The Color of California Water Politics

By Henry Holmes

Water is a resource which all human beings need for survival. Presently in California, water is a precious and increasingly scarce resource because of environmental, economic, social and political factors. There is intense competition for access to water which raises a range of related issues, from water quantity to quality, from water use to how much water costs. Yet, entire communities of people in California, namely people of color and low-income people, have no voice in the debate or in policy-making over water resources in the state. This is unacceptable. There is something fundamentally and morally wrong about excluding entire communities of people from the discussion and decision-making process involving water, a resource which is a critical need for all people.

Water Policy, People of Color and the Poor

In all the forums discussing and formulating policy about water in California, people scratch their heads and ask, "Why aren't there more people of color?" It is often said that people of color do not care about the environment and that they are not interested in water. If you don't think people of color care about water, just turn off the tap to East Oakland and see how much that African American community cares about water. Shut off the tap to the Mission District in San Francisco and see if that Latino community cares about water. Try Chinatown and the Tenderloin, and you will see that working, low-income and poor people of all colors care about water. When people see their self-interest at stake, they will pay attention. When people hear their needs being addressed, they will listen. Given the rapidly changing demographics of California's population, the question of the color of water policy in California is one that must be addressed.

Metropolitan Joins Mothers of East LA in Conservation/Community Action Project

Southern California's Metropolitan Water District (MWD) joined mothers in East Los Angeles in launching an innovative pilot program this summer that combined the goals of water conservation with community action.

Under the two-month pilot program, which kicked off during the Boyle Heights Community Fair in June, the MWD worked with members of the Santa Isabel Church Chapter of Mothers of East L.A. to distribute and install 1,000 free ultra-low-flow toilets in local residences. Responding to area residents' concerns about unemployment, the program also created new jobs for community members who were trained to install the units. They also received instruction in sales and personal development.

The program was initiated by Juana Beatriz Gutierrez, president of the Santa Isabel Chapter of Mothers of East L.A. Founded in 1985, Mothers of East L.A. is a non-profit service organization of about 350 area mothers that has blocked the siting of a prison and a toxic waste incinerator in the overwhelmingly Latino East L.A. area.

The conservation/community service effort is part of MWD's Water-Wise program, which assists the district's 27 member public agencies in implementing water conservation programs. Through its member agencies, MWD provides more than half the water used by 15 million Southern Californians.

For more information about the Water-Wise program in East Los Angeles, contact Julio Sanchez at 800/660-8028.
**Editors' Notes**

When we first began to think about doing a special RPE issue on water, we quickly realized that this was a huge subject that had scarcely been explored from the perspectives of our culturally and geographically diverse communities. We understood that trying to organize material scattered in so many different places into a coherent framework would be a difficult job to say the least. Determined to approach the subject in a holistic way, we began by looking at the water cycle in nature.

In its simplest form, this cycle consists of three stages: evaporation, precipitation and run off. Water evaporates from lakes, rivers, oceans and vegetation, and rises to the upper atmosphere, where it mixes with dust and gas in clouds. It returns to the earth in the form of rain or snow and then runs off into ponds or soaks into the ground. Finally, the runoff replenishes our lakes and streams, quenches the thirst of plants and animals. Civilizations from Egypt to China have been built on these three cycles, on the ways societies capture and manage or mismanage water.

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**Race, Poverty & the Environment**

Managing Editor
Ellie Goodwin

Editors
Carl Anthony  Luke Cole

Contributors
Ralph Abascal  Leticia Alcantar
Kay Bushnell  Diane Cameron
Pamela Chiang  Karen Garrison
Richard Cohn-Lee  Mike Lee
Jorge Emmanuel  Henry Holmes
Langston Hughes  Jonathan Kozol
Bruce Livingston  Project Nagara
Thomas Nelson  Chris Page
Rural Coalition  Haipei Xu

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**Editorial Policy**

**Race, Poverty & the Environment** is a quarterly newsletter dedicated to publishing material exploring the intersections of race, poverty and the environment. The views reflected in Race, Poverty & the Environment are not necessarily those of the editors.

**California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation** or **Earth Island Institute**

**Mission Statement**

The mission of Race, Poverty & the Environment is to provide an authentic voice for environmental justice. RPE aims to service its readers with news, articles, book reviews, theory, resources and notices that examine and provide evidence of the relationship among race, poverty, and the environment. Further, we must continue to build the bridges that have been tentatively constructed in the past few years between mainstream environmentalists and grassroots environmentalists, in a way which preserves the autonomy of community groups. RPE presents the voices and experiences of a sector of society in a manner that is accessible to grassroots organizers and activists, environmental professionals, concerned citizens, and policy makers alike.
Healing urban waters is part of the healing of urban communities so desperately needed across the nation. The Clean Water Act, also known as the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972, is recognized by many activists as one of the most citizen-friendly and most empowering of all federal laws. As such, it is an ideal tool for empowerment and healing in the urban environment.

The Clean Water Act was a hallmark piece of environmental legislation, setting the ambitious goal of eliminating all pollution discharges into the nation's waters by 1985. As an interim goal, the Act required that waters be at least "fishable and swimmable" by 1983. Twenty years later, the Act has achieved considerable success in removing some of the grosser forms of pollution from industries and municipal sewage plants. At the same time, however, inner-city environments have seen a general decline in health and vitality during two decades under the Act.

Since 1972, the Act has been modified by Congressional reauthorization three times — in 1977, 1981, and 1987 — in order to improve the Act and focus on water quality issues not previously addressed by earlier versions. As written today, some of the Act's features include a funding system for the construction of sewage treatment plants, a permitting system (the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System or NPDES) for the discharge of any pollutants to navigable waters provided they do not violate water quality standards, and provisions allowing citizens to bring civil actions in court against any person in violation of the terms of their NPDES permits.

In some areas of the country the Act has resulted in reductions in the more easily identified industrial and sewage pollution into our waters. For example, areas like Lake Erie and the Potomac River in Washington, DC. have rebounded significantly since the late 1960s due to programs aimed at reducing municipal sewage and industrial wastes.

Despite these significant gains, the Act has clearly fallen short of even its interim goal of making our nation's water fit for fishing and swimming. With the Act up for reauthorization in 1992, an ideal opportunity exists to strengthen and improve the Act and put it back on course. The Clean Water Network, a coalition of over 300 public interest groups and organizations representing all 50 states, has been formed to realize this goal.

The coalition currently focuses its efforts on 1) prevention of pollution by contaminated stormwater runoff, toxics, raw sewage from combined sewer overflows, and other sources inadequately controlled under the present Act; 2) protection of critical ecosystems such as wetlands; and 3) enforcement of the Clean Water Act and closing gaps in the Act to ensure, among other things, the rights of citizens to know what pollutants are being discharged in their neighborhoods, and guarantee that adequate funding will exist to pay for clean up programs.

As part of the Network's efforts to close existing gaps in the Act, two organizations, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and the Center for Environment, Commerce, and Energy (CE3) along with other urban-action groups, are developing a concept paper that we hope can serve as a springboard for increased dialogue and action on a long neglected subject: the urban environment.

In its current form, the Act remains essentially blind to the disparate environmental impacts felt in urban areas and especially low-income areas where people of color live. A
Recent Environmental Protection Agency study reported that "it is possible to document differences in observed and potential exposure to some environmental pollutants by socioeconomic factors and race."

For instance, large proportions of people of color reside in metropolitan areas, where they are exposed to higher levels of air pollutants. People of color are more likely to live near waste treatment facilities or hazardous waste sites than the general population.

Certain people of color, by virtue of their generally higher fish consumption, are also at a greater risk of exposure to water pollutants such as dioxins, furans, and PCBs than other segments of the population. This is especially true for people of color who fish, many of whom depend on fish caught in urban streams to feed themselves and their families. For example, a recent Michigan survey of licensed anglers revealed that Native Americans consumed 36 percent more fish and Blacks 13 percent more fish than the Caucasian population. Another study indicates that Asians/Samoans consumed the most fish among sport fishers in the Los Angeles area. In a survey of recreational anglers in New York's Jamaica Bay, approximately 39 percent of all respondents indicated that fishing was either important or very important as a source of food. The study also indicated that for every subsistence angler, an additional 24 family members consumed Jamaica Bay fish.

The fact that people of color often bear the brunt of environmental dangers has been recognized by a few public officials. Alabama Attorney General Jimmy Evans, for example, recently filed a lawsuit against the EPA and the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, citing data supplied by the NRDC that the Agency did not sufficiently take into account higher fish consumption patterns of people of color when it created its water quality standard for the highly toxic pollutant dioxin. Unfortunately, examples of government effort to correct this problem are rare.

In most cases, the urban environment is still the hardest hit by pollution, and paradoxically, it is often given the lowest priority when it comes to restoration, protection, and funding. Urban streams and adjacent areas often are wrung off as lost causes. These streams are filled with silt from construction and debris such as auto tires and the rusted bodies of abandoned cars, and contaminated with high levels of bacteria and toxic pollutants from stormwater runoff and other sources such as combined sewer overflows. Bill Gifford, a journalist who covers the Anacostia River in Washington, DC, gives an apt description of combined sewer overflows: "[Washington's] sewage and storm sewer systems are combined. So during torrential downpours the two systems...result in what civil engineers call a combined sewer overflow, or what lay observers would term a horrific surge of millions of gallons of shit—and rainwater."

Many urban streams, like the Los Angeles River in California, have suffered similar fates. Becoming blights or mere conveyances for unwanted wastewater and debris. Some streams have even become totally enclosed by concrete, in effect becoming running sewers totally out of reach as sources of enjoyment and sustenance. Yet, these are the areas where large numbers of our nation's people live, work, and spend their leisure time. For those unable to travel to less polluted swimming and sightseeing areas, and for the many who depend on the fish and shellfish from their local stream or harbor to feed themselves and their families, polluted urban waters represent a risk to personal health and well-being, and a missed opportunity for improved quality of life. These trends show no signs of changing. In fact, studies show that the demand for recreation closer to home is actually increasing?

For these reasons, it is imperative that urban streams be restored to become oases of beauty, recreation, and spiritual renewal for their communities. Urban community leaders around the country have shown that this can be achieved when there are high levels of community involvement combined with the political will of federal, state, and local government. If done correctly, stream restoration can also bring essential jobs into urban communities—jobs that put people to work to improve their local environment.

The Urban Watershed Restoration Act Concept Paper seeks to harness the energy and resources of the urban community along with federal, state, and local agencies, in order to heal urban watersheds for those who depend on them as sources of enjoyment and sustenance. It will also serve as a framework for other communities wishing to undertake urban watershed restoration efforts of their own.

Local empowerment and grassroots control are essential in efforts to restore urban watersheds. The concept paper describes a dedicated program under the Clean Water Act that would enable community organizations, public

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The Environmental Legacy of US Bases in the Philippines

by Jorge Emmanuel

After enjoying unhampered use of two huge military bases in the Philippines for nearly a century, the US has abandoned Clark Air Base and is vacating Subic Naval Base, leaving behind an environmental disaster.

The move was precipitated by the Philippine Senate's rejection in September 1991 of a proposed treaty that would have extended the US lease on Subic Base for another ten years.

Last January, the US General Accounting Office (GAO) identified PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl) contamination, lead and other hazardous substances buried in a landfill, fuel leaks into soil and groundwater, and other toxic hot spots at the bases in the Philippines. If the US were to clean up the bases according to US standards, the GAO reported, the cost of environmental restoration would approach Superfund proportions. Nevertheless, the GAO concluded that the US bears no legal liability for the environmental damage caused by its bases.

The GAO study is only the latest in a series of reports regarding toxic contamination at the bases. Los Angeles Times reporter John Broder, in a June 1990 article, quoted Defense Department official David Berteau as saying "If there's a horror story out there, Subic may be it." Berteau was then the senior Pentagon official in charge of environmental programs. Broder claims that the US military "poured tons of toxic chemicals into Subic Bay in the Philippines."

Broder also questioned an Air Force official about Clark Air Base. The official acknowledged that no assessment of the ecological damage at Clark has been done, adding: "We comply with host country laws. In the Philippines, there are none, so we are not in violation of any." (On the contrary, Philippines environmental laws have been compiled in a large three-volume set since the 1970s; the Philippines, however, has a serious problem in enforcing its environmental laws.)

The US military’s own Inspector General, in an internal 1986 study, revealed serious hazardous waste disposal problems in overseas bases including the Philippines. These problems involved wastes containing pentachlorophenol (a lethal poison), the toxic metal lithium, and PCBs. The same internal study concluded that the US military took advantage of the "lax regulatory climate in the host country" and "ignored" available methods for protecting the environment.

In his article, Broder revealed a disturbing trend of blatant disregard for the environment at overseas military bases. There are at least 300 toxic contamination sites in US Army bases in West Germany. The US Air Force admits having polluted the soil, surface water and groundwater at every one of its airbases in Europe. As a consequence of these cavalier attitudes by US defense officials in Europe, charges of illegal disposal of hazardous chemicals have been brought against military employees in West German and Italian courts. David Lange, a US Army official in Europe, reports that European governments are now demanding that the US military comply with their countries’ environmental laws and that the US government shoulder the cost of environmental cleanup.

During the last few years, anti-bases advocates and private groups in the Philippines have been developing their own ideas for economic conversion. But toxic contamination has become a stumbling block. Before these bases can be convened to civilian and productive uses, environmental investigation, clean up and restoration of the baselands are necessary to ensure that the areas will not further threaten human health and the environment.

Toxic clean-up addresses only one sad legacy of the US bases. Any conversion plan also has to deal with the social needs of tens of thousands of women and children, some as young as nine years old, working in the "entertainment industry" (brothels, go-go dancing, massage parlors, nightclubs, bars, etc.) that had served American servicemen for decades. Many of these women and children have suffered physical and sexual abuse, unjust labor practices, drug addiction, and exposure...
Lament of History, Call of New Civilization: 
Revelations from the Three Gorges 
by Haipei Xu

Just as Nature unfolds itself through a series of evolutions, renewing itself through continuing innovation and negation of itself. The Industrial Revolution, for the first time in human history, has made a powerful impact on nature and human society on an unsurpassed scale. Up to today, this has strained the fragile relations of man and nature to critical limits. The debate come true. Since 1949, the dam has frequently been a priority on the national agenda. Yet every time a so-called feasibility study is done, it is obsessed with how to build the dam, not whether it should be built at all, or whether there are alternatives. Opposing voices are silenced, sometimes ruthlessly. In the swirling, misty fog of impact on nature and human society on an unsurpassed scale. Up to today, this has strained the fragile relations of man and nature to critical limits. The debate come true. Since 1949, the dam has frequently been a priority on the national agenda. Yet every time a so-called feasibility study is done, it is obsessed with how to build the dam, not whether it should be built at all, or whether there are alternatives. Opposing voices are silenced, sometimes ruthlessly. In the swirling, misty fog of

Any large scale project affects nature and risks environmental damage, if not complete disaster.

surrounding the Three Gorges Dam Project serves as an example of the tensions of the rapidly changing world in which we live.

The proposed dam has moved through the rapid currents of modern Chinese history. At different times, the plans have been altered to accommodate some changing needs, but the basic building goal remains the same for all the would-be builders: they want to construct the Dam so problems of electrical power, flooding and navigation will be solved, once and for all, so a national dream of modernization can

of natural processes than of those man-made. Any large scale project affects nature and risks environmental damage, if not complete disaster. Under the current circumstances, where there has not yet been a serious environmental study, and where the upper reaches of the Yangtze River are becoming badly deforested and eroded. Nature could take a terrible revenge upon such a dam.

What are the Three Gorges? What do they mean to the Chinese? The Three Gorges is a vital chain of canyons and valleys in the great Yangtze river system, and a unique ecosystem. It has, world-famous scenery and geology, and a rich social and cultural history. It is a precious heirloom, passed down for 5,000 years? Like the Great Wall, it is a national symbol. It is part of the psyche of the Chinese. long serving as a fountain of inspiration to the spiritual well-being of all our people.

What does it mean to lose the Three Gorges? It means a vast deep lake. 375 miles long and 570 feet deep. flooding 67,000 acres of farmland and choking numerous fish hatcheries. It means the

Facts about the Three Gorges Dam Project
Site: Three Gorges on the Yangtze River, People's Republic of China
Dimensions: 175-185 meters (570-610 feet) wide, 2500-2800 meters (8200-9200 feet) wide
Cost: more than $100 billion.
Projected normal water level: 165-180 meters (540-590 feet)
Surface area: 54,000 square kilometers (21,000 square miles)
Projected annual yield: 84 billion watt-hours

Source: Green China Magazine
The Fight to Save the Nagara
An Open Letter from the Project Nagara Coalition
Prior to European settlement, salmon for native people of the coasts of North America were a measure of the quality of life. They still are.

Today, salmon barely survive. For example, in 1992, only four Red Salmon are known to have succeeded in their migration 800 miles up the Columbia River into the Salmon River where they spawn near Sun Valley, Idaho. Here in the US, our salmon’s survival depends on a reformed water policy but an array of powerful interests blocks any attempts at change.

The fighting ground for salmon is international and therefore we must help each other. A call has come to help save Japan’s last free-flowing river, the Nagara, and its rare salmon. Dam construction threatens its survival.

If completed, the dam will close the Nagara River off from the sea; the rare species of warm-water satsuki salmon will disappear and a myriad of traditional human uses of the river will rapidly follow.

The Society Against the Nagara River Estuary Dam Construction is led by Mrs. Reiko Amano, an outdoor writer. Her national network is supported by a cross-section of the Japanese public and political leaders. This summer, at the Global Forum in Rio de Janeiro, representatives of the Nagara Society appealed to the international environmental community for help. Thereafter a coalition of concerned groups and individuals in the US and Japan formed Project Nagara. Further international connections are needed to exert pressure on the Japanese government before dam construction resumes.

Although 80 percent of the local residents oppose it, final construction of the dam on the Nagara River is scheduled to resume on October 14. Please join us in this international effort to save the last free-flowing river in Japan. Contact Project Nagara, 2855 Telegraph Avenue Suite 309, Berkeley, CA 94705, 510/704-0145.

It's in the Water...

Pesticides found in groundwater are remarkably persistent. Dibromochloropropane (DBCP), a pesticide banned in 1979 when it was found to cause sterility in humans, is still the most widely found pesticide in California’s water: more than 2,500 wells statewide have been contaminated with DBCP, and more are found each year.

The worst DBCP contamination is in Fresno County, where a 1984 study found DBCP in more than 1,740 wells. A state study of the effects of DBCP on the residents of Fresno County found a significant increase in the incidence of stomach cancer and leukemia in communities where DBCP was detected in the water supply. The study found that those areas with the highest level of DBCP contamination were “more rural, more Hispanic, and of low income and education level.”

This pattern holds true for many areas facing pesticide contamination, as poor people are the more likely to drink water from shallow, poorly constructed and maintained wells — the type of wells that are most vulnerable to pesticide contamination as the chemicals leach through the soil.

Going on a Water Diet
by Kay Bushnell
One of the most significant things an individual can do to save water has nothing to do with running a faucet. It has to do with one’s food choices, most notably adopting a plant-based diet. A plant-based (vegetarian) diet also has been proven to be much healthier, cheaper and less environmentally harmful than a meat-based diet.

How does your diet relate to how much water you use? The answer lies in the amount of water needed to produce a given amount of food. To produce a single pound of beef requires between 2500 and 6000 gallons of water, a pound of pork, 1630 gallons, and a pound of chicken 815 gallons. By contrast, a pound of wheat or potatoes only requires 25 gallons. So, you could maybe save 200 gallons of water a day by not bathing, not flushing the toilet, letting your lawn die, not shaving and not brushing your teeth — or you could save 5,000 gallons or more per day simply by not eating meat.

Well over a third of California’s water is used for meat production. In addition to wasting water, there are a number of environmental drawbacks to a meat-based diet. For example:

- An acre of wheat can feed 16 times as many people as an acre used for beef production.
- Livestock agriculture is responsible for 85 percent of topsoil erosion in the United States.
- Livestock farming is not only responsible for destruction of tropical rainforests in Latin America, it is also the #1 cause of deforestation in the U.S.
- Two of the largest causes of death in the U.S., arteriosclerosis (heart disease) and colon cancer, are directly attributable to a meat-based diet.

Health studies consistently show that a well-balanced vegetarian diet is far healthier than a meat-based diet. To many people, a vegetarian diet brings up images of bland, tasteless food, and questions of “what about protein?” The truth is that a vegetarian diet can be as delicious as a meat-centered diet, and most vegetarians get more than enough protein.

Becoming a vegetarian is easy. The trick is to gently ease oneself into a vegetarian diet; first not eating meat quite so often; then excluding red meat and pork, chicken, and fish in stages; and then perhaps eliminating dairy products. But, as most vegetarians usually echo, what really convinces people to become vegetarians is that the food is delicious.
**Project YES**

by Chris Page

"Our goal is to get together as a crew, take care of our community’s environment, and have fun while doing it. To make Oakland a better place to live. To work to the best of our ability so we can be positive role models for other young adults."

--- Quote from a Project YES Participant

Forty-one students cluster around tables in a Claremont Middle School classroom, defining their goals for the summer. Each summer for a month and a half, Project YES (Youth Engaged in Service) employs over two hundred junior high school students from five Oakland, California public schools. Supervised by staff from the East Bay Conservation Corps, the program increases young people’s awareness of their environment while encouraging them to improve the world in which they live. In the education portion of the program, crew presentations, skits, and discussions of energy savings are complemented by a daily journal exercise. In the work portion, projects include recycling, painting community murals, weeding the backyard of a Montessori Day care center, and stencilling a warning against dumping chemicals down Emeryville storm drains.

The program has a noticeable effect on its participants as well as in the city. Studies have noted increased confidence, improved school attendance, and a greater ability to interact with adults among former YES crewmembers. On the worksite, YES members learn teamwork and often develop strong ties to their supervisors and fellow crewmembers.

"When I filled out my application for this program I knew I wouldn’t like it," wrote one participant. "But for once I was wrong. After a couple of weeks in the program a funny thing happened. I started to enjoy my job. YES means more than Youth Engaged in Services. It means youth enjoying themselves providing services to help improve their environment."

Despite the fact that almost every middle school in the district has requested a chapter of Project YES at their campus, the program continues to operate out of its original five schools and employs fifty fewer students than it has in previous summers. Due to necessary cutbacks from the program’s main funding source, the Department of Conservation and a lack of funding support from the Oakland public schools, the growth of Project YES has been limited even as the program continues its success.

For more information about Project YES or the East Bay Conservation Corps, contact Kathleen Michaels, East Bay Conservation Corps, 1021 Third Street, Oakland CA 94607 or call 510/891-3517.

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**Birth Defects in Brownsville**

Young mothers in the Brownsville, Texas-Matamoros, Mexico area fear that water contamination from industrial maquiladoras plants — owned by U.S. companies but operating on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande River — is causing a dramatic upsurge in birth defects in the region. Particularly troubling is an explosion of cases of anencephaly, a fatal underdevelopment of the brain.

Nationwide, anencephalic births occur two to three times per 10,000 live births; the rate in Texas is three or four per 10,000. In Cameron County, surrounding Brownsville, the rate has been consistently higher since about 1986, and jumped to about 14 per 10,000 in 1989. A year ago, obstetrical nurses at Valley Regional Medical Center reported a horrific streak — three anencephalic births during a single 36-hour period. Many of the victims are low-income Mexicans and Mexican-Americans who work in and near the maquiladoras.

In Matamoros, meanwhile, a similar escalation has been detected. In 1987, the rate was 3.2 per 10,000 births; the next year it increased to 5.3, then 11.8. For the past three years, it has been 15 or above.

No one knows why the incidence of birth defects has skyrocketed. A yearlong study by the Texas Department of Health failed to find an answer. Some blame industrial discharges from maquiladoras — which spew toxins into the air and water, other believe fathers were exposed in the workplace and brought the poisons home.

Studies have shown links between xylene and toluene — common chemicals used in Matamoros factories — and neural tube birth defects like anencephaly. And a 1991 study by the National Toxics Campaign found high concentrations of xylene in canals around some Matamoros industries — some at levels more than 6,300 times U.S. drinking water standards.

For many observers, there is a familiar pattern to the crisis: "People think that if they were rich and white, there would be quicker action," says one public health expert. Most of the mothers affected are poor Mexican-American or Central American women.

The probe into the causes of the anencephaly outbreak has political overtones: Texas, as a border state, could gain economically from the North American Free Trade Agreement. But growing environmental concern could derail the agreement, and opponents of the agreement point to the Brownsville epidemic as evidence of their concerns. Brownsville has drawn national and international attention in recent months — ABC’s PrimeTime Live covered it — just as the debate heats up on the free trade agreement.

Although the issue has become nationally known, the birth defects in Brownsville and Matamoros have the most profound impact on the families affected. And local activists point out that the birth defects are a symptom of a much deeper problem. "Listen, the babies are not the only problem here," says Domingo Gonzales, a labor organizer with the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras. "What we have here are American corporations that come and want to pay low wages and not spend money on infrastructure that protects the environment."
Life on the Mississippi

By Jonathan Kozol

In the 1830s and 1840s when towns started to develop in the old South, the African American community began to form its own neighborhood. With the collapse of the plantation system, racial segregation took the place of slavery as the method of keeping blacks down. Urban blacks, unwelcome in established residential districts, were forced to live in the alleys and shanty towns on the outskirts of the towns. More often than not, they formed communities on the least desirable land, on the floodplains and near swamps—"the bottoms," as they were called. This pattern of environmental racism continues today in communities as far apart as Richmond, California and Savannah, Georgia. The brief excerpt below, drawn from Jonathan Kozol's new book, Savage Inequalities, describes the impact of such a pattern of exposure to flooding and raw sewage in an East Saint Louis housing project, and what it means for the health and well-being of African American school children who live there.

East St. Louis lies in the heart of the American Bottoms—the floodplain on the East side of the Mississippi River opposite St. Louis. To the East of the city lie the Illinois Bluffs, which surround the flood plain in a semi-circle. Towns on the Bluffs are predominantly white and do not welcome visitors from East St. Louis.

The two tiers—Bluffs and Bottoms—writes James Knowland, a professor of Public Policy at Knox College, "have long represented...different worlds." Their physical separation he believes, helps to rationalize the psychological and cultural distance that those on the Bluffs have clearly tried to maintain. "People on the Bluffs, says Knowland, "overwhelmingly want this separation to continue.

Towns on the Bluffs, according to Knowland, do not pay taxes to address flood problems on the Bottoms. Even though these problems are generated in large part by the water that drains from the Bluffs. East St. Louis lacks the funds to cope with flooding problems on its own, or to reconstruct its sewer system, which, according to local experts, is "irreparable." The problem is all the worse because the chemical plants in East St. Louis and adjacent towns have for decades been releasing toxins into the sewer system.

The pattern of concentrating black communities in easily flooded lowland areas is not unusual in the United States. Farther down the river, for example, in the Delta town of Tunica, Mississippi, people in the black community of Sugar Ditch live in shacks by open sewers that are commonly believed to be responsible for the high incidence of liver tumors and abscesses found in children there. Metaphors of caste like these are everywhere in the United States. Sadly, although dirt and water flow downhill, money and services do not.

The dangers of exposure to raw sewage, which backs up repeatedly into the homes of residents in East St. Louis, were first noticed in the Spring of 1989, at a public housing project, Villa Griffin. Raw sewage, says the Post Dispatch, overflowed into a playground just behind the housing project which is home to 186 children, "forming an oozing lake of tainted water." Two school girls, we were told, experienced hair loss since raw sewage flowed into their homes.

While local physicians are not certain whether loss of hair is caused by the raw sewage, they have issued warnings that exposure to raw sewage can provoke a cholera or hepatitis outbreak. A St. Louis Health official voices her dismay that children live with waste in their backyards. "The development of working sewage systems made cities livable a hundred years ago," she notes. "Sewage systems separate us from the Third World."

"It's a terrible way to live," says a mother at the Villa Griffin homes, as she bails raw sewage from her sink. Health officials warn again of cholera—and this time, of typhoid also. The sewage, which is flowing from collapsed pipes and dysfunctional pumping systems, has also flooded basements all over the city. The city's vacuum truck, which uses water and suction to unclog the city's sewers, cannot be used because it needs $5,000 in repairs. Even when it works, it sometimes can't be used because there isn't money to hire drivers. A single engineer now does the work that 14 others did before they were laid off. By April the pool of overflow behind the Villa Griffin project has expanded into a lagoon of sewage. Two million gallons of raw sewage lie outside the children's homes.

(excerpted from Jonathan Kozol, Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools, Crown Publishers, 1991.)
The Politics of Water

An interview with Anthony Willoughby

Anthony Willoughby is chair of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Water Rates in Los Angeles, CA, which is charged with the responsibility of restructuring the Department of Water and Power's water rates. Willoughby is the first African American to chair such a committee.

Race, Poverty & the Environment: The Blue Ribbon Committee on Water Rates, would you describe it as sort of a Water Christopher Commission? [The Christopher Commission was set up to overhaul the Los Angeles Police Department in the wake of the beating of Rodney King by LAPD officers.]

Anthony Willoughby: Exactly. That's a pretty accurate analysis. The last time there was a commission on water rates was in 1977. If we implement a proper and forward-looking approach to the water rate structure, then there may not be a need for an additional committee for a significant period of time. Hopefully, a program will evolve that may last well into the next century.

RPE: Where does California rank in regards to the quality of water?

W: I don't think anyone can make a statement in answer to that question, primarily because although you may have a certain quality of water at the source, that water is being delivered to various facilities. Depending on the quality of your facility, the end product will be much different.

To give you just one example, take DWP [Los Angeles' Department of Water and Power]. The quality of water being whatever you may classify it as, that same unit of water delivered to the Valley or one of the newer sections of the city, say West Los Angeles, will be much different than that same unit of water delivered to South-Central or East LA, or even downtown, for that matter.

RPE: We've noticed the difference in water—in some areas it comes out of the faucet with a brown color. How can I think the public needs to know that it is not the water that costs: the delivery of water is the primary cost factor.

Anthony Willoughby is chair of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Water Rates in Los Angeles, CA, which is charged with the responsibility of restructuring the Department of Water and Power's water rates. Willoughby is the first African American to chair such a committee.

I think the public needs to know that it is not the water that costs: the delivery of water is the primary cost factor.
involved in delivery of water is essentially fixed. Maintaining the infrastructure involved in delivery of water — aqueducts, pumping stations, the pipes, etc. — are fixed costs. No matter how much water the consumer uses, the cost for delivering the water remains the same.

When DWP asked consumers to reduce water usage by 15 percent, it make allocations to accommodate for that 15 percent reduction. What happened is that the public conserved at a 30 percent rate, causing an unanticipated 15 percent loss of revenue. DWP had to ask for a 15 percent increase to cover their fixed costs.

The public’s perception is that you asked us to conserve, we did an even better job that we were asked to do, and now we’re being penalized for doing a great job.

Part of the problem is the rate structure DWP currently uses, a commodity demand rate structure, which is not as flexible as some of the other rate structures in use. Our job is to restructure the rates so that it’s fair to everyone.

RPE: How did Arizona’s lawsuit over water fights affect California?

W: The U.S. Supreme Court decided that Arizona is entitled to some of what used to be our allocation of water. This has allowed Arizona to use more water to develop their communities.

Naturally, we’re deprived of that water and it hurts us, but the Supreme Court decided it would be more equitable for the state of Arizona to share in our water.

What the DWP may want to look into, as a long-term growth concept, is to find additional sources of water for LA. However, these kinds of things require significant costs.

RPE: Arizona, we understand, has recently restructured their water rates. How successful has that been?

W: How do you weigh success? Their decision was to go to a flat rate with two increases in rates, which may or may not be feasible in Los Angeles. You have a different population. The age groupings in Phoenix are somewhat different from in California. You tend to have older individuals who are retiring, some of whom, because they’ve been able to move to Arizona and retire, tend to be a little more affluent. So, by not separating classes of users, they were able to implement their structure.

In California, you have a much more diverse demographic base. You have a number of minority families who tend to be younger and whose incomes are fluctuating. Those things must be taken into consideration when setting a rate structure.

RPE: Obviously, Los Angeles needs more water. What’s the future of desalination?

W: Desalination is very, very expensive. Currently, it’s cost-prohibitive. In the future, the differential between what desalination costs and the costs of water delivery will narrow because of more advanced technology and the rising cost of delivery. Right now, however, desalinating water is not feasible.

RPE: There was some talk about importing water from Alaska, somehow. Are you familiar with that plan?

W: No. I haven’t heard about that plan, but I do know that if you’re talking about water from Alaska, you’re talking about a serious outlay in order to lay pipes from Alaska to California. The California Aqueduct, the building of which was started decades ago, was never completed. If we can’t complete the California Aqueduct, are we going to complete an Alaska aqueduct? I don’t think so. Nor do I believe that in today’s political climate the public is willing to make an outlay for such a grandiose project. In the future, it may be feasible, either economically or politically.

We really don’t have to go that far. There are other closer, available locales. We can’t go to the Mississippi because it’s polluted. But there are other areas that have specific amounts of rainfalls, so the issue is whether they would like to have it deferred to California.

There again, you have a very political situation: the diversion of water. Everyone wants to divert the water. And the more other states sees it’s feasible to bring water into areas that do not have water the more they want to do it within their own state and that’s what’s happened to Arizona.

RPE: Is there a way to get around politics as it relates to water in California?

W: No. Water is probably the most valuable product in California. There’s no getting around it, primarily due to our climate. Water has driven politics in California from its inception: water, its availability and the right to use it.

RPE: Getting back to the immediate problem, what should water consumers, especially those in the older parts of the city do to insure a better quality of water?

W: Well, my committee was established to get input from concerned water consumers. What we learn from the public will dictate what changes are made and who the changes will be made by. We got some input during our meeting in South Central, but we can’t get too much input.

This interview originally appeared in the January 30, 1992 issue of the Los Angeles Sentinel, and is reprinted with permission.
Wetlands and Housing: A Search for Unity

by Bruce Lee Livingston

In 1991, conservative Jack Kemp, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, managed both low-income housing activists and wetlands activists. The Kemp Commission reported the reason we don't have enough housing for the disadvantaged is because of wetlands protections and the Endangered Species Act.

Is this a smokescreen to divide environmentalists from housing activists and people of color? Kemp's goal is not to build low-income housing. His goal is to deregulate the environment and housing development. This article outlines some of the real issues involved and suggests some approaches to unity.

What is really behind the failure of America to adequately house the disadvantaged? Government intervention in the housing market has had a strong influence in housing development through federal subsidies and local zoning. The post-war housing boom was only possible with government support such as veterans' loans and Federal Housing Authority loans.

Tragically, the boom did not include urban poor, some of whom were given subsidized project housing which left residents in job- and education-starved environments. Much of this federally subsidized suburban sprawl has paved over or filled farmland, open space and wetlands.

The environment has not been so favored in comparison to housing. Wetlands protections have only come into their own through the 1977 Clean Water Act. The Endangered Species Act has only been law since 1973. In California over 91% of our historic wetlands have been destroyed, most of them through digging and channelling the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. In addition, bay lands, coastal wetlands and flood plains along rivers have been converted to urban uses. Less than 1/2% of California's land mass is potentially considered as a federally regulated wetland.

Is this tiny amount of land what is really slowing up low-income housing development? Outrageous, maybe, but it could be an effective wedge to divide environmental activists and housing activists. Factors like economic recession, inflation and discriminatory rental practices are the main reasons why we don't adequately house the poor. Even federal support for middle-class housing has disappeared.

The idea of "jobs-housing balance" can help create a unified approach for the two sides. An area is said to have a balance of jobs and housing if housing is available to workers at a near commute distance to work and at a price affordable to the worker's household.

Perhaps more important than a unifying concept is the need to communicate and unite around specific issues. Perhaps wetlands activists, people of color and low-income housing developers should hold workshops or conferences to air out differences and search for unity. One point of unity is that minority communities often wisely supplement their diets with shellfish and a myriad of fish that they catch themselves in wetlands.

Environmentalists could also support key federal, state and local legislation for housing development and subsidies. Urban sprawl, which is encroaching on wetlands and open space, cannot be tackled without providing urban corridors with good mass transit and dense but liveable housing nearby. Many environmentalists are renters as well, sharing concerns for renter's rights.

In Rhode Island, Clean Water Action joined with open space advocates and housing advocates to pass the Conservation and Housing Trust Fund Act. This unique coalition combined its forces to create funding for both open space acquisition and affordable housing development. "I think [working with environmentalists] is a very exciting concept because this gets at the quality of life issues which we are already beginning to address," says Anna Neuland of Housing Now and the Right to Housing Coalition of Rhode Island.

Even apparent conflicts between the environment and job concerns can be overcome. In 1992, African-Americans, labor, environmentalists, and regulators worked closely to find a compromise for disposal of dredge spoils. The Port of Oakland needs to constantly dredge the bottom of San Francisco Bay to keep shipping lanes open. The Port provides thousands of jobs for people of color. Thanks to the negotiations, instead of disrupting marine life in the Bay fisheries, the dredge spoils will contribute to wetlands restoration in San Pablo Bay. Only unity and determination held the negotiations together.

These kinds of efforts require more communication and work. Using jobs/housing balance concepts, supporting each other's issues, and simultaneously addressing quality of environment and quality of life issues can start the process.

For more information or to start a dialogue contact Campaign to Save California Wetlands, 510/654-7847; Clean Water Action 415/362-3040; Save San Francisco Bay Association 510/452-9261; Greenbelt Alliance 415/523-4921; Housing Committee at Old St. Mary's 415/398-0780; Northern California Non-profit Housing Association 415/495-2273; Community Design Center 415/836-0730.
The past six years of drought in the West, coupled with exploding population growth have brought water issues to the forefront of legislative and media attention. In response, urban water agencies, urban environmentalists, landowners, and even some farmers are advocating the sale of water away from agriculture to cities and industry. This strategy, called water transfers or water marketing, is being hailed as the cure-all for the West's water woes. Left behind in the cheering is any concern about the troubling impacts that water marketing will have on rural communities and California's watersheds. However, a grassroots water policy program based in California's rural communities has been increasingly influential in raising awareness about water transfers.

The Real Impacts of WaterMarketing

The sale of rural water supplies was crucial in the growth of many cities in the American West such as Tucson and Phoenix in Arizona and Denver and Colorado Springs in Colorado. The adverse impacts of such sales on rural communities have been well documented. One purchase of irrigated farmland by a municipality in need of water to support its growth, for example, resulted in the loss of 10 percent of the tax base in La Paz County, Arizona. This pattern will repeat elsewhere because cities (and other government entities) are generally tax-exempt, and land that they buy for water rights is removed from local tax rolls.

In Yolo County, California, the creation of a state-controlled "water bank," which shipped over half of its water south to the Los Angeles region, meant the loss of at least 450 farmworker jobs and a sharply increased demand on county-funded social service programs. Rural communities already closing library and hospital doors cannot bear the burden of these new costs.

The environmental impacts of water marketing can be equally devastating. Mono Lake, which had its tributaries tapped in 1941 to quench the thirst of far off Los Angeles, now holds half the volume of water it once did, in essence shattering the ecological balance of California's second largest lake. The Owens Valley, once the site of Owens Lake, is now a dustbowl with serious air pollution problems from particulate matter (dust) because of the water diversion. Less obvious are the impacts water transfers have had on underground reserves of water. Just this year, a farmer in California's Tehama County bought six acres of land and installed a pump so that he could ship the groundwater to 1,450 acres he farmed elsewhere. Farmers neighboring the six acres were outraged, fearing that their wells would be depleted.

Rural Response to WaterMarketing

In the Fall of 1991, the California Action Network (CAN) and California Association of Family Farmers (CAFF) brought together people who were directly affected by water transfers. Our main objective was to include our views and concerns in the statewide debate around water marketing. Present at a series of five consensus-building discussions were farmers leading the movement to reduce pesticide use, hunger activists, agricultural consultants, public officials, technical advisors, and interested community members. As a result of hours of discussion, we published a platform titled Sales of Water in California: Some Thoughts from Agricultural Communities.

With this document in hand, we set out to bring our unique views into the water marketing forum. Since then we have met with the media, legislators, and a wide variety of environmental organizations working on water resource issues.

Safeguarding Rural Economies and Environments

Due to the high value of water in California, farmers may turn more of a profit selling water than they would growing crops. This dewatering of agriculture will result in depleted groundwater supplies and depressed rural economies. Adverse long-term impacts on already struggling rural economies could be quite serious. We propose that 40 percent of the sale price of transferred water be used to cover the true costs of water marketing to rural areas. The revenues generated would go toward environmental restoration, immediate social service needs and long-term rural economic development.

Our water policy group has continued to interact with environmentalists, legislators and the press to influence their thinking on water marketing. In the past, the views of poor people and family farmers regarding water policy have been ignored. In fact, as an influential agricultural economist recently stated, the needs of poor people — a so-called "third party" — should not be allowed to "distract" the workings of water marketeers. However, since water has so much to do with economic and political power in California, rural people must become more informed, more organized, and more vocal with respect to water issues. We will continue our efforts to forge a new water policy that is both economically and environmentally sound.

CAN and CAFF promote sustainable agriculture and small-scale family farming through legislative lobbying, grassroots organizing, and membership education. Two documents on water marketing written by rural activists are available from the CAN, P.O. Box 464, Davis, CA 95617, 916/756-8518.
MARKETING...

A Modest Proposal

by Ralph Santiago Abascal

California's San Joaquin Valley is a living "body" — water is its "blood." Its veins are the Central Valley Water Project. In the next few months, Congress will probably allow sale of some of that water to the highest bidder. Because it has much higher value in urban areas, that's where it will wind up. Properly designed, that outcome could be good for all Valley residents and city folk. But, that's not where the debate is headed. If nothing changes, a handful of big growers will be marvelously enriched, at the expense of the rest of rural residents. Those who will benefit are very, very active in the political process.

In 1902, Congress enacted the Reclamation Act for the express purpose of kickstarting the economic development of the West. Irrigated agriculture was to be the means, not the end. Since then, the distinction between means and ends has become blurred.

For the past decade, it has been increasingly recognized that too much federally subsidized water is used on farms, producing vast surpluses (more than 50% of the output of California's Westlands Water District, the nation's largest, is surplus crops), resulting in even more federal dollars being spent to buy and store this unwanted output. At the same time, industrial and other economic development is stymied because all remaining nonagricultural water is being used.

The answer? Water marketing. That is, selling some water in the "too much" areas to those in the "too little" regions. Because of high demand, private sales (of nonsubsidized water) have taken place for some time: one Colorado town paid $10,000/acre/foot for a local farmer's water rights (sales at $3,000/acre/foot are more common). Since 1980, Phoenix has bought over 500,000 acres of farmland just for its water rights. But private sales can only be a drop in the bucket. Water delivery systems to all large urban areas have been built by government to carry public water. That's the water with real potential.

The basic problem with selling Valley water is that it is the "blood" of the Valley's body. Sell some of it, and the Valley weakens; sell too much and it dies. Why? Well, ignore the obvious: less water, fewer jobs for farmers. Less water also means declining sales of seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, farm equipment, less work for crop dusters, truckers, cannon makers. Then, with declining agribusiness income, fewer groceries are sold, less gas, clothing, toys, ice cream is bought.

Bills to allow such water sales have been pending in both Congress and the California Legislature for more than a year. But the best of the lot would let growers who sell water keep 75% of the profit! The government would keep only 25%. Of that 25%, half would go to fish and wildlife restoration; the other half would be used to "address adverse social and economic consequences." Apparently, the belief is that growers won't agree to sell without a sufficient inducement i.e., a whopping 75% of the resulting profits.

I have purposely left unsaid, until now, what most readers know. The water is ours — it belongs to us, the American people, not the growers who now allow to use it. We built these dams, canals, and pumping stations with o w money, and we currently pay for nearly all of the operating costs. So far, we have believed that 85% of it should be used on farms. Now, we want to reduce that percentage. Because the growers have a wee bit more access to the members of Congress and the California Legislature than "we" do, "we" have to provide "inducements" to get them to allow us to use our water in the best way we see fit.

Being a realist, I would agree that some inducement is needed, but what has been suggested so far is just beyond reason. Consider another scheme, one that is still a very good deal for "them." We could simply buy the land of any grower who wants out. For an inducement, we would pay, say, $500 per acre above the going rate. Then, we can turn around and sell the water on the best terms we can. Southern Californians are willing to pay at least $300 to $500 an acre/foot.

The average grower uses about 3 acre feet per year, per acre. So, if the market value of farmland is, say, $3,000, and we add $500 for "inducement," we could recoup the purchase price in 3-4 years. Thereafter, each of our acres would generate $900-1,500 (or more) forever for us. What I'd suggest is that the proceeds go into a "Rural Enterprise Zone Fund" for economic development to replace the jobs lost by the reduced farm output.

Farmers who'll stay in business and reduce water use by adopting conservation techniques could sell the water saved. Since conservation often costs money, let them first deduct those costs, and then keep 25% of the net profit, the rest to go into the Rural Enterprise Zone Fund. This way, the farmer gets all the water conservation costs picked up by us, crop production costs go down because less water is used, and, after all this, the farmer gets 25% more "inducement." That's plenty. Plus, for some areas like the west side of the San Joaquin Valley, which will turn to desert in the next few decades because of inescapable salinization, irrigated agriculture is an unnatural act. In short, any smart westside grower ought to get out when the getting is good. This is an offer that can't be refused.

Ralph Abascal is General Counsel to California Rural Legal Assistance.
St. Regis Mohawks Blast GM, EPA Cleanup Plans

The St. Regis Mohawk Tribe does not concur with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Phase II proposed remedial action plan for the General Motors Central Foundry plant, which has contaminated the St. Lawrence River just upstream from the St. Regis reservation in upstate New York.

Tribal Council Chiefs L. David Jacobs, Lincoln C. White and Norman J. Tarbell find the EPA's second GM proposed remedial action plan (PRAP) unacceptable because it recommends capping the heavily polluted Industrial Landfill and East Disposal Area at the central foundry site. "The St. Regis Mohawk Tribe does not think that capping is a permanent remedy and the Tribal Council does not agree with the 500 parts per million cleanup level for the East Disposal Area," Head Chief Jacobs said. "This is not the Tribe's cleanup plan, it is EPA's. We do not agree with it and we have made comments and suggests to EPA that they amend the cleanup plan to address our concerns," he added. "Now we need the community's support to prevent EPA from including this high contaminant level in the final record of decision."

Ken Jock, director of the Tribe's Environment Division, said new regulations on PCB cleanup were ordered by EPA headquarters last year. These new regulations actually allow EPA Region II to let high concentrations of PCBs remain in the soil and use the cap as a permanent remedy. "This policy is not a good one as far as the situation at GM because of the East Disposal Area's proximity to the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe's lands and wetlands, and its bordering on the St. Lawrence and Raquette rivers. There is a possibility of movement of pollutants in groundwater," Jock added. But, Jock said, there are exceptions under which EPA Region II could be more stringent at the GM site, including ordering more protective, permanent treatment of the plant site. Such an order could include removing PCB-contaminated materials down to 10 ppm in the East Disposal Area and the industrial Landfill.

The Mohawks problems began in 1959 when GM built an aluminum casting facility directly upstream on the western border of the St. Regis reservation. GM used PCBs and disposed of them onsite. The PCBs have since contaminated the three rivers surrounding the facility — where the Mohawk have fished for thousands of years — so that fish from the rivers are no longer safe to eat.

The Tribal Council has let EPA know that they feel a permanent solution is the only acceptable remedy, and that any cap put in place should only be considered an interim measure. "The environment has been and will continue to be the number one issue in the eyes of the Council Chiefs," Head Chief Jacobs said. "As Native Americans, we always look to the future and try to plan for seven generations. Therefore, on environmental matters it is important that we speak out and ensure a safe, healthy future for our descendants."

Local Action: The Minority Environmental Association

The Minority Environmental Association (MEA) is a non-profit grassroots organizations of professionals representing a variety of environmental interests. MEA emphasizes the importance of improving awareness of environmental risks and develop more opportunities for jobs and contracts for traditionally disadvantaged people within the environmental community. Founded in late 1989 by a group of African American entrepreneurs in Cleveland, Ohio, MEA has members across the country including New York, New Jersey, California, South Carolina, Georgia, Washington, DC, Kansas, Illinois, Colorado and Mississippi.

MEA advocates for more jobs and contracts for communities that are at greater risk and more exposed to environmental problems. We also seek to enhance community awareness regarding issues such as lead poisoning, water pollution, and community right to know policies.

Public involvement is an essential part of the goals for MEA. For example, MEA has targeted Cleveland for a lead poisoning outreach campaign. The first part of our awareness initiative was a conference entitled "Lead Poisoning in the Urban Environment," which was sponsored by Case Western University. We are also sharing some practical information in a door-to-door campaign, as well as making efforts to obtain scholarships for educational opportunities for our members.

Water quality is a major concern to MEA members, not only because diverse community viewpoints are necessary, but participation in water policy and administration is important. To that goal, MEA worked with the Natural Resources Defense Council and the African American Environmental Association in a project analyzing the pollution in the Cuyahoga River.

MEA also believes that economic development is a requirement to build a future for people of color. MEA is currently collecting information on recycling projects, but is careful to monitor the effects of such job-creating industries on the environment.

For more information about the MEA, please contact Deborah Alex-Saunders, Minority Environmental Association, Inc., PO Box 5732, Cleveland OH 44101-0732, 412/625-3230.
For decades, a select group of people made such decisions over the fate of California's water. The number hasn't expanded much today, and the primary policy makers represent an increasingly narrow segment of the state's diverse population. As a result, out-dated water policies that benefit a small minority of the population still have a lock hold on California's water management institutions.

Long-term federal water contracts, for example, provide water to some of the state's largest and most prosperous farmers at taxpayer-subsidized prices of $10 to $15 or less per acre foot, while urban residents pay rates well over $300 for the same amount of water (an acre foot is enough to supply a family of 5 for a year). The largest farmers will probably see little change in their rates a few years from now, when many urban Southern Californians may be paying $500 or more per year. In part due to these price differences, pasture and alfalfa for cows currently consume more water than the state's entire human population, but create a small fraction of a percent of the state's economic product.

Inequities exist within urban districts too. Under the traditional pro-growth policies of large urban water districts, suburban residents with large lawns often pay a lower price per unit of water than inner city apartment dwellers who use little water. Yet it is the demands of high water-using suburban customers that generally trigger the need for expensive new supplies and environmentally harmful new projects. By not passing those costs on to those who incur them, water districts help promote suburban sprawl at the expense of the inner city.

Besides being inequitable, below-cost pricing and inflexible federal contracts for irrigation districts discourage efficient water use, further harming the environment. Excess water use by irrigators can flush toxic elements and pesticides from soils into the very rivers that provide drinking water for many of the state's residents. At the same time, excess pumping and diversions have aggravated water quality degradation and devastated fish and wildlife resources of great value to the public. In a very real sense, the public pays twice for policies that encourage wasteful water use: through the pocketbook and through the deterioration of publicly-owned resources.

California's diverse population clearly has a stake in how water is managed. Yet in the past people of color and the poor have had virtually no say in water policy decisions. As water becomes more expensive and the effects of environmental deterioration spread, it makes less and less sense for half the state's population to go unrepresented in water debates.

The exceptions to that rule suggest that broader participation would significantly change the current priorities for water management for the better. One is the success of the Hoopa Valley Indian Tribe of Northern California in compelling the federal government to provide sufficient flows to support its subsistence salmon fishery in the Trinity River. They helped draft federal legislation that would give legal force to those protections, and now participate in the restoration of salmon. Another example is the involvement of representatives of the diverse population...
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Los Angeles in a Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee on Water Rates [see interview with Anthony Willoughby, page 11—ed.]. That committee has proposed an innovative water rate structure for L.A. that promotes conservation, equitable pricing, and water quality improvements for the aging sections of the inner city. In short, it aims to promote better stewardship of the urban environment and the natural environment. Under this structure, those who consume significantly more than average would pay higher rates. The low income program would be expanded to include apartment dwellers not now eligible for low income rates. The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power will now propose a city ordinance based on these recommendations.

Such a linking of conservation incentives and low income rates makes a great deal of sense. A study by the Metropolitan Water District indicates that certain factors, such as rising household income, single family homes, and expansion into the dry inland suburbs, are associated with above-average water demand. Living in multifamily housing, in contrast, decreases water demand compared to the average. The factors associated with conservation, not with increasing demand, characterize inner city residents, and water rates should reflect that fact. But no one made such a proposal until L.A. formed a broadly representative commission. That process points the way to a very different model for policy making in California.

California needs innovative ideas like the L.A. water rate proposal. Indeed, California needs new water politics. Robert Gottlieb and Judith Redmond have proposed that a new policy-making process be structured around core values that the water bureaucracy now ignores. Their suggested values — equity, respect for land, managed growth, and livable environments — are a good starting point for discussion. The other crucial requirement for a process that reflects today’s needs is increased participation by California’s diverse constituents.

Here are few ways that interested people can get more involved in current water policy discussions:

- Environmental Water Leadership Council. Contact Yvonne Goodlow, Friends of the River, 916/443-3155. This ad hoc coalition of 230 environmental groups meets regularly to brief each other on water issues, air diverse views, and develop shared positions. It also provides an opportunity to discuss the negotiations among urban, agriculture and environmental representatives in the three-way process and other decision making forums.

- Urban Waste Conservation Council Plenary Meetings. Contact: Dave Fullerton, 510/525-3849. The Urban Water conservation council implements a memorandum of understanding (MOU) reached last year between environmentalists and urban water agencies. The MOU commits urban agencies to best management practices (BMPs) for water conservation, and provides a process for strengthening those practices over time. For example, the L.A. rate proposal could be used as a basis for a broadly applicable new BMP on rate structures.

- EDGE Water Resources Committee. Contact: Ellie Goodwin, Natural Resources Defense Council, 415/777-0200. EDGE is a coalition of environmental and social justice organizations in California. As part of an upcoming EDGE conference, the Water Resources Committee will draft a suggested strategy for water management reform that promotes equity, sound growth management and environmental protection.

Karen Garrison is the water resource specialist in the San Francisco office of the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Toxic Fish Consumption by People of Color

Last year, Professor of Environmental Sociology Patrick West and Professor of Outdoor Recreation Samuel T. Dana of the University of Michigan’s School of Natural Resources conducted a study on the disproportionate consumption of toxic fish by people of color fishing in Lake Michigan. The study found that officials had underestimated fish consumption levels in both general and special populations. Average consumption of fish was almost 3 times higher than previously thought, with the result of greater exposure to toxins in the general population. West and Dana’s study shows even higher exposures for African American and Native American populations. Michigan’s rule 1057, which regulates toxic discharge into Michigan surface waters, assumes consumption levels at 0.5 grams of fish per person per day. The study found that older African Americans consume 31.6 grams of fish per person per day, and middle income blacks consume 30.5 grams per person per day. The Chippewa Indians aged 31-50, with a fishing culture and long historic roots in the Lake Michigan area, consume 31.6 grams per person per day. Low-income Native Americans consume even more at 33.7 grams per person per day. Thus the Michigan toxic discharge level is set at less than one-fifth the level needed to protect communities of color. West and Dana conclude that these populations are at much greater risk than officials assume. At the time of their study, the state of New York had adopted a much higher standard, assuming consumption at the 30 grams per person per day. For information contact: Professor Patrick West or Professor Samuel T. Dana, College of Natural Resources, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor Michigan. 48104.
EPA Touts its Environmental Equity Water Projects

The following list is drawn from the recent US EPA Report entitled Environmental Equity: Reducing Risk for All Communities.

Multicultural Participation in the Chesapeake Bay Program
Region III (Philadelphia)
Contact: Dominique Lueckenoff, Chesapeake Bay Program
The Chesapeake Bay Program is developing a multicultural participation program to broaden public participation and involvement in the restoration of the Bay. The target groups for greater involvement are citizens of African, Latino and Asian descent, as well as rural poor and others with a direct economic link to the productivity of the Bay. The focus of the program is on structuring public information materials and educational programs to have broad appeal and encourage increased participation. This includes surveying multicultural interests to evaluate the impact of the Chesapeake Bay Program on racial minority and low income communities.

Gulf Coast Toxics Initiative
Region VI (Dallas)
Contact: Lynda Carrol, Office of Planning and Analysis
The Gulf Coast Toxics Initiative is a major 1992 enforcement effort in Region 6. The program will target facilities in the sensitive Gulf Coast ecoregion where most of the toxic releases of the region occur. The region's inspectors will allocate 38 percent of their time to this initiative. Owing to the high human populations and the quantity of wetlands in the Gulf Coast of Louisiana and Texas, it was selected as the most likely area to benefit from an intensive multimedia enforcement effort.

California Migrant Labor Camp Drinking Water Enforcement Program
Region IX (San Francisco)
Contact: Mona Ellison, Drinking Water Program
During the past year, Region 9 has gathered information on migrant labor camp drinking water systems in California. The Region 9 Drinking Water Branch was concerned that labor camps shared many, if not more, of the compliance problems common to small systems throughout the state. In summary, Region 9 found violations at 191 labor camps serving over 8500 people in 20 counties. Failure to monitor and report waste was the most common violation category.

More than one county contact warned that strict enforcement of the drinking water regulations may result in the closure of many labor camps, creating additional burdens for county administrators, taxpayers and camp residents. Region 9 is now working with state and local officials to devise and implement an enforcement plan.

Mexico-U.S. Integrated Border Environmental Plan
Headquarters/Region VI/Region IX
Contact Richard Kly, Office of International Activities
In response to a request by the Presidents of Mexico and the U.S. in November, 1990, EPA and its Mexican counterpart have developed a bilateral plan to protect the environment of the border area. Of particular concern are the inadequate waste water treatment and drinking water facilities for the colonias (unincorporated towns along the border). The plan was released in mid-winter of 1992. To begin making progress immediately, the US National Enforcement Training Institute held training sessions for Mexican inspectors of maquiladora industries on March 23-27, 1992.

Region 6 awarded a $15 million grant to the Texas Water Development Board to establish a revolving loan fund for plumbing programs to colonias in 12 counties. The program provides low-interest loans to individuals for connecting homes to drinking water and/or sewage collection systems and for household plumbing improvements. People can take up to 10 years to repay the loans. Ultimately, this program could provide benefits to some 200,000 people living in 950 colonias along the Texas-Mexico border. In March, loans were provided to the City of Pharr in Hidalgo County where some 500 homes in the Los Milpas and Lopezville colonias will receive indoor plumbing and clean water.

A Methodology for Estimating Population Exposure from the Consumption of Chemically Contaminated Fish
Headquarters/Region X (Seattle)
Contact: Craig McCormack, Science Policy Branch
The purpose of the study is to develop a methodology to estimate populations that may be at greater risk than average from eating fish contaminated from industrial point pollution. These populations eat fish at a greater than average rate, and include Native Americans, Asians, Blacks, and recreational and subsistence fishers. The methodology developed provides an estimate of a geographical area of potential exposure and an estimate of exposure and risk in consideration of age, sex and race/ethnicity. The methodology will assist EPA regional offices and states in issuing fish advisories.

To collect more data on the fish consumption patterns of Native Americans, EPA is sponsoring the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission Survey of Fish Consumption and Related Issues. In this survey, four Pacific Northwest Native American tribes are being surveyed about their fish consumption habits.
To the average tourist or media-influenced person, the Big Island of Hawaii is nothing short of a fantastic paradise offering sunshine, smiling faces and exotic landscape. To the island's native population, however, the realities are far from the idyllic images set forth by the tourist industry.

In his latest film, *Troubled Paradise*, Steven Okazaki explores this unseen Hawaii. *Troubled Paradise* brings a greater understanding of Native Hawaiians and their struggles by first laying a social and cultural groundwork. By allowing people to tell their own story, and by devoting a large portion of the film to social conditions and culture, we clearly see what is at stake as Hawaiians mobilize to fight new land developments and the building of a geothermal energy plant.

*RPE*'s Mike Lee talked with filmmaker Steven Okazaki about the background and creation of *Troubled Paradise*.


Steven Okazaki: I got interested in 1985. I went to Hawaii for the Hawaii International Film Festival and met with several activists involved in local issues who talked to me about the Native Hawaiian community. At the time the biggest issue was the fight to get the island of Kahoolawe back from the U.S. Military. Hawaii is a very complex place. It's a place of great beauty. It is also a place of corruption and great human suffering. The native population has really been abused over the years. I wanted to learn about the Native Hawaiian people, their culture, the music, the dance, the religion, their special relationship to nature. When I want to learn about something, I try to make a film about it so I can make a living at the same time.

I proposed a film about the Native Hawaiian cultural and political resurgence to a few PBS entities and a number of foundations. I got a lot of blank stares and blank responses. People really don't have a sense of the real Hawaii. Their brains won't accept an image of Hawaii more complex than those pathetically quaint C&H sugar commercials with the little brown children romping in the cane fields. They can't imagine that Hawaiians have any problems; they look so happy in those commercials. It took so much education that I got frustrated and put it on the back burner. Several years later, in 1990, I ran into the same Hawaiians I met five years before, realized I still wanted to make the film and decided to try again. This time I tied the story of the native population to how the rain forests on the Big Island were being threatened because of the government’s geothermal program. This made the project somewhat more fundable.

**RPE: You did a lot of initial research for this film; how did it evolve from there?**

**S.O.:** You start with an idea, then watch it change. Until you get out in the field and meet the people, you can't force...
the film into something that you've dreamed up sitting in front of your computer. With this film it was going to be more about environment, science and nature. What began to be so much more interesting was the culture and the people. The film slowly evolved away from interviews with the academics to interviews with people that lived there.

RPE: Why did you choose to highlight the connection between land rights and culture?

S.O.: Initially I thought land issues in Hawaii were really complicated. There is this long history of missionary involvement, land speculators and inter-marriage, and I just thought I really wanted to leave land out of the story because I thought the mainland audience wasn't going to understand all this background. But as much as I wanted to do this, it just kept coming back because all Hawaiians talk about their spiritual selves being attached to the land. The destruction of the land means the end of their spiritual selves, and they understand that so it worked itself in. We had to give a few facts to suppon and illustrate certain issues the Hawaiians brought up. But it was really the Hawaiians, it wasn't me.

RPE: As a filmmaker from the mainland. were there any particular lessons you learned or difficulties you encountered?

S.O.: Hawaiians "hang loose." It's hard to go with the flow when you're carrying a film crew around with you. We did the best we could. You can't rush people who don't want to be rushed. After a few frustrating encounters, I decided to make a more impressionistic film about what we were experiencing and the people we were meeting. When you shoot a volcano, it will flow when it wants to flow.

When I initially considered doing the project, I looked into the media scene in Hawaii. There were a lot of talented people there. I thought there might be some resentment about a mainlander making a film about Hawaii, and there was in the beginning. But my feeling was that most of the media people there make a living either directly or indirectly through tourism, the military or from the state. Many of them don't really have the freedom of voice.

RPE: How was your experience in the Islands making the film as mainland? Is there a common bond between Asian Americans and Native Hawaiians?

S.O.: I'm not an expert on dynamics between the races in Hawaii but as an outside observer I can see certain things — but I can only speculate. It seems to me that people are very race conscious there. Most of the people are inter-mixed marriage-wise, but still color is an issue. And I think whenever a Native Hawaiian sees an Asian they ask themselves, "are they one of those kinds of Asians or one those kinds?"

Are you an insensitive Japanese tourist, are you a Japanese American Democratic Party machine person, or are you someone who is working in suppon of the Native Hawaiian movement? I think initially it was important for Native Hawaiians to band together and in some ways deny the outsiders so they could believe in their own strengths. But now they realize they need to open up and work with as many groups as possible.

There were situations where I would walk in and people would be down right ornery and non-respective towards me. And I don't mind that, I understand that I would be wary if a filmmaker asked to enter my house, enter my life and filmed my life and cut and edited it at will. But that's what's supposed to happen, I appreciate that. An intelligent person challenges the filmmaker and says, "what do you want, what are you doing here, what do you propose to do?"

RPE: You mentioned the lack of freedom of voice in Hawaii. was this part of your motivation?

S.O.: Well I think the lack of voice is really a race issue. I mean, what are the similarities between Troubled Paradise and my first documentary, Survivors? There is a big difference between the idea of Hawaii and Hiroshima, clearly, but everyone in the world has heard of and knows of Hawaii, and everyone knows of Hiroshima. You have books and films coming out on both subjects, but nowhere in mainstream media are these people who actually created Hawaii, or who experienced Hiroshima, getting to talk about what these things mean to them.

Somehow the western journalists, politicians and historians come in and interpret the meaning of Hawaii for everybody but never hand over the microphone and tape recorder to the Hawaiians, and that's just a kind of colonial racism. It's a view that "these people don't know who they are," and we'll interpret it for them and we'll interpret it for the rest of the world. I find that real offensive.

What motivated me to make the film on Hiroshima was simply that there were thirty films out on the subject, but not a single one had any of the people who experienced it. That's
the attitude of the people who made the films, the historians, and that's revolting.

The same in a sense holds true for Hawaii. Everyone hears about Hawaii, reads about Hawaii, and we all see these commercials — and people on the mainland have hardly ever heard a Hawaiian talk about how they feel about tourism and development. And that's all the film is about, just letting people who are most affected, whether by a geothermal plant or hotel development, say how they feel about it.

Initially the idea was to have the developer talk and have the Hawaiian talk. Well the developer refused to be in the film, but if they had been in the film they would have put their PR person in instead and they would have given us this basically spiked speech. In the end this becomes pointless. So I thought those people have the newspaper editorials, the magazine covers ••• they have a voice ••• they have a place to say whatever they want to say and to color whatever story they want. The Hawaiians don't, so that's the voice I'm talking about.

RPE: How do you feel this film differs from your other works?

S.O.: Days of Waiting was restrictive to work on, very difficult because of it's simplicity. Everything was plotted out in a deliberate way. I had very little to work with and had to make the most out of what I had. Troubled Paradise was a joy to work on. It has so many elements. We had hula dancers dancing on the edge of a volcanic crater. I'm really interested in music and haven't been able to work with it as much as I'd like. This film was a wonderful opportunity.

Western journalists, politicians and historians come in and interpret the meaning of Hawaii for everybody but never hand over the microphone to the Hawaiians, and that's just a kind of colonial racism. People on the mainland have hardly ever heard a Hawaiian talk about how they feel about tourism and development.

Some of the islands' best musicians are in the film. It's a serious film, but also a fun film. The people are so warm and honest in the film. Hawaiians have so much dignity. I'm more interested in capturing that then in capturing the violent movement of some protests. Other filmmakers are better at that.

RPE: How about your relations with the Asian American community and the general public?

S.O.: The Asian American community has been very supportive of my work. It's still frustrating, though. Sometimes the support and recognition from the community comes after the fact; you win an Oscar and then the community says to you "now we think you're great." Excuse me, but I think I've been doing work relevant to the community for a long time. The community needs to support, spiritually and financially, its artists, dancers, writers and filmmakers early on. It's important that the community responds in the early stages, not just after someone wins a Tony or Emmy or Oscar.

I think some of the values of the community could be better. Asians are too materialistic and too concerned with what other people think of them. We're too nice. We prefer silence to action. It doesn't work. Asians are subjected to all kinds of prejudices and racism in this country and to encourage people not to respond to that or pretend that it doesn't exist is a huge mistake; I think this is still a frame of mind in the community.

RPE: Any suggestions on how the Asian American community could "speak up"?

S.O.: It's a really complicated thing because it's a really strong unconscious, psychological/cultural thing. It's like the Hawaiians, they're raised with this "Aloha" idea of treating people a certain way and when people treat them in a totally opposite way it's kind of unfathomable and they don't have a reaction culturally.

I think that part of the process, and what we would like to do with a new project I'm working on about anti-Asian violence, is make it more of a part of peoples' consciousness to really accept and understand how we are shaped by racism, and how it is undeniable part of every day of your life in this country. This is not to create an angry, frustrated, cynical human being but to put to them the question, "What can you do and how can you create a positive response?" I think part of it is asking questions and talking to each other. For me the beginning is to work on the consciousness of the community. For me, as a filmmaker, it's a matter of raising the issues.

Mike Lee, of Third Image Film in San Francisco, is currently working on a film regarding environmental justice. Portions of this interview were excerpted from the National Asian American Telecommunication Association newsletter.

Organizing the South for Worker Safety

On May 2, a march and rally took place in Hamlet, North Carolina to demand justice for Imperial Food Products Workers and victim families and to deepen the battle cry "Organize the South." The "Justice for Hamlet — Organize the South Coalition" is growing rapidly, focusing both on supporting Hamlet’s workers and on organizing to address working conditions and health and safety regulations.

On September 3, 1991, 25 workers at the Imperial Food Products Chicken Processing Plant in Hamlet, North Carolina died as a result of a tragic and needless industrial explosion. Fifty-six others were injured. The plant had never been inspected for compliance with federal or state laws.

According to reports by workers, the explosion was caused when an hydraulic line under repair ruptured nearby 26-foot chicken fryers in operation. Keeping burners lit while fuel lines were under repair was company policy, said workers. Most deaths resulted from workers inhaling toxic fumes because all but one of the plant’s exits were blocked and workers could not get out. Employees reported that exit doors were locked or blocked to "prevent stealing."

Despite several investigations to determine responsibility for the explosion and deaths, no indictments have been issued against the owners or managers of the plant. Local and state officials and the owners continue to blame each other. A month after the explosions, Imperial Food Products owner Emmett Roe closed the plant, leaving over 200 workers without jobs.

The Justice for Hamlet Coalition attracted nearly 100 organizational sponsors who want to prevent another needless tragedy like Hamlet. They are working to address the current workplace safety situation in the U.S. South, which has become a haven for plants like Imperial Foods who locate there because of lax enforcement of existing regulations, tax breaks, and the lack of unions and an organized labor movement.

For more information, or to support the coalition and the Hamlet workers, contact Concerned Citizens of Tillery, PO Box 61, Tillery, NC 27887.

—— RuralCoalition
P.O. Box 53201
Washington, DC 20016


Latinos and the Environment

Cornell University was host to the first conference on the Environment and Latino Imaginations. The conference was an interdisciplinary venture of various department at Cornell. The schedule for the conference included sessions on "Ideal Landscapes," "Understanding Environmental Decline," and "People at Risk: Reconquest of the Urban Environment."

Some of the speakers included Luis Acosta of El Puente Project who spoke about some of the activities the project is working on in their community in Brooklyn, NY. Laura Pulido, professor at Cal State-Fullerton, wrote and spoke about Los Ganados Del Valle in New Mexico and people's focus on community development as their organizing tool. Oscar Vazquez, of SUNY-Binghamton, spoke about Las Casitas in New York City which are modeled after the casitas in Puerto Rico. He explained that the creation of the casitas is, among other things, a reclamation of traditional patterns of land use of unclaimed or used land.

Also speaking were authors whose work included different aspects of the Latino environment as seen in literature. The purpose was to look at environmental themes, issues and content of literature, essays, poetry and how it translates to the traditional concept of the environment as defined by the majority culture in the U.S. One author included Sylvio Martinez Palau who wrote "Made in the USA." One of his short stories, "El Reino de este mundo II" is a satire about the overabundance of merchandise created in a capitalist utopia and the results of a radiation leak in the factory.

Alicia Sheppack and Leticia Alcántar represented Urban Habitat and PODER from the San Francisco Bay Area. If you would like more information or are interested in continuing dialogue and forming alliances with people who are working on issues related to Latinos and the environment, call Alicia at 415/788-3666.
From the dust bowls in the Southwest of the United States, to desertification in the African Sahel, we can see the devastating effects of water evaporation, flooding and erosion on soil quality and crops — effects which fall most sharply on poor people.

Toxic water, floods and droughts also plague urban communities. Rivers loaded with garbage, chemicals and sewage poison drinking water and fish, and destroy opportunities for leisure and enjoyment. From the dust bowls in the Southwest of the United States, to desertification in the African Sahel, we can see the devastating effects of water evaporation, flooding and erosion on soil quality and crops — effects which fall most sharply on poor people.

Thinking about the grassroots organizations and communities of color we work with, we looked for examples of urgent water issues. We discovered that many poor communities around the world struggle with droughts, floods and poisoned water, crises directly related to the hydrological cycle. Hurricane Andrew hit Southern Florida and Hawaii was devastated by a hurricane a week later, about the time we were going to press — too late to include in this issue — giving a dramatic illustration of the way rain and wind storms violently affect all communities, but especially affect those with fewer resources. Poor communities have often been located in flood plains, and often lack the wherewithal to protect their property, health and safety. From the dust bowls in the Southwest of the United States, to desertification in the African Sahel, we can see the devastating effects of water evaporation, flooding and erosion on soil quality and crops — effects which fall most sharply on poor people.

Toxic water, floods and droughts also plague urban communities. Rivers loaded with garbage, chemicals and sewage poison drinking water and fish, and destroy opportunities for leisure and enjoyment. Checking out the human uses of water for transportation, irrigation, industrial, municipal and recreational uses led us to greater insights about how to think about cultural diversity, social justice, and water issues. We soon discovered that we had much more material than we could possibly use in a single issue. So we have tried to select stories and examples which convey something of the range and complexity of this subject. We realize that it is only a beginning.

On the back page, the famous poem by Langston Hughes, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," first published in 1921, speaks powerfully to the deep awareness of the water cycle which runs through all cultures. Our front page essay by Henry Holmes on "The Color of California Water Politics" suggests the extent of social and economic bias in ways we make decisions about water. Our cover story on the Mothers of East L.A. shows, too, how an inventive community group can turn the adversity of urban water shortage into an opportunity for local economic development.

The feature essay on Communities and the Clean Water Act describes an effort by the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Center for Environment, Commerce and Energy (an African American consulting organization) and other groups to improve the Clean Water Act, turning it into consideration of the needs of inner cities.

Urban stream restoration can result not only in clean up of toxics in rivers and restoration of wetlands — it also can lead to revitalization of our inner cities and creation of much-needed jobs to urban residents, according to Richard Cohn-Lee and Dianne Cameron.

Other water and toxics stories include a report from Brownsville, Texas on pollution and birth defects, water contamination on the St. Regis Mohawk reservation, and poison fish in Lake Michigan. An interview with Anthony Willoughby, chair of L.A.'s Blue Ribbon Committee on Water Rates, discusses the poor water quality in the city's older sections, and the social justice implications of urban water pricing. Excerpts from EPA's recent and controversial Equity Report describe the agency's migrant labor camp drinking water enforcement programs, waste water treatment and drinking water facilities for the colonias (unincorporated towns along the Mexican Border), risk assessment methods for chemically contaminated fish, and water quality projects in the Gulf Coast and Chesapeake Bay Region.

Our issue contains several pieces on flooding. Haiping Xu challenges the proposed Three Gorges Dam in China, which will displace more than 1.2 million people, and destroy precious and irreplaceable ecosystems. We've also included a news item on efforts of the Society Against the Nagara River Estuary Dam Construction in Japan. A brief but harrowing description of the...
We've learned from Tom Gwyn and Lily Cervantes — both of whom serve on the State of California Coastal Commission — that almost none of the 2,000 applicants who come before the board for coastal building permits are from communities of color or represent their interests. Wealthy communities have sought restrict public access to the ocean in order to keep young Latinos and African Americans out of their communities. We'll run the full story in a future issue. We also learned that the commission is interested in establishing an internship program for young people from communities of color.

We've also learned that the commission is interested in establishing an internship program for young people from communities of color. We want to thank the Political Ecology Group, who with the Urban Habitat Program co-sponsored a forum on Water Politics, last December which gave us our first opportunity to try out some of the material included here on a receptive audience. We want to thank Richard Walker, Professor of Geography, and Nancy Nader, President of the East Bay Municipal Utility District, who were panelists at that event. Finally, we especially want to thank Henry Holmes at the Urban Habitat Program, who not only participated in that panel, but was responsible for collecting most of the articles here.

We've learned a lot in putting this issue of Race, Poverty & the Environment together. We hope you'll find it useful.

Ellie, Luke & Carl
which will be comprised by a majority of people of color by the year 2000, it is short-sighted to fashion water policies without these voices at the table.

One may ask, why should communities of color and low-income communities of the inner city care about water policy? What, if anything, does it have to do with priority survival issues, such as the need for jobs, food, affordable housing, adequate health care and the crises of drugs, violent crime, AIDS and the poverty of central cities? To answer these questions, we need to first look at what water policy is and what the impacts of water policy are on communities of color and low-income communities.

Examples of Water Issues Important to People of Color

- Drinking Water & Lead Poisoning

Most of the focus on water issues in California is on water supply, water allocation, how water is used and the persistent drought. Little attention is consistently paid to safe drinking water. One in six people drink water with excessive amounts of lead, a heavy metal which impairs the central nervous system, learning ability and attention span. Much of the housing stock in the inner city is old, often containing corroding lead-soldered pipes, which leach lead into the tap water. Add this fact to the already high rates of lead poisoning in the inner city, particularly of young people, and one sees another facet of a serious threat to community health and safety of already stressed communities.

- People v. Fish (or Jobs v. t k Environment)

Efforts to save the chinook salmon in the San Francisco Bay raised once again the tension between environmental protection and the economic survival of people, or more crudely put, the people versus fish (jobs versus the environment) dilemma. Environmentalists claimed that dredging the San Francisco Bay to allow sufficient channel depth for ship navel to the ports of Oakland and San Francisco jeopardized the survival of the chinook salmon and its winter run. Mainstream environmentalists were adamant in their calls to save the chinook salmon — an important and necessary thing to do. But no less important and necessary is to fight for the economic survival of communities that would be devastated if the economic opportunities of the ports of Oakland and San Francisco, such as they are, were jeopardized. The experiences and perspectives of communities of color need to be part of the discourse concerning environmental and economic issues of the Bay, for they are inextricably interrelated.

Water Policy Excludes People of Color and the Poor

Though water resources and policies affect people of color and the poor, they are not part of the debate or decision-making process. There are a number of fora and institutions addressing water issues in California. For example, there are the "three-way negotiations" occurring among representatives of urban water districts, agribusiness and "mainstream" environmentalists. There is also the Committee for Water Policy Consensus and the San Francisco Estuary Project, in addition to dozens of public interest organizations and government agencies whose purpose is to deal with various aspects of California water policy.

One example from these fora that highlights issues of social justice and equity related to water is the "Memorandum of Understanding Regarding Urban Water Conservation (MOU)." This informal agreement was reached by participants on the Committee for Water Policy Consensus, a group comprised mostly of urban water suppliers, water districts and some large mainstream environmental organizations. It sets forth certain "Best Management Practices" for conserving urban water. One of these practices targets the top 20% of water users who would receive information and services related to water audits and incentives to implement various water saving devices, as well as adjustments to high water use bills if water conservation measures are implemented. Typical of middle-class investment models, this policy formula does not address social equity issues regarding inner city communities of color and low-income communities. The people who will benefit them most are the highest water users. Those who typically use the most water are either high usage businesses or middle class and high income households, who can afford to wash multiple automobiles, hose down sidewalks and driveways, fill swimming pools and hot tubs, have multiple bathrooms with various water using devices, water lush lawns and gardens - water uses that inner city residents do not have the luxury of enjoying. This guideline, as one example of a market-based policy model, which professes to be neutral and objective, is inherently biased.

Yes, those who use the most water should be targeted to conserve water. But, there must also be a mandate to make water conservation devices, services and incentives available to low-income households. As competition for water increases, as the prolonged
Diversifying the process of formulating California water policy is not a matter of asking some people of color to join and support the already-established group of people already sitting at the table and their respective agendas.

one community to another. thus making water pricing an important component of the water conservation debate. Additionally, land use and planning policies which favor suburban development exacerbate the decay and abandonment of the urban infrastructure and contribute to water policy inequities. Market-based policy models that do not account for these social inequities do not address the socioeconomic "externalities" that have very real impacts on particular communities of people.

Similarly, policies that target single family homes and new housing construction benefit those who can afford to own or build a new home or apartment building. Water conservation policies should target homeowners and new residential construction. At the same time, they should also target existing older homes and apartment buildings in the inner cities. However, there is no policy mandate in the MOU to provide water conservation services to low-income and inner city water users.

Another example of the social equity implication of water policy is the concept of "water banking," or "water marketing." This market model is being touted as the answer to problems of water supply and allocation: if you let the "free market" take care of it, the result will be a more efficient water transfers system. From an environmental justice perspective, this argument is not convincing. Similar arguments have been made in the energy policy arena. While not a perfect analogy to water issues, the energy sector is riddled with social, economic and environmental inequities which the "free market" has, far from solving, often created and exacerbated. People of color and poor people bear an unfair burden of adverse social, economic and environmental impacts of our current energy system. These communities bear a greater share of toxic contamination and health burdens of every kind, from lead, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and benzene in motor vehicle and industry emissions, to contamination of soil and groundwater under abandoned gas stations, industrial parks, oil refineries, hazardous waste facilities and other toxic waste sites. They also bear a disproportionate economic burden, paying up to one third of their total household budgets for basic energy services. Market models being put forth to try to reverse adverse environmental impacts and to be disincentives to natural resource waste are all too often regressive and inequitable. There are lessons to be learned from the energy sector experience that should be applied to water policy. California water policy is lacking a systematic and consistent method for addressing the equity implications and the distribution of benefits and burdens of "free" or modified market water supply and transfer policy proposals.

If the "water negotiators" have decided or decide, a priori, that free market water transfers are the best solution to California's water needs, and expect others who had no part in debating that position to join with them in advocating this policy solution, then resistance from those left out should come as no surprise. This is not a constructive way to build bridges and establish coalitions with diverse communities with diverse interests. We all need water. We all need to decide what we are going to do about water in California.

New models are needed. Old assumptions must be challenged. Water politics as usual does not serve the public interest. Cities, agriculture and the natural environment need not be antagonists. We need to look at the long-term view to make connections, see interrelationships, understand social, economic and environmental ramifications and put forth ideas that take these into account. Policies such as water marketing have equity implications, benefits and burdens, which affect city dwellers as well as rural communities. We can see that from the experience in the energy sector. We can see that in a free market logic that says it is "cost effective" to put toxic incinerators and hazardous waste facilities in communities of color and poor communities, urban and rural.
Disenfranchised communities face a creative challenge of building an advocacy base from which their voices are injected into the water policy debate.

"Support" does not just mean finding out peoples' issues and advocating positions on them. While that is important, it is also important to work with people from diverse communities to shape and set the agenda, which means a willingness to step outside of one's area of "expertise" to address larger relationships and issues that others may see as being important.

Disenfranchised communities face a creative challenge of building an advocacy base from which their voices are injected into the water policy debate and their interests incorporated into decision-making regarding water resources and issues. There is a need to institutionalize knowledge, information, expertise and economic resources in the community regarding water issues and other key urban environmental resources, such as land, air and energy. Community development corporations, with their knowledge and connections to communities, are well positioned to take a leadership role in this regard — to be a repository of knowledge, skills and resources regarding environmental justice in urban communities of color and low-income communities. People of color and poor people are affected by their environments, too often adversely. They have a stake in how we deal with urban environmental resources.

Environmental justice is about empowering disenfranchised communities to be a part of the debate and decision-making process about environmental resources. It is not about one group of people leading, joining or following another. It is about facilitating constructive, collaborative and cooperative working relationships among social justice advocates, environmentalists, policy makers and others. So long as we hold to our "specialty" agendas, we will get nowhere. For progressive change to happen to meet the needs of social justice and environmental protection, we need new visions and new models. To be equal partners and to sit at the policy-making table, communities of color, working and low-income communities need access to knowledgeable people, information and resources, including money, just as public agencies, private corporations and large environmental organizations have.

**Water Policy and Ecologically Sustainable Community Economic Development**

By looking at water policy, communities of color and low-income urban communities can discover and realize tangible opportunities for community economic development and empowerment in efforts to conserve and reuse gray and reclaimed urban water, community development corporations can develop programs to make water conservation information and services available to water users in the community. For one example, water audits of businesses, residences and public buildings, along with water conservation retrofit programs can provide employment opportunities to stimulate local economic development. To the extent that water use is reduced within a community, it should be able to benefit from the savings in water expenditures and to keep the retained savings in the community to promote other economically and ecologically sustainable development. As with energy efficiency, weatherization and retrofit programs in the residential and small business energy sector, parallel efforts in water conservation and reclamation can be made while promoting socially and environmentally responsible small business opportunities, affordable housing and community economic development programs.

**Conclusion**

As diverse cultures and communities of color become the majority in California (in San Francisco and Oakland, people of color are already the majority), the public debate, policy and decision-making process must reflect that reality. African, Native, Asian/Pacific Islander and Latino Americans, as well as low-income and working people, must become advocates of a new environmentalism which bridges community, culture, class, race and sex. The diverse cultural life experiences of people of color must infuse public consciousness and our orientation to environmental resources and environmental issues such as water. The social justice and equity dimensions of environmental issues must be directly addressed. For there are always social justice issues linked with the environment. This is true of water, as well as every other environmental issue.

Water policy provides an opportunity to define social and environmental equity as the starting point of the public debate and decision-making process. Only by involving the full scope of concerns and constituencies affected can California develop ecologically-sustainable and socially-just policies regarding its water resources.

*Henry Holmes is an environmental justice policy analyst with the Urban Habitat Program, a project of Earth Island Institute.*
The drowning of 13 ancient towns and hundreds of culturally significant villages and other sites. It means the forced migration of up to 1.5 million people, leaving homes and ways of life that have been theirs for generations. It means the complete destruction of a fragile, interdependent relationship among humans. nature and history that has survived for thousands of years.

This is even worse than the socialist modernization of Beijing, in which the old, walled citadel has been forced to give way to modern offices and thoroughfares. Comparing what is now to what was in Beijing, hardly anyone cannot feel anger or sorrow, but alas, for Beijing it is too late. Forty years later, the communists want to repeat history, only on a much grander scale. The People's Republic trumpets its "spiritual civilization" everywhere. every day. but real aesthetic. historic or cultural values are regarded as so insignificant that they never should be considered.

Socio-economic systems can be changed again and again, but the major alteration of the Three Gorges is irreversible. For forty years the short-sightedness in our social construction has devastated countless smaller gorges. Let us ask ourselves, how well will we be judged by out descendants for such acts. and for how long will we be held accountable for one so great as the desolation of the Three Gorges?

The only sensible choice before us is to terminate the Three Gorges Dam Project, and replace it with a tributaries plan; persistently reforest and institute soil conservation measures; develop a comprehensive plan to harness the Yangtze River. and make a grand program to promote the beauty and heritage of the Three Gorges for the peoples of the world to visit and experience, for all time. The Three Gorges is of such scale and significance that it belongs to all humanity and to the future as well as the past.

If the meaning of human existence draws from the constant definition, interpretation, and correlation of two pairs of relationships, man to man and man to nature, the growing green movement in the last twenty years has, for the first time, finally begun to bring the balance into daily consciousness and behavior. "Green" has grown beyond simple environmental protection, it has become the symbol for a new era. Green in this context symbolizes nature, harmony, potentials, growth, communication, peace, and life itself. and it is accompanied by an equilibrium of science and technology tempered by burning social development. This is not conjecture or idealism; this is reality.

The find irony of the Three Gorges is that in the flowering years of the industrial Revolution. the young Karl Marx, as a leisured gentleman, savored and reflected upon the Three Gorges, and the artistic state in general of the flow of communication between nature and humans. With rare visionary foresightedness he set forth an ideal hypothesis relating human beings to nature: "the humanization of nature and the naturalization of humans." Today, the converging of all the traditional hypotheses, and the Green movement, has created an enormous force for major societal change to shape a new future. It is a great challenge to those who would live in the past to reexamine the relationship between economic and socio-cultural development and redefine the goals of human evolution. The decisions we make about the Three Gorges will serve as a mirror of our feelings, hopes and thoughts for our future. May the Three Gorges be green, everlasting.

1 In the 1959 "anti-rightistcampaign," nearly all engineers who disagreed with the dam proposals, and the eight presidents of hydro-electric institutes in South China, were persecuted.

2 The World Bank estimates 1.4 million, but there are other dynamic projects including the 18-year construction cycle which adds another 300,000 and more after 50 years of silting.

3 Several prehistoric sites, dated 3500 to 1500 BC, have been excavated, and experts expect to find more in the canyon.

Environmental Justice Photo Exhibit
Opening January I, 1993
The Environmental Justice Photo Exhibit Committee was formed by members of the Berkeley Environmental Justice Coalition to create a vehicle by which the public can be educated about our issues on a mass scale. This exhibit will use your testimony and photographs to portray the issues and struggle of your community or organization. We hope to create profiles of over twenty communities that identify with the principles of the national environmental justice movement. Already we have been working with people in Richmond, California. Oakland. Keleboston City, Wassonville, Texas City. Albuquerque, and Los Angeles. We have been talking with others throughout the continent and in the islands. As a travelling exhibit it will visit communities as diverse as the ones we represent. We need your input and suggestions. We will pay for photo development. Help us share the spirit of our struggles and inspire all of our communities.

Contact Elijah Carden 213/254-2540, 927 Terrace 49. Los Angeles CA 90042 or Magdalena Avila, 510/644-2247.
Resources

Articles, Essays and Reports:
Water & Environmental Justice


Books:
Water & Environmental Justice

Briggs, Charles, and John Van Ness, eds. Land, Water and Culture: New Perspectives on Hispanic Land Grants. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987. The essays in this third volume of the New Mexico Land Grant Series explore the social, ecological, political, and legal roots of the land grants, the disposition of which is as crucial to the survival of these communities today as it has been during the past four centuries.


Hough, Michael. "Water." In City Form and Natural Process. London and New York: Routledge Press, 1984. Describes the physical and biological properties of water, the way its natural cycles are affected by the city and the implications for urban design when alternatives to its current uses and management are examined.


"Sustainable Urban Landscape/Wisdom." EARTHWORD: The New Environmental and Social Responsibility (Fall 1991). A publication of the Eos and Architects, Designers and Planners Social Responsibility/Orange County Chapter (CA). The articles included: a special issue cover topics concerning recycling, grey water systems as a long drought relief, and a draft of the Los Angeles landscape ordinance. Contact: EARTHWORD c/o Eos Institute, 1550 Bayside Dr., Corona del Mar, CA 92625

Books: General Water


URBAN HABITAT READER
Edited by
Arthur Montoe
NOW AVAILABLE

Designed as a tool for busy multicultural community activists, organizers and environmentalists, the Urban Habitat Reader, published quarterly, is a compilation of newspaper articles on environmental issues in the San Francisco Bay Area covering topics such as health, toxics, racism, transit, water issues and open space. A selection of 80 to 100 key articles from several thousand published are available at your finger tips. An excellent way to stay informed.

For the SAMPLE first Edition send a check or money order of $10.00 plus $2.00 for postage and handling to:
Urban Habitat Reader/Earth Island Institute
300 Broadway, San Francisco, CA 94133


Van der Ryn, Sim. The Toilet Papers. Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1978. This book, written by a leading authority on appropriate technology, offers plans for several types of dry toilets and greywater systems. The author also discusses the history and philosophy of turning organic wastes into rich humus.

Periodicals: General Water

No Thank You, Hydro-Quebec: There Are Alternatives. For copies of this tabloid about the James Bay Hydroproject, contact: James Bay Action, 812 Broadway, New York, NY 10003, 212/473-2630; or No


Project Nagara: A coalition of concerned groups and individuals in Japan and the United States working to save the last free-flowing river in Japan and exerting international pressure on the Japanese government to stop dam construction scheduled to resume in October, 1992. Contact: Project Nagara, c/o Project Raft, 2555 Telegraph Ave., Suite 309, Berkeley, CA 94705, 510/704-0145.

Rural Water Assistance Program: Provides technical assistance in the form of financial feasibility studies and development planning to rural communities to construct and maintain water and sewage treatment facilities. Contact: 802 South King Street, Leesport, PA 705/478-9652.

Water Information Network: Provides information on water contamination problems, purification options, and product evaluations. Contact: P.O. Box 909, Ashland, OR 97520, 503/488-3029.

California and Western States


The Water Education Foundation: The Foundation is looking to develop and implement educational programs leading to a broader understanding of water issues and to the resolution of water problems. Contact: 177 "K" St., Suite 517, Sacramento, CA 95814, 916/448-1198.

Vietnamese Fishermen Association of America: Helps newly arrived people from Viet Nam seek employment in the San Francisco Bay fishing industry. Familiarizes local Vietnamese fishermen with federal, state and local water and fishing laws. Contact: John Nguyen, Vietnamese Fishermen Association of America, 35th Ave., Oakland, CA 94601, 510/534-5592.
Environmental Poverty
Law Network Launched

Poor people's lawyers who take on environmental cases have formed a nationwide network to strengthen and broaden the cases brought to defend low-income neighborhoods from environmental degradation. The network, known as the Environmental Poverty Law Working Group (EPLWG), seeks to tap the potential of legal services attorney and to enhance the tools available to low-income communities fighting environmental hazards. Legal services offices, situated in poor communities across the country, are in a position to represent communities on the front line of the struggle for environmental justice; EPLWG provides these lawyers with resources, training, expertise and networking opportunities.

The Working Group, a project of California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation's Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment, is an outgrowth of CRLA's 25 year history of environmental justice work through environmental poverty law; CRLA brought the first suit to ban DDT, on behalf of migrant farm workers, in 1969. The Working Group, which includes over 150 legal services programs in 37 states, is coordinated by CRLA Foundation attorney (and RPE editor) Luke Cole. The Working Group, with a steering committee of legal services workers from 16 programs nationwide, is also advised by a panel of environmental attorneys, law professors and activists.

EPLWG puts out a newsletter three times a year. For more information, or to be on the EPLWG mailing list, write Luke Cole, CRLAF, 2111 Mission #401, San Francisco, CA 94110.

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Race, Poverty & the Environment
C/o Earth Island Institute
300 Broadway, Suite 28
San Francisco, CA 94133-3312

Address Correction Requested

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RPE is a joint project of the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation and the Urban Habitat Program.