

**A Study of Eco-Racism in the United States of
America:
American Indians, African-American Slaves, Modern
Citizens**

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The study of environmental history became a new topic of interest within the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. This field covers a broad spectrum of ideas that have evolved over the past fifty plus years. The first people to take interest in the topic were those seeking to preserve the natural-environment in America. The shift then changed to ask the question about environmental justice and the idea of eco-racism. Racism as it relates to the environment is an interesting new sub-field of environmental study. The idea being that non-white Americans are placed or given the areas with the worst possible living conditions, so that Anglo-Americans can obtain maximum profit and live a life in comfort. Many members in this field of study believe this to be accurate. However, after a close inspection of the history of the colonization of North America, the founding of the United States of America, the practice of slavery and its abolition, the industrial revolution, and finally the post-industrial revolution era seems to show a different driving force behind where different people/races are located. Power has always dominated this country. Those with power have money and seek to ever expand their wealth in any way possible. When the first Europeans came to the New World they quickly became the ones with power, and set the precedent for how America would operate that still lasts to this day.

When the first Europeans made their way across the Atlantic to the New World they came with the mentality that they were a dominant people over the Native population. Indians were seen as uneducated in all matters of life including their economic practices, ideas of communalism, their dress, and possibly most of all their religion (or lack there of in European eyes). Where as Europeans, such as English Protestants saw themselves as great: “For they were supremely confident—as only an

insular people can be—that their way of life was superior to anything Europe (and therefore the world) had to offer and that the Indians, for all their deficiencies, would soon recognize England’s preeminence.”¹ Europeans in the New World used religion to form their assurance as a greater power over the indigenous population. Their first plan was to try and convert the Indians to Christianity. Many early settlers believed that the Indians wanted their help. “If there was any question as to the nature of the help desired, the younger Hakluyt had answered it a half century earlier. ‘The people of America crye oute unto us... to come and help them,’ he told Queen Elizabeth, ‘and bringe unto them the glad tidinges of the gospel.’”² But, after nearly a hundred years of mediocre success in their pursuit, Europeans soon began to believe that Native Americans were unsuitable and/or incapable of grasping their great religion. The English took this a step further, as seen by Cotton Mather’s advice to the New England Company: “to Humanize these Miserable *Animals*, and in every measure to *Cicurate* [tame] them & *Civilize* them, were a work of no little Difficulty; and a Performance little short of what One of our most famous *Physicians* esteemed the *Greatest Cure* that ever himself had wrought in all his practice; *To bring an Idiot unto the Use of Reason*.”³ This perception that Native Americans were no more than animals dehumanizes them, and allows for relations with, and future actions against, to follow guidelines that one would associate with treatments fitting for beasts not man. The questions are then raised; did Anglo-Americans commit

¹ James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (Oxford University Press, 1985), 131.

² James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (Oxford University Press, 1985), 133.

³ James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Culture in Colonial North America* (Oxford University Press, 1985), 133.

genocide on the Native American population, or was it purely in pursuit for financial gains in the New World?

The term genocide, when heard today, is closely related to Nazi actions before and during the Second World War. Millions of innocent people throughout Europe were put to death by Nazi Germany in a way never before seen. Winston Churchill said it best, “We are in the presence of a crime without a name.”⁴ After the war the United Nations put a name to the scenes found in Europe, genocide, and since then historians have begun looking at older events to see if they too may fall under the term genocide. As the American Revolution begun many settlers joined the militia to fight the Red Coats. Independence from the British was the demand, and a new nation would be born. However, the idea of power would still remain after America’s independence was won, and the quest for wealth was prominent. Settlers began heading west into new territories where Indians had called home for years. The Indians “faced hordes of frontier settlers whose goal often consisted of suppressing their rights to land. Along the frontier, from New Hampshire in the north to Georgia in the south, groups of Americans banded together to push into new lands, building small stockades to protect their vulnerable stock and families.”⁵ One could make the argument that this was the earliest form of eco-racism: pushing the non-white Indians away from good lands and making them relocate. However, has this not happened throughout history? Expanding their borders by assimilating, expelling, or killing the natives of the newly captured lands formed all

⁴ Gary C. Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing And The Indian: The Crime That Should Haunt America* (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1948), 3.

⁵ Gary C. Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing And The Indian: The Crime That Should Haunt America* (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1948), 87.

empires in history. Hitler and the Nazis specifically targeted certain races, namely Jews, and put and put them to death.



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Americans focused on gaining land for their families to prosper on at first, and later the government focused on expanding the countries borders to reach the West Coast. Native Americans lived on this land and were here first, but expansion comes at a price.

It is interesting to see that even the Founding Fathers were interested in gaining profits through the new lands: “The British Crown had ceded to the young United States a vast empire, starting at the Appalachian Mountains and extending to the Mississippi River. This meant profit for the likes of many Founding Fathers, including Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, Hamilton, and Henry.”⁷ Other Americans fought west for land too: “By 1783 [Daniel] Boone had over a thousand men under arms. These fell under the leadership of charismatic men such as Boone as well as the famous ‘ranger’ George Rogers Clark. Almost every man who followed them into battle had some interest in land speculation.”⁸ Soon these ambitious western settlers gained great tracts of land on the

⁶ Map, *Tribal Locations Before European Contact*, <http://www.thegatewaypundit.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/indian-land.jpg>, (accessed 5/4/15).

⁷ Gary C. Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing And The Indian: The Crime That Should Haunt America* (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1948), 88.

⁸ Gary C. Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing And The Indian: The Crime That Should Haunt America* (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1948), 88-9.

frontier. “The Clark family (including the youngest son, William, of Lewis and Clark fame), which had been a relatively modest Virginia clan in terms of land ownership, came to own thousands of acres of land taken from Indians in Kentucky by 1800.”⁹ Though there were bloody conflicts between Anglo-Americans and Indians, there were also trades and purchases made for much of the land between Indians and land speculators or the National government. Daniel Boone himself helped orchestrate a major purchase of land in Kentucky: “Boone helped bring several thousand Cherokees together



in 1775, who supposedly sold Henderson (under title of the Transylvania Company) some 27,000 square miles of land between the Cumberland and Kentucky Rivers, nearly all of eastern Kentucky.”¹¹ The price paid for the land in Kentucky from the Cherokee Indians was most definitely not top dollar, but why would any businessman pay more than necessary on an investment. The people with power can make the rules, and at this time Anglo-Americans had more power than the natives. “The ‘Deed game’ of earlier

⁹ Gary C. Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing And The Indian: The Crime That Should Haunt America* (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1948), 89.

¹⁰ Painting, *Creek Indians*, http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/dd/Benjamin_Hawkins_and_the_Creek_Indians.jpg, (accessed 5/4/15).

¹¹ Gary C. Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing And The Indian: The Crime That Should Haunt America* (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1948), 89.

colonial times reemerged in the West after American independence; the only obstacle to wealth was the American Indian.”¹² Wealth was the driving decision maker in American actions against the Native Americans, but not the only factor as our nation’s first westerner became president.

“The Democrats, who would call themselves ‘Jeffersonians,’ then elected the first westerner to become president, Andrew Jackson. These men all had in common a limited belief in egalitarianism, the view that all white American men had a right to property, religious freedom, and what Ben Franklin so aptly added to the Declaration of Independence: ‘the pursuit of happiness.’ But men of color had few rights, if any, even when it came to ownership of property.”¹³ The fact that ‘men of color’ have little to no rights in the early years of this country is something that will remain an issue to this day. The root of this idea seems to directly be connected with the same kind of mentality early European settlers had when they came to the New World. The idea that Anglo-Americans were the dominant species in the land, and that they deserve to have what they want. However, this mentality can be quite dangerous to follow; “the belief that such unwanted people have no right to the homes and lands that they historically have held. This is a lesson of history that the world must come to understand, for no justification can promote forced removal—ethnic cleansing.”¹⁴ However, it seems highly unlikely that a new nation such as the United States would act in any different way after winning its independence and have a whole new frontier to explore and conquest. It is also

¹² Gary C. Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing And The Indian: The Crime That Should Haunt America* (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1948), 88.

¹³ Gary C. Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing And The Indian: The Crime That Should Haunt America* (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1948), 110.

¹⁴ Gary C. Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing And The Indian: The Crime That Should Haunt America* (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1948), 328.

interesting that Jeffersonian politics became the dominant political power during the early 1800s. Jeffersonians believed the American farmer was the true heart of the nation.

“North America had few cities, which Jeffersonians saw as an advantage over Europe, because urban communities often bred disorder and poverty. A farm provided sustenance for the family and allowed the yeoman owner to work the land, which Jeffersonians often saw as a spiritual pursuit.”¹⁵ This ideal drove Jeffersonian politics even though plantations were taking over much of the South using slave labor. “The planter class that emerged from this agricultural revolution soon overwhelmed the influence of small farmers who lacked the capital to acquire slaves.”¹⁶ The peculiar practice of Indian removal in America would now begin to shift to the peculiar institution of slavery, which eventually tried to tear the United States apart.

The need for cheap labor has always existed in America. Early settlements often used indentured servants coming from Europe to work the land. However, the Great Plague of 1665¹⁷ caused for a shortage in new European workers coming to America. It is interesting to note that the practice of enslaving Native Americans did happen to a small extent, but was not very practical; “for colonists needed Indians as allies and trading partners...” Native American populations were also shrinking rapidly, “Indian numbers continued to decline sharply due to devastating epidemics of novel diseases.”¹⁸ As

¹⁵ Gary C. Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing And The Indian: The Crime That Should Haunt America* (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1948), 110.

¹⁶ Gary C. Anderson, *Ethnic Cleansing And The Indian: The Crime That Should Haunt America* (University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, 1948), 111.

¹⁷ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 87.

¹⁸ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge 2000) 87.

tobacco production continued to increase in the Chesapeake region the need for a cheap work force grew along with it.

The earliest known African slaves were brought to mainland North America in the early 1600s. Over the following centuries a vast network was created between Western Europe, the Americas, and Africa that boosted the economies of all who were involved. At the core of this economic expansion was the Slave Trade. “In combination, European financial capital, rich New World lands, and African workers generated rapid growth, centered on plantation-grown tropical agricultural commodities, and on precious metals, gold and silver, produced by Africans working in the Americas as slaves.”¹⁹ An interesting aspect of the Slave Trade, that does not seem to get looked at very often, is that Africans seemed strangely fine with sending their own countrymen into slavery. This can best be explained by, “the opportunity [Africans had] to acquire the commodities that European slavers offered [which] allowed Africans to build new trading networks, to accumulate significant political power, to replace old structures of community based on birth and affinity with more deeply hierarchical aggregations of slave dependents, to create new configurations of ethnic identifications, and—broadly—to integrate an increasing area inland from the coasts into the Atlantic economy.”²⁰ Slavery and the slave trade were rooted in economic advancements for all parties involved except the actual slaves. The most powerful people in Africa enslaved their countrymen to promote their own self-interests, and in turn the most powerful people in America used slave labor to promote their self-interests and expand their wealth. From the very beginning African

¹⁹ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge 2000) 28.

²⁰ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 35.

slaves were seen as a lesser race to the White Americans. Therefore, “the English mainland colonies moved toward a biracial society, one in which people from Africa and their descendants—including those of mixed African and European heritage—held a subordinate legal, social, and economic status.”²¹ African-Americans were seen as a work force for the advancement of White interests in America. Their living conditions varied based on many factors, “the daily labor routine, while always arduous, varied significantly depending upon the size and location of the plantation, the time of year, and the nature of the crop.”²² Slave’s conditions in America also depended a lot on who their owner was. Possibly the worst aspect of slavery, that affected the slave’s lives the most, was the constant reshaping of enslaved families and communities. “If any one aspect of enslavement shook the belief systems of Africans and tested their capacity to survive, it was the overwhelming destruction of family and community bonds.”²³ This could happen for any number of

²¹ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 63.

²² William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 89.

²³ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 93.



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reasons. If a slave owner was in debt he could sell a slave (or slaves) to pay off said debt. Or, if a slave got unruly the master might sell the slave to rid his slave community of the problem. Either way, internal slave trade within America had a great affect on the lives on African-American slaves. Mothers would often have their babies taken away and sold, and they would usually never see their families again. The total number of Africans taken from their homelands and brought to the Americas is estimated around twelve million people. Interestingly, “the British colonies in North America received only about 600,000, 5 percent of the total Atlantic trade, mostly between the 1720s and 1770s.”²⁵ By the early 1800s it became law that no new slaves could be imported into the United States. However, the slave community in America had already become a self-sufficient practice that no longer needed new Africans to replenish its self. Instead, slaves were now traded within America from different plantations and between different states. With Eli Whitney’s invention of the cotton gin, in 1793, it opened the way for the Lower South to

²⁴ Photo, *Slave Family and their Home*, http://www.sylvest-sarah.com/images/lc/family_home_big.jpg, (accessed 5/4/15).

²⁵ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 35.

become the cotton kingdom.²⁶ And this new ‘kingdom’ needed slaves to work the cotton fields.



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A great majority of slaves in the North and around the Chesapeake region would soon be relocated to the great plantations in the Lower South, and this would impact many slave families and communities in America.

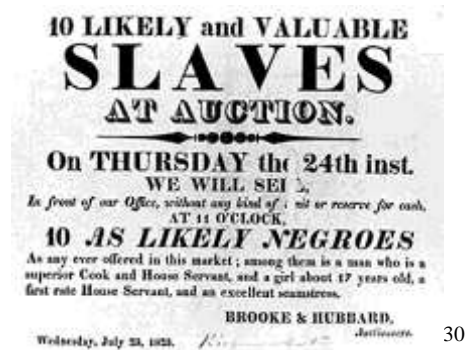
As southern leadership shifted from the Chesapeake region to the new cotton kingdom of the Deep South, slave owners had to make decision on how to keep their practices profitable. A good example of this comes from William Henry Tayloe and the Mount Airy plantation. Tayloe recognized, “that his cohort of enslaved laborers was constantly increasing, he took full advantage of this situation by moving surplus workers to more profitable work sites or selling them to make money.”²⁸ At the root of all the decisions slave owners made with regards to what to do with their slaves was money. Whatever decision was made the goal was to make the most profitable deal for the white owner. Even so, many slave owners were not completely ruthless in their dealings with their slaves. Tayloe, “living in an era of Victorian sensibility, he felt, I believe,

²⁶ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000).

²⁷ Image, *Slaves Working the Cotton*, http://www.powayusd.com/online/virtualcivics/Slavery%20DBQ_files/image002.jpg, (accessed 5/4/15).

²⁸ Richard S. Dunn, *A Tale of two Plantations: Slave Life and Labor in Jamaica and Virginia* (Harvard University Press, 2014) 271.

considerably more moral responsibility toward his human property,” but this still, “did not stop him from routinely breaking up the African American families under his control.”²⁹ Slave owners for the most part tried to keep the lives of their slaves decent. But economic based decisions often left slave families broken. It was a very hard transition for a slave who was from a Chesapeake plantation, to be sold and relocated into a Deep South plantation.



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The area was all new, they usually did not know anyone, their new owner might be much harsher towards the slaves, and they did not know if they would ever see their old family again.

The institution of slavery became quite harsh in the Deep South by the 19th century. Throughout the cotton kingdom of the South, “brute force, unrewarded toil, sordid punishment, and draconian codes severely circumscribed their world.”³¹ Tension was now rising between slaves and their masters, and the hope for freedom was becoming very apparent. Slaves in the Deep South now had, “a burning desire to be free and continuing conflict with those who denied them their liberty. The overreaching

²⁹ Richard S. Dunn, *A Tale of two Plantations: Slave Life and Labor in Jamaica and Virginia* (Harvard University Press, 2014) 271.

³⁰ Poster, *Slave Auction*, <http://jewishcurrents.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Slaves-for-sale-poster.jpg>, (accessed 5/4/15).

³¹ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 102.

with. Both sides were in desperate need of help; “former slaves entered freedom with nothing to sell but their labor. Their employers were primarily former slave owners who were bereft of capital, low on credit, and accustomed to having absolute power over black labor.”³⁵ The Federal Government should have played a more key role in the rebuilding of the American South and the merger of the newly freed people into the community.



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For one, “Congress refused to confiscate farmlands from supporters of the former Confederacy,”³⁷ this land could have been divided up among different, formerly enslaved, families and used by them to make food for themselves and other goods in order to make a living. However, this would have meant taking land from white men, and that was not an option. Secondly, “the federal government refused to make financial loans to plantation owners so that the war-ravaged South could reconstitute its economy on a sound basis.”³⁸ All southerners were left in a difficult situation: African-Americans,

³⁵ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 167.

³⁶ Image, *Sherman Marches on Atlanta*, <http://voiceseducation.org/sites/default/files/images/shermanatlanta.gif>, (accessed 5/4/15).

³⁷ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 167.

³⁸ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 167.

for the most part, had to work the same fields they had been enslaved on for the past two and one third centuries for little economic compensation, and the white planters had to try and repay their debts, while now also having to hire and pay their laborers. Tensions between races were still very high after the Civil War.

To try and help the struggling Southern economy the government created the Freedmen's Bureau in 1865. It was "a compromise between congressional members aligned for and against land confiscation, the bureau was intended to protect the rights of former slaves and to ensure a smooth and timely return to the production of cotton, sugar, tobacco, and rice, which had been severely reduced during four years of war."³⁹ After the abolition of slavery, newly freed African-Americans could now move to other parts of the country if they desired. This, along with the reintroduction of sharecropping, also slowed the rebuilding of the Southern economy. The majority of African-Americans that chose to stay in the South wanted to own and work their own land. Plantation owners wanted to keep their workforce in a similar state as it was before the Civil War. Neither side really wanted to use a sharecropping system. "During the initial years of Reconstruction, former slaves and slaveowners faced off in a struggle to determine the specifics of the labor-management relations. The former slaves rebelled against attempt by owners of large plantations to simulate the labor relations of the slave regime."⁴⁰ The hostilities between former slaves and slave owners often got intense, and the Freedmen's Bureau was tasked with dealing with these issues. "The Freedmen's Bureau adjudicated thousands of labor disputes between planters and laborers, most involving labor turnover as African

³⁹ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 168.

⁴⁰ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 168.

Americans attempted to change jobs when it suited them. Labor turnovers was most frequently due to harsh means of supervision by plantation owners, and such as whippings, and the inability of a huge percentage of financially embarrassed planters to pay laborers their wages at the end of the year.”⁴¹ The Freedmen’s Bureau was not the most well liked government agency in the eyes of many white southerners after the war.



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Even with the passing of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments that freed all slaves in America and granted them citizenship and political rights, African-Americans were still not seen as equals especially in the South. “Within the next quarter-century those victories were rescinded as, state by state, the South disenfranchised black voters near the end of the nineteenth century.”⁴³ The idea of white supremacy has stayed constant from the time the first Anglo-American settlers entered the New World, and continued still even after the country went to war against its self. This should not be a surprise, “political events during the nation’s birth illustrate the prevalence of racial

⁴¹ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 169.

⁴² Election Poster, *The Freedman’s Bureau*, http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/33/Freedman%27s_bureau.jpg, (accessed 5/4/15).

⁴³ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 167.

prejudice in the new republic and devotion to its preservation as a white man's country."⁴⁴ White Americans in power want to keep the power with them, and not let a 'lesser-race' have any advantages over whites. "Despite the rhetoric of human equality and inalienable rights, after the [Revolutionary] war most of the states in post-revolutionary America denied free blacks the right to vote."⁴⁵ This belief was reintroduced after the Civil War.

Instead of deciding what social and economic classes would now rule the South, white planters maintained their focus on the issue of race. Planters saw the need "to exclude African Americans from the political process and to prevent them from using collective efforts to improve their economic status," to help this exclusion project white Southerners used, "the Ku Klux Klan and other terrorist organizations [that] employed extreme violence and terrorism such as the practice of lynching."⁴⁶ Terrorist organizations were part of the white South's fight to keep down black advancements, but

⁴⁴ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 103.

⁴⁵ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 103.

⁴⁶ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 172.



political reform was also a major tool in keeping the power and wealth in the hands of the white elite. The first evidence of this came shortly after the conclusion of the Civil War with the introduction of the Black Codes. “Emboldened by the former slaveholding president’s conciliatory posture, the conventions drafted and passed constitutions that defined in no uncertain legal terms the inferior civil status of blacks in their states.”⁴⁸ Even though the federal government allowed for blacks to now be ‘free’ citizens of America, state governments, especially the former slave states, made sure that the black community remained an unequal race. These Black Codes were intended to keep life in the post-war South as similar as possible to pre-war living conditions for the upper white class. The major obstruction that the Black Codes put onto blacks were the restrictions made to limit African-American’s ability to pick-up and move. “Southern states passed a vagrancy law aimed at restricting occupational mobility and general free movement... [these] laws imposed fines of involuntary labor on broad categories of blacks who were

⁴⁷ Image, *KKK Gatering*, http://i.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2013/09/27/article-2434992-185185480000578-948_634x436.jpg, (accessed 5/4/15).

⁴⁸ William R. Scott and William g. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 172.

considered engaged in antisocial or nonproductive activities, identified as ‘rogues.’”⁴⁹ Forcing freedpeople to stay in the South, especially to work other people’s land, for little pay and harsh conditions, is an example of eco-racism. The fact they had to live in shacks, and were only able to farm the least desired land in the South was a major social injustice. Finally, the Republican Party was able to regain control of the Reconstruction movement, and “Congress voided the Black Codes through the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which outlawed discrimination.”⁵⁰ However, the seed of discrimination had already been deeply planted in the ideals of the former Confederate states, and with the Reconstruction period coming to an end in the 1880s Southern legislation was back at it.



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“The southern states reinstated the spirit of the Black Codes by passing regulatory legislation that made no mention of race, and, therefore, presumably bypassed constitutional objections, but was directed against black people.”⁵² Black Americans

⁴⁹ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 172.

⁵⁰ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 173.

⁵¹ Image, *The History of Voter Disenfranchisement*, <http://mysticpolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/black-codes-jim-crow-and-obama-the-history-of-voter-disenfranchisement-01-01-640x360.png>, (accessed 5/4/15).

⁵² William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 173.

would have to continue to fight to fix environmental and economical wrongs done to them by the white Americans in power.

As the 19th century came to an end, African-Americans as a whole were still living in a similar state as they did one hundred years earlier. Blacks in America were in a rough spot due to the new state laws; “stripped of the vote, segregated in separate schools and public conveyances, and deprived of standing in court against whites—demonstrated that while the Thirteenth Amendment’s ban of slavery still held, its effects had been restricted about as far as was practically possible.”⁵³ Though White Privilege is seen as the dominant practice in the American South, not all whites enjoyed the luxuries found on some southern plantations. “Relatively small farms owned and worked by white families produced increasing quantities of cotton in the piedmont regions of the Upper South. White and black cotton producers became victims of a brutal economic system wherein low cotton prices throughout the latter nineteenth century and most of the first half of the twentieth tied them to a cycle of credit advances, poverty, and debt to landowners and merchants that for many often became a cruel form of debt peonage.”⁵⁴ It can safely be said that even poor whites had a better way of life than the greatest majority of African-Americans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, it is not fair to say all whites enjoyed the same privileges; only the wealthy men in positions of power were truly living in ‘high cotton.’

In 1890 the United States census came out saying, “approximately 90 percent of the black population of roughly 7.5 million Americans lived in the South, and a huge

⁵³ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 173.

⁵⁴ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 173/4.

majority of African Americans were employed as laborers in agriculture and in personal service.”⁵⁵ A shift did start to occur where blacks were able to find work in areas outside the plantation lifestyle. African Americans found this new work in “railroads, in coal mines, in the growing lumber mills, and turpentine industries that became important to the southern economy...” this only started to happen because, “black labor could be obtained cheaply from plantations.”⁵⁶ This new labor force, that was willing to work long harsh hours for little pay, greatly helped in the revitalization of the new southern economy. Finding work was becoming a bigger and bigger challenge regardless of race, and “African American’s strongest asset in a discriminatory environment was their willingness to work harder... simply because they had to if work was to be had at all.”⁵⁷

The idea comes to mind, that the simple solution to the problem black southerners faced would have been to move out of the hostile region. As previously mentioned, the majority of southern blacks did not have the economic means to move their families elsewhere, and/or they were contractile bound to work land in the South. African-Americans also faced the problem of a mass emigration “between 1880 and 1910, nearly seventeen million Europeans emigrated to the United States,” and these new European-Americans, “spread throughout the Northeastern and Midwestern United States where they swelled the size of the labor force and precipitated a great competition for jobs, housing, and other resources.”⁵⁸ With the influx of Europeans into the workforce, and the

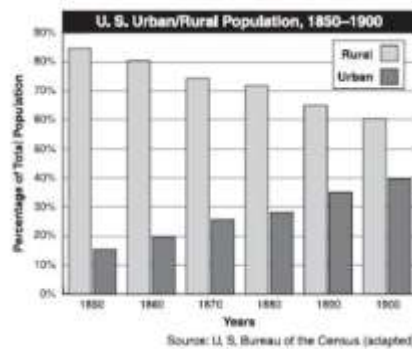
⁵⁵William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 174.

⁵⁶ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 174.

⁵⁷ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 178.

⁵⁸ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 179.

racist views still held by many Anglo-Americans throughout the country, finding work outside of the South was difficult even if the African-Americans had the means to travel out of the region. Even though the task was difficult, urbanization was becoming a growing trend in



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America. Industries based in cities created mass job openings, and brought a new hope for a better life to many poor farmers. Even with the appeal of a possible new career, “in cities like Atlanta, Chicago, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, San Francisco, and hundreds of smaller towns, with few exceptions, blacks were proscribed from employment in all but menial laboring and personal service positions.”⁶⁰ With the eruption of another war, African-Americans will once again gain some ground in their struggle for equality in the workforce and environment.

With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 the number of emigrating Europeans drastically slowed, and industry output in America increased. This created the need for more employees, and would also create tension between industry leaders in the North and South. “Hundreds of agents from northern and southern factories scoured the

⁵⁹ Graph, *US Urban/Rural Population 1850-1900*, <https://21stcenturylearning.sharepoint.com/siteimages/Urban%20Graph.jpg>, (accessed 5/4/15).

⁶⁰ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 179.

rural South searching for laborers while evading the landlords and local authorities who fought, sometimes with violent extralegal methods, to retain black labor in the rural South.”⁶¹ World War I provided a way out of the Deep South for many African-Americans, and the number of migrants to the urban North greatly increased in the early twentieth century. However, once African-Americans arrived to the many big northern cities they still did not find desirable jobs. “African-American men were still employers’ second choice to white labor.” Furthermore, “African-American men were typically preferred for heavy and exacting labor in areas ‘designated’ for blacks because they required work in extreme heat, moisture, dust, or some other undesirable condition.”⁶² As the twentieth century continued forward black Americans were finally starting to see some improvement in their standards of living as a whole. “African Americans in the labor market, as badly limited as it was, could nonetheless only compare favorably to a slavery that had been escaped a mere 35 years earlier...” However this was not the case for all blacks, “a majority were still tied to occupations connected to agriculture in the rural South. There the everyday task of making a living proved difficult even in the best of years.”⁶³ It has taken, and continues to take, a long time for the Deep South to acclimate from the former days of slavery to the modern day free America. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was one of the largest steps towards progress for black equality in America since the abolition of slavery. “Its passage paved the way for testing a long-held

⁶¹ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 179.

⁶² William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 180.

⁶³ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 180.

theory of black power that perceives politics as the path to extensive African-American empowerment.”⁶⁴



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Slavery was a key example of how powerful government action could be in the eyes of many African-Americans. “The sanctioning of racial slavery provided dramatic testimony of the power of policymakers and furnished the basis of a nascent theory of black political empowerment—the view that if politics can be used as a means of oppression, it could also be used as an instrument of liberation.”⁶⁶ Going forward, African-Americans must use government to further enhance their ways of life, and attempt to gain further political and economic control in America.

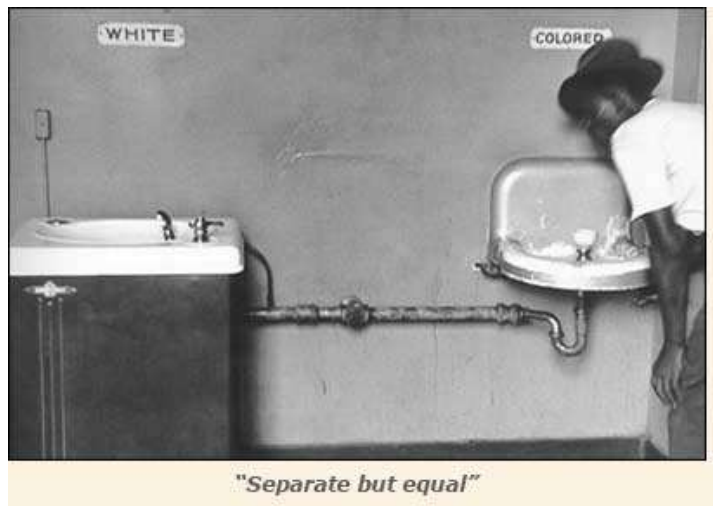
The battle for African-Americans attempting to gain power will continue to be a struggle; since, before the United States even became a nation white European settlers entered the New World with a sense of dominance over all others. Since then, Anglo-

⁶⁴ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 404.

⁶⁵ Copy, 1st Page of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/25/Voting_Rights_Act_-_first_page_%28his-res%29.jpg, (accessed 5/4/15).

⁶⁶ William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 405.

Americans have used their power to extort other races for the advancement of upper-class interests. Post-slavery America has struggled with equality, which led to the Civil Rights



movement, and then to the emergence of the study of environmental injustices found in America today.

Environmental History is a new area of study that began to become popular in the middle of the twentieth century. “The modern environmental movement was rooted more deeply in the American experience. Attracting major support from the middle and upper-middle classes, and bolstered by the maturing of ecological science, it functioned politically as a coalition of groups with a variety of interests.”⁶⁸ The original focus was for the preservation of natural spaces and wildlife. But as the study of environmental history began to expand, race-based environmental injustices began coming apparent throughout America’s history. “In the literature on the United States, at least, historical treatment of African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asians with respect to the environment

⁶⁷ Photo, *Separate but Equal*, <http://www.sistasthemusical.com/images/Separate-but-equal.jpg>, (accessed 5/4/15).

⁶⁸ Martin V. Melosi, “Equity, Eco-Racism and Environmental History,” *Environmental History Review* 19, no. 3 (Autumn, 1995): 1.

is marginal at best. In addition, as a scholarly organization, the American Society for Environmental History has a membership which is overwhelmingly white.”⁶⁹ It is not surprising that the majority of similar organizations are predominantly white. Because of this, it is also not surprising that the study of race-based environmental issues has not been more heavily studied in the past. Not because the people who might have studied the subject chose not to, but rather the minorities who have faced environmental wrongs have not had the voice to get their message out to the environmental community.

The modern “Environmental Justice Movement found its strength at the grassroots, especially among low-income people of color who faced serious environmental threats from hazardous wastes and other toxic material.”⁷⁰ Who better to provide the backbone for this movement than the people affected by the harsh living conditions in every day life? Interestingly, “some scholars argue that the struggle for environmental justice for people of color predates the 1970s, but these efforts generally were contested under the rubric of ‘social’ as apposed to ‘environmental’ problems.”⁷¹ Past wrongs done onto minority races can be considered social injustices, but many also are directly related to environmental issues imposed onto the minorities. “For those defining the goals of the movement, grassroots resistance to environmental threats is simply the reaction to more fundamental injustices brought on by long-term economic and social impacts.”⁷² Since the end of slavery in America, African-Americans have worked to gain social, political,

⁶⁹ Martin V. Melosi, “Equity, Eco-Racism and Environmental History,” *Environmental History Review* 19, no. 3 (Autumn, 1995): 3.

⁷⁰ Martin V. Melosi, “Equity, Eco-Racism and Environmental History,” *Environmental History Review* 19, no. 3 (Autumn, 1995): 4.

⁷¹ Martin V. Melosi, “Equity, Eco-Racism and Environmental History,” *Environmental History Review* 19, no. 3 (Autumn, 1995): 4.

⁷² Martin V. Melosi, “Equity, Eco-Racism and Environmental History,” *Environmental History Review* 19, no. 3 (Autumn, 1995): 4.

and economic equality. Environmental equality seems like the logical next step for minorities to work at achieving. One major difference with this modern Environmental Justice Movement is how it began. Lois Marie Gibbs explains it best, “our movement started as Not In My Back Yard (NIABY),” meaning no person wants a hazardous waste plant in their back yard, “but quickly [the movement] turned into Not In Anyone’s Backyard (NIABY) which includes Mexico and other less developed countries.”⁷³ The movement is a great undertaking to try and include other less developed countries as well as deal with the issues still present in America.

An overlying theme found in studying eco-racism is the idea of white privilege. George Lipsitz defines racism in America with the, “emphasis that it places on white skin privileges—rather than ignorance, Western cultural flaws, of innate bigotry—as the foundation upon which racism is built. Whites are racist, because they benefit from it—and therein lie the strength and power of whiteness.”⁷⁴ This is not a fair assumption that all whites are racist, and use racism to exert their dominance over other races. The majority of white Americans are in the middle- or lower- social/economic classes. The upper, ruling class, are the people that use tools such as racism for their own economic gains. Taylor further explains this idea; “despite the ideal of white unity and equality, there is plentiful evidence of class and gender oppression within the white cultural group. The white class and gender system places upper-class whites over middling, working-class, and poor whites, and it places white men over white women... So, then, bubbling just below the surface of white unity are deep fractures along class and gender lines.”⁷⁵

⁷³ Martin V. Melosi, “Equity, Eco-Racism and Environmental History,” *Environmental History Review* 19, no. 3 (Autumn, 1995): 4.

⁷⁴ Henry Louis Taylor, “The Hidden Face of Racism,” *American Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Sep, 1995): 395.

⁷⁵ Henry Louis Taylor, “The Hidden Face of Racism,” *American Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Sep, 1995): 396.

Still the argument is made that when blacks threaten the wellbeing of any class of whites, whites as a whole band together to once again oppress the blacks. And, “the result is that African Americans have been locked in the nation’s economic basement since they were brought to this country in chains.”⁷⁶ It seems that the reason for the slow advancements for black equality comes from the fact that they came to this country originally as slaves. This created years of uneducated people that were seen as a lesser race than whites. Since slavery ended, the process of creating schools and getting poor Americans to attend the schools has been slow. A lack of a good education hurts anyone who is trying to find better employment regardless of skin color. It is true that, “earnings, derived from one’s occupation are the primary source of income used to purchase a low, middle, or high standard of living. People with a middle or high living standard can provide their children with a quality education, prepare for a lengthy retirement, and secure good housing and neighborhood conditions.”⁷⁷ This is a reciprocating theme to the problem, without financial security it can be very hard to secure a good education for your family, and without a good education it can be very hard to secure a good occupation. The people in America with money want to keep their money, and they are not worried about weather or not poor Americans are financially stable or well educated. The example is provided that, “when steel, oil, and railroads gave birth to a blue-collar army of mill and factory workers and when the service industry was creating an even newer army of white-collar clerks, typists, telephone operators, and salespersons—most black workers still toiled on antiquated southern plantations.”⁷⁸ As previously mentioned, black workers in the South

⁷⁶ Henry Louis Taylor, “The Hidden Face of Racism,” *American Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Sep, 1995): 397.

⁷⁷ Henry Louis Taylor, “The Hidden Face of Racism,” *American Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Sep, 1995): 397.

⁷⁸ Henry Louis Taylor, “The Hidden Face of Racism,” *American Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Sep, 1995): 398.

were ‘stuck’ geographically speaking due to—in large part—a lack of economic holdings. Yes, African-Americans in postwar southern states were treated very poorly in many cases, but to infer that it was strictly out of a sense of whiteness is not accurate. Instead, the remaining planters in the South who could come up with enough capital to keep their operations open, did so to the best of their abilities as the agricultural economy around them deteriorated.

As the industrial age came, the relocation of many Americans to cities also began to happen. During this time, “from 1850 until 1940, black workers not only remained locked in the nation’s economic basement, but they were concentrated in jobs slated for elimination as industry modernized.”⁷⁹ It can be easy to simply say this was because of white privilege and racism towards black Americans. Still it seems that the lack of a good national public schools system affects the majority of the black community, than simply skin color. A study of Cincinnati’s work force in the early twentieth century provide some incite: “in 1920, 86 percent of African Americans worked as unskilled laborers and domestic and personal servants. Simultaneously, 20 percent of native whites and whites with foreign or mixed parentage and 29 percent of white immigrants worked in the same occupational categories.”⁸⁰ African Americans did greatly outnumber whites in the unskilled labor of Cincinnati, but it is not as though no whites were working the same jobs. People with similar economic and schooling backgrounds tended to work in similar career fields.

Possibly the greatest example of eco-racism seen in the twentieth century is the race-based suburbanization that whites performed that started around the time of the

⁷⁹ Henry Louis Taylor, “The Hidden Face of Racism,” *American Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Sep, 1995): 399.

⁸⁰ Henry Louis Taylor, “The Hidden Face of Racism,” *American Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Sep, 1995): 399.

Second World War. “Between 1940 and 1970, a second great migration of blacks from south to north—intertwined with a movement of blacks from farm to city—took place. The growing black urban population led to an acceleration of white suburbanization...” and this led to, “the city [becoming] blacker and poorer, while the suburbs became whiter and richer.”⁸¹ Through political action whites were able to create a separate, race based, community outside of the central city. Additionally, the government still thought of African-Americans as a less intelligent race in terms of their ability to live as ‘normal’ families did. “City housing officials identified all of the region’s public and private agencies available to serve public housing clients... These agencies would help tenants ‘understand and accept financial responsibility... in a business like way,’ and develop ‘balanced ways of life [allowing them to] grow into useful, contributing citizens.’”⁸² This is archaic thinking for the middle of the twentieth century in the United States, but proves there is still a racial issue within America. Race may have played a role in the suburbanization of whites, but if anyone had the means to move away from harsh living conditions they would do so. “The consequences of industrialization ‘have forced an increasing number of African Americans to become environmentalists. This is particularly the case for those who live in central cities where they are overburdened with the residue, debris, and decay of industrial production.’”⁸³ Regardless of skin color no person wants to live in heavy industrial zones that impede the quality of living.

⁸¹Henry Louis Taylor, “The Hidden Face of Racism,” *American Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Sep, 1995): 402.

⁸² William R. Scott and William G. Shade, *Upon These Shores: Themes in the African-American Experience, 1600 to the Present* (Routledge, 2000) 341.

⁸³ Martin V. Melosi, “Equity, Eco-Racism and Environmental History,” *Environmental History Review* 19, no. 3 (Autumn, 1995): 4.

Part of the reason why the Environmental Justice Movement has taken so long to gain traction is, at least in part, due to the ratio of whites to other minorities within the field of environmental study. For example, “for white suburbanites, within this context, the problem of decaying central city neighborhoods seemed abstract, distant, and unrelated to their day-to-day realities.”⁸⁴ Instead of looking at this example as white neglect to central city problems, it seems more telling that the people suffering from eco-racism problems do not have a voice, at least until recently, to get their message heard. Environmental groups as a whole also need to reach out more to the minorities who are willing to fight to fix the injustices done to them and the environment. Dorceta E. Taylor wrote, “existing environmental groups have largely failed to attract minorities due to the particular appeals and incentives they promote.”⁸⁵ If more people were able to join these groups, then more work could get done towards helping the environment and those living in it.

The Environmental Justice Movement does have a few other problems that will have to be addressed for noble progress to be made in the field. First of all, there is mistrust between different Environmental groups. The ideas of the Environmental Justice Movement, “interestingly, overlap with many of the values found in the literature of other environmental groups.” So it would seem that the different groups could easily work together on shared issues; however, “leaders in the Environmental Justice Movement are prone to characterize mainstream environmentalism—especially as represented by the so-called ‘Group of Ten’—as white, often male, middle- and upper-class, primarily

⁸⁴ Henry Louis Taylor, “The Hidden Face of Racism,” *American Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Sep, 1995): 403.

⁸⁵ Martin V. Melosi, “Equity, Eco-Racism and Environmental History,” *Environmental History Review* 19, no. 3 (August, 1995): 7.

concerned with wilderness preservation and conservation.” They then take it a step further by saying these groups are, “insensitive to—or at least ill-equipped to deal with—the interests of minorities.”⁸⁶ If environmentalist groups cannot even put aside their differences in order to help a similar cause, how can they expect for the entire country (and beyond) to follow the cause. Secondly, many environmental groups doubt the effectiveness and/or willingness of the federal government to implement just environmental regulations to help minority living conditions. Some people even blame the government for current environmental situations found in America. Robert Bullard said, “In many instances, government is the problem.” He feels that a “dominant environmental protection paradigm has been in operation which, among other things, institutionalizes unequal enforcement of laws and regulations, favors polluting industries over ‘victims,’ and delays cleanups.”⁸⁷ For the Environmental Justice Movement to truly be effective a working partnership will have to be met with other environmental groups and with the government.

By this time there have been many studies completed that show a link between race-based, or at least poverty-based communities and the locations of hazardous waste sites. One study reported, “the findings stressed that racial composition of a community was the single variable best able to predict the siting of commercial hazardous waste facilities. Minorities, especially African Americans and Hispanics, were overrepresented in communities with these facilities. Furthermore, the report concluded, it was ‘virtually impossible’ that these facilities were distributed by chance and thus race must have

⁸⁶ Martin V. Melosi, “Equity, Eco-Racism and Environmental History,” *Environmental History Review* 19, no. 3 (August, 1995): 5/6.

⁸⁷ Martin V. Melosi, “Equity, Eco-Racism and Environmental History,” *Environmental History Review* 19, no. 3 (August, 1995): 9.

played a central role in location.”⁸⁸ Race may have been the reason for the placement of these facilities, but economically speaking does it not make sense that these plants are located where they are because they are built on the cheapest land possible? Just like Daniel Boone bought land from the Native Americans for a great price in regards to his interests, so too could modern day industrial leaders buy inexpensive land to build their plants on in order to make the most profit possible? Either way “this research recasts issues of intentionality and scale, as it requires us to examine the production of industrial zones, their relation to other parts of the metropolis, and the potentially racist nature of the process by which these patterns evolved.”⁸⁹

A sense of entitlement and racist ideas have been present in America long before the Revolutionary War heroes and our Founding Fathers made this great country. Since then minorities have always struggled in one-way or another to find peace in our society. Whether environmental injustice comes out of deep, underlying, resentment towards minorities, or if it is simply the product of our capitalistic economic society one thing is for sure: the Environmental Justice Movement has brought to light the issue of eco-racism. “It has shifted attention to urban blight, public health, and urban living conditions to a greater degree than earlier efforts by predominantly white environmental reformers... Whether or not the Environmental Justice Movement grows beyond its current strength, it has altered—and could possibly transform—the debate over the future goals and objectives of American environmental policy.”⁹⁰ The Movement seems to be

⁸⁸ Martin V. Melosi, “Equity, Eco-Racism and Environmental History,” *Environmental History Review* 19, no. 3 (August, 1995): 8.

⁸⁹ Laura Pulido, “Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90, no. 1 (March, 2000): 13.

⁹⁰ Martin V. Melosi, “Equity, Eco-Racism and Environmental History,” *Environmental History Review* 19, no. 3 (Autumn, 1995): 10.

on the right track for the hopeful advancement of lower-class citizen's living conditions in the environment. The use of the term eco-racism is the only term possibly holding back the program. Instead of race-based environmental inequalities, it seems these inequalities are much more tied to economic prosperity (or lack there of). Andrew Hurley makes a lasting impression with his thoughts; "that industrial capitalists and wealthy property holders had 'a decisive advantage in molding the contours of environmental change. Those groups who failed to set the terms—African Americans and poor whites—found themselves at a severe disadvantage, consistently bearing the brunt of industrial pollution in virtually all of its forms: dirty air, foul water, and toxic solid waste."⁹¹ The men with the power and the money can decide how the majority of the rest of the nation will live, and that is clearly evident when examining the history of the United States of America.

⁹¹Martin V. Melosi, "Equity, Eco-Racism and Environmental History," *Environmental History Review* 19, no. 3 (Autumn, 1995): 13.