Ground Up: An Environmental Justice Newsletter

Join us for the 14th Annual Environmental Justice Conference!

CAER Information
Weekly Meetings:
Tuesday 7:00 p.m.
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Saturday, April 25, 2009

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<td>10:00-11:00am</td>
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<td>Urban Environmental Justice Ben Duncan</td>
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FREE FOOD! FREE CONFERENCE! FREE KNOWLEDGE!
A Message from the Co-Directors
Emily Chi, Ashley Pheil, Adrien Wilkie

What a year! The Coalition Against Environmental Racism (CAER) kicked off the 14th Annual Grassroots Environmental Justice Conference in February with a Winter Term Preview. Dr. Robert D. Bullard spoke in our largest lecture hall on campus on February 17 and enlightened an audience of 500 students and community members. He spoke about ways in which we, as Americans, can grow smarter to achieve healthy and livable conditions.

Dr. Bullard has given us momentum to put on a spectacular conference this year. With heightened awareness of environmental justice issues around campus, we look forward to expanding community participation and incorporating community action in our commitment to reducing environmental racism locally, nationally, and around the world. With these goals in mind, we are excited to present our "Voices for Environmental Justice."

We have, yet again, an impressive lineup for this year's conference, including Dr. Benjamin Chavis, who coined the term "environmental racism" in the 1980s. Saturday, April 25 will start off in the morning with CAER officers presenting an interactive introductory environmental justice workshop. Next, we will have a discussion about urban environmental justice with Ben Duncan, a former co-director of CAER (see pg. 5 for bio). Our lunch keynote will feature Louise Benally (pg. 4), a Diné woman from Arizona, as well as a free lunch for all keynote attendees. We will then have a food justice panel with journalist Reese Erlich (pg. 5), who will be speaking on food justice in Cuba, and representatives from Eugene's own Huerta de la Familia (pg. 4). In the afternoon we will also have a workshop by our evening performer Ariel Luckey (pg. 5) on environmental justice through hip-hop theatre. Dr. Benjamin Chavis (pg. 4) will be our evening keynote, and free dinner will be served. We will end our day of inspiration with a performance by Ariel Luckey. We will reconvene the next day and put our new knowledge and inspiration to action. This year we are thrilled to have a community action component to our conference, and will have a volunteer event with Huerta de la Familia on Sunday, April 26. We urge you all to join us as we take action to promote environmental justice in our own community.

Thank you all for your continued support and see you at the conference!

-CAER 2008-2009 Co-Directors

Nuclear Consequences
Nicholas Hayman

In the mid-twentieth century, the United States began extensive nuclear research in response to World War II. One of the major research facilities that performed nuclear research was Hanford, which is located in south-central Washington. This lab operated plutonium production reactors and reprocessed plutonium and uranium. However, in the late twentieth century, the federal government started shutting down some of its labs, including Hanford. The consequences of this research and poor waste disposal methods still are prevalent throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Due to the placement of this lab—located next to the Colombia River—one of the largest affected groups is the Native Americans. The area affected by Hanford is crucial for numerous reasons to the Native Americans, including the fact that it is home of their reservation. The stretch of the Colombia River that is most affected by the pollution is one of the last free-flowing parts of the great river, and is crucial to salmon spawning.

Because the government has not been proactive in cleaning up the affected area, the Native American tribes living in the area filed numerous lawsuits against Hanford and the government during the 1990s. These lawsuits cited the release of such toxins as plutonium and radioactive iodine, and radiation as the causes of various maladies, including thyroid and bone cancers, arthritis, diabetes, blood and reproductive disorders, and autoimmune disorders.

Soon, the government realized the gravity of this situation and has since begun cleanup on the site. As with any major cleanup effort, it will take decades, and will cost tens of billions of dollars to complete. Unfortunately, some of the pollution is so extensive that it will always be a scar on the land, which will never be free of pollution. This includes the pollution of the aquifer beneath the site, and the Colombia River. On the bright side, though, the affected Native American tribes are supposed to be included in many of the important policy decisions, such as protecting of the Colombia River, as this process is completed. Overall, this is an example of an environmental injustice issue that is in the process of being resolved.
The Peaks of Northern Arizona

Karen Musgrave

In northern Arizona, three major peaks mark the horizon—the San Francisco Peaks. To many, these peaks are merely attractive mountains—a place to hike, camp, or ski. However, to 13 different Native American tribes, these mountains are sacred. Some tribes, including the Navajo, have used the peaks as boundary markers and places where medicine men can collect various herbs for healing ceremonies. Because of the appeal of the peaks to many, they have been a point of conflict since the late 1800’s.

The San Francisco Peaks are officially under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Forest Service, which has allowed a large amount of construction and deforestation since the late 1800’s. In the 1930’s a ski resort was built, and in 1969 the addition of further amenities was proposed. Several tribes opposed and prevented the addition of restaurants, shops, and lodges. Evidently, the Forest Service forgot about the opposition of the tribes, and in 1979 built paved roads, a new lodge, and four new lifts on the sacred peaks. Although tribes such as the Hopi and Navajo protested the incursion and eventually filed lawsuits, the Forest Service continued to create the glamorous ski resort. The separate lawsuits of the Hopi and Navajo were combined into one and denied. According to the judge, the tribes may have been offended, but the Forest Service met all provisions of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978.

Today, the Arizona Snow Bowl ski area continues to attract thousands of visitors. A new proposal has been made to create more snow using wastewater from Flagstaff, the city at the base of the peaks. Again local tribes are working to fight the proposal because they believe the wastewater will pollute the pure, natural water of the mountain.

Is it right for the Forest Service to build a resort with the knowledge that they have only “offended” certain groups of people, since it does not legally block local tribes from practicing their religions? But one must wonder if this is a good enough justification for continuing to build resorts on sacred land. Although this resort may sound appealing to many skiers and hikers, it raises a serious issue. One must consider the long and ongoing battle between many groups’ beliefs and the desire to create resorts and attractions. This has been the crux of the conflict since the 1930’s and it appears that there is no immediate resolution.

At a Crossroads: Hip-Hop and Environmental Justice

Terra Reed

I often point out that the environmental justice movement was a product of the civil rights and other social justice movements. It is about people taking a stand and expressing their need for cleaner air and water, better access to healthy food, less pollutants poisoning their families, and a voice in the decision-making process affecting their communities. Environmental justice activism can be found on Native American reservations, in many countries, in the suburbs, and in the ghetto.

Another movement that has roots in social justice is the hip-hop movement, which started in the projects of New York by young people expressing themselves through music, dance, and art, and telling their stories on the mic. Many rappers, like other musicians and performers throughout the ages, use their voices to speak up about injustices they see in their communities, and environmental injustices are not an exception.

Many groups take advantage of the broad appeal that hip-hop has among young to plant the seed of activism through music. The Hip-Hop Caucus and the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network are organizations that were started by people who recognized the importance of hip-hop culture. They are trying to take the negative stereotypes associated with hip-hop—like gangs, violence, and drugs—and turn it into a positive outlet for people to talk about urban poverty, climate change, education, and social injustice.

There are a number of artists and activists at the crossroads of the hip-hop and environmental justice. Notably, two of the speakers at this year’s 14th Annual Environmental Justice conference, have been active leaders in the environmental justice and hip-hop movements. Ariel Luckey (see pg. 5 for bio) explores community activism, the taking of Native American land, toxic pollutants, and the privatization of natural resources through hip-hop theater. Dr. Benjamin Chavis (pg. 4) started the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network, working with names like Russell Simmons and P. Diddy to empower rappers and activists.

I leave you with some lyrics that I think are relevant to the environmental justice movement:

“They don’t call the shots, but they’re in the line of fire.” —Sage Francis (continued on page 4)
(continued from pg. 3) “They say they want a revolution, but half of them would be content with some decent distribution.” --Atmosphere

“My revolution is born out of love for my people, not hatred for others.” --Immortal Technique

Public Participation Essential to Environmental Justice Movement

Sarah Daegling

The Environmental Protection Agency began addressing issues involving environmental justice in 1992 due to public concern. The Office of Environmental Justice was created, and soon after, the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) began to operate. NEJAC was formed on September 30, 1993 under the Federal Advisory Committee Act. Its function is to obtain advice and recommendations from those involved in the environmental justice dialogue and pass this advice on to the EPA after considerable discussion. Public participation and the expression of varied opinions are essential parts of the process, in hopes that only recommendations with public support will be made.

In a June 9, 2008 memo, EPA administrator Stephen Johnson made clear how important NEJAC is to the Agency's operation. According to Johnson, the EPA seeks to focus more on the implementation and integration of environmental justice into its programs. NEJAC provides advice and pertinent information to the EPA, allowing an increased and informed emphasis on environmental justice.

Conference Speaker Bios

Louise Benally is a Traditional Dineh mother and grandmother and has been a Human Rights and Environmental activist since the age of 14. Currently, she works as an organic farmer, rancher, and health educator at Northern Arizona University. Her community has been impacted by the Peabody Coal Mine for the last 37 years, and she has worked with her community to resist forced relocation. She has received multiple human rights awards and has been advocating for Human Environmental Justice at both the national and international level. She is also currently a board member of the Black Mesa Water Coalition.

Sarah Cantril has an undergraduate degree from the University of Oregon in "Ethnicity and Gender in American Society", an independent study through the Honors College. She also has a Masters Degree from Portland State University in Social Work Administration. Sarah has worked with the Latino community in Eugene since 1990 and founded Huerto de la Familia in 1999. Huerto de la Familia is a non-profit community garden that provides gardening assistance and education about gardening, nutrition, and health to low-income Latino families here in Eugene.

Dr. Benjamin Chavis Muhammed is an activist who coined the term “environmental racism” and played an important role in the establishment of the environmental justice movement.
Ariel Luckey was born and raised in Oakland, California. He is a hip-hop theater artist whose community and performance work dances in the crossroads of education, art and activism. He attended his first workshop at the age of 2 with his father, Paul Kivel, a writer and political educator, and has been active in the community ever since. Ariel has developed a powerful approach to arts activism through his training with Wavy Gravy and Patch Adams at Camp Winnarainbow, June Jordan at UC Berkeley's Poetry for the People and Augusto Boal at Theatre of the Oppressed workshops. Ariel's lyrical language and political vision have inspired and transformed audiences from the streets of Seattle's WTO demonstration to Cafe Cantante in Havana, Cuba to the Nuyorican Poets Cafe in New York. He has been a featured artist at the North Bay Hip-Hop Theater Festival, the White Privilege Conference and the Intersection for the Arts' Hybrid Project and has shared the stage with The Coup, Zion-I, Marc Bamuthi Joseph and Sparlha Swa. As a father, friend and activist, Ariel makes connections between issues, communities, and movements to build alliances for social and environmental justice.

Ben Duncan is a health educator with Multnomah County Health Department, Environmental Health Division. His work focuses on the relationship between health and housing, through both policy and family-based empowerment work. Outside of Environmental Health, Ben works with the Diversity and Quality Team, the Employees of Color, and the Health Equity Initiative, all of which focus on his real interest: equity and justice. He is an appointee to the Governor's Environmental Justice Task Force and is a board member with Organizing People, Activating Leaders (OPAL), a non-profit organization that works for Environmental Justice in the Portland metro area to support ignored communities that fight against the oppression of pollution and social injustice.

Reese Erlich is a foreign correspondent who has won numerous journalism awards, including the prestigious Peabody (shared with others). He reports regularly for National Public Radio, Latino USA, Radio Deutsche Welle, Australian Broadcasting Corp. Radio, and Canadian Broadcasting Corp. Radio. He recently published a book, called Dateline Havana, which explores the historic U.S. domination of Cuba and the power of the Cuba lobby. Of particular interest is that he compares U.S. and Cuban agricultural policies, such as organic and chemical farming practices. He also analyzes Cuban agricultural reform and the impact of the U.S. embargo.

Low-Income Neighborhoods Should Not Have to be Low-Food Neighborhoods

Christina O'Connor

If Horatio Alger had lived today, perhaps even he would admit that the upward social mobility of the honest, hard-working characters in his novels is more of an idealistic myth than a factual account. In Alger’s day, the American Dream used to represent at least some truth. For those who were willing to work hard, riches, or at least a decent living, awaited.

These days, you would be hell-bent to find any remaining evidence of the American Dream’s validity. Today, you could work hard and still end up as one of the million of hungry Americans. Somewhere during the century between Alger’s death and the present day, the American Dream disappeared.

Or, maybe The American Dream just died trying to cross the food desert.

The only thing that is perhaps more absurd than hunger in the most bountiful nation is one reason that Americans might be hungry: they do not have adequate geographical access to food.

As defined by the UK-based Low-Income Project Team, food deserts are geographic areas in which “people experience physical and economic barriers to accessing healthy food.”

The existence of a food desert can intensify food insecurity. If people cannot easily access food, their ability to maintain a healthy diet is endangered. Unfortunately, but predictably, food deserts are most common in low-income minority neighborhoods. According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, high-income neighborhoods have 30 percent more grocery stores than their low-income counterparts. Convenience stores or fast-food restaurants are often more common than grocery stores in these areas.

Food deserts within Oregon may be a partial explanation for the high rates of hunger and food insecurity throughout the state. Compared to other states with similar moderate poverty levels, Oregon’s hunger and food insecurity rates, at 4.4 and 11.9 respectively, are much higher.

A 2003 Oregon State University study found that there are a greater amount of supermarkets in Oregon’s high-income regions. It also compared two higher-income metros.
Eugene and Springfield, with two lower-income rural areas, Oakridge and Florence in Lane County. Results showed that Oakridge and Florence residents typically had fewer supermarkets located near them.

Even Portland has its food deserts. A 2004 Coalition For A Livable Future study indicated that Northeast Portland, which contains many neighborhoods that consist predominately of minorities, had comparatively few supermarkets. The Coalition reported the year before that demand for emergency food in the Northeast district was on the increase.

With the current dismal state of the economy, food security is becoming increasingly threatened. The USDA reported in December that food banks nationwide had a 30 percent increase in demand since the year before. Oregon levels also increased. According to a January report from the Oregon Food Bank, the demand for emergency food had increased 15 percent statewide since the same time in 2008. In Lane County, demand went up 8 percent.

For white suburbanites, the concept of a food desert may seem like just as much of a myth as the American Dream to the “other half.” After all, wealthy suburbs are packed with Safeways, WinCos, and Costcos. But communities must no longer neglect their most vulnerable populations. The disparity between the food availability for rich and poor neighborhoods represents a breakdown of policy ethics. Especially in these times, policy makers and city planners need to eliminate food deserts to stop the further erosion of food security for low-income populations that are already having a tough time getting enough to eat. State and local governments need to dedicate increased resources to the establishment of supermarkets in low-income areas, even if this means subsidizing the store; let projects in wealthy neighborhoods take the backburner for a year. Planning officials and policy makers need to restore their ethics and enable all members of their community to have equal access to something so basic as food. After all, we never want to reach a time in history when food security becomes a myth.

**Air Quality Abroad**

Nichelle Hernandez

Air quality is a very prominent problem in the U.S. With the resources and technology we have, we can study and help prevent the air quality problem that comes with large city centers. However, abroad this problem is often overlooked or not acknowledged at all. Since the 1800s in the U.K alone, over 6000 people have died due to air quality. We in the U.S. are not without air quality problems. In 1948, in De Nora, Pennsylvania, 50 people were killed by what has been dubbed “a killer fog” of post-production smog. But this problem was addressed, and steps were taken to prevent this tragedy from happening again.

In developing countries, little to nothing is ever done to address air quality. China is one example: there are many major sources of pollution—more people, industry, motorized vehicle use, and less space. Cities like Beijing, Delhi, Jakarta, and Mexico City are all places where air pollution is rising from these same sources, and in the U.S more than 75% of densely populated cities do not meet current EPA standards.

This is a big deal. The Euro-EPA estimates that 70-80% of people living in the 105 worst air quality cites in the U.K don’t even know there is a problem. The effect air quality has on us can be sudden and drastic or slow and steady. From small breathing problems to death, and everything in between. Air quality is a huge factor in the health of the general populous. According to an article by the World Resources Institute (WRI, “on a global basis, estimates of mortality due to outdoor air pollution run from around 200,000 to 570,000, representing about 0.4 to 1.1% of total annual deaths.”

We tend to only think about the issues and problems we face at home, but this is a recurring problem in all countries. When learning about these injustices abroad, most tend to only think of workers or people living close to the major pollution-producing areas—those most directly affected. The same WRI article states that “these mortality estimates alone do not capture the huge toll of illness and disability that exposure to air pollution brings at a global level. Health effects span a wide range of severity from coughing and bronchitis to heart disease and lung cancer. Vulnerable groups include infants, the elderly, and those suffering from chronic respiratory conditions including asthma, bronchitis, or emphysema.

For example, air pollution in developing world cities is responsible for some 50 million cases per year of chronic coughing in children younger than 14 years of age. However, even healthy adults can suffer negative effects.” Air quality is a global problem, and I encourage readers to think about global environmental justice issues, which are often forgotten. Something like this cannot be forgotten. Visit http://www.wri.org/publication/content/8463 for more information.
Community Leadership
Isabelle Francou

As written in my previous article in the Winter Newsletter, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has made environmental justice one of its priorities. We saw that, depending on the leadership of the agency, the emphasis put on considering and solving environmental justice issues varies in intensity.

In this article, I want to highlight one of the programs lead by the EPA to help communities work together and find solutions to improve their environment. This program is called Community Leadership Training (CLT). It “teaches communities how to tap into existing resources, relationships and energy in their communities. It helps community leaders generate excitement, form partnerships, make deals, transform complexity and obstacles into participation and solutions, and secure the resources needed to achieve dramatic air toxics reductions.”

The EPA supports this project because it shows that leaders can achieve extraordinary results with the right support: “It calls for a shift from a project management approach to a leadership approach.” It recalls the fight lead by women in some communities who became leaders and carried out projects, opposition, and movements. In many cases, when environmental racism is engaged, the whole community has the same discontent but without a competent leader to take initiatives, the fight might not be efficient.

CLT responds to that by teaching leaders. The EPA does this in partnership with other organizations. For example, the Consensus Building Institute (CBI) has sought, over the last five years, to better understand mutual gains negotiation and alternative dispute resolution experience within the environmental justice community. To do so, it partnered with the EPA Office of Environmental Justice, which helped the CBI gather data about how residents of at-risk communities have succeeded in negotiating environmental projects, for instance.

In more specific terms, collaboration between the EPA and the CBI aims at helping communities breathe a cleaner air. It is done throughout many programs, campaigns, and projects. This action helps increase “social capital”, meaning that many more resources are now available for environmental justice cases.

CBI is one among many organizations that work to help communities lead themselves. However, I would like to note the job accomplished by the EPA. EPA headquarters in D.C. sets standards for air quality. Those regulations are sent to the regional and state staff, who have to apply them to the region or state. In order to succeed in this task, the EPA collaborates with other organizations, creates partnerships and sometimes provides grants. Collaboration makes the implementation of national standards possible.

It is the same with environmental justice: EPA headquarters comes up with a text defining the meaning of environmental justice. EPA regional offices, collaborating with other organizations, have to make possible the realization of those values and priorities in concrete situations.

Power Shift 2009: Incorporating Justice
Emily Chi

12,000 youth. 4 days in the nation’s capital. This historic national summit brought together activists and nonprofit organizations from around the country to demand clean energy and climate policy.

It wasn’t just any climate change or environmental convention, however. This was a project of the Energy Action Coalition, comprised of fifty environmental and environmental justice organizations. The significance of environmental justice was unmistakable with the phenomenal selection of keynote speakers, panelists, and workshops that represented the foreforns of the environmental justice movement.

Among the many amazing and inspirational speakers, we were in the presence of Van Jones of Green for All (www.greenforall.org), who currently serves as a special adviser to the White House Council on Environmental Quality, and who has worked tirelessly for green jobs and justice in the new green economy; Majora Carter of Sustainable South Bronx (http://www.ssbx.org); and Nia Robinson of the Environmental Justice and Climate Change Initiative (http://www.ejcc.org). Furthermore, at one of the environmental justice panels, we heard from Tom Goldtooth, director of the Indigenous Environmental Network. We also heard from Dr. Robert Bullard, who CAER brought to the university campus in February. One of the keynote speakers for CAER’s upcoming Environmental Justice Conference, Louise Benally, was also featured at Power Shift and we are thrilled that she will be speaking to us here in Eugene about her work on indigenous environmental justice issues.

Power Shift tied together social and environmental issues, making it evident that we can no longer fight for sustainability and environmental issues without regarding human rights and justice. After all, we can’t fight for our future unless we fight for everyone’s future.
What is CAER?

CAER is a student organization committed to bridging the gap between the struggle for social and environmental equality. CAER has the dual mission of educating the campus about Environmental Racism and building coalitions within the University community to foster activism in the Environmental Justice Movement.

Environmental Racism addresses the fact that poor people, but specifically communities of color, are disproportionately impacted by pollution, waste disposal, hazardous sites, resource depletion, and natural disasters in the natural and built environment. Environmental Racism further emphasizes that communities of color are targeted by racist public policies and private interests, which refuse to involve them in decision-making processes.

CAER exists as a resistance to this inequality and as a strong and visible piece of the Environmental Justice Movement, a mobilization of people, communities, and organizations committed to fighting Environmental Racism in urban and rural settings across the country and the world. CAER works to build alliances with student unions, social justice groups, environmental organizations and the community in order to educate and take action locally, regionally, and globally.

Like What You Read?
Want to learn more about Environmental Justice and Environmental Racism?

Come to one of our weekly meetings! We meet every Tuesday at 7 p.m. in the Multicultural Center of the EMU. (It’s in the basement, directly below Panda Express).

Please drop by – all our meetings are open to the public!

Save the Date!

Thursday April 16
Film Showing: “Fenceline”
Willamette 110 7 p.m.

Thursday April 23
Film Showing: TBA
Lawrence 166 7 p.m.

Saturday & Sunday April 25th - 26th
14th Annual Grassroots Environmental Justice Conference
University of Oregon

Thank you for your continued support!