



GROUNDWORK
USA

Environmental Justice Timeline

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The Indian Removal Act & Trail of Tears

Andrew Jackson, then President of the United States, signed the Indian Removal Act into law. American colonists wanted the Native Americans' ancestral homelands for themselves, and "Indian removal" was Jackson's top priority. Many tribes, including the autonomous nations of Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee, and Seminole, resisted relocation by filing a series of lawsuits and attempting to make treaties with the U.S. government.

The Indian Removal Act allowed the U.S. government to forcibly remove nearly 50,000 people from their land east of the Mississippi River. The series of forced removals became known as "death marches" because over 10,000 people died from hunger, disease, exhaustion, exposure, and violence. The forced relocation of the Cherokee Nation is known as the Trail of Tears: 4,000 people died during the journey to western lands.



POPULATION OF AN INDIAN VILLAGE MOVING.—DRAWN BY JOHN B. BROWN.—[See Page 105.]

The Great San Francisco Earthquake & Fire: Chinatown

After the Great San Francisco earthquake and fire, those suspected to be looters were shot, and minorities--especially from Chinatown--were preferentially targeted.

One man was suspected of looting his own store and stabbed with a bayonet. Another was stoned to death for trying to salvage items from his home. Authorities claimed that only 300 people died. It took decades for Gladys Hansen, the city's archivist, to prove that over 3,000 people had died.

In addition, 15,000 Chinese residents lost everything in the earthquake and fires. They were the only ethnic group to be relocated to refugee camps outside the city. After years of struggle, they eventually returned and rebuilt Chinatown.



The Ludlow Massacre

Colorado coal miners began to organize and strike for better pay, health, and safety regulations with the help of the Union Mine Workers of America. Miners were evicted from their company-owned homes and so built tent colonies to live in, such as the Ludlow colony.

During the Ludlow Massacre, Rockefeller-owned Colorado Fuel and Iron (CF&I) paid militia to surround the Ludlow colony with guns and later set fire to it. The miners attempted to protect themselves, and a gun battle occurred. At least sixty-six men, women and children were killed in the attack and the rioting that followed. After Ludlow, support for unions rose and stricter labor laws were enforced.



The Memphis Sanitation Worker's Strike

Two Memphis garbage collectors, Echol Cole and Robert Walker, were crushed to death by a malfunctioning truck. Twelve days later, frustrated by the city's long pattern of neglect and abuse of its black employees, 1,300 black men from the Memphis Department of Public Works went on strike with the help of their local union against unfair working conditions and to demand better pay.

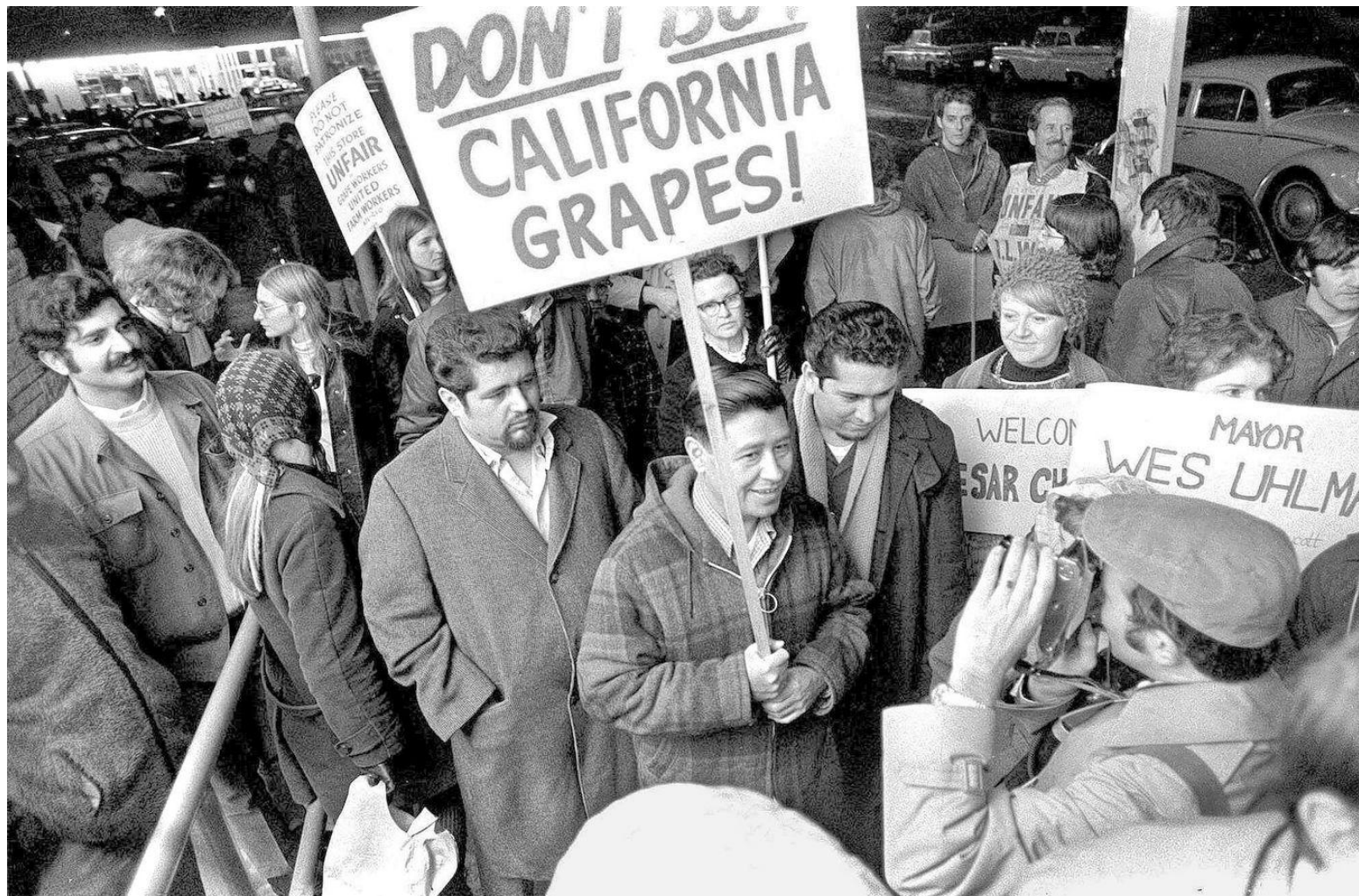
A month later, Dr. King himself began participating in marches. Protests were met with mace, tear gas, and even the shooting of a 16-year-old boy by the police. It wasn't until after Dr. King was assassinated that a deal was reached with the city in which the council agreed to recognize union workers and guaranteed better wages.



Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, & the United Farm Workers

Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta founded the National Farm Workers Association (which later became the “United Farm Workers Organizing Committee” or UFW) in California to protect Latino and Filipino farm workers from harmful pesticides poisoning them and their families, as well as unfair working conditions.

Child labor, sexual harassment, and pesticide poisoning were all integral to the UFW battles. Decades later, tens of thousands of farm workers have won UFW contracts with higher wages, family health coverage, pension benefits and other protections.



The Warren County Protest

African-American residents and civil rights leaders protested the decision to locate a PCB landfill site in Warren County, North Carolina. This resulted in over 500 arrests.

The landfill was built to contain illegally dumped PCB contaminated oil that was sprayed along 210 miles of roadways in North Carolina. The Warren County site, chosen from 90 sites under consideration, had the highest percentage (64%) of African-American residents of any county in the state. The studies that followed linked race to close proximity with hazardous and toxic waste facilities.

The term “environmental justice” emerged around this time.



Influential Publications

Three important publications were released: 1) “Siting of Hazardous Waste Landfills and Their Correlation with Racial and Economic Status of Surrounding Communities” by the U.S. General Accounting Office, 2) “Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A National Report on the Racial and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Communities of Hazardous Waste Sites” by United Church of Christ’s Commission for Racial Justice, and 3) “Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality” by Robert D. Bullard. These all documented race as a factor in the placement of hazardous waste sites.

W301

DUMPING IN DIXIE

*Race, Class, and
Environmental Quality*

**Robert D.
Bullard**



Westview Press

Indigenous Peoples Sue Chevron

Luis Yanza and Pablo Fajardo led indigenous people of the Amazon in an unprecedented legal battle against Chevron and Texaco for dumping millions of gallons of crude oil and drilling wastewater directly into the Ecuadorian Amazon. Inhabitants demanded that Chevron pay for a complete cleanup of the ecosystem, and monitoring and improvement of the inhabitants' health.

Yanza and Fajardo celebrated a major victory with an appeals court that ordered Chevron to pay \$18 billion in damages to 30,000 indigenous plaintiffs. However, Chevron refused to pay and is fighting the decision in court.



Bill Clinton Signs E.O. 12898

The United States government began to recognize environmental justice during the Clinton Era, with the signing of Executive Order 12898.

It states that “each federal agency must make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health, environmental, economic and social effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations.”



Hurricane Katrina Aftermath

After the horrifying events of Hurricane Katrina, minorities faced slow responses and lack of adequate government aid from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

FEMA notified displaced families of termination of temporary shelter benefits before the agency had sent them an initial determination of eligibility; people living in FEMA trailers were exposed to toxic formaldehyde from the building materials and did not have adequate ventilation; and tensions rose between the families displaced and residents who lived next to FEMA trailer parks.



Dakota Access Pipeline Protests

Grassroots movements form worldwide for over a year to oppose the Dakota Access Pipeline, a 1,172-mile-long underground oil pipeline, which endangers drinking water, destroys sacred sites and threatens ancient burial grounds.

Standing Rock Sioux elder LaDonna Brave Bull Allard established a camp as a center for cultural preservation and spiritual resistance to the pipeline; over the summer, the camp grew to thousands of people. To remove protesters, law enforcers used attack dogs, tear gas, riot gear, military equipment, bulldozers, water cannons in freezing weather, and eviction.



Hurricanes Harvey, Irma & Maria

There is nothing in recorded history that resembles what hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria have inflicted on Caribbean islands. In just one month, the scenes have been horrific--trees stripped bare, houses flattened, boats strewn like toys.

Category 5 hurricane Maria became one of the most intense Atlantic hurricanes ever recorded to make landfall, striking southeastern Puerto Rico with winds up to 155 mph. Puerto Rican residents rationed basic supplies in fragile infrastructure after hurricane Irma just two weeks prior. The storm wiped out 100 percent of the island's power. Recovery is likely to take years.

