

DAY 11: Environmental Racism. Environmental Justice.

Despite wanting the best for their families, people with limited means are often less geographically mobile and have fewer affordable choices when deciding where to live. What is affordable is often situated near land that is comparatively cheap due to its proximity to industrial areas, highways, landfills, and chemical facilities and/or areas at risk of ecological disaster. This has led to residents with low incomes, and often also people of color, living in areas with high rates of air and water pollution, which have a direct, negative impact on their health.

Washtenaw County is no exception-- [PFAS contamination in groundwater at Ypsilanti Township's Willow Run Airport is more than five times the acceptable level](#). Studies have shown that [Black people are exposed to more pollutants than white people](#). [Air pollution](#) and particulate matter exposure have been linked to asthma, low birth weights, high blood pressure, and other adverse health outcomes. This is environmental racism.

In 2017 in [Ypsilanti, a group of mothers in the Sycamore Meadows began mobilizing fellow residents to advocate for better living conditions of the apartments in which they lived](#). They garnered the support of the local health department and County government, and were able to obtain inspections for all the housing units (95% of which failed) and ensure these conditions were remedied. These mothers were part of the [Trusted Advisor Group of Washtenaw County Success by Six](#). They continue to convene and mobilize via a tenants association they helped to form. This is environmental justice.

The modern environmental justice movement started in 1982 when the majority Black residents of a small town in North Carolina battled to prevent the construction of a hazardous waste landfill near their community. At its core, this movement is built around the principal belief that environmental justice is racial justice. Since then, this movement has been championed and led by the people it most affects.

An important aspect of environmental

Did you know? Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, an Associate Professor at Michigan State University, used science to prove that children in Flint were exposed to lead and went public with her findings to bring light to the crisis. Her book, [What the Eyes Don't See](#) is her first-hand account of how the crisis unfolded. Watch her [TEDMED talk](#) to learn more.

Today's Challenge:

Option 1: [Have you heard of environmental racism? Watch this 3-minute video](#) on how numerous systemic issues contribute to differences in exposure to potentially harmful environmental conditions.

Option 2: Read about the [history of the Environmental Justice Movement](#). Then read how [activists in the River Rouge neighborhood of Detroit fought back against pollution and won in 2021](#).

Option 3: Check out the [Principles of Environmental Justice](#) developed at the National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit with help from [Dr. Dorceta E. Taylor](#), University of Michigan professor and Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for The School for Environment and Sustainability.

Option 4: [Watch this interview of Rober Bullard, a founder of the environmental justice movement](#), who explains how and why pollution is segregated.

Option 5: [Listen to this podcast interviewing Queer Nature cofounders So and Pinar, who speak about ideas of queer ecology and belonging with and in the land](#). The two talk about how the acknowledgment of our relationship to where we live can inform a sense of responsibility, connection, and belonging.

Option 6: [Explore this multi-part series of works on the subject of environmental justice and Indigenous communities in the United States](#), curated by Raymond Foxworth of the First Nations Development Institute.

Option 7: [Watch this YouTube series, Planeta G, which is amplifying Latinx voices in the environmental movement](#), created by two Greenpeace communications specialists, Crystal Mojica and Valentina Stackl.

Don't forget to [RSVP to one or more lunch hour discussion groups](#) hosted by [Nonprofit Enterprise at Work](#) and UWWC to connect with others and reflect on our shared experiences.