“Come Sunday morning, there’s going to be a new environmental movement!” With these words, Dr. Benjamin Chavis of the United Church of Christ charged the delegates, participants and observers at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit with an awesome task. We, as people of color, had gathered to reclaim and define current environmental and social issues in our own words and experiences. The search for solutions would begin in earnest. Yet at the core of the discussions, dialogues and debates, the twin evils of racism and classism were always present. When one sector of a society uses its wherewithal to exploit others, the cure is not solely the responsibility of another, more benevolent sector of the dominant group. Those directly affected must have a voice in designing the repair. Even though the disenfranchised were not architects of the initial pollution, they are the recipients. However unintentional, racism and classism can and will pervert the most noble of goals. Acknowledging this fact was possibly one of the most difficult realizations for representatives of traditional environmental groups.

The traditional environmental movement has been fairly comfortable addressing issues in a more analytical or “preservationist” bent: an endangered species or wetland, an entity or entities that have no sentient voice. While these efforts are crucial, the amount of resources and time spent on these concerns has been viewed by people of color and low income people to have little or no regard for their more immediate needs. The activities of a Sierra Club or Audubon Society were

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