philadelphia Refinery Explosion

Due to redlining practices in Philadelphia, African Americans' homes were intentionally located near the Philadelphia Energy Solutions Refinery (PES), which produced hazardous waste and toxic pollution. Due to decades of prolonged exposure, the community suffered from adverse health effects, such as debilitating asthma and many forms of cancer.

During the last five years of its operation, the refinery was out of compliance with the Clean Air Act and was fined almost \$650,000 for violating air, water, and waste-disposal rules. The refinery finally exploded and released more than 5,000 pounds of deadly hydrofluoric acid into the air. The refinery closed shortly after the fire, and PES filed for bankruptcy.



# Cumulative Impact Bill

The cumulative impact bill, also known as NJ S232, is a groundbreaking piece of EJ legislation passed in New Jersey. This bill requires the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection to deny permits for power plants, landfills, incinerators, recycling facilities, and sewage plants in low-income communities of color in New Jersey that have already been disproportionately impacted by pollution. The Department of Environmental Protection will have to assess the cumulative impact of pollution in various neighborhoods and prevent further disproportionate impact.

