



ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

LEARNING GOALS

- To understand the concepts of environmental justice.
- To consider how environmental issues have a disproportionate impact on marginalized groups.
- To practice drawing connections between global issues and local challenges.

ASSIGNMENT

Estimated Time: ~25 min

- Watch: "[A Brief History of Environmental Justice](#)" in the United States (~3 min.)
- Read: [Poor Neighborhoods Feel Brunt Of Rising Heat. Cities Are Mapping Them To Bring Relief](#) (~5 min)
- Listen: "[China Reshapes the Vital Mekong River to Power Its Expansion](#)" (7:52)
 - For your reference: [Map of Mekong River Dam Projects](#) (taken from [Nikkei Asia](#))
- Listen: [Is There Environmental Racism In Hawaii?](#) (8:18)

TERMINOLOGY

- **Environmental Justice:** The idea that environmental laws and regulations should provide equal protection to all communities, especially the most vulnerable ones which face the greatest risks of environmental and health hazards.
- **Office of Environmental Justice:** Created in 1992, the Office of Environmental Justice is an office under the Environmental Protection Agency and was created to protect low-income and minority communities from environmental injustice. Under the Trump administration, the EPA has lost some of its funding and power to create regulations meant to protect vulnerable communities.
- **Urban heat island:** Refers to the increased heating in cities that result from asphalt and concrete surfaces absorbing and radiating heat back into the atmosphere. Urban heat islands contribute to the fact that lower-income urban areas are facing increasing temperatures.
- **Mekong River:** A major river in South Asia that passes through China, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. China has recently begun to build additional dams on the river to generate more hydropower.

KAHOOT QUIZ

- Go to Kahoot.it or use the Kahoot mobile app and enter the pin 0506036
- Or, use [this link](#)



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do Chinese economic interests challenge the well-being and livelihood of Mekong communities?
- From a US perspective, do you think developing stronger diplomatic ties with Cambodia and other countries in Southeast Asia could counter Chinese influence and help to address environmental justice issues? Why or why not?
- What other international environmental justice issues (today or in history) can you think of?
- Since 1982, how has the American government's stance toward environmental racism evolved?
- Why is it important for the government to include local residents in the heat-mapping project in Dove Springs?
- The ProPublica video notes that national environmental regulations and environmental justice policies have varied among different presidential administrations. How might local actors ensure that the environmental justice concerns of their community members are addressed, regardless of changes happening at the federal level?
- According to the Civil Beat article, why is it more difficult to determine if there is environmental justice in Hawaii than in other states in the U.S.?
- The podcast gives three examples of environmental racism in Hawaii: 1) the use of immigrant labor during Hawaii's plantation era, 2) the military bombing of Kahoolawe, and 3) the location of landfills and power-plants.
 - In these cases, can or should we use the terms environmental racism and environmental injustice interchangeably? Why or why not?
 - Dr. Devon Payne-Sturges says environmental racism is "about those institutional rules ... government and corporate actions and decisions that *deliberately* [*emphasis added*] target certain communities for the least desirable land uses, which would result in disproportionate exposure to toxic chemicals and hazardous waste." Do you think these actions/decisions *deliberately* target communities based on race? Why or why not?
 - Can an action or decision have a racist impact without having racist intent?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Delhi's air pollution is a classic case of environmental injustice](#): An article from The Guardian explaining the disproportionate impact of air pollution on lower-income citizens in Delhi, and how the Indian government is addressing citizen demands for cleaner air.
- [How Is Oahu's Trash Impacting the Waianae Coast?](#)
An article by the Honolulu Civil Beat on the controversy of expanding the PVT landfill near residential communities in Nanakuli.



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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (continued)

- [Residents And Policymakers Battle Over Hawaii Wind Energy Projects](#)
An article by the Honolulu Civil Beat on the controversy around the Na Pua Makani wind farm on the North Shore and the struggle between the need for clean energy and community health concerns.
- [Mapping Policies for Environmental Justice](#): An article from the Bloomberg CityLab explaining the history of environmental injustice in major U.S. cities, and how state governments are enacting policies to address the health concerns of minority groups.

IDEAS FOR ACTION

Easier

- The construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope on Mauna Kea has created much controversy in the summer and fall of 2019. Research different perspectives and hold a respectful discussion with your classmates. Helpful resources may include the following op-ed pieces:
 - [Opinion | The Thirty Meter Telescope Can Show Us the Universe. But at What Cost?](#) (New York Times, Nov. 2019. Access the article as one of your free monthly articles when you register.)
 - [Opinion: I am One Hawaiian](#) (Honolulu Civil Beat, September 2019)
 - Is TMT an environmental justice issue? Why or why not?
- The NPR article (“Poor Neighborhoods Feel Brunt of Rising Heat”) explains that, upon gathering data, cities can adjust their policies and/or create projects that would provide residents with some relief. Brainstorm or research some projects that the city of Honolulu could or is currently implement to bring relief to some of the hottest areas in the city. Who would be most affected by these projects, and what local actors (schools, local businesses, etc.) might be able to help implement these projects?

Medium:

- The study [The Nature Gap](#) from the Center for American Progress has several graphs and figures explaining the differences in access to nature between high and low-income communities (see the section “Analyzing inequities in natural area loss”). After looking over the data and analysis, brainstorm with your classmates different ways you could present this data, as well as the idea of environmental injustice, in a more accessible way to younger students. Choose one of your ideas, execute it, and present it to a local elementary school class or your younger family members.
- The ProPublica video gives a brief outline of the history of environmental justice in the United States. Work with your classmates to create a more detailed timeline of the progress of the environmental justice movement in the United States. Include specific examples of environmental racism that have occurred throughout the United States. Share your timeline and examples with your class, and consider the similarities and differences between the examples of environmental racism you have found. How might the government better address similar situations in the future?



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IDEAS FOR ACTION (continued)

Difficult:

- [KAHEA](#) is a local nonprofit focusing on protecting natural resources and sacred Native Hawaiian sites. KAHEA has also advocated for environmental justice, particularly for the communities in Waianae, whose residents have high rates of asthma and cancer related to environmental stressors. Volunteer with the organization or attend one of their events to learn more about what we can do to promote environmental justice in Hawaii.

HAWAII DOE SUBJECT STANDARDS LINKS

Hawaii Core Standards for Social Studies

- Content Standard [SS.WH.8.12.1](#)
- Content Standard [SS.WH.8.7.2](#)
- Content Standard [SS.US.12.8.1](#)
- Content Standard [SS.US.12.16.2](#)
- Content Standard [SS.MHH.4.9.1](#)
- Content Standard [SS.PID.4.10.2](#)

- Action Projects link to [SS.PID.5.7.1](#)
- Content Standards [SS.7PI.3.14.1](#)
- Action Projects could link to [SS.7PI.3.8.3](#)

[National Health Education Standards](#)

- NHES.2.12.10
- Action Projects could link to NHES.8.12.1-4

This lesson was created by Megan Tagami.