





Climate, COVID, and Cages

Environmental Racism Under Lockdown

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Summary: Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour have experienced lockdown in very different ways than their white counterparts. Underlying environmental disparities have made BIPOC individuals more susceptible to COVID-19, while they are also overrepresented in 'essential' jobs and thus more exposed. BIPOC communities are also grossly overrepresented in literal lockdown via immigration policies and mass incarceration; while for those in quarantine, unequal access to green spaces is a major factor in mental and physical wellbeing.

The events of 2020 have granted racism in the United States and the United Kingdom more attention than usual, but the full problem remains unaddressed. *Far more than a horrific moment caused by police violence, "I can't breathe" is the basic norm for many in a world shaped by environmental racism.*

principles for discussion

1. we all come as learners, not experts
2. we all are both oppressor and oppressed
3. we all must practice and practise allyship

environmental racism

nature and environmental
resources are yet another arena
through which systemic racism
is carried out

environmental racism

“racial discrimination in environmental policy making, the enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in our communities, and the history of excluding people of color from leadership of the ecology movements”

Chavis (1982)

A watercolor illustration on the left side of the slide. It depicts a pair of hands, rendered in warm, earthy tones of brown and orange, cupping a mound of dark, rich soil. A small, vibrant green seedling with several leaves sprouts from the top of the soil. The background around the hands and soil is composed of soft, blended washes of green and blue, suggesting a natural, outdoor environment. The overall style is artistic and evocative, symbolizing care for the earth and growth.

environmental justice

- distribution
- recognition
- participation

DISTRIBUTION

An aerial, painterly view of a landscape featuring several wind turbines scattered across green and brown fields. Large, billowing white clouds dominate the upper half of the image, creating a dramatic and somewhat ethereal atmosphere. The overall style is artistic and textured, with visible brushstrokes and a soft focus.

who:

- receives benefits
- bears costs
- faces risks



carbon
emissions

986

A flight from New York to London produces around 986 kilograms of carbon dioxide – that's more than the average sub-Saharan African's *annual* greenhouse gas emissions.

A watercolor illustration of a mountain landscape. It features a prominent mountain peak in the background, a body of water (likely a lake or river) in the middle ground, and a winding path or road in the foreground. The colors are muted greens, blues, and greys, with some white highlights suggesting mist or snow.

access to green spaces

1%

Just 1% of visitors to Yosemite National Park are Black, even though Black people make up 14% of the US population.

BIPOC individuals are far less likely to have a private garden or easy access to public green space in both the US and UK, while park closures have been more severe in BIPOC-majority areas.



*proximity to
environmental harms*

66%

People of color in the US are exposed to 66% more air pollution.

Race remains the biggest indicator of whether a person lives near contaminated air, water, or soil in the United States.

RECOGNITION

A detailed illustration of a humpback whale swimming in deep blue water. The whale's body is covered in characteristic white, wavy patterns and dark spots. Its head is turned slightly to the right, showing its eye and the beginning of its baleen. The background is a deep blue with some lighter, yellowish-green patches, suggesting an underwater environment.

who:


- *is acknowledged*
- *is taken into account*
- *do we care about*



*confronting
inequalities*

EPA

Two years ago, Googling “environmental racism” would immediately take you to the US EPA’s definition and advocacy around racial disparities in access and risk. Today, the phrase has been all but eradicated from the website, while the Agency’s environmental justice efforts have been massively scaled back.

A watercolor illustration of a wind farm. In the foreground, a large wind turbine is depicted with a blue tower and three blades, one of which is a vibrant blue. The background shows several other turbines receding into the distance. The sky is painted with soft, blended colors of orange, yellow, and light blue, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The ground is a mix of green and yellow washes, representing grass and fields. The overall style is artistic and painterly.

*future
generations*

1.75

Humanity uses 1.75 Earths in a year – it takes the planet around 21 months to regenerate the resources we consume in just 12.

*non-human
animals*

0.01%

Humans make up only 0.01% of living beings on the planet.



PARTICIPATION



who:

- has a say
- decides
- implements & enforces



environmental professionals

14%

People of color make up around 36% of the US population, but account for just 14% of environmental organization staff.

In the UK, only 3.1% of environmental professionals identify as non-white minorities, though they account for 19.9% of the workforce.

Aarhus Convention

47

The world's leading international law on public participation in environmental decision-making has 47 signatories...the US isn't one of them.






*budgets
reflect values*

5.7

Trump's proposed 31% cut would have made the EPA's annual budget \$5.7 million – the same total granted to the New York Police Department.

2021 projections have improved somewhat, but the [EPA](#) gets just 0.1% of the federal budget, while the [NYPD](#) accounts for 5-6% of the city's expenditure.



45%

550%

300%

>45% of inmates serving life sentences under the Three Strikes law are Black.
That's **three hundred percent overrepresentation**.

Prisoners are 550% more likely to contract COVID-19 and 300% more likely to die from it.