Women in the Movement

by Jane Kay

Who are the women in the environmental movement? What are the issues that spurred them into action? Jane Kay, the environmental writer for the San Francisco Examiner, has met many of these extraordinary people and written about their efforts. From the Navajo reservation to inner-city Oakland, Ms. Kay shares a few of her experiences with women in the environmental and social justice struggle.

From the Navajo women fighting uranium tailings to the Latinas pursuing lead cleanup in Oakland, people of color who bear the brunt of pollution across the country are moving from victims to activists.

And in grassroots resistance to pollution, women have been leading the way in calling attention to environmental health problems and doing something about them.

In my travels as an environmental reporter, I've been awed by women who've led difficult struggles to get horrendous environmental problems targeted and solved.

Perhaps it's because women aren't as easily intimidated by authority. At an historic women's meeting in Window Rock, Arizona in the mid-1970s, Navajo Tribal Council member, the wise Annie Waneka, was a model for other women. She found the room for a big national conference locked. She just laughed, and said it didn't surprise her. She got it opened.

Or perhaps it's because women find the courage when they see their children threatened by dangerous radiation or chemical emissions or leaded paint or pesticides or toxic waste incinerators. Women who have never spoken in public, or raised their voices or questioned authority find it easy when the health of their families is at stake.

Women, including women of color, have always been the guardians of wisdom and humanity, which makes them natural, but usually secret, rulers.

-- Charlotte Wolf

Forest Service Prepares for the 21st Century

by Dianne Saunders

While media attention has focused on efforts to protect the remaining old growth forest and wilderness ecosystems controlled by the US Forest Service, another change is happening inside the organization. Since 1991, professional ranks of the Forest Service have been dominated by men of European ancestry. A recent court settlement is changing all that. Now, the workforce of the US Forest Service must reflect the massive demographic changes taking place in American society. African American anthropologist Amahra Hicks is helping the Pacific Southwest Region to meet the challenge.

America's workforce is changing. By the year 2000, one third of all new entrants into the workforce will be "minority groups," primarily African Americans and Hispanics. This emerging culturally diverse workforce seems like a breath of fresh air to those of us who value the strength that diversity can bring. But will people of color be prepared and qualified to assume the many occupations that await them?

FOCUS ON

Women of Color

- At the Grassroots
- As Community Leaders
- In "Traditional" Environmental Careers
- Redefining the Movement

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Editors' Notes

call We Speak for Ourselves, news from the movement, and three other reponbacks.
To focus primarily on women of color in the environmental and social justice movement was an ambitious venture. By no means can just this issue of RPE do justice to what is happening. With these few pages, however, are a sampling of success stories, major setbacks and outstanding victories. There are many other publications that highlight women involved in this work and we encourage our readers to seek them out - several are listed in the "Resources" section.
The can, determination and personal growth the women in this issue experience through their involvement in urban and rural coalitions provides positive role models for young people everywhere, particularly for young women of color. Our hope with this issue of RPE is that a few of these stones can be told and shared as examples of what can and is being accomplished in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds.

For environmental justice,

Ellie Goodwin

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This issue is the second of our theme issues, with our focus on women of color in the environmental movement. We have submissions from around the country - some encouraging, others not so. All the piece are empowering to people interested in the effect women of color are having on the environmental and social justice movement, and the progress being made. We tried to solicit our material from women of color, where possible we felt that the most honest and direct way to get the real story was to have the people most involved share their views.

Jane Kay of the San Francisco Examiner wrote about women she has reported on in environmental stones. Ellie Goodwin, our managing editor, interviewed two women involved with PUEBLO, a Bay Area group that works with the ethnically diverse community in Oakland. Dianne Saunders, outreach coordinator of the Video Project, brings us two pieces: a profile of Amihra Hicks of the Forest Service, and a reponback on a recent Urban Habitat meeting. We also have a profile of African-American activist Cora Tucker, a report on an exciting new publication called We Speak for Ourselves, news from the movement, and three other reponbacks.
RPE: I'd like to start with some background on PUEBLO and how you both became involved.
Sandra Davis: I became involved in PUEBLO as a student through my college. I took an internship with the Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO) and was, through the internship, asked to come on staff when PUEBLO started. We won the Campaign for Accessible Health Care (CAHC). We started CAHC as a campaign around trying to get the county to develop a measles outbreak prevention project here in Oakland. I came on as an intern, then was hired as lead organizer with CAHC. The lead issue that we've been working on is the second campaign that we've taken up.
Gwen Hardy: I became involved through the campaign with door knocking in the neighborhood. One of the interns came to my door and asked me questions concerning health care and asking about the CHDP. I didn't really know what CHDP meant.
RPE: What does CHDP stand for?
GH: Some people have already been involved in organizations or a pan of some group or something that is working on education issues or childcare. Other people that come to the group, like me and like our Asian and Latino members, might be a little bit more skeptical. We are so used to people coming into our neighborhoods, asking questions about our problems and situations and that was the end of it. No follow-up. Our organization (PUEBLO) goes into the community when they themselves, the ones that are there were encouraged to be a part of this.
RPE: What are some future efforts or projects for PUEBLO?
SD: Bridging the cultural and language barriers that we've run into working in the community. What we are looking for is building a multi-issue, multi-ethnic organization for low income people of color in Oakland. We've come a long way in the two campaigns we've worked on. Around the lead campaign we've really bridged gaps between the Latino and the African American community because the issue, of course, affects other people as well but particularly those two communities. This past summer we've had simultaneous meetings in four different communities. It's a big challenge because it's not just about bringing people together face to face, but really trying to get communication going and that means taking time.
RPE: Can you describe some of the other people involved in PUEBLO?
GH: The lead organizer and Gwen Hardy, chief spokesperson for PUEBLO.

At the center of the environmental/social justice movement are the grassroots groups. These organizations take a straight-on, no nonsense approach to investigating issues that affect their communities, often with excellent results. One such group is People United for a Better Oakland (PUEBLO) -- the main force behind the aggressive community campaign against lead poisoning in Oakland. RPE's Ellie Goodwin interviewed Sandra Davis, lead organizer and Gwen Hardy, chief spokesperson for PUEBLO.
The Environmental Support Center:  
A Resource for the Environmental Justice Movement  
by Jim Abernathy

The Environmental Support Center (ESC) was created in late 1990 to serve the interests of regional, state, local, and grassroots organizations working on environmental issues. The impetus for the formation of the Center was the growing realization that the health and well-being of those organizations is essential to the progress of the environmental movement in the United States.

It is obvious that the enactment of federal environmental laws, changing the behavior of multinational corporations, work in the international arena, making sure that environmental issues are addressed in the national media, and other activities that are the focus of national and international environmental organizations are critical to the environmental movement.

What has not been as evident is that several of the most important environmental problems must be solved at the local and state level. Land use management is a prime example as is utility regulation. Water resource policy and facility slandering are others. Even the federal regulatory systems for water and air pollution are mostly in the hands of state and regional government regulators. Certainly, recycling, environmental education, state and local parks and reserves, and protection and enhancement of wetlands and fish and wildlife habitats are in major ways under the purview of state and local authorities. In addition, there are the many programs for direct citizen involvement which only work well at the neighborhood level.

It is undeniably true that national environmental organizations, through their members and staff, expend significant efforts aimed at addressing these issues at the state and local level. However, it is clear that the major burden for this work has and will continue to be on regional, state, local, and grassroots organizations.

In many ways the environmental movement at the state and local level is vigorous. There are thousands of groups involving millions of citizens. Then is an intensity of effort that pervades groups that are all volunteer or operate with a very small staff which has been very effective over a wide range of issues.

This has been particularly true with organizations created to advocate the interests of the poor or people of color and which do not define themselves as environmental groups but spend significant time and resources addressing environmental issues of concern to those constituencies. This important environmental work has too often been invisible to traditional environmental groups and to their funders and supporters.

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Hunter College to Fight Environmental Racism

The Community Environmental Health Center (CEHC) at Hunter College has selected Marjorie Moore to serve as Program Director. As CEHC’s new Program Director, Moore becomes the first African-American director of a city-wide environmental organization in New York.

Moore said the CEHC will “take the lead role in fighting environmental racism” in New York, which she described as “the disproportionate impact of environmental health problems on our city’s third world communities.” Citing the abundance of such undesirable facilities as sewage treatment plants, bus depots and hazardous waste storage sites, Moore declared, “CEHC is prepared to work with community residents and groups — to help them with the scientific, legal and political information necessary to wage successful fights to protect their communities.” She also expressed her outrage of the persistence of childhood lead poisoning, 50% of whose victims, according to the NYC Department of Health, are African-American and Latino children. A recent study concluded that children who are lead poisoned when they are very young are seven times more likely not to finish high school.

In addition to its leadership on lead poisoning prevention, CEHC has also published Hazardous Neighbors: Living Next Door to Industry in Greenpoint-Williamsburg, a major study documenting hazardous waste storage in a densely populated residential community, and launched a Youth Environmental Action Program, which, in its first year, worked with young people from Harlem to implement a community-wide recycling program.

“This year, we’ll be initiating our Northern Manhattan Environmental Resource Center to provide intensive assistance to Harlem and Washington Heights,” Moore announced. “We welcome ideas from communities throughout the city for new environmental projects which aim toward active community participation in and control of major decisions which affect our quality of life.” CEHC is also seeking student interns for several community projects.

Before her new appointment, Moore had coordinated the Center’s childhood lead poisoning prevention project in Harlem since 1988 and co-directed CEHC’s similar efforts in Brooklyn. Moore also is a founding member of the West Harlem Environmental Action Coalition (WHEACT) and the New York City Coalition for Environmental Justice, and is a member of the Board of Directors of the Harlem Consumer Education Council.

For more information about CEHC, or to apply for internships, call 212/481-4355.
RPE Profile:
Cora Tucker
Founder, Citizens for a Better America

"When you say environmental, you're tapping into a lot of issues. Everything is connected."

Cora Tucker is a modern-day Pied Piper whose entourage of children respond to her call: "Citizens for a Better America Forward march."

In 1975, the Winn's Creek Youth Group outgrew Tucker's basement in the southern Virginia town of Halifax. From 20 kids gathering informally in her home, they grew to 200. Tucker and the youth group tried to build a recreational center. But county funds were approved, then disapproved when some Halifax denizens discovered the center was to be for Black and white children.

That year, the group changed it name to Citizens for a Better America (CBA) and, under Tucker's inspired auspices, the children started a sense of ways on local hiring, bank lending and business policies. Asking innocent questions of family friends and neighbors yielded an unpleasant surprise for the racially mixed group—this thing called racism was alive and well in their town. After CBA filed complaints with the feds, Halifax County was ordered to clean up its hiring act or lose federal revenue-sharing funds.

"You have to do something to influence the children in whatever you do," Tucker says. Though Tucker did not go beyond high school, she believes education to be a salvation. "We ask the children, 'What do you want to do? What do you want to do?"' The next step, says Tucker, is to discuss what must be done to realize that dream. You want a recreational center. Build one. You wonder if that's true? Investigate.

Her earliest followers are now adults. And CBA has over 7,000 members in four East Coast cities. "A good organization works on all the issues," says Tucker, who heads the Halifax-based chapter. CBA has worked on voter registration, organizing a union, reforming employment habits and a slew of environmental issues. In the county of 30,000 people, Cora recalls, 8,000 showed up for a public hearing CBA organized to prevent Halifax from becoming a nuclear repository. "We had to ask people to leave." When the mother of seven wanted to illustrate the need for recycling, she asked the children to save all their garbage for one week. This past December at CBA's prompting, Halifax County began a study for a county-wide recycling program.

She is well acquainted with the woes of pesticides and intimate with devotion. Tucker's father was a sharecropper who died when she was six, leaving her mother to raise nine children. "There wasn't a choice" whether to become active, she says. At age six she joined NAACP. CBA campaigned for a pesticide-user licensing bill that Virginia's Assembly just ratified.

"I consider myself an environmentalist and a few other things, too." She sits on the board of the NationalToxics Campaign and the National Health Care Campaign. visits nursing homes and works personally with "children at risk." CBA is now organizing and holding hearings in communities threatened by toxics.

In Halifax, Tucker says, whites and Blacks have worked together when the issue was education—a tutoring program, for example—or an environmental threat. But the going gets rough. She says, when the issue is race, discrimination, civil rights. "Racism is a big factor in a lot of environmental issues," Tucker says. "Most of the time I go to these traditional environmental meetings, and I'm the only Black person there. These traditional groups ask me what to do. I tell 'em, then they go and do the opposite thing."

-- Cora Tucker

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-- Cora Tucker

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Defense Department Moves on the Environment?

On October 10, 1989, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney announced that the Pentagon would enter the environmental age and stated that "I want the Department of Defense to be the federal leader in agency environmental compliance and protection." To implement the Secretary's policy, the Pentagon launched the Defense and the Environment Initiative (D&EI).

The Pentagon kicked off the D&EI with a September meeting of over 500 people, of whom only 40 were environmentalists. Sprinkled amongst Pentagon officials and Department of Defense (DOD) contractors. The DOD held the conference to gain input on how the Pentagon should form its environmental policies.

There were numerous topics discussed at the D&EI conference, including National Environmental Policy Act procedures, natural resource management, pollution prevention, DOD proposals to acquire an additional five million acres of land, military toxics, and the military's use of our nation's skies. These last two issues have special relevance to RPE readers.

American Indians

While the problems of low-level and supersonic overflights affect many communities in rural areas, their greatest impact has been on Native American reservations. Indeed, Native Americans — many of whom live on isolated reservations apart from white people and other people of color — experience military overflights and sonic booms far out of proportion to their numbers. Having little or no political clout with the U.S. military, many native leaders contend that DOD sees the vast emptiness of their reservations as fair game for abusive military overflight activities.

Toxic Wastes

The Pentagon, despite its mission of protecting the U.S., poses a major threat to America's environment. The Pentagon continues to be one of the largest generators of hazardous waste in the U.S., possibly in the world. Defense activities produce up to 1.5 billion pounds of waste yearly in the production, testing and use of chemical weapons, explosives and rocket fuels as well as nuclear warheads.

Visually every military base works with hazardous wastes, and contamination by toxic chemicals is rampant. Ships, planes, tanks and maintenance yards generate a variety of solid and liquid hazardous wastes. These include paints, solvents, petroleum products, propellants, explosives, obsolete chemical weapons, and radioactive wastes, to name a few. The military's toxic wastes are deadly, unique and highly variable.

What's worse, DOD has kept secret the exact extent of its environmental damage in the name of national security. In the past, a typical DOD response to criticism has been to argue that while it strives to meet environmental laws, national security puts the military above the law. This attitude continues to be a problem.

The economic and social costs of this military wreckage are still unknown. Based on current DOD, Department of Energy and General Accounting Office estimates, the total cost of bringing U.S. military facilities into compliance and mending the existing damage, could exceed $150 billion. Future generations will be paying this bill far into the 21st century.

While the DOD pronounces that they have made the environment a priority, this claim is easily questioned. In 1984 the Defense Environmental Restoration Program was established. Yet, out of 1.6 trillion dollars spent on the military between 1984 and 1989, the DOD spent just $21 billion for this program.

Despite President Bush's repeated expressions of concern for the environment, the DOD requested only $518 million for the program in fiscal 1990, or about one sixth of one percent of the total military budget.

It is not debatable that DOD needs to improve its response to environmental problems. Secretary Cheney did briefly open a door, but has that door been quickly shut in the face of the nation? It has now been five months since the D&EI conference and follow-up notes promised to conference attendees have not materialized. At this point, D&EI is clearly "and merely "business as usual" for the Pentagon.

Across the U.S., the vast majority of toxic waste sites and military hazardous training activities are located in low-income and minority communities. Impacted groups include Black, Latino, Native American, Asian American and people who live in sparsely populated rural areas. The concerns of these communities must be met, but so far the D&EI process is not addressing these concerns in a meaningful fashion.

— Grace Bukowski

Student Environmental Action Coalition Catalyst Conference, Champaign-Urbana, IL, October 4-7, 1990.

Student Interested in Environmental Justice

Last fall, 7,100 student environmental activists, representing all 50 states and 11 foreign countries, gathered for the second annual weekend-long conference of the Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC), known as ...
the "Catalyst Conference." SEAC was formed in 1988 and has affiliates at nearly 1,100 campuses nationwide. It became clear within minutes of the conference's opening address that the students were expanding their definitions of "environmental issues" far beyond issues traditionally embraced by the mainstream environmental movement. According to Will Toor, one of the conference organizers, "children being poisoned by lead is as much an environmental issue as global warming."

Among the speakers who addressed what turned out to be the largest student environmental gathering in history were Winona LaDuke, Cesar Chavez, and the Reverend Jesse Jackson. LaDuke, who spoke on an environmental action panel on the opening night of the conference, said Americans "have got to figure out how not to live like invaders... This is not about buying green. This is not about changing corporations. What we have to do is drastically change the way society consumes." Chavez stated, "You can't get to the corporations by going to the politicians. They're one and the same." Both student and non-student speakers contended that at the root of the global ecological crisis is a corporate model that seeks profit at the expense of people and environment, and complicity among the many governments who perpetuate that model.

Several workshops and seminars addressed issues of environmental justice, with titles such as "Race, Class and the Environment: Pollutants and Minority Communities," "Racism in the Environmental Movement" and "Strategizing for Environmental Justice." In addition to these, one of the two plenary sessions of the conference focused on environmental justice.

Yet despite the fact that environmental justice was a major theme of the conference, and the fact that SEAC's philosophy statement says "SEAC is committed to bringing together a diverse community organized across lines of class, race, age, sexual orientation, gender, religion and culture," the vast majority of the conference participants were white, and a sense of dissatisfaction was expressed by many of the students of color present.

One student, Thomsine Gunn, said "It didn't seem like they (the organizers) were reaching out for people of color. When are the minority people on the planning committee?" Scheduled into the conference agenda was a caucus period in which several groups with common interests were formed. Among them was a caucus of people of color. Many of the students and former students felt that even within SEAC institutionalized racism was operating.

The People of Color Caucus pointed out that for too many people of color "the environment" means a community infested by drugs and a lack of affordable housing, social services, and the absence of meaningful work, and including them in the decision-making process. He adds, "SEAC should devote its energy and material resources to addressing racism within its own structure."

Before the national conference, plans were underway to hire a diversity coordinator to work out of the national SEAC office. This person would be responsible for reaching out to communities underrepresented within SEAC, and ensuring that SEAC's programmatic work is relevant to those communities.

Furthermore, as a result of the conference, three voting positions were created for members of the people of color caucus on the National SEAC Council, which is the decision-making body for the entire organization, with one voting member from each of 17 regions. Byun views this addition to the council as positive, and says it will help foster ongoing dialogue about strengthening SEAC as a movement by framing "environmentalism" in a way that speaks to the political, economic and social concerns of people of color in the US and abroad.

--- Lisa Teten
Earth Island Institute
300 Broadway, Suite J
San Francisco, CA 94113
Urban Habitat Workshops, Oakland, CA, December 1, 1990 and January 12, 1991

Urban Habitat Holds Two Workshops on Environmental Agenda

Making use of a portion of a $50,000 grant from the San Francisco Foundation, the Urban Habitat Program held its first two workshops to determine its target groups, issues and action priorities.

The first workshop was held on December 1, 1990 in Oakland, CA. Over 35 San Francisco Bay Area people representing a wide range of multicultural, social justice and economic concerns came together. Several of those present met each other for the first time, so the workshop provided a much-needed opportunity to network and gather resources dedicated to quality urban life.

To open the workshop, Carl Anthony, one of the founders of the Urban Habitat Program, outlined the major reasons why the program exists:

1. To broaden the focus of the mainstream environmental movement to include urban communities, whose people are disproportionately bearing the impact of environmental hazards.

2. To keep the general public, particularly its governing bodies, aware that urban areas are multicultural; to therefore amplify the voices of Bay Area community residents and organizations which address the social, economic and ultimately environmental needs of those communities.

3. To promote a definition of "environment" which includes institutional as well as biological issues, based on the reality of institutional racism.

The keynote address was given by Richard Moore, executive director of the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP). (SWOP gained national recognition when it helped initiate a letter in 1989 to the "Big 10" mainstream environmental organizations, criticizing their hiring practices which have effectively excluded people of color.) Richard spoke impressively about how SWOP over the past 15 years has addressed the environmental issues of residents and workers of the Southwestern U.S., such as the devastating impact of toxic emissions by industrial plants on community residents, life-threatening health hazards in the workplace, the need to implement testing for lead poisoning, and eliminating racist hiring practices in the local industry to promote community-sensitive policies.

Perhaps because these issues have related to urban working class, people of color, SWOP and grassroots organizations like it have not received adequate recognition and support from mainstream environmental organizations. SWOP has and will continue to advance the overall environmental movement; the movement will truly be a progressive one only when its mainstream organizations direct their attention and resources to the work of organizations such as SWOP.

As for the issues which Urban Habitat needs to consider as priorities, the assembled group raised the following:

- Racism and xenophobia within ourselves and our communities
- Environmental education that is accessible, relevant and consistent from an early age.
- Pollution and toxics in our communities, including alcohol, tobacco and street drugs.
- Environmental protection and restoration, including land use decision-making.

The group also discussed the work which Urban Habitat can/should do to address those issues. Many suggestions were raised, all relating to supporting individuals and existing groups that are already in the forefront of protecting the urban environment: disseminating information to empower the uninformed

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and the disenfranchised; and building effective coalitions between educators, activists and religious leaders. One action that Urban Habitat will try to implement immediately is the translation of parts of the Race, Poverty & the Environment newsletter, first into Spanish, then other languages.

Urban Habitat's second workshop took place on January 12, to further discuss how to strengthen our capacity to take needed action, especially given the diversity of cultures and issues to be addressed. This question raised...
Conference Robes
Health Risks Facing
Communities of Color

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) held its first National Minority Health Conference in Atlanta Georgia from December 3 to 6, 1990. The conference focused on health risks posed by environmental contamination in minority communities. The audience included over 300 doctors, government officials and health professionals from across the United States. Dr. Aubrey F. Manely, deputy assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services gave a lively opening address, emphasizing the high health price that people of color and the poor now pay for other peoples’ pollution. "Who pays and who benefits?" she asked. Dr. Reuben C. Warren, director for minority health at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, criticized the larger environmental movement for ignoring minority health issues.

The meetings consisted of formal papers, workshops and panels in three broad areas: demographic data, health perspectives and health communication. More than 40 papers were presented on such topics as toxic waste and African American communities, childhood lead screening, consumption of dioxin-contaminated fish, PCB contamination among Mohawks in New York, abandoned uranium mines in the Navajo nation, health communication and migrant workers. and using demographic data in case studies and national data bases.

Nearly all of the presenters whose papers explored the disparate impact of environmental contamination on communities of color praised the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice’s Toxic Wastes and Race report. The Commission is a church-based civil rights organization, not an environmental group or government, agency — not a small point since the nationally-based environmental organizations were late in adopting environmental equity as a goal. Moreover, federal agencies — including EPA, ATSDR, HHS, CDC and others — have largely failed to investigate institutional barriers and the disparate toxic contamination problems borne by people of color. Presenters after presenter pointed to “environmental racism” as a major culprit in the ecological imbalance that now exists in the nation. All communities are not created equal. Some are more equal than others. The speakers called for more aggressive steps to be taken, at all levels of government, to eliminate the growing health disparities in our urban ghettos, barrios, reservations and rural “poverty pockets.” This includes reduction of risk posed by the disproportionate exposures of these communities to lead, toxic chemical emissions, hazardous wastes, pesticides, and other man-made threats. It also means dismantling the institutional barriers that stall access of people of color to the health care, affordable health care, quality neighborhoods and schools, and clean physical environments.

Because this was the first ATSDR conference that dealt with this topic, the fact-finding/technical theme dominated the sessions, while giving only limited weight to the role of institutional arrangements and state action. Hopefully, follow-up conferences can address these issues and involve more grassroots community leaders in “hands on” models to empower the “victims” of environmental racism.

— Robert D. Bullard
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Thanking Those who Make RPE Possible...

The Race, Poverty & the Environment newsletter is a joint project of Earth Island’s Urban Habitat Program, and California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation’s California Communities at Risk Project. Urban Habitat is supported by a generous grant from the San Francisco Foundation. The California Communities at Risk Project carries on work with the generous support of the Glen Eagles Foundation, the Public Welfare Foundation, the Abellard Foundation, The Beldon Fund, the Van Loven Sels Foundation, the Vanguard Foundation, the Acorn Foundation and the Strong Foundation.
Resources'

News Service -- Women

Women's Feature Service, a Global Network of Information and Analysis from the South. The Women's Feature Service is a wire service of features written by Third World women journalists with a progressive perspective. which puts out some 300 features a year. The WFS has a network of more than 150 journalists, editors and translators from 60 countries - reporting from their own countries, the WFS contributors are better informed of socio-political and economic reality, providing an effective interpretation for the service's international audience. WFS, P.O. Box 462, New York, NY 10017. 212/370-1773.

Reports & Articles -- General


The CERES Environmental Performance Report for Valdez Principles Signatories has just been released. The Valdez Principles establish an environmental ethic, with criteria by which investors and others can assess the performance of companies. The principles encourage companies to go voluntarily beyond the requirements of law. The principles provide guidelines for protection of the biosphere, sustainable use of natural resources, reduction and safe disposal of waste, wise use of energy, reduction of health and safety risks, development of safe products and services, and compensation for damage to the environment. Contact CERES, Centa for Environmentally Responsible Economies. 711 Atlantic Ave., Boston, MA 02111. 617/451-0927.

Water Information Network Review, A Citizen's Journal on Water Issues in the Southwest. Available from Southwest Research and Information Center, P.O. Box 4524, Albuquerque, NM 87106.

Upcoming Events

Success stories sought for the Global Assembly of Women and the Environment, Miami, FL, November 48, 1991. Women and their organizations play important roles in advancing environmental awareness, education and management in support of sustainable development. The Global Assembly of Women and the Environment is a forum for women to present their activities and success stories. For information contact Wa'fas Ofosu-Amaah, Consultant to the Global Assembly, United Nations Environment Program. 1849 F Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006. (See also article on page 17).

Jobs

Executive Director sought. The Human Environment Center (HEC) is seeking an executive director to serve as its chief executive officer. The Human Environment Center is a tax-deductible, 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to the twin goals of environmental quality and social equity. The Center identifies environmental issues that disproportionately affect people of color and the poor and brings together environmental and social equity organizations to address these issues and promote high quality urban and rural environments. Through a small Washington, DC-based staff, the Center provides educational, technical and advocacy assistance to promote the convergence of these twin goals at the national, state and community levels. It operates internships and professional recruitment programs aimed at people of color in an effort to assist the environmental community in increasing staff diversity and to bring a diverse perspective to environmental decisionmaking. The Executive Director will be responsible for raising funds to support HEC, implementing the organization's policies and ensuring its fiscal accountability. Salary: $50,000 to $60,000. Contact: Search Committee, Human Environment Center. Suite 827.1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington DC 20006.

Job listings. The Job Seeker is a bi-weekly bulletin for the environmental/natural resource fields including forestry, wildlife, fisheries, soil and water conservation, environmental education, environmental protection/regulation, parks and outdoor recreation. It is free, fast and nationwide. To receive a free sample issue simply write to The Job Seeker, Rt.2, Box 16, Warrens, WI 54666.

War, the Environment, and the Persian Gulf

As we go to press, war is raging in the Middle East. Thousands of people are being injured and killed in an adventure which seems to us the height of folly. Most of those in combat on both sides are people of color. We have seen two excellent resources which describe the environmental and human effects of the Persian Gulf war:

War in the Gulf: An Environmental Perspective. This paper, the Action Paper #1 of the Political Ecology Group, is a thorough and concise tour through the short and long term impacts of the war on the Gulf's environment, on U.S. national security and the environment, and on what the environmental movement should be doing about it. It presents an environmentalist's platform for peace.

Devastation in the Deserts: The Environmental Impact of Military Action in the Middle East, the Winter 1991 issue of Earth Island Journal, is packed with five key articles on the war's impact. Earth Island offers perspectives not heard on CNN or in the New York Times.

Both of these resources are available from Earth Island Institute, 300 Broadway, Suite 28, San Francisco, CA 94133. 415/788-3666.
Women in the News

WANGARI MATHAI, outspoken grassroots leader of the Greenbelt Movement in Kenya, was keynote speaker for the National Open Space Conference in Palo Alto, CA in late September 1990. Over 500 of the nation's leading open space advocates were joined by their counterparts from Canada, Great Britain, Gambia, Costa Rica, Japan, Taiwan and other countries for a four-day International Open Space conference. Ms. Mathai described the achievements of her thirteen year campaign to raise the consciousness of East African people on the urgent need to protect and rehabilitate our global ecological environment. Two booklets and several films about her work planting trees in Kenya have been produced. Seven million trees planted have survived. For more information write the Green Belt Movement, P.O. Box 67545, Nairobi, Kenya. The National Open Space Conference organizers announced the formation of a new organization — Open Space America — to provide networking services to open space advocates and to host future conferences. Open Space America can be reached at P.O. Box 34559, Estes Park, CO 80517. Memberships are $10 for individuals and $50 for nonprofits.

- CATHY SNEED MARCUM, an African American horticulturalist, runs an unusual program for juveniles and young adults in the San Francisco County Jail. The program supervises prison inmates who plant and cultivate enough fruits and vegetables to feed 2,000 homeless people per day in the city. Contact the Prison Horticultural Program, City Hall Room 333, San Francisco, CA 94102. 415/554-7225.

- EDITH ADAME, an activist attorney in San Francisco, announced an environmental project in formative stages at the Latino Issues Forum. A California think tank dealing with a broad cross section of topics affecting the welfare of the state's Spanish-speaking population. The announcement was made in a paper presented at a panel on Race, Poverty and Environment at Stanford University's Public Interest Law Conference. Ms. Adame's remarks focused on occupational health and safety issues and transportation issues affecting Latino, African American and other poor communities in California. For information contact the Latino Issues Forum, 1535 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94110.

- MARY KING, an African American public official well respected by San Francisco Bay Area environmentalists for path breaking legislation to contain suburban sprawl, protect vulnerable farmland and the surrounding metropolitan fringe, has been recently elected President of the Alameda County Board of Supervisors.

Summit Planned to Address "Environmental Racism"

The Commission for Racial Justice, a major civil rights organization, announced in December that it will convene the first National Minority Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington, DC in October 1991. The Summit will probe "environmental racism" — the idea that minorities, despite being disproportionately affected by pollution and hazardous wastes, have long been locked out of the environmental policy debate.

Several hundred national and grassroots leaders in the civil rights, minority, environmental, government, and corporate communities will be invited to attend the three-day summit. Invited keynote speakers will include U.S. Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan, EPA Administrator William Reilly, and U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Louis Sullivan. Summit attendees will develop a national agenda that will help reshape and redirect the environmental movement in the United States.

One result of the Leadership Summit might be the creation of a permanent, minority-led organization that will mobilize communities to deal with environmental racism locally as well as nationally.

The Commission, founded 27 years ago, is the national civil rights agency of the United Church of Christ, a 1.7 million member Protestant denomination. The Commission, which has offices in Cleveland, New York, Washington, D.C. and North Carolina, has been at the forefront of this issue since 1982. Its work includes the landmark 1987 study "Toxic Waste and Race in the United States."

(The report conclusively documented that minority communities contain far more toxic dumps than non-minority communities. Three of every five African Americans and Latinos live in a neighborhood with a hazardous waste site. Moreover, three of the five largest hazardous waste landfills — 40 percent of current U.S. commercial capacity — are located in minority communities. Among the report's many findings was that race was the most significant variable in differentiating communities with hazardous waste sites from those without such sites.)

Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, the Commission's Executive Director who first coined the term "environmental racism," said "The environment is too important to be left to just environmentalists. The evidence clearly shows that it's African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans who are disproportionately living with toxic pollution in their back yards." He added, "Our future is at stake. It's precisely because industry doesn't put toxic waste dumps in Beverly Hills that we must insist on being a part of the policy debate. It's our environment too."

Dr. Chavis called for a partnership to fight environmental racism, comprised of the environmental movement, industry, government, civil rights, and grassroots organizations. Summit planning will involve leaders from all these fields. "Noting that the "green movement" itself has long admitted that it has failed to effectively include minorities, Dr. Chavis called on the leaders of the major environmental groups in particular to actively support the Summit."
We Speak for Ourselves: Social Justice, Race & Environment

We Speak for Ourselves: Social Justice, Race and Environment, a mini-dossier published by the Panos Institute to focus attention on the phenomenon of "environmental racism," was released in December 1990.

The concept of "environmental racism," a term coined in the early 1980s by Dr. Benjamin Chavis of the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice, is built on research showing that communities of color are targets for toxic dumping and for the placement of the nation's most hazardous industries.

The Panos report gives reality to the research, documenting the disproportionate environmental risk experienced in communities of color. It does so by featuring stories of communities as diverse as a Chicano neighborhood in Albuquerque, NM, an African-American community in the Georgia Sea Islands dating from the pre-Civil War era, and the Western Shoshone in Nevada.

"In We Speak for Ourselves, the marriage of the movement for social justice with environmentalism is documented. And, like most marriages, those involved are determined to make it work in spite of the odds. This is especially true for African, Asian, Latino and Native Americans, who are increasingly faced with high exposure to poisonous chemicals and toxic environments," says Dana Alston, editor of the report and director of the Panos Institute's Environment, Community Development and Race Program.

This approach has caused conflict with the mainstream environmental movement, and has led to a perception among the mainstream groups that persons of color have been uninvolved in environmental action.

The Panos report illustrates how individuals and organizations in urban and rural communities of color throughout the U.S. have joined the movement for social justice and have made it a healthy environment. Written and edited by persons of color, We Speak for Ourselves promises to stimulate debate about the continuing struggle for environmental justice in communities of color -- and beyond -- during the 1990s.

The Panos Institute, publisher of We Speak for Ourselves, is an independent, international information and policy studies organization dedicated to working in partnership with others to raise public understanding of sustainable development. By combining careful research on environmental and development issues with forceful dissemination, Panos provides information services to the media, decision makers and the general public.

Copies of We Speak for Ourselves: Social Justice, Race and Environment, may be obtained from the Panos Institute, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 301, Washington, DC 20036, 202/483-0044.
Eight thousand feet up on the treeless plain of the San Luis Valley Basin, the headwaters of the Rio Grande begin their decent through the San Juan Mountains. Here, in this historic southern Colorado county Chicanos are taking a stand against the reopening of a gold mine that endangers their cultural traditions.

"We don't have a lot of time before we were totally displaced from our rural communities, our families scattered and our values and way of life totally changed," says Maria Valdez.

A sixth-generation native of the San Luis valley and a graduate student in Regional Planning at the University of Colorado, she and her husband, Arnie Valdez, founded People's Alternative Energy Services which, along with Concerned Citizens for Environmental Soundness, is fighting the opening of El Pomo gold mine.

"In the 1970s, another company operated the mine using the same cyanide technique (to separate the gold from the ore) that is again being proposed. There was a leak that polluted our waters and killed hundreds of trout," says Valdez. What they are up against is the county commission's traditional view of the mine as a source of jobs and tax revenue, in an area with 24 percent unemployment.

Historically, ethnic communities with chronic unemployment have been faced with the same dilemma. Earning a living meant accepting hazardous jobs and polluting industries.

Today, many Latinos feel they have found another way. They are reasserting their traditional relationship with the land and adapting the sustainable economic development concepts of the environmental movement. In rural towns, Latinos are developing a "land-based ecology" that has its roots in the "self-reliant village" concept of their ancestors. Using organic and greenhouse farming as well as wind and solar-generated power, this approach promotes self reliance and environmental stability by helping families earn a living from small farms. This economic development strategy, say its proponents, is in harmony with their natural environment and with their Indo-Hispanic culture, both of which have a value that is not reflected in economic statistics.

Recent media coverage has played up the fact that Latinos (and other ethnic groups) have only minor roles in the more visible organizations that champion the environment among white middle-class people.

Across the West, Latinos have been doing battle for decades on land use and water rights issues.

Traditional Culture, New Agriculture
by Emma Torres

Many Latino activists say their community's problems and solutions both come out of their own culture's view of the earth's natural resources.

Americans.

Less has been said about ethnic community organizers who have been active on environmental issues, but do not typically call themselves environmentalists. Across the West, for instance, Latinos have been doing battle for decades on land use and water rights issues. And clearly, in the fight against pesticides, it was Chicanos who initiated the community's San Joaquin Valley who led the way more than 20 years ago, when Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers first organized the tablegrapes boycott and won a ban on DDT.

Today, Latinos appear to be building on this common history of activism. They are breaking the isolation of organizing in sparsely populated rural lands to fight the suburbanization and pollution of their rural lands. From California to Texas they are coming together to assess their needs, share limited resources and present a unified front on common issues.

The United Farm Workers union has a seven-acre demonstration farm on which farmworker families learn to make the small plots surrounding their homes more productive.

Rebecca Flores-Harrington, a UFW organizer, stresses that the key to success for their experiment lies in being able to make money for poor people to live on. "When people see that you can do that, they will get serious about this organic farming."

The United Farm Workers organization has always managed to generate support for its struggle against toxic pesticides. But growing environmental awareness has made new alliances possible. Groups like the Institute for Rural Studies in Davis, Cal. the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation, and the Mineral Policy Center have played a welcome role in community struggles against national companies. But in other cases, Latino activists and environmentalists have not been on the same side. "Don't call us environmentalists," says Eduardo Lavidi, an activist in New Mexico. "Here in Taos County," he explains, "environmentalists have pushed hard for an upstream flow protection act which insures that a stream remains at a certain level. But that will end up taking water from small Latino farmers... disrupting the way they live. It will impact the water system which the community has been using for two centuries."

"We don't want these pups to do for us," said Lavidi. "We want to do it with them. We want more of a partnership." His words echo the feelings of many Latino activists, who say their communities' problems and solutions both come out of their own culture's view of the earth's natural resources. This view, they say, is one that the broader environmental movement needs to respect—and incorporate into a multicultural environmental agenda.

Article excerpted by permission from the Bay Guardian.
"We have learned the benefits of a balanced and integrated work force. People with different perspectives and points of view enhance our overall mission, its balance, cost-efficiency and effectiveness..."

-- F. Dale Robertson, Chief of the U.S. Forest Service
community college must also have an agreement with a four-year college or university that has an accredited program in forestry and/or natural resources.

Commencement 2000 will involve community leaders and organizations by establishing partnerships to support educational and recreational programs. Such partnerships will increase awareness among currently underrepresented groups about Forest Service programs, employment opportunities and benefits.

"Most corporations do their Recruiting at the high school and college level, through career fairs and the like," says Amahra. "Commencement 2000 is designed to impact an entire educational system in order to yield well-qualified students for the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, Natural Parks Service, state agencies, private corporations and non-profit environmental organizations."

Amahra's personal goal is to enlighten young people, and an entire community, about the environment and their connection to it. "So many kids live with limited options. Commencement 2000 is designed to increase kids' awareness, develop their interest, and empower them to assume responsible, interesting careers relating to the environment."

This kind of diversity is valued within the Forest Service, and has given rise to a very innovative and far reaching program.

The Outreach/Recruitment Task Force which brought Amahra into the Forest Service was established in 1989 to study the various issues of a changing workforce and developing appropriate policy in order to reach parity with the civilian labor force. The impetus which gave rise to the Task Force and its work was a consent decree resulting from a class action lawsuit brought by a group of women eight years ago.

"The experience of a consent decree is both demoralizing and disruptive to a workforce. People really want a better way of adjusting to change," says Amahra. Increasingly, cultural diversity is becoming valued, around the country and within the Forest Service. Moreover, by starting at the elementary school level, and integrating such program components as pre-career training, job shadowing and mentorships, Commencement 2000 is gradually acculturating a whole generation of kids to the Forest Service while simultaneously acculturating the Forest Service to a changing workforce.

Commencement 2000 is now ready for implementation as a pilot program in Oakland. The feeder school systems chosen for the pilot are Parker Elementary School, King Estates Middle School, Castlemont High School, Merritt College, and UC Berkeley. Within the next two years the program is scheduled for statewide implementation.

The Forest Service has been criticized for various policies and practices in recent years. The Forest Service however, is made up of people who don't all think and feel the same way. This kind of diversity is valued within the Forest Service, and has given rise to a very innovative and far reaching program. Commencement 2000 will have the greatest impact as both corporations and non-profit environmental organizations form partnerships with the program to support educating underrepresented youth, and paving the way for increasing numbers of people of color, the physically challenged and women to become not only environmental activists, but policy-makers in society.

Dianne Saunders is outreach coordinator for the Video Project, a non-profit distributor of social-issues documentary videos and films, located in Oakland, California.
Women's Work...

Putting today's essential health and environmental knowledge into practice will be seen by many as women's work.

But women already have work.

They already grow most of the developing world's food, market most of its crops, fetch most of its water, collect most of its fuel, feed most of its animals, weed most of its fields.

And when their work outside the home is done, they light the third world's fires, cook its meals, clean its compounds, wash its clothes, shop for its needs, and look after its old and its ill. And they bear and care for its children.

The multiple burdens of womanhood are too much.

And the greatest communications challenge of all time is the challenge of communicating the idea that the time has come, in all countries, for men to share more fully in that most difficult and important of all tasks — protecting the lives and the health and the growth of their children.

— Adapted from *Fac" of Life*, UNICEF/WHO/UNESCO

Environmental issues require constant effort, endlessly applied. Those who oppose strong action on behalf of the environment are always present and well armed with legal and technical expertise. It is not usually possible to sustain such an effort on the other side.

This is because many state and local groups do not have the financial and organizational resources they need. In fundraising, they do not have access to national markets for direct mail and their work has not been the focus of many national foundations. Quite often groups do not take full advantage of their internal resources such as members and boards to improve development strategies and gain allies.

To address these concerns the Board of Directors of the Center has adopted the following mission:

1. Increase the effectiveness of regional, state, local, and grassroots organizations working on environmental issues by strengthening the fundraising, strategic, communications, and organizational capacity of these groups;

2. Increase the cooperative effort among regional, state, local, and grassroots environmental organizations and groups representing low-income communities, people of color, and others currently relatively powerless in American society;

3. Enable regional, state, local, and grassroots organizations working on environmental issues to work more effectively with national environmental groups and other national organizations on issues and projects which are mutually beneficial; and

4. Raise new dollars and other support for the constituencies it serves.

The office of the Center opened in late October and initially the work in carrying out this mission will concentrate on four areas.

- First, we will contract with existing providers of training and technical assistance to deliver those services to the state and local groups in the areas of fundraising, organizational development, and strategy development. Second, we will devote effort to brokering professional assistance and equipment and to establishing useful communications and other networks between state and local groups. Third we will encourage the use of workplace solicitation as a fundraising tool where it is cost-effective. Fourth, we will work to increase the cooperation between national, state and local environmental organizations in strategy development and joint media releases.

In all of these efforts the Center will work with both traditional environmental groups and those groups representing constituencies of color and poverty for which environmental issues are a high priority. We welcome inquiries from regional, state, local and grassroots groups to whom we may be of assistance.

The services provided by ESC will be without charge although in most instances groups for whom we will subsidize the delivery of training and technical assistance will be asked to pay some portion of the cost. Please call or write for more information:

James W. Abernathy, Executive Director
Environmental Support Center
1731 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 200
Washington DC 20009
202/328-7813
Women and the Environment

A Global Perspective, a Local Meeting

by the United Nations Environment Program

As people seek to establish a better, more sustainable relationship with the systems and resources of nature, they observe that environmental problems reflect the aggregate of actions of all individuals, at all levels of society, in all parts of the world. Critical in determining the aggregate effect of human activity on the environment are women who constitute half the world's population.

The United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985) was a decade of extensive discussion related to the role of women in society, and in particular the role of women in development. At the last of three Decade Conferences in 1985, noting the aggregate potential of women to affect the environment and the relationship of environment to the quality of development, governments adopted a resolution urging "women to be more conscious of the crucial role they play in environmental and natural resource management." Governments called on the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) to "provide information on how women can play an active role combating serious environmental problems such as desertification, deforestation, deploynent of plant genetic resources, proliferation of hazardous chemicals and the mismanagement of water resources. Water pollution... as well as in preventing the wasteful use of resources in the home, agriculture, commerce and industry."

Historically, in many cultures gender has determined the economic and social roles of women as they relate to natural resources and the environment. Today many developmental and political changes are taking place which are altering traditional relationships and roles related to women and the environment. It is critical for those concerned about the future of ecological systems. sustainable development and women to address the potential women have in the outcome of the important issues.

Women around the world and their organizations have important potential in promoting environmental awareness, environmental education, environmental management and sustainable development. In many nations women have been first to call attention to chemical, water and air pollution (for example, Rachel Carson's Silent Spring). Women in India, Uganda and Kenya struggle to protect and plant trees. Women in Europe shop "green." Outstanding women are providing leadership in Latin America and the Caribbean in environmental education and coastal and marine protection. Women in Asia are addressing the issues of water and waste. In the USSR thousands of women are taking part in a movement called Bambi (children's ecological and ethics movement), to increase the next generation's environmental awareness. In the U.S., the League of Women Voters has a national program in forcing national action on water pollution.

Women have experiences unique to their gender in generating and managing national resources, and are important actors in achieving sustainable development and integrating environmental considerations at the community level.

The United Nations Environment Program is convening a Global Assembly of Women and the Environment — called "Partners in Life" — from November 4-8, 1991, in Miami, Florida, to advance the capacity of women in environmental management and sustainable development. During this Assembly, women from around the world will present success stories as practitioners which demonstrate their important potential in contributing solutions in fresh water management, managing waste and energy and creating market demands which are a positive force in achieving environmental goals. The Assembly will be convened by UNEP's Senior Women's Advisory Group on Environment and Development implemented by Worldwide, with support from the Women's Foreign Policy Council.

The specific issues to be addressed at the Assembly are: 1) benign or environmentally friendly systems, products and technologies; 2) fresh water; 3) waste; and 4) energy as it relates to climate change.

For more information, please contact Waafas Ofosu-Amaah, consultant to the Global Assembly, UNEP, 1889 F Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006.
"For me a gratifying part of this work is seeing people really taking power into their own hands, taking control of the issues that affect their lives."

-- Sandra Davis, PUEBLO

of an organization and having an exact idea or issue that you want to get taken care of and working within the community structure, you bring the community together. We can do it.

SD: For me the connection started happening when I was working in the community and started working with people that were really part of my family. I am committed to this work because I'm committed to my people. I was very fortunate—first generation in my family to go to college. I feel that I really do owe something to the people that struggled to put me where I am. For me a gratifying part of this work is seeing people really taking power into their own hands, taking control of the issues that affect their lives. I'm committed to this work as long as people out there are willing and ready to move.

GH: You know that PUEBLO means "the people."

For more information about PUEBLO and the Center for Third World Organizing, contact Sandra Davis at PUEBLO, 3836 Martin Luther King, Jr. Way, Oakland, CA 94612. 415/601-0158.

color, are on the front lines of protest, research, lobbying and public education to slowly and painfully bring about change. Here are some of the places:

In Arizona
- Cyanide in a Tombstone silver mine threatened ground-water.
- Families lived in mobile homes atop asbestos tailings and Tonto National Forest residents in Globe were sprayed with the herbicide 2,45-T.
- A copper smelter spewed out sulfur dioxide in Douglas.
- Drinking water tainted with trichloroethylene, or TCE, was unknowingly delivered to people's houses for 30 years in Tucson.
- On the Arizona Strip at the Utah border, Mormon communities were contaminated by Nevada Test Site atomic fallout.

In California,
- A fin released toxic chemicals into neighborhoods in Oroville.
- In Calaveras County, asbestos dumped on roads put children at risk.
- In the Central Valley, people drank well water contaminated with pesticides and worked in freshly sprayed fields.

In researching a recent story on lead pollution in Oakland, I met four strong women. I can still hear the words of Guadalupe Núñez, Maria Garcia and Luz Maria Fonseca who talked of a new organization in the Fruitvale neighborhood.

The mothers became pan of the environmental movement after they learned from People United for a Better Oakland (PUEBLO), a group launched by the Center for Third World Organizing, that their yards and playgrounds contained lead.

Now they go from door to door to get people to meetings. They — whites, blacks, Filipinos and Hindus — protested at Children's Hospital in Oakland in July 1990 to change the system and get routine lead testing under the Children's Health and Disability Prevention Program of Medicaid.

Núñez, sitting in her living room, said she had lived in her tidy house by the railroad tracks for 15 years before she even learned about lead in paint, soil and air.

"Then are a lot of problems with lead. They don't want to listen to us. They don't want to clean up our neighborhoods. The people who live here, well, we've known each other for 10 years, but they don't do anything for us."

"We need more information. We need more people to come here and speak to us in Spanish. But I don't feel isolated, and I'm not afraid of going to protests. Slowly more people understand about the lead problems." She smiles and says, "Adelante."
Chem Waste runs three toxic waste incinerators -- all in communities of color. Now they want to build a fourth incinerator in the Latino town of Kettleman City. "You don't have to be a rocket scientist to see a pattern here," says environmental poverty lawyer Luke Cole.

Chem Waste operates three other incinerators around the country: one on the South Side of Chicago, a neighborhood that is 72 percent African American and 11 percent Latino; one in Saugert, Illinois, which is 73 percent African American and has an average yearly household income of just $7,200; and one in Port Arthur, Texas, 40 percent African American and six percent Latino. "You don't have to be a rocket scientist to see a pattern here," said attorney Cole. Chem Waste also operates the nation's largest toxic waste dump in Emelle, Alabama, a poverty-stricken town in Alabama's "Black Belt," 79 percent African American with a median household income of just $7,300 annually.

The community of Kettleman City first heard about the proposed toxic waste incinerator in 1988, and have been fighting it ever since. Lead organizers Espy Maya and Mary Lou Mares have built a 300-member community group in the tiny farmworker town. El Pueblo turned out over 150 Kettleman City residents at a public hearing on the incinerator last November, although the County tried to limit input from Kettleman City by holding the hearing 40 miles away in Hanford. With help from CRLA and Greenpeace, El Pueblo rented buses to take its members to the hearing.

Mares and Maya, along with Kettleman activist Auscencio Avila and Luke Cole and Efrain Camacho of CRLA, organized a letter writing campaign in which more than 120 Kettleman residents wrote comments on the Environmental Impact Report in Spanish. Kings County, continuing its exclusion of Spanish-speakers, responded to the comments in English.

Since the beginning, El Pueblo has been aided by the organizing efforts of Greenpeace, who first alerted community activists to the proposed incinerator. The international environmental group raised the stature of the anti-incinerator fight, and has held several protests at the existing dump site. Greenpeace activists successfully shut down the Kettleman Hills toxic waste dump for a day in November 1990 to call attention to the community's struggle.

El Pueblo has effectively made the anti-incinerator baule a San Joaquin Valley-wide issue. Working in coalition with other groups, such as Citizen Action of Fresno, El Pueblo helped to get local government bodies in other counties to oppose the incinerator, thus showing that public officials without an economic stake in the decision would vote to secure the public's health and safety. The Fresno City Council and the Visalia City Council both passed resolutions opposing the toxic incinerator.

As well as building an effective community group, Mares and Maya have built their self-confidence through their struggle. Mares recently went back to school -- after taking almost 20 years off to raise her family and work in the tomato fields surrounding Kettleman City. "If you had told me two years ago that I would be going on TV or challenging Kings County officials, I never would have believed you," laughs Mares, who today regularly takes on the County in TV interviews, in public hearings, and now, in a historic lawsuit.

For more information on the struggle, contact Mary Lou Mares and Espe Maya, El Pueblo, P.O. Box 386, Kettleman City, CA 93226; or for info on the lawsuit, please contact Luke Cole, CRLA, 2111 Mission Street, Suite 401, San Francisco, CA 94110.
Residents of the small Central California town of Kettleman City in Kings County brought a major civil rights suit over the siting of a toxic waste incinerator in the low-Income, Latino community on February 7. The suit marks the first time that civil rights law has been used to try to block the siting of a toxic waste facility. Chemical Waste Management, an Illinois-based company that is the largest toxic waste company in the U.S., is behind the project.

"Chem Waste targets communities like ours all over this country," said Mary Lou Mares, a leader of El Pueblo para el Aire y Agua Limpio (People for Clean Air and Water), the community group which brought the suit. "We're saying basta! (Enough is enough!)" Chem Waste now runs the nation's third largest toxic waste dump, some four miles from Kettleman City, and wants to add a massive toxic waste incinerator at the dump site. "Chem Waste thought that because we are poor Latinos, that they could sneak the incinerator by us," said Espy Maya, another El Pueblo leader who has raised four children in Kettleman City. "Well, they're wrong. We'll take this to the Supreme Court if we have to, and we'll win."

The suit, brought by the poverty law firm California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA), charges that Chemical Waste Management has discriminatory sited the toxic waste incinerator in the poor, farm worker community as part of a broader, nationwide pattern of siting dangerous toxic dumps and incinerators in poor communities with substantial populations of people of color. It also charges that Kings County systematically excluded Spanish-speaking people from the incinerator permitting process, even though Kettleman City is 85 percent Latino and 40 percent mono-lingual Spanish-speakers. "This is a classic case of environmental racism. and so we're going to fight it with environmental law and civil rights law," said Luke Cole, a CRLA Foundation attorney who has represented the community group El Pueblo throughout the administrative process.

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