

Environmental Justice in Detroit:
A Comparison with the
Civil Rights Movement

Mary Hennessey
University of Michigan
Program in the Environment
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ABBREVIATIONS

Services	ACCESS	Arab Community Center for Economic and Social
	CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
	CRJ	Commission for Racial Justice
	CRM	Civil Rights Movement
	DIFT	Detroit Intermodal Freight Terminal
	DWEJ	Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice
	EJM	Environmental Justice Movement
	EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
	FEPA	Fair Employment Practices Act
	FEPC	Fair Employment Practices Commission
	GAO	General Accounting Office
	GDRRA	Greater Detroit Resource Recovery Authority
	HFHS	Henry Ford Hospital System
	LULU	Locally Undesirable Land Use
	MWRO	Michigan Welfare Rights Organization
	NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored
Peoples		
	NEJAC	National Environmental Justice Advisory Council
	PCB	Polychlorinated biphenyl
	RECA	Radiation Exposure Compensation Act
	RM	Resource Mobilization
	SADRI	Social and Demographic Research Institute
	SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
	SDEV	Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision
	SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
	UAW	United Auto Workers
	UCC	United Church of Christ

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CHAPTER 1

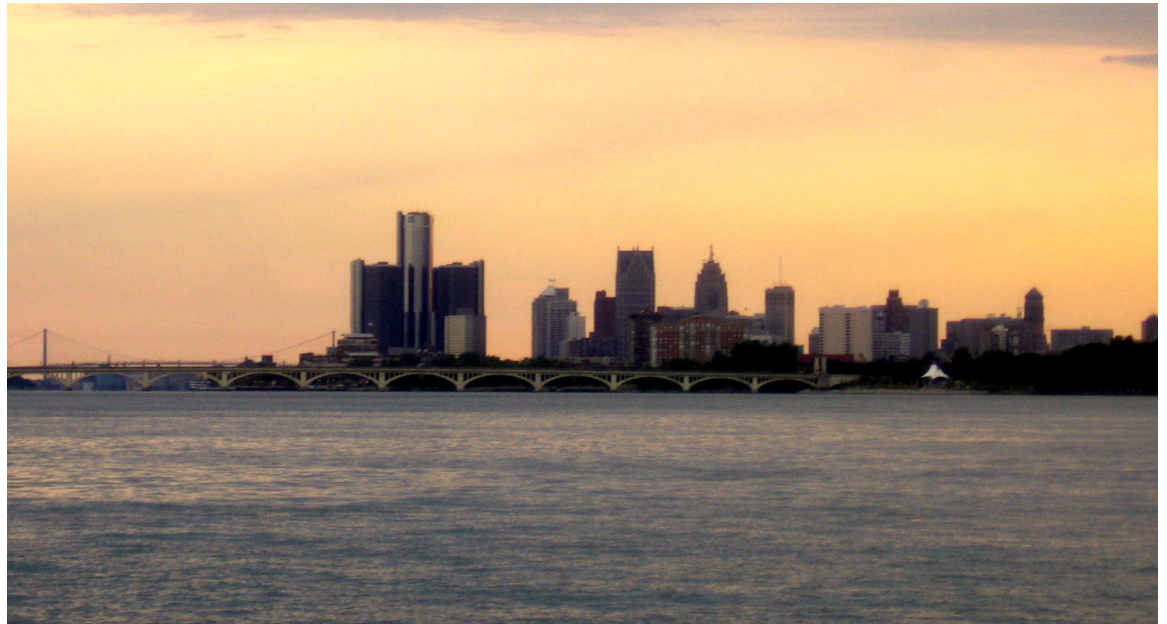


Figure 1: Detroit Skyline at dusk
Photo by Mary Hennessey, 2007

Introduction

“Speramus Meliora. Resurget Cineribus
We hope for better days. It will rise from the ashes”

-Motto of the City of Detroit

Introduction

Many social movements have traced their lineage to the Civil Rights Movement. Such contemporary movements have involved migrant farm workers, gay rights, women, and Environmental Justice. These social movements continue to fight for justice and equality not attained by the Civil Rights Movement (CRM). The Environmental Justice Movement (EJM) brings together environmental and social justice concerns. The similarities and differences that exist between the Civil Rights and Environmental Justice Movements both nationally and in Detroit offer compelling insight and will be the focus of this paper.

The Civil Rights Movement and the Environmental Justice Movement are both examples of social movements. Social Movements have been very influential in American history because they have brought about substantial systemic and symbolic change. Social movements are collective efforts by individuals from outside society's normal channels of influence that seek to change a condition or process that, in their opinion, is not adequately addressed by society's existing institutions. D'Angelo (2001) notes that, "all the [social movement] participants tend to share the same goals of change, although they may differ on strategies to accomplish those goals."¹ This

¹ Raymond D'Angelo (2001) The American Civil Rights Movement: Readings and Interpretations. McGraw-Hill/Dushkin: United States of America pg. 113.

paper provides a brief and non-exhaustive analysis of the Civil Rights and the Environmental Justice Movements.

In this paper I will answer the questions: “How is the Civil Rights Movement similar to and different from the Environmental Justice Movement? What lessons can advocates of the EJM learn from the history of the CRM”?

To answer these questions I will do the following: I will describe the history of the national CRM with an emphasis on key moments. Then I will do the same for Detroit’s CRM history. I will compare the national CRM to Detroit’s CRM with an emphasis on movement initiation, composition, organization, strategies and success. Then I will describe key events of the national EJM. Next I will elucidate the history of Detroit’s EJM using three representative examples. Again I will compare the national EJM to Detroit’s EJM using movement initiation, composition, organization, strategies and success. Next I will compare the CRM and the EJM to each other using the same characteristics as before. Then I will suggest what lessons the EJM can learn from the CRM to become a more successful social movement. Finally I will recommend future research topics in light of the conclusions from this paper.

Throughout this paper, I will refer to Resource Mobilization (RM) Theory which is a theoretical explanation of social movements. RM Theory states that a social movement – or collective action – is an organized group that achieves success by mobilizing the resources of people to exert influence. Social movements are initiated in response to increasing organization and to

the introduction of charismatic leaders. The composition or membership of social movements, according to RM Theory, is people who have social connections to one another such as fellow church-goers or neighbors. From this perspective, organization is very important and the more closely integrated a community, the more likely it is to initiate a social movement. The strategies of RM-type social movements include mobilizing resources such as financial support, people, coalitional support and political influence. RM Theory judges the success of social movements on how many of these resources are mobilized.

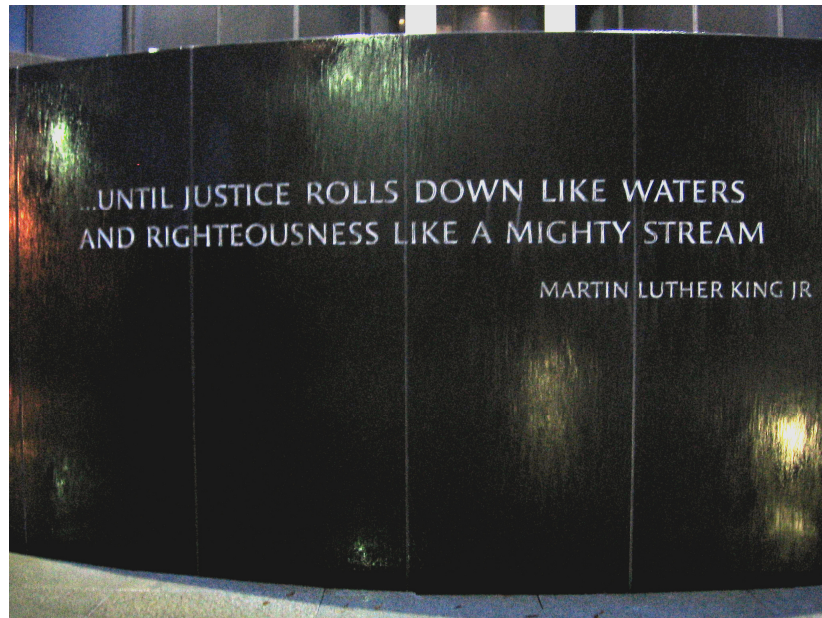
I will support the CRM sections of this paper with reputable books, academic journals, newspaper articles and the author's research during visits to many nationally known CRM locations. The EJM has a much smaller body of literature so I will draw from books, journal and newspaper articles and key documents of the EJM including the Principles of Environmental Justice and the Principles of Working Together. Detroit has an even smaller literature base to support my arguments so I will document three representative EJ struggles that Detroit EJ activists identified in background interviews for this project.

- The Municipal Incinerator
- Water Shutoffs in Highland Park
- The Henry Ford Hospital System Medical Waste Incinerator.

Lastly, I will use anecdotal evidence from my own limited experience in Detroit's EJM.

While the author believes the comparison in this thesis is both interesting and useful there are several limitations in making the comparison. The difference in organizational structure between the centrally organized Civil Rights Movement and the decentralized Environmental Justice Movement challenges attempts to effectively compare the impacts of two structurally distinct movements. Efforts to measure their respective successes must take into account that the decentralized nature of the EJM means that local victories do not often receive national attention while the major events of the Civil Rights Movement received strong media attention. Being a locally organized movement, the EJM derives its power from that systemic choice but also faces greater obstacles in achieving national recognition for its achievements.

CHAPTER 2



**Figure 2: Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, AL
Photo by Mary Hennessey, 2007**

The Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement: History

The Civil Rights Movement in the United States has a long history dating to the country's importation of slaves. This paper's purview will be a brief period of intense activity known as the modern Civil Rights Movement occurring between 1955 and 1968. There were many different wings of the modern Civil Rights Movement including non-violent, Marxist and black power groups. This paper will focus on the non-violent wing of the Civil Rights Movement.

African-American resistance to white oppression did not begin with the modern Civil Rights Movement (CRM). From the time the first Africans were brought as slaves to the United States, there were daily acts of resistance ranging from disobeying orders to slave rebellions. The modern CRM differed from these earlier acts of resistance in terms of its coordination and leadership.

The Civil Rights Movement aimed to change the system of discrimination and domination in America, especially in the South. It was composed of many different organizations including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Although these groups shared the same general goal of ending racial discrimination and achieving equality, they differed with respect to strategies ranging from legal action to social protests and demonstrations.

The modern Civil Rights Movement era began in 1955 with the arrest of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott led by Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. While the struggle for Civil Rights continues, King's assassination in 1968 marked the end of an era.²

The modern Civil Rights Movement was born in the South where the oppression of African-Americans was most severe. African-Americans living there experienced a daily assault on their dignity in the form of social, political and economic repression.³ According to Civil Rights scholar Aldon Morris, this repression forced African-Americans to earn a poor living, live in segregated neighborhoods and attend segregated schools. Jim Crow laws maintained this separation. Jim Crow was a social system "designed by white Southerners to separate the races in every sphere of life and to achieve total domination over African-Americans."⁴ Lynchings and other violent acts were often committed against African-American Southerners to maintain a segregated society.

In 1955 the CRM was propelled onto the national stage, concurrently transforming some people into heroes and others into martyrs. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a 26-year-old newcomer to Montgomery, Alabama when the police arrested Rosa Parks for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white person. After being chosen to lead a retaliatory bus boycott to dismantle Jim Crow transit laws, King rose to national prominence as an

² Aldon D. Morris (1984) The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change. The Free Press: New York.

³ Morris (1984)

⁴ D'Angelo (2001) pg. 1. Note, the term Jim Crow came from a 1830s Minstrel show character who, painted in blackface, danced without crossing his feet and sang a song with the line "Eb'ry time I weel about I jump Jim Crow."

intelligent, religious, non-violent spokesman for the CRM. King successfully led a yearlong bus boycott. The community organized free carpools that ran along the bus routes and held meetings at local churches to fundraise and organize support.

The 1963 March on Washington was another key event. Despite the tremendous racial turmoil of the previous eight years, African-Americans were still in a very desperate situation due to their persistent inferior status. The themes of the March became “unity, racial harmony and especially a cry to ‘Pass the Bill,’”⁵ a reference to the new civil rights bill delivered to Congress by President Kennedy. On August 28, 1963 over a quarter of million people marched on Washington, D.C. to protest against a racially segregated society and to march for the passage of the Civil Rights Act. Among many speakers, Martin Luther King delivered his memorable and moving “I Have a Dream” speech.

After the Civil Rights Bill passed in 1964, activists began to campaign for voting rights. This right was an important symbolic and political goal especially as the 1964 Presidential election approached. In 1964, Freedom Summer in the South took shape, drawing activists from all over the country to help register African-Americans to vote. Despite the work of Civil Rights workers the barriers to registering remained considerable.

Dr. King traveled to Selma, Alabama to highlight these barriers and organized a march from Selma to the state capital of Montgomery in March,

⁵ Juan Williams (1998) Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years 1954-1975. Penguin Press: New York p.59.

1965. On Bloody Sunday, 600 marchers began to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge over the Alabama River where Alabama State Troopers met them with violence and drove them back across the bridge. Undeterred, a later Tuesday, nearly 2000 marchers assembled again and crossed the bridge to commemorate the violence. A few weeks later marchers again assembled in Selma to march to Montgomery. After three days of marching, 300 people from Selma joined 25,000 people in Montgomery and rallied for voting rights at the Alabama State Capital. After that demonstration, President Johnson called on Congress to pass the Voting Rights bill.⁶

Impressive acts of social mobilization were a mainstay of the Civil Rights Movement and unfortunately this paper can only briefly touch on some of the most important events and people. See the following “Civil Rights Timeline” for a more complete record of the key events of the Civil Rights Movement.

⁶ National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior Brochure, National Historic Trail Alabama “Selma to Montgomery” (2003).

Civil Rights Timeline

Figure 3: Timeline, Created by Mary Hennessey, 2008

1896: Plessey vs. Ferguson — Establishes ‘separate but equal’ principle.

May 17, 1954: Brown vs. Board of Education — Desegregates schools, strikes down Plessey but unenforced by President Eisenhower, left up to states.

December 1, 1955- November 13, 1956: Montgomery Bus Boycott led by Martin Luther King Jr. with over 50,000 participants. Results in Supreme Court banning segregated seating on buses.

September 24, 1957: Little Rock, Arkansas desegregation by ‘Little Rock Nine’ of high school.

February 1, 1960: Students and others begin sit-ins at segregated lunch counters at Woolworths in Greensboro, North Carolina. While already taking place, sit-ins spread around country.

December 5, 1960: Supreme Court outlaws discrimination in bus terminals.

May 14, 1961: Freedom Riders, an interracial group, ride through the Deep South testing desegregation laws; are violently attacked throughout their journey.

May 3, 1963: Attack of school children in Birmingham, Alabama. Bull Connor ordered hoses and dogs used during peaceful demonstration.

August 28, 1963: March on Washington. Over 250,000 Americans march for Civil Rights. MLK gives “I Have a Dream” speech.

September 15, 1963: Bombing of 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, a center for Civil Rights planning kills four school-age girls.

June 20, 1964: Freedom Summer. 1,000 young, mostly white, Northerners come to the South as Civil Rights volunteers and teachers.

July 2, 1964: President Johnson signed Civil Rights Act of 1964.

March 7, 1965: Bloody Sunday, Selma to Montgomery. Marchers are terrorized and beaten back.

March 25, 1965: Selma to Montgomery March.

July 9, 1965: Congress passes Voting Rights Act.

1967: Thurgood Marshall becomes the first African-American on the Supreme Court.

April 4, 1968: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.

CHAPTER 3



Figure 4: Detroit Monument to the Underground Railroad
Photo by Mary Hennessey, 2007

Detroit Civil Rights Movement

*“If a man hasn’t discovered something that he will die for,
he isn’t fit to live.”*

- Dr. Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., Detroit 1963.

The History of Detroit's Civil Rights Movement

Detroit has a tumultuous race relations history. Detroit is a city with a substantial African-American population dating from the great migration period of the 1930s through the 1950s. Detroit citizens have played an active role in fighting for racial equality and were critically involved in the Civil Rights Movement. From the Underground Railroad, the trial of Ossian Sweet, the 1967 Riot (or Rebellion), the 1963 March down Woodward Avenue and a speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., to numerous prominent civil rights activists, Detroit has had a vast and important Civil Rights history.

The Civil Rights struggle in Detroit started as early as the establishment of the Underground Railroad in the 1840s. The Underground Railroad provided slaves a route to escape from the South and travel to the North for freedom. Canada – specifically the port of Windsor, Detroit's twin city – was a frequent destination. “Of all the underground gateways to Canada, the busiest was Detroit.”⁷ The number of slaves passing through Detroit to Windsor on the Underground Railroad is not absolutely known but one estimate states that somewhere between 800-1000 passed through in just two days in 1855.⁸

To escape the segregation of the Deep South and find better work, many African-Americans migrated to the North in search of better opportunities. The period of Great Migration (1916-1929) brought many

⁷ Fergus M. Bordewich (2005), Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the war for the Soul of America, Harper Collins: New York p. 257.

⁸ Wayne State University Detroit African-American History Project www.daahp.wayne.edu/

African-Americans to Northern cities including Detroit.⁹ There they faced segregated housing and second class employment among other inequalities.

The story of Dr. Ossian Sweet demonstrates the explosive, segregated housing situation in Detroit. When Sweet, a Southern born African-American doctor, moved into an all white neighborhood in 1925 with his wife, they faced an angry mob. One of the nine people present at Dr. Sweet's house shot and killed a white man while defending the Sweet family's right to live there. During the subsequent highly-charged trial, Clarence Darrow in 1925-1926 defended the nine accused with support from the NAACP¹⁰. Sweet and his co-accused were eventually acquitted on all charges but the tension created by segregated housing in Detroit persisted.¹¹

As late as the modern Civil Rights era, it was housing that revealed the ugliest part of Detroit politics.¹² While white Detroiters in the 1960s supported fair employment and sometimes integrated schools, when it came to housing integration, most whites were fiercely opposed. Many African-Americans in Detroit were confined to substandard housing, or 'defined residential ghettos' because of redlining, collusion between real estate agents and homeowners and discrimination in Federal Housing Administration policies.¹³ The 1963 Home Owner's Right Act in Michigan was an attempt to redress this inequality but it fell short of achieving success.

⁹ Thomas J. Sugrue (1996) The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit, Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey.

¹⁰ The NAACP uses the courts to challenge unjust laws and is one of the nation's oldest civil rights organizations.

¹¹ Kevin Boyle (2005) Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age, Holt Paperbacks: Detroit, MI.

¹² Sidney Fine (2000) Expanding the Frontiers of Civil Rights in Michigan 1948-1968, Wayne State University Press: Detroit.

¹³ Fine (2000) p. 113.

In addition to housing segregation, discrimination in the workplace was one of the chief grievances of civil rights activists. In Detroit, with its booming auto industry, this struggle for fair employment was particularly pronounced. Many workers were excluded from obtaining or advancing in their jobs because of their skin color. Even as millions of African-Americans emigrated from the South in search of better jobs, the work they found was frequently the lowest paying and most dangerous. In addition, once they did find work they were often passed over for promotions despite sufficient qualifications.¹⁴ These circumstances hindered the economic success of African-Americans in Detroit for years to come. The role of labor unions in Detroit provides an interesting example of Detroit's Civil Rights Movement experiences.

Labor Unions' role in the Detroit Civil Rights Movement

Compared to the national Civil Rights Movement, the Detroit Civil Rights Movement's leadership reflected strong labor union support, engagement and involvement. The labor unions in Detroit provided a different avenue for civil rights struggles because national Civil Rights leaders did not want the Civil Rights Movement or themselves to be labeled Communists. In Detroit there were several militant Marxist groups working for Civil Rights on the factory floor including the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. By the mid-1960s the struggle for equality was moving from Southern heartland to urban ghettos. In Detroit, working class people in

¹⁴ Sugrue (1996)

general and African-Americans in particular were turning to the concentration of economic power as *the* social problem that demanded political action, protest, and revolt.¹⁵

Legislatively, the modern Civil Rights battle in Michigan and Detroit began with efforts to pass the Fair Employment Practices Act (FEPA). Strongly supported by labor unions, the Michigan Legislature passed the FEPA in 1955. The law made it illegal to refuse to hire or discriminate in the workplace on the basis of race, color, national origin or ancestry. One of the most important features of the law was the creation of the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) which could process complaints of violations of FEPA.¹⁶ Detroit had strong representation on the first Commission with four of the six original commissioners connected to Detroit. Detroit residents also contributed 70% of the claims to FEPC primarily due to its concentration of people of color and their employment in the auto industry.

Although discussed later in this paper, labor leaders like United Auto Workers (UAW) President Walter Reuther were strongly committed to the cause of Civil Rights. Union leaders and members contributed financial resources to the movement including cash to bailout arrested CRM leaders, organizing space for CRM event planning and needed coalitional support.¹⁷

Unions also contributed resources to the Civil Rights Movement that

¹⁵ Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin (1998) Detroit: I Do Mind Dying South End Press Classics: Cambridge Mass Updated Edition.

¹⁶ Fine (2000)

¹⁷ Cheryl Brent Erickson "Dreamers: the Friendship of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Walter Reuther. UAW Allies for Social Justice Series. <www.uaw.org/events/mlk02.html.

significantly assisted its capacity to continue its struggles both in Detroit and nationally.

Union membership was at its peak during the modern Civil Rights Movement and unions were an influential voice in politics and the national consciousness. Unions in Michigan and particularly in Detroit held considerable clout: Their support of civil rights influenced national and local politics including dramatically increasing the numbers of elected African American officials. This helped eventually to secure civil rights through the passage of legislation and the oversight of the courts.

On an individual level, Detroiters, like other Northerners, have played a very important part in the Civil Rights Movement. Rosa Parks, who was later a Detroit, sparked the Civil Rights Movement when she refused to give up her seat to a white passenger in Montgomery, Alabama. Another Detroit's sacrifice is much less well known but equally commendable. After witnessing the events of Bloody Sunday in Selma, Alabama, Viola Liuzzo drove from Detroit to Selma by herself to assist the protesters. On one occasion After the Selma-to-Montgomery March was finished she was shuttling Civil Rights workers back to Selma. Liuzzo was driving one black marcher to Selma when a car full of Klu Klux Klansmen approached. They chased the car for twenty miles eventually shooting and killing Liuzzo.

The city of Detroit has also been host to some notable CRM events. Martin Luther King debuted his "I Have a Dream" speech in Detroit after leading a march of over 200,000 people down Woodward Avenue in 1963. Marches and rallies like this one were very influential in the nation's struggle

for racial justice; when Martin Luther King gave his “I Have a Dream” speech later in Washington D.C., it became one of the most recognizable moments of the CRM.

Another chapter in Detroit’s CRM history was the 1967 riots.¹⁸ Nationally, race riots were becoming somewhat common in mid-1960s with riots in Los Angeles, Chicago, Newark and other cities. On July 23, 1967, Detroit Police raided a blind pig, or an illegal bar, at the intersection of Twelfth St. and Clairmount. While the Police were arresting bar patrons, onlookers became agitated at another perceived example of police brutality and violently drove the police out of the area. Depending on whom you ask, there are many different reasons why African-American Detroiters rioted.¹⁹ People most commonly blame police brutality although there were more deep-rooted, systemic reasons including joblessness, price gouging at inner city stores, and economic subjugation.

The 1967 riot was a catastrophic event in Detroit’s history:

At its peak, [the riot] had raged across fourteen square miles of the city...the human arithmetic was bloody. Detroit police put final riot fatalities at 41. Of those killed, 17 were classified by the police as looters. Two of the dead looters were white. Estimates of the injured ran from 300 to 600, and included 85 Detroit police officers. More than 4,000 residents had been arrested; more than 5,000 were left homeless and filled dozens of emergency refugee centers. Fire had damaged 682 buildings; 412 were total losses. Property losses reached \$45 million.²⁰

¹⁸ Also commonly known as the Rebellion.

¹⁹ Note that other racial groups including many white Detroiters also rioted.

²⁰ Henry Hampton, Steve Fayerm and Sarah Flynn (1990) *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s Through the 1980s*, Bantam Books: New York.

The riot marked an important turning point in Detroit history. At the time of the riots, many people considered Detroit a model in race relations.²¹ The riot revealed deep schisms within the city and scared a number of white Detroiters so much that they moved to the seemingly safer suburbs in a pattern of white flight.

The aftermath of the 1967 riot can be seen to this day in the blocks upon blocks of abandoned homes and vacant lots. Detroit must cope with population shrinkage and loss of subsequent tax revenue, a decaying infrastructure and a lack of resources to address these issues. The economic decline of Detroit and its legacy of activism have created conditions ripe for environmental injustice.

Resource Mobilization Theory and the Civil Rights Movement

To compare the national CRM and the Detroit CRM, I will compare the initiation, composition, organization, strategies and success of both movements using Resource Mobilization Theory where significant.

Initiation

In 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks refused to vacate her bus seat, breaking the law and setting into motion the modern Civil Rights Movement. Her action was not an isolated response to one-time discrimination. From the days of slavery, there had been prolonged mistreatment, segregation and subjugation of African-Americans in American society. The modern Civil Rights Movement sprung into action after Parks'

²¹ Fine (2000)

brave act but there was long term discrimination against African-Americans and resentment among African-Americans as a result. This long pattern of discrimination suggests that the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement was consistent with Resource Mobilization Theory because it was not the result of deteriorating social conditions but rather increased organization and leadership.

While Detroit has a long-time history of resistance and activism against racism, its modern Civil Rights Movement began as a part of the growing National Civil Rights Movement. Even though Detroit's modern CRM was only initiated after the national CRM, Detroit has been dealing with racism and racial tension throughout its long history much like African-Americans in the South. There was no comparable Rosa Parks moment in Detroit but rather a steadily increasing drumbeat for change. Some of the major issues that propelled Civil Rights to the forefront of Detroit politics include segregated and substandard housing, discrimination in the workplace, high unemployment, segregated schools and police brutality.

Composition

The modern Civil Rights Movement was primarily sustained by the efforts of African-American men and women although people of other races also played important roles. The key leadership roles – particularly at the national level – were held by well-educated, professional African-American men who often had ties to the church.²² The masses participating in the

²² Morris (1984).

movement were a mix of lower, middle and upper class African-Americans. The composition of the CRM was consistent with Resource Mobilization Theory because it was made up of people with many social connections to each other, especially the within the church.

Some whites and other ethnic groups participated in the CRM as well. During Freedom Summer, described earlier, white students flocked to the Deep South to register African-Americans to vote. Several white people even gave up their lives in the struggle for Civil Rights, although not nearly as many lives as their African-American peers.²³ African-American and white students both played critical roles in protesting against racial discrimination and challenging Jim Crow laws.

The racial composition of Detroit's CRM largely is similar to national trends for several reasons. Detroit has a majority African-American population due to their emigration from the South in search of better employment opportunities and because of white flight to the suburbs. These demographic conditions contributed to Detroit's majority African-American CRM composition. Similar to the national CRM, Detroit's CRM was also composed of individuals from other ethnic groups such as Viola Liuzzo, the white Detroiters who was killed by the Klu Klux Klan in Alabama while helping Civil Rights workers.

In contrast the class composition of Detroit's CRM was significantly different than the national CRM. The labor leaders in Detroit in general were

²³ The Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama movingly tells the incredible stories of every Civil Rights martyr.

mainly of working class origin as opposed to national CRM leaders who were middle class professionals.

Organization

Some of the Social Movement Organizations (SMO) of the Civil Rights Movement include the NAACP, SCLC, CORE, and SNCC. These groups were all national organizations with a prominent and involved national leadership. The CRM was tightly organized with strong national coordination that emphasized national over local leaders.

The Civil Rights Movement also drew on existing organizations and structures. Black churches were an important mobilizing resource from the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. They provided an invaluable base from which to organize and gather relatively free from white oppression. Strict urban segregation in the South facilitated close relationships between African-Americans and churches, which were “an arena where group interests could be articulated and defended collectively... the organizational hub of black life.”²⁴ Charismatic ministers understood the depth of their members’ suffering and dramatically expressed a more equitable vision for their race’s future.

Labor unions were also an important resource of the Civil Rights Movement. The national CRM leaders sought to distance themselves from Marxist labor organizers because they did not want to be red baited. Despite this conscious distancing, the CRM used the more liberal organized labor

²⁴ Morris (1984) p. 5.

group's resources. Labor leaders, like UAW President Walter Reuther were deeply committed to the cause of Civil Rights. They contributed resources including cash bailouts for arrested CRM leaders, organizing space for CRM event planning and coalitional support.²⁵ Also the Ford Foundation as well as other foundations contributed resources to the Civil Rights Movement.

Again Detroit's CRM organization mostly reflected trends set by the national CR organization. There were many national Civil Rights groups with offices or chapters in Detroit including the NAACP and the Urban League. Like the national CRM, Detroit also used national organizations and leadership to help plan CRM events in Detroit including the March down Woodward Avenue.

Detroit's CRM does break with the organization of the national CRM in several important areas. First, the role of Marxist groups in Detroit was very different than the national CRM because national leaders did not want to be closely associated with organizations influenced by Communist ideology. Second, the 1967 riot had neither national leadership nor local leadership again breaking with the organizational hierarchy of the national Civil Rights Movement. The riot's complete lack of organization is inconsistent with Resource Mobilization Theory because intra-movement organization is very important.

²⁵ Cheryl Brent Erickson "Dreamers: the Friendship of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Walter Reuther. UAW Allies for Social Justice Series. <www.uaw.org/events/mlk02.html.

Strategies

What also marked the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement was the increase in scale and organization of activism and the use of non-violent direct action, which was encouraged by King and influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's *Satyagraha*. King identified non-violent direct action as the way to achieve access to and success in negotiations:

Non-violent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored.²⁶

The organized boycotts, marches and rallies previously described created the tension and crisis sought by King and his allies. Unlike any of the pre-Modern Civil Rights era strategies, mass non-violent direct action brought tremendous change to the African-American community in a way never seen before or since.

Detroit relied on many of the same strategies as the national CRM. Detroiters took action to break down racial barriers in schools, employment, and housing. They used legal solutions including going to trials and protesting unfair hiring practices. They also used illegal solutions including rioting and other violence.

The disruption and violence of Detroit's CRM breaks with Resource Mobilization Theory because Ossian Sweet resorted to violence to defend his house in an all-white neighborhood. The 1967 riots also broke with the National Civil Rights Movement strategy of non-violence.

²⁶ Martin Luther King Jr. Letter From A Birmingham Jail April 16, 1963 in [Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965](#) by Juan Williams (1998). Penguin Books: New York, p. 59.

The labor organizers used strikes and other strategies in very different ways than the National Civil Rights Movement. First, a part of labor was without national involvement because national CRM leaders sought to distance themselves from labor struggles tainted by Marxism. The Civil Rights Movement did receive support from the more liberal unions including money and organizing space. Second, because strikes often times created chaos and work floor violence, they were very inconsistent with the organized, non-violent strategies used by the national CRM.

Evaluating the Success of the Civil Rights Movement

According to Resource Mobilization theorists McCarthy and Zald (1977), success of a social movement is best understood by how many resources were mobilized. This approach is very limited in practice because it does not consider whether the goals of the social movement were achieved. Because of this limitation, the successes and shortcomings of the CRM are discussed independent of Resource Mobilization theory. Because hundreds of thousands of people joined the CRM it would be considered a success by RM theorists.

Excluding Resource Mobilization Theory, there are also other components when considering the success of the Civil Rights Movement. Morris claims that the CRM had three main objectives: achieving political, social and economic equality. There has been political success as reflected in the passage of important legislation enfranchising African-Americans. In terms of social change, Jim Crow laws no longer dominate the Deep South

and while there has not been perfect integration, there are no longer vast public spaces off-limits to African-Americans.²⁷

However, this movement did not achieve economic equality so success was not total. African-American families earn on average a far lower income than their white counterparts. The economic failure of the Civil Rights Movement has had dramatic effects:

The economic exploitation of blacks throughout America is now the most severe and critical problem plaguing the national African-American community. This disparity is in fact more pervasive today than it was before and during the Civil Rights era because it is a national phenomenon.²⁸

The economic hardship of the African-American community has been well documented. The results of economic failure of the Civil Rights Movement can be readily seen in African-American schools and neighborhoods in urban ghettos around the country. The historical economic stratification in America that is still present today has likely set the stage for many current environmental injustices.

Detroit's CRM has achieved both the same success and lack of success as the National Civil Rights Movement albeit in a different manner. As a result of white flight, Detroit's schools and neighborhoods are now predominantly African-American. This does not mean that Detroit is free of racism, but the spatial segregation of the 50s and 60s has shifted. Detroit's economic troubles, particularly among its African-American population, are

²⁷ Morris (1984)

²⁸ Morris (1984) p. 289.

an extreme example of the economic failings of the Civil Rights Movement.²⁹

This economic disparity has helped set the stage for environmental injustices.

²⁹ The economic decline affecting African-Americans in Detroit is also part of a larger regional economic decline related to the auto industry.

CHAPTER 4



**Figure 5: Example of an illegal dumping site in Detroit
Photo by Mary Hennessey, 2007**

The Environmental Justice Movement

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

- Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.,
Letter from a Birmingham Jail, August 1963

Background and Definitions

Environmental Justice is based on the assertion that certain groups in society bear disproportionate environmental and economic burdens. These burdens not only include negative health effects of living in proximity to environmental hazards including exposure to stationary and mobile sources of air pollution, and soil contamination but also certain people's vulnerability to climate change.

Environmental Justice does not have one simple, agreed-upon definition. Two examples are the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) definition and University of Michigan Professor Bunyan Bryant's definition. The EPA states:

Environmental Justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, culture, education, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.³⁰

Bunyan Bryant's definition of Environmental Justice is:

Environmental Justice refers to those cultural norms and values, rules, regulations, behavior, policies, and definitions that support sustainable development, so that people can interact with confidence that their environment is safe, nurturing and productive. EJ is served by when people can realize their highest potential, without experiencing the "isms." EJ is supported by decent paying and safe jobs; quality schools and recreation; decent housing and adequate health-care; demographic decision-making and personal empowerment; and communities free of violence, drugs and poverty. EJ

³⁰ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.
<http://www.epa.gov/compliance/resources/faqs/ej/index.html#faq2>.

communities are where both cultural and biological diversity are respected and highly revered distributive justice prevails.³¹

These definitions describe both ends of the spectrum of the Environmental Justice Movement. While the former is a very bureaucratic, policy-driven definition, the latter is a more holistic-centered approach for creating sustainable EJ communities. While the EPA definition is reactive and focuses on the equal enforcement of environmental laws, Bryant's definition is more proactive; it focuses on building sustainable and just communities.

Although a relatively new field, there have been several key scholarly works that set the stage for much of the Environmental Justice Movement including such groundbreaking studies as Vicki Been's analysis of locally undesirable land uses (LULUs), the United Church of Christ's national study of disparate toxic siting conducted by the Commission for Racial Justice (CRJ), a study conducted by Douglas Anderton of the University of Massachusetts and Bunyan Bryant and Paul Mohai's book, Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards: A Time for Discourse. These analyses explore the causes and explanatory factors of disparate siting or lack thereof.

Been's study asserts that LULUs are not sited in areas with a high proportion of people of color. Rather, Been claims that people of color and low-income people moved to communities after a LULU has been sited there because a result of dropping property values.³² According to Been, market dynamics, not environmental racism, explains why toxic sites have predominately poor and minority residents nearby.

³¹ Bunyan Bryant, Personal Communication, September 5, 2007.

³² Vicki Been (1994) Locally Undesirable Land Uses in Minority Neighborhoods: Disparate Siting or Market Dynamics? *Yale Law Journal* 103 (6) pp. 1383-1422.

The landmark United Church of Christ study (1987) by the Commission for Racial Justice and the 1994 Anderton study contradict each other's findings. The CRJ study finds that race is the most important factor in determining whether an environmental hazard is found within a community. The Anderton study on the other hand, asserts that hazardous sites are no more likely to be located in an area with a high percentage of people of color.

Methodologies

As the movement grew, there developed a plethora of research methodologies that attempted to quantify Environmental Justice. There are two main types of methodologies employed; Mohai and Saha (2006) found that researchers generally employ either the distance-based or unit-hazard coincidence method. According to Mohai, the unit-hazard coincidence method is the most common and least accurate of the two.³³ It involves selecting a geographic unit (usually census tract, zip codes, or counties), identifying whether or not there are toxic LULUs contained within and comparing the demographic data (usually race or income level) of those units with LULUs to those without. This method assumes that those living within the unit are the ones most affected by the toxic site and that may not be the case as people living immediately across a census tract may in fact be more affected than those people living at the far end of the census track. Mohai attributes the contradictory results of the studies noted above to use of unit-hazard coincidence methods. He advocates using distance-based methods (including

³³ Paul Mohai and Robin Saha (2006) Reassessing Racial and Socioeconomic Disparities in Environmental Justice Research. *Demography*: 43 (2) pgs. 383-399.

50% areal containment, boundary intersections, and areal apportionment). This method generally involves drawing a series of radii around a toxic LULU and analyzing the demographics of the areas captured. Using this method, Mohai has found that race is the most accurate predictor of the incidence of toxic sites.

History and Key Moments

An event that took place in Warren County, North Carolina was a catalyst for the national EJM. In 1978, tons of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) was illegally dumped along 241 miles of North Carolina roads. Governor Hunt chose Warren County, a mostly poor, African-American community to dispose of the contaminated soil.³⁴ In 1982, residents joined with Civil Rights activists to protest against the dumping of PCBs in a new landfill that was built specifically for that purpose.³⁵

After a lawsuit by the NAACP failed to prevent construction, the activists mobilized. The residents and activists organized large, non-violent demonstrations in an attempt to block the PCBs from entering their community. Leaders of the United Church of Christ and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference as well as Congressional Representative Walter Fauntroy were arrested. The protests ultimately failed to block the dumping of PCB but they did spark the EJM.

³⁴ General Accounting Office (1983) *Siting of Hazardous Waste Landfills and Their Correlation with Racial and Economic Status of Surrounding Communities*. Washington, D.C.

³⁵ Robert D. Bullard (1993) *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*. South End Press: Boston, MA.

Following Representative Fauntroy's return to Washington D.C., he requested that the General Accounting Office (GAO) study EPA Region 4 to ascertain if landfills were being disproportionately built in black areas. The GAO study (1983) found that three of the four landfills in EPA Region IV were located in areas where the majority of the population was African-American. The study also found that "at least 26% of the population in all four communities have incomes below the poverty level and most of this population is African-American"³⁶

This regional confirmation of racial inequality in landfill siting spurred further investigation. The United Church of Christ's (UCC) Commission for Racial Justice issued a report in 1987 entitled *Toxic Waste and Race in the United States*. This study found that race, more so than socioeconomic status, was the most important predictor of toxic sites' locations. The release of this study was a key moment in the EJM as it inspired many follow-up studies. The UCC's 1994 follow-up study found that the significance of race increased as the number of people of color living near toxic sites increased as well as the percentages of non-white people living around toxic sites.

From its earliest days, Environmental Justice activists have been involved in taking the traditional environmental movement to task for what they perceive as its complicity in creating urban "environmental sacrifice" zones and racist hiring practices.³⁷ On March 15, 1990 the Louisiana's Gulf Coast Tenant Leadership Development Project and the Southwest Organizing

³⁶ GAO (1983), page 3.

³⁷ Kathryn Savoie, Personal Communication, June 16, 2007.

Project sent a letter to the so-called Big 10 environmental organizations.³⁸ In this letter, they criticized the organizations on three points; that they had poor minority representation in their membership and organization personnel, that some were selling out by accepting funds from groups polluting poor neighborhoods and that the Big 10 environmental groups had sold out EJ communities to preserve the wilderness.³⁹

The earliest contribution of academics was the Michigan Conference. The first national gathering of Environmental Justice Scholar-Activists was held at the University of Michigan School of Natural Resources and the Environment in 1990: a group of predominantly people of color scholars gathered to discuss what was to become the emerging environmental justice movement. It was also known as the conference on Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards. Approximately 40 people attended and out of that meeting were three main outcomes. First they produced a book entitled *Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards: A Time for Discourse*. Second they organized a series of meetings with EPA and other officials to discuss their agencies' future involvement in EJ issues.⁴⁰ Lastly, they decided to organize a landmark national conference.

The First National People of Color Environmental Justice Summit was held in Washington D.C. in October 2001. The United Church of Christ

³⁸ The 'Big 10' environmental groups are the Sierra Club, Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, National Parks and Conservation Association, Izzy Walton League, Friends of the Earth, Wilderness Society, National Audubon Society, National Resource Defense Council, Environmental Defense Fund, and National Wildlife Federation.

³⁹ James P. Lester, David W. Allen and Kelly M. Hill (2001) Environmental Injustice in the United States: Myths and Realities. Westview Press: Boulder, CO.

⁴⁰ Bunyan Bryant (2nd Ed.) Environmental Advocacy: Working for Environmental and Economic Justice.

continued its presence in the EJM by being the major sponsor of the Summit, led by the Reverend Ben Chavis. Over 500 people attended from culturally diverse backgrounds including African-Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and Native Americans. The Summit emphasized staying decentralized and egalitarian. They adopted the slogan “We Speak for Ourselves.” They decided to develop regional rather than national leadership and to return to their communities to organize for Environmental Justice. One of the most important outcomes of the Summit was the adoption of the seventeen “Principles of Environmental Justice.”⁴¹ These principles emphasized the importance of protecting the health of their communities while achieving “political, economic, and cultural liberation.” The Summit brought together EJ activists from around the country and helped propel EJ onto the national stage as never before.

By design, the post-Summit history of the Environmental Justice Movement was less in the national public eye. Activists returned to their communities and continued or began fighting for environmental quality. The struggles ranged from urban battles over incinerators to struggles on the reservation regarding nuclear exposure and groundwater contamination to the right for economic prospects in all communities. Academics and activists continued meeting with high-level government officials and producing more academic studies confirming the existence of environmental disparities within

⁴¹ See Appendix A.

people of color and low-income neighborhoods versus more affluent neighborhoods.⁴²

After continued meetings with scholar-activists, President Bill Clinton issued Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice in 1994. In this Order, the term “Environmental Justice” was adopted and referred to “disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects...on minority and low-income populations.”⁴³ The Executive Order expanded previous EPA work regarding Environmental Equity by including dimensions of public participation and enforcement. In addition, the Executive Order was more goal-oriented than earlier government work. By releasing an Executive Order, President Clinton raised national awareness and gave more legitimacy to the emerging Environmental Justice Movement. While not a legislative action similar to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 12898 was a key moment for the Environmental Justice movement.

The work of scholar-activists continued for the rest of the 1990s and a second national EJ Summit was convened in 2003. Identity politics and other tensions permeated the conference but participants were able to produce a noteworthy document known as the “Principles of Working Together.”⁴⁴ The Principles are an important resource for diverse groups of people attempting

⁴² See studies by Benjamin A. Goldman and Laura Fitton (1994) *Toxic Waste and Race Revisited* and by Paul Mohai and Bunyan Bryant including *Environmental Injustice: Weighing Race and Class as Factors in the Distribution of Environmental Hazards in University of Colorado Law Review* pp. 925-27 (1992) and *Environmental Racism: Reviewing the Evidence in Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards: A Time for Discourse* (1992) pp. 165-169.

⁴³ Robert R. Kuehn (2000) *Articles: A Taxonomy of Environmental Justice Environmental Law Reporter*.

⁴⁴ Bunyan Bryant, Personal Communication, September 10, 2007.

to form coalitions and to use in critical meetings to ensure respect and a framework for working out differences.^{45 46}

See the following “Environmental Justice Timeline” for a more complete record of the key events of the Environmental Justice Movement.

⁴⁵ See Appendix B for the Principles of Working Together.

⁴⁶ The Principles of Working Together have been used with great success at least one meeting I have attended.

Environmental Justice Timeline

Figure 6: Timeline created by Mary Hennessey, 2008

1964, 1965, 1968. Passage of Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act; Assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. on a hotel balcony in Memphis Tennessee. Considered end of modern Civil Rights Movement. Many CRM activists join other social movements like the Peace Movement, the Women's Movement, and the Environmental Movement.

1976: United Auto Workers Conference "Working for Environmental and Economic Justice" Organized by University of Michigan School of Natural Resources Environmental Advocacy graduates in Black Lake.

1982: Warren County Incident: Governor Hunt orders 31,000 gallons of PCB waste to be dumped in Sheffield Township, Warren County, North Carolina, an area that is 75% African-American. Many former civil rights protesters use non-violent direct action to stop the dumping. Over 500 are arrested including Congressman Walter Fauntroy.

1983: General Accounting Office study confirms that three out of four toxic landfills in EPA Region 4 are located in predominantly African-American areas.

1987: Landmark United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice report "Toxic Waste and Race in the United States" issued. A nationwide study, it found race to be most reliable factor for environmental pollution in a community.

1990: Letter to the Big 10 Environmental Groups from EJ activists.

1990: Michigan Conference. University of Michigan School of Natural Resources conference devoted to environmental justice. Outcomes, publication of a book named *Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards* and several high level meetings on Environmental Justice.

1991: First People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held in Washington, D.C.
Produced the 17 "Principles of Environmental Justice".

1994: Conference entitled Health Research and Needs to Ensure Environmental Justice. Over 1,000 participants.

1994: President Clinton issued Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice.

1997: President Clinton issued Executive Order 13045 on Protecting Children from Environmental Health and Safety Risks.

2003: Environmental Justice Summit. Produced "Principles of Working Together."

CHAPTER 5



Figure 7: Municipal Incinerator
Photo by Mary Hennessey, 2008

Detroit Environmental Justice Movement

“We came up with the name, Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice because we wanted to make it clear we weren’t victims, we weren’t put upon, that we had information and we had access to information and the tools we could address these issues ... no one else’s vision will be imposed on us, or no longer imposed on us.”

- Donele Wilkins, Executive Director of Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice

Detroit Environmental Justice Movement

The Environmental Justice Movement in Detroit is one of the most vibrant and intriguing movements today. There are a myriad of activists, governmental officials, and communities struggling to solve problems ranging from motor vehicle pollution, illegal dumping, Brownfield identification and remediation, and incinerator pollution.

Detroit is 81% African-American⁴⁷ and has been in serious economic decline for the last half-century. The decline has made Detroit susceptible for economic and environmental injustice. According to the twenty-year follow-up report to the 1987 United Church of Christ's report, Detroit has one of the greatest percentages of people of color hosting environmental hazards compared to non-host communities.⁴⁸

There are numerous injustices across the city such as air pollution, water privatization, and lead poisoning and numerous groups and individuals who are fighting them. This section details an events-based EJ history of the Detroit area followed by a brief profiling of some of the major environmental justice issues in Detroit. These issues were partially identified by a series of interviews with key environmental justice leaders and partially by the author's own observations. Lastly I will examine an environmental justice success story: the shutting down of the Henry Ford Hospital Medical Waste Incinerator on Detroit's Westside.

⁴⁷ South East Michigan Council of Governments Community Profile. Available at <http://www.semcog.org/cgi-bin/comprof/profiles.cfm>

⁴⁸ Robert D. Bullard, Paul Mohai, Robin Saha, and Beverly Wright (2007) Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty: A Report Prepared for the United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries.

Like its Civil Rights history, Detroit has a rich Environmental Justice history. In part this history reflects the number of significant environmental justice conferences that have occurred in Detroit. In 1979, the Sierra Club, the Urban League, and the Urban Environmental Conference held “City Care: A Conference on the Urban Environment” in Detroit.⁴⁹ Another early conference where the UAW played a key organizing role was the “Working for Economic and Environmental Justice and Jobs Conference.” In 1997, the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) meeting was held in Detroit.

Following the First People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991, delegates from Detroit began making plans for creating Environmental Justice in their community. In 1994, they founded ‘Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice’ in order to give a grassroots voice to propel decision-makers to make Environmental Justice an issue of importance.⁵⁰

State-wide efforts for Environmental Justice started in Detroit. This effort focused on securing Governor Jennifer Granholm’s support for an Executive Directive that would make EJ a statewide priority in state agencies and give significantly more legitimacy to current Environmental Justice efforts. In November 2007, Governor Granholm signed the Directive; its effects on state policy are still undetermined but it is undoubtedly a victory for Environmental Justice activists.

⁴⁹ Kathryn Savoie “Environmental Justice: Looking Back, Moving Forward” Prepared for the South East Michigan Tenth Anniversary Environmental Justice Celebration.

⁵⁰ Bullard et al (2007).

Because the EJM is so decentralized, it seems to me that Detroit's EJM is best understood by the injustices which activists choose to fight against. I have described representative EJ struggles identified by EJ activists interviewed for this project.⁵¹ The following section will describe three EJ struggles.

Detroit Municipal Incinerator

When the Municipal Incinerator first opened, it was the largest incinerator in the country and the largest incinerator of its kind in the world.⁵² The construction of the Detroit Incinerator in 1986 met with immense protests. The neighboring Canadian province of Ontario sued to prevent its construction. Greenpeace activists as well as many local groups also protested against its construction. Yet Furuseth and O'Callaghan (1991) found that 2/3rds of residents surveyed did not know an incinerator was being built in that area and that many residents were not opposed to the initial construction of an incinerator.⁵³ Many Detroiters supported efforts by Detroit Mayor Coleman Young to create local employment through an incinerator.⁵⁴

The site chosen for the incinerator, at the junction of I-94 and I-75, is located within a poor, mostly African-American neighborhood that was already home to many environmental and health hazards.⁵⁵ In 1989, the

⁵¹ Kathryn Savoie of ACCESS and Donele Wilkins of Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice

⁵² William E. Schmidt (1990) Trying to Solve the Side Effects of Converting Trash to Energy New York Times May 27, 1990.

⁵³ OJ Furuseth and J. O'Callaghan (1991) Community Response to a municipal waste incinerator: NIMBY or neighbor? Landscape and Urban Planning Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 163-171.

⁵⁴ Bunyan Bryant Personal Communication, September 5, 2007.

⁵⁵ Mary Beth Doyle and Brad van Guilder. (2002) For A Clean and Safe Detroit: Close the Country's Largest Incinerator. From the Ground Up March 2002 Issue.

incinerator started burning Detroit's trash. The 1991 budget crisis forced the city to sell the incinerator to Phillip Morris. Despite this privatization, the City of Detroit still pays for servicing and upkeep in return for Phillip Morris running the operations of the incinerator. The quasi-public group Greater Detroit Resource Recovery Authority (GDRRA) is responsible for the operation of the incinerator. According to a 2002 *Metrotimes* article, Detroiters have paid \$1 billion for the construction, maintenance, and operation of the incinerator.⁵⁶

In addition to the incinerator's financial costs, the health effects are considerable. According to the publicly-available incinerator records, most of the particulate emissions from the incinerator are within legal air quality limits. However, the incinerator has consistently exceeded the limit for releasing carbon monoxide. The incinerator also emits lots of nitrogen oxide, and releases known carcinogens, or cancer causing agents, by burning plastics.⁵⁷ Only one year after its opening, state regulators shut the incinerator down because its mercury emissions were much higher than permitted.⁵⁸ A 2002 study stated that residents living near an incinerator may have adverse health conditions such as heart disease, cancer, increased allergies, and immune deficiencies, among other things. The neighborhoods surrounding the municipal incinerator have "one of the highest rates of elevated blood lead levels in the city."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ L. Collins, "Ill Wind" *Metrotimes*, March 20, 2002.

⁵⁷ Doyle et al (2002)

⁵⁸ Schmidt (1990)

⁵⁹ Doyle et al (2002) p. 1.

The controversy around the incinerator has increased in scope and intensity. Environmental, Environmental Justice groups and Detroit City Councilwoman Joann Watson have been exploring possible alternatives to the municipal incinerator as part of the Detroit City Council Recycling/Environmental Task Force. In April 2008 Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick will present his budget to the City Council.⁶⁰ The Taskforce is hoping that next year's budget will not include funding to GDRRA. The City Council has until June 30th to inform GDRRA of this decision. If the city does not terminate its contract with GDRRA by that time, Detroit may be locked into costly incineration for many years to come.⁶¹

⁶⁰ The recent text message scandal has left other city problems in the background. MetroTimes article "Just Go: Why the Mayor Should Step Down" February 27-March 4 included a statement to this effect by Councilmember Joann Watson "I keep trying to get attention focused on these very important issues – what to do with the waste incinerator, the issue of predatory lending and home foreclosures, regional transportation – but I can't get publicity for these things." p. 15.

⁶¹ Recycling/Environmental Taskforce Meeting, January 17, 2008.

City of Highland Park Water Shut-offs

The water crisis in Highland Park is another ongoing Environmental Justice crisis. In Highland Park, a city contained within the City of Detroit, residents have been undergoing a struggle revolving around the availability of water since 2002. The documentary called ‘The Water Front’ asks, “What if you lived by the largest body of fresh water in the world but could no longer afford to use it?”⁶²

Highland Park, the birthplace of Henry Ford’s Model T car, revolutionized the world of business and industry. With the decline in the auto industry, especially the relocation of Chrysler to Auburn Hills, Highland Park lost much of its population. Now a city of 16,000 people, Highland Park residents, like many people around the world, have struggled to protect their access to potable water. In 2002, Highland Park was struggling to pay its bills and to deliver city services. The city (via the state) hired consultants to help them balance their budget. The consultants viewed the water treatment plant, developed by Ford, as the greatest asset of the city and recommended using water bills to bring in more revenue.

The results were disastrous. Residents received water bills as large as \$10,000. Water shut-offs became very common. As houses had their water shut-off, parents feared that they could have their children taken away from them since their houses were technically unfit for children. Residents were understandably outraged. Activists Maureen Taylor, Marion Kramer and

⁶² TheWaterFrontMovie.org

Valerie Johnson of the Michigan Welfare Rights Organization and the Highland Park Human Rights Coalition spearheaded the movement to end the quasi-privatization of Highland Park's water. They worked to expose the state appointed city manager's exploitation of the city's water supply and to prevent a private takeover of Highland Parks Water resources. They created their own water payment plan, which includes no shut-offs and reasonable payments although the plan was not implemented as of this date by the city. Water is not traditionally treated as a commodity, as in Highland Park, and clients are normally charged only for delivery costs.

Activists did achieve partial success through mobilizing residents through protests and attendance at City Council meetings and by helping to elect sympathetic City Council members. Eventually, the consultants were dismissed and the city is now being managed by a local financier. However, the water issue remains precarious, with companies now looking to buy and bottle Highland Park water. Unfortunately this water situation is not unique to Highland Park with many Detroit residents also having their water shut-off.

The whole situation was captured in a compelling documentary, The Water Front, by Canadian filmmaker Liz Miller.

The Henry Ford Hospital Medical Waste Incinerator

The final Detroit Environmental Justice example is unique among the three examples in that it fully achieved its goal. There are other successful EJ struggles in Detroit including the closing of the Hamtramck Incinerator and slowing down the DIFT terminal construction. As the number of not-yet successful EJ struggles outweighs the number of successful EJ stories, the Henry Ford Medical Waste Incinerator is a representative and important example of a successful EJ struggle.

The Henry Ford Hospital System (HFHS) provides critical health services to residents of Southeast Michigan. Yet until 2001, the Hospital was using an on-site medical waste incinerator that many people claim was harming the health of the neighboring residents. From 1996 until the eventual closure of the incinerator in 2001, a sustained coalition formed to shut down the Henry Ford Medical Waste Incinerator.

The impacted Westside Detroit neighborhood is predominantly African-American.⁶³ Neighbors believed that the waste being burnt in the incinerator was making them ill; causing asthma and headaches.^{64 65 66} The HFHS had already shut down its suburban hospital's on-site medical waste

⁶³ South East Michigan Council of Governments Cluster 6 Community Profile. Available at <http://www.semcog.org/cgi-bin/comprof/profiles.cfm>

⁶⁴ Daniel Mears (2000) "Henry Ford Hospital annually incinerates 6 million pounds of waste, which includes diseased organs and amputated limbs, as well as medical supplies stained with body fluids: Henry Ford to shut down incinerator: Hospital responding to concerns of foul smells, health issues" The Detroit News, February 23, 2000 Wednesday Final Edition, Pg. 3S.

⁶⁵ Rhonda Bates-Rudd (2000) "Hospital to close incinerator after neighbors complain; Henry Ford to phase out medical waste disposal unit despite upgrade" The Detroit News, March 29, 2000 Wednesday METRO; Pg. 6C.

⁶⁶ The Detroit News (1999) "Incinerator worries neighbors: Ford Hospital says medical waste-burner isn't to blame for nausea, headaches." The Detroit News, July 26, 1999 METRO; Pg. 1C.

incinerators. This incited allegations of environmental racism to emerge as HFHS's only operating medical-waste incinerator was in the mostly African-American city of Detroit.⁶⁷

Concerned by serious health accusations, community and environmental justice activists mobilized. The coalition included Virginia Park Citizens District Council, Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice, South East Michigan Group of the Sierra Club, the Ann Arbor Ecology Center, the Sugar Law Center for Economic and Social Justice, the National Wildlife Federation, the Michigan Chapter of the American Lung Association, Hamtramck Environmental Action Team, and Clean Air Please of Madison Heights.⁶⁸ Their protest strategies included public displays and scientific certitude about the health implications of incineration. These strategies highlighted the intellectual disconnect between a hospital serving its patients and hurting neighboring residents.

The Henry Ford Hospital opened on West Grand Boulevard in 1915 in an "affluent neighborhood" and has operated the medical waste incinerator since then.⁶⁹ In 1996, neighbors began complaining that the smoke from the incinerator was making them ill. In the same year, Wayne County cited the hospital after the incinerator emitted more smoke than allowed.⁷⁰ The incinerator closed down for repairs and reopened later in 1996. This was

⁶⁷ Dixon, Jennifer "Residents Want Hospitals to Shut Detroit Incinerator Burning Medical Waste Hazardous, Group Says." *Detroit Free Press* January 10, 2000. Metro Final Edition.

⁶⁸ Bunyan Bryant (2003) *Environmental Advocacy: Working for Economic and Environmental Justice* Second Edition.

⁶⁹ Dixon (2000).

⁷⁰ David Josar (1999b) "Groups: close waste incinerator: Henry Ford Hospital Burner is called threat to health" *The Detroit News* September 22, 1999 pg. 1C.

during the early days of the struggle against the HFHS and involved mostly neighborhood residents.

In late 1998 Jewel Ware, a Wayne County Commissioner representing the neighborhoods around the hospital, joined the neighbors in their protests. She began holding town hall meetings with them and other coalition groups mentioned above. Together the coalition organized a collective, public strategy to make the HFHS respond to the neighbors concerns about the incinerator.⁷¹ Their methods included displaying lawn signs and newspaper advertisements drawing attention to the issue.

In response to public complaints about the odors and smoke emitted from the incinerator, the HFHS closed the incinerator for six months and spent \$2.1 million dollars on repairs.⁷² The hospital insisted that the repairs would make the emissions from the incinerator at or below EPA regulations. However following the incinerator upgrade, residents still complained of nausea, headaches, and other health problems they attributed in part to the incinerator.⁷³ The community fears were validated after the incinerator's emissions were found to contain illegal quantities of cadmium. The hospital insisted the cadmium levels were caused by improper rechargeable battery disposal and subsequent incineration and promised to prevent that from

⁷¹ Bates-Rudd (2000).

⁷² Rhonda Bates-Rudd (1999) "Hospital claims air cleaner: Henry Ford Invested \$2 million on pollution controls to clean toxins" *The Detroit News* December 15, 1999 8S.

⁷³ David Josar (1999a) "Incinerator worries neighbors: Ford Hospital says medical waste-burner isn't to blame for nausea, headaches." *The Detroit News*, July 26, 1999 METRO; Pg. 1C.

happening again. HFHS continued to claim the hospital was completely safe.⁷⁴

In September 1999 Ware and another Wayne County Commissioner Edna Bell introduced a resolution calling for the HFHS to stop burning all but a small portion of its medical waste. A group of local ministers, as well as a myriad of local environmental justice activists, backed the effort. Through the end of 2000, residents, activists, public officials, clergy, community, and environmental groups continued to press the HFHS to discontinue using the incinerator. They targeted the public at large and hospital board members.⁷⁵

In February 2000 their efforts paid off. In a private meeting with approximately 15 neighbors and activists, the HFHS announced they would close the incinerator. The meeting appeared somewhat impromptu as the hospital had not yet decided when it would stop using the incinerator or what methods it would use to dispose of its medical waste. Hospital officials stressed that the emissions were safe but it would close the medical waste incinerator anyway.

In a later announcement, a hospital spokeswoman said that the voice of the community had led them to shut down the incinerator:

Our reason for doing this is very straightforward. We value our relationship and the reputation we have in this community. We've listened to our neighbors concerns and we want to be good corporate citizens.⁷⁶

This announcement by the hospital confirmed earlier statements by neighborhood residents. In separate articles, two residents expressed a nearly

⁷⁴ Josar (1999b).

⁷⁵ Josar (1999a)

⁷⁶ Bates-Rudd (2000).

identical sentiment. They believed the hospital was a good neighbor and that it would not purposefully harm them. One neighbor said “I believe if there was a problem they would correct it.”⁷⁷ They believed that their protests were not in vain and that the hospital would do the right thing, a sentiment not usually found in environmental justice struggles.

The hospital was under pressure to close the incinerator from external sources as well as local ones. Other Henry Ford Hospitals had shut down their medical waste incinerators in Metropolitan Detroit. By shutting down their final medical waste incinerator, the HFHS followed the regional and national trend of ceasing medical incineration in favor of recycling and sterilization. Immediately before the HFHS closed its last medical waste incinerator the nearby University of Michigan Hospitals closed its incinerators.⁷⁸

On the opposite side of the fence, there were also many reasons to continue incineration. Less than a year before the hospital announced they were closing the incinerator, they spent over \$2 million upgrading it. Also, there was tremendous pressure to decrease the quantity of medical waste. In 1998 the American Hospital Association agreed to cut hospital waste in half by 2012.⁷⁹ Ultimately these reasons were not enough to keep the incinerator in operation.

The HFHS medical waste incinerator case-study demonstrates the potential of coordinated public actions against environmental injustices.

⁷⁷ Josar (1999a)

⁷⁸ Dixon (2000)

⁷⁹ Patricia Ansett (2001) “State Hospitals Aim to Cut Pollution UM Tries New System; Ford to Shut Incinerator” Detroit Free Press June 14, 2001 Metro Final Edition Pg. 1B.

Without legislation or judicial action a very large hospital system was convinced to close a pollution source by a relatively small group of passionate, committed community members. This is not usually the case in environmental justice struggles and may serve as a useful model for future advocacy.

Resource Mobilization and the Environmental Justice

Movement

To compare the national EJM with the Detroit EJM I will use Resource Mobilization as the framework to compare the two movements in the areas of initiation, composition, organization, strategies and success.

Initiation

As described in the history of key events, the National EJM was sparked by protests against toxic dumping in a predominately African-American community in Warren County, North Carolina in 1982. This event was certainly not the first case of environmental hazards being sited in a largely people of color community, but like Rosa Parks in Montgomery, it set into motion a chain of events that would become known as the Environmental Justice Movement.

Two Detroit activists interviewed for my research noted the First People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit as the spark for the Detroit EJM. Both activists described how attending the Summit inspired them to return home and begin working on Environmental Justice in Detroit.⁸⁰ The reason for the initiation of the various EJ struggles in Detroit varies but is similar to the initiation of the national EJM. It is sometimes a reaction when faced with a new injustice such as water shut-offs or toxic dumping. Sometimes activists initiate or expand EJ struggles because there is more leadership and organizational support available such as when Wayne County

⁸⁰ Donele Wilkins of Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice and Kathryn Savoie of ACCESS.

Commissioner Ware joined the fight to shut down the Henry Ford Medical Waste Incinerator. EJ workers will also initiate EJM activity partially because there is a more complete understanding of the health effects of environmental hazards, as was the case with the Municipal Incinerator and the Henry Ford Hospital Medical Waste Incinerator.

Composition

The composition of the Environmental Justice Movement is very racially diverse. African-American, Asian-American, Native American, Latino-American and other groups have been at the forefront of the environmental justice movement. The EJM seeks to emphasize its collective struggle against environmental imperialism. From the earliest texts of the movement, the “Principles of Environmental Justice” called on:

all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities... to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves... and to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples” (Emphasis added)⁸¹.

This excerpt demonstrates the multicultural yet inclusive composition of the EJM. It recognizes cultural sensitively, the need for autonomy of people of color, and the need for people of color to join the EJM to take back their communities and protect them against environmental harm.

⁸¹ Preamble of the Principles of Environmental Justice, Appendix A.

At the Second People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 2002, the multicultural dimension of the EJM was further developed. In the *Principles of Working Together*, they go further in embracing diversity:

affirmation of the value in diversity and the rejection of any form of racism, discrimination and oppression. To support each other completely, we must learn about our different cultural and political histories so that we can completely support each other in our movement inclusive of ages, classes, immigrants, indigenous peoples, undocumented workers, farm workers, genders, sexual orientations, and education differenced.⁸²

The EJM affirms that as a group it rejects discrimination in any form. In principle, the EJM is working towards becoming an inclusive social, economic movement that is sensitive to cultural diversity.

The racial composition of the EJM in Detroit reflects the multicultural trends at the national level. Activists of many diverse backgrounds in Detroit work towards local solutions to EJ problems. As a predominantly African-American city Detroit has many people of color to draw on both to lead and participate in the EJM. As demonstrated by the EJ examples discussed above, EJM members also include residents, environmentalists, environmental justice workers, scholar-activists and governmental representatives.

Organization

From the beginning the Environmental Justice Movement has been very decentralized.⁸³ According to the “*Principles of Working Together*”, the EJM “demand[s] that people from grassroots organizations should lead the

⁸² *Principles of Working Together*, Appendix B. Addressing Differences.

⁸³ John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald (1977) Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory in *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 82, No. 6. May, 1977, pp. 1212-1241.

environmental justice movement.” At the First People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit delegates adopted the phrase “we speak for ourselves”—a phrase that is still used today.⁸⁴

The EJM in Detroit again largely reflects national trends. While many Detroit EJ activists are active in national EJ affairs, their work in Detroit appears to be, for the most part, very locally-based. There is no national EJ group directing or coordinating the work of Detroit groups relative to their peers around the country. The work is very decentralized, with organizers on the ground working closely with others in the EJM. The local activists and groups which were active in the previous EJ examples reflect the decentralized nature of the EJM in Detroit. Their organization reflects national trends because there are coalitions among various members including residents, activists, environmentalists, environmental justice workers, academic-activists and governmental representatives.

Strategies

Grassroots and community-based activism dominates the strategies of the EJM. The first Core Value principle of the “Principles of Working Together” is:

The Principles of Working Together commit us to working from the ground up, beginning with all grassroots workers, organizers and activists. We do not want to forget the struggle of the grassroots workers. This begins with all grassroots workers, organizers and activists.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Bunyan Bryant and Elaine Hockman (2005) A Brief Comparison of the Civil Rights Movement and the Environmental Justice Movement in Power, Justice, and the Environment: A Critical Appraisal of the Environmental Justice Movement. David Naguib Pellow and Robert J. Brulle (eds.) MIT Press: Cambridge, MA.

⁸⁵ See Appendix B, The Principles of Working Together.

Grassroots workers are educated, empowered, and the first line of defense for Environmental Justice communities.⁸⁶ This education does not extend to the principles and practices of nonviolence as within the CRM.

Coalitions between grassroots workers and academia are another characteristic strategy of the EJM. Academic research has not only provided a scientific basis for activists' claims, but it has also provided credibility to the EJM.⁸⁷ Following the 1990 Michigan Conference on Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards, scholar-activists won key meetings with high level government officials to express their concerns about the environmental condition of people of color communities and to advocate for additional research dollars. These meetings resulted in the successful passage of Executive Order 12898.

The strategies of Detroit's EJM are similar to the national EJM because they both rely on grassroots work, scholar-activist collaborations, and pressure on local governments. Detroit's EJ groups used many grassroots strategies in the previously described examples including demonstrations, town hall-style meetings, and public campaigns. Academics who identify as activists have also been active in Detroit's EJM. This academic-activist collaboration with Detroit's EJM includes ongoing attempts to shut down the Municipal Incinerator or to make it safer. Similar to the national EJM, Detroit

⁸⁶ Robert D. Bullard and Glenn S. Johnson (2000) Environmental Justice: Grassroots Activism and Its Impact on Public Policy Decision Making. *Journal of Social Issues*. 56(3) pp. 555-578.

⁸⁷ Bullard and Johnson (2000)

EJ workers put pressure on Governor Jennifer Granholm to sign the Executive Directive on Environmental Justice.

Evaluating the Success of the EJM

There are many different definitions of success within the EJM and because the EJM is so decentralized one does not often hear about local successes. In one regard, the EJM has not yet had specific legislative success because there has not been signed Congressional legislation on Environmental Justice although bills have been introduced and there have been legislative hearings concerning Environmental Justice.⁸⁸ In another regard, there have been few court victories for EJ activists in part because there are restrictions on the courts' power to redress environmental injustices. The Supreme Court ruled that litigants must show discriminatory intent in environmental justice cases.⁸⁹ This has proved a nearly insurmountable task as there is rarely legal evidence proving planned discrimination. To date, Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice has been the most positive national governmental action on Environmental Justice.

The Environmental Justice Movement has achieved some important successes. Across the country there have been many on the ground successes and Environmental Justice legislation at the state level. There are many unknown stories because the EJ struggles are coordinated mostly at the local levels. On the ground EJ successes include slowing down the construction of

⁸⁸ James Wright (2007) "U.S. House hearing targets environmental racism" *The Michigan Citizen* October 21-October, 27 2007, pg. A11.

⁸⁹R. Gregory Roberts (1999) Environmental Justice and Community Empowerment: Learning from the Civil Rights Movement. *American University Law Review* Vol. 48.

the DIFT project in Southwest Detroit, the Shintech Corporation building a smaller than originally planned chemical plant in Cancer Alley in Louisiana and the passage of the Radiation Exposure and Compensation Act (RECA) benefiting Native American residents of the Four Corners region in the Southwest United States.⁹⁰

There is also state legislation pending in Arizona, Connecticut and New York that would address Environmental Justice and offer some relief for EJ activists and advocates in those states.⁹¹

Similar to the national EJM, Detroit's EJM has had some successes at the state and city level. The EJM in Detroit successfully closed the Henry Ford Medical Waste Incinerator after a protracted battle. Governor Granholm also recently signed an Executive Directive on Environmental Justice although as noted earlier, it is unlikely this Directive will be anything but a symbolic victory. As is the case at the national level the number of ongoing struggles for Environmental Justice in Detroit vastly outweigh the victories.

RM theorists would likely consider the national and Detroit EJM both primarily unsuccessful social movements since thus far there are not many resources mobilized. While there is a committed group of EJ activists, the number is very small relative to social movements such as the CRM. However, under the RM success definition, one can mobilize many resources, but fail to accomplish anything and still be considered a success. As in the

⁹⁰ For more information on these and many other successful and ongoing EJ struggles visit the School of Natural Resources Environmental Justice Case Studies resource page at <http://www.umich.edu/%7Esnre492/cases.html>

⁹¹ To research pending and active Environmental Justice legislation use the National Conference of State Legislatures website site at www.ncsl.org/programs/enviro/envJustice.cfm

discussion of the CRM, the RM theory definition of success is extremely limited and should not imply that the EJM has not achieved other measures of success since it has accomplished local victories throughout the country and in Detroit.

CHAPTER 6



Figure 8: Henry Ford Hospital
Photo by Mary Hennessey, 2008

Comparing the Civil Rights Movement with the Environmental Justice Movement

*"I started with this idea in my head, 'there's two things I've got a right to...
death or liberty'"*

-Harriet Tubman

Comparing the Civil Rights Movement with the Environmental Justice Movement

The Environmental Justice Movement is not considered to be a part of the Environmental Movement. While the Environmental Movement generally concentrates on preservation and conservation of wilderness areas, natural habitats and nonhuman species, the Environmental Justice Movement focuses on a more inclusive vision of justice that includes social, racial, economic and environmental concerns. In this way, the goals of the EJM are perhaps more consistent with those of the Civil Rights Movement (CRM).

Because EJM lacks historical research and analysis this makes the comparison between these two movements difficult. This paper draws on the “Principles of Environmental Justice” and the “Principles of Working Together,”⁹² two key documents adopted at the First and Second People of Color Environmental Leadership Summits, respectively. Resource Mobilization Theory – when relevant – is used as a framework of comparison. Anecdotal evidence from research on the CRM and the EJM in the city of Detroit has also been utilized where appropriate.

Initiation

The CRM and the EJM were both initiated in a similar manner. Although the pre-CRM history is better understood than the pre-EJM history both movements were sparked after long-standing oppression and poor social conditions.

⁹² See appendices A and B.

Composition

The leadership and much of the mass base of the CRM was primarily African American. The CRM strived to break down segregation and achieve equality for African-Americans. This focus is probably the reason why African-Americans made up the majority of the movement.

The Environmental Justice Movement, on the other hand, is more racially diverse by design and by necessity, perhaps, because the EJM strives to achieve environmental justice for *all* historically oppressed groups. The First People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit had representatives from a variety of racially diverse groups, namely African-American, Latino-American, Asian-American and Native American.

Although students have played a relatively less prominent role in the EJM than the CRM, the EJM is trying to draw students and young people into the fold.

Composition: The Role of Women

In the Civil Rights Movement, women contributed much to the ground-level organizing and leadership. They also initiated some of the most important events. Despite their hard work, women were excluded from national leadership even when they were the most qualified. During the famous March on Washington, Daisy Bates, Rosa Parks, Ella Baker, and other legendary female civil rights leaders were forced to walk far away from the front of the March. Instead they walked with the wives of the all-male

leaders. There was not a single female speaker that day despite the pleadings of many female CRM activists.⁹³

The Environmental Justice Movement – perhaps with the faults of the CRM in mind – became very inclusive of women, with females often in positions of leadership in EJ Organizations. At the Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, held in 2002, many women leaders of the EJM were honored.⁹⁴ This stands in sharp contrast to the actions of the Civil Rights Movement where women and people of different sexual orientations were systematically excluded from positions of prominence, either covertly or overtly.

The role of women in Detroit’s EJM confirms national trends. Women lead all of Detroit’s most active EJ groups, including Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice (DWEJ), the Sierra Club’s office of Environmental Justice, Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision (SDEV), the environmental division of the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) and Michigan Welfare Rights Organization (MWRO).

Organization

The CRM was centrally structured and included many national groups and their leadership. In sharp contrast, the EJM has resisted the building of a national organization and leadership. By and large work of the EJM takes place locally.

⁹³ Gail Collins (2007) “The Women Behind the Men” The New York Times Op-Ed September 22, 2007.

⁹⁴ Bunyan Bryant (2nd Ed) *Environmental Advocacy: Working for Environmental and Economic Justice*.

The CRM involved many black churches. The churches provided invaluable community resources including people, spaces to organize, and a base from which to draw resources. Even though the EJM got its start with the United Church of Christ, the church became seemingly less involved as the movement progressed. To date the movement draws mostly on the resources of grassroots organizations, community organizers and foundations.

Strategies

While the Environmental Justice Movement uses some of the same tactics as the CRM, its main strategies are not the same. Both movements use grassroots activism but the EJM uses “bottom-up” strategies while the CRM uses more “top down” strategies. Both movements also use non-violent direct action, but they utilize this strategy very differently. In the CRM, workers were trained in the principles and practices of non-violence before being sent into the field. This kind of training does not exist in the Environmental Justice Movement.⁹⁵

Evaluating the Success of the Movements

If one compared the CRM to the EJM, the CRM was more successful in passing national legislation and achieving judicial success but the EJM has experienced significant local victories because the EJ focus has been less at the national than at the local level. Because of the decentralized nature of the EM, the passage of national legislation has been less of a priority. The extent that the EJM has been successful at the local level is hard to determine. Yet

⁹⁵ Bunyan Bryant, Personal Communication, April 8, 2008.

we know of local neighborhood victories where communities were able to shut down incinerators, landfills or other locally undesirable land uses. Some EJ groups have been successful in getting legislation passed at the state level in several states.

Much like Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice, Michigan's Governor Jennifer Granholm recently signed an Executive Directive (ED) on Environmental Justice which was discussed earlier. It remains to be seen if this Directive will have substantive impact but it does not seem likely. The state ED was signed with a complete lack of publicity so it will not raise awareness of Environmental Justice or likely be enforced. Despite the lack of legislative success, there have been on the ground victories in Detroit including the Henry Ford Medical Waste Incinerator.

Resource Mobilization theorists would both claim that the CRM was a successful social movement while the EJM has not yet achieved the same level of success. This is true by most measures and is one reason why the Environmental Justice Movement has much to learn from the Civil Rights Movement.

CHAPTER 7



**Figure 9: Site of violent CRM protest at Kelly Ingram Park in Birmingham, Alabama.
Photo by Mary Hennessey 2007**

Lessons from the Civil Rights Movement for the Environmental Justice Movement

*“The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all
concessions yet made to her august claims have been born of earnest
struggle...*

If there is no struggle, there is no progress.”

-Frederick Douglass

Lessons from the Civil Rights Movement for the Environmental Justice Movement

The following lessons from the Civil Rights Movement include a caveat in relation to the Environmental Justice Movement. The CRM was a centrally organized movement with national leadership while the EJM is a decentralized movement with local leadership. This difference in structure compounds the difficulty in comparing the two movements and necessitates a somewhat nuanced approach to “lessons-learned.”

The Civil Rights Movement achieved remarkable success in its modern history. As Morris (1984) noted, the CRM achieved social and political rights for African-Americans in the Deep South with several key judicial and legislative victories.⁹⁶ The CRM gave voice to large populations of previously disenfranchised voters and citizens and effectively ended systemic discrimination on the basis of race.

While the Environmental Justice Movement has not achieved the same national legislative or social success, the decentralized nature of the EJM means that local victories do not often receive national attention but should not be discounted in an evaluation of the overall achievements of the EJM. The EJM has consciously chosen to continue as a locally organized movement. It derives its power from that systemic choice but it also faces greater obstacles in achieving national recognition for its achievements. With this key distinction in mind, based on the results of my research, I have

⁹⁶ Brown vs. the Board of Education, the Voting Rights Act of 1964 and the Civil Rights Act of 1965.

created a list of five lessons from the CRM in order to increase the success of the EJM:

1. The first lesson is something the EJM seems to have already adopted with the history of the CRM in mind. The CRM had strong national coordination and leadership while the EJM has a very decentralized local coordination and leadership. The more decentralized and polycephalous nature of the EJM has given it the potential of greater sustainability relative to the CRM because it is less vulnerable to high-level political assassinations or arrests.⁹⁷ By and large, EJM's grassroots strategies have lived up to EJM's slogan "We Speak for Ourselves." However this difference in organizational structure does make national recognition more difficult and should be considered when examining the EJM.
2. The CRM was greatly aided by the passage of key legislation including the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. Based on my comparison of the two movements, I believe that the single greatest victory the EJM can achieve at this point is the passage of legislation both locally and at the state level. While national legislation would give EJ activists across the country an important boost in their struggles, it is unreasonable to call on a decentralized organization to achieve national legislation. Under Resource Mobilization Theory, gaining this level of political support would greatly

⁹⁷ Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia H. Hine (1970) People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation. Bobbs-Merill: Indianapolis.

increase the level of success of the EJM and would give activists and advocates a firmer basis in their fight for Environmental Justice.

3. To achieve this kind of legislative success, one strategy the EJM could adopt from the CRM is the use of highly publicized protests. While it is sometimes difficult to gain publicity for EJM events, I believe it will be worth it. For example the Voters Rights Act was passed in part due to the public awareness of the issue that was generated by the March from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. If the EJM were able to mobilize this level of attention, it may have more success in getting important local and national legislation passed. Detroit achieved on the ground success in the case of the Henry Ford Medical Waste Incinerator in part because of the highly public protests staged by opponents of the Incinerator.
4. One of the greatest assets of the CRM was the participation of students. Although the Principles of Working Together state that youth are full and complete members, the EJM has not yet mobilized nearly the number of students as the CRM.⁹⁸ Because students' energy and creativeness should be a real asset for the EJM, the movement should strive to involve more students and youth as the CRM did.
5. Lastly the greatest lesson the EJM could learn from the CRM is a more pressing vision of why Environmental Justice is a right for everybody. Because the effects of environmental hazards on human health are more difficult to see and understand than the effects of discrimination and segregation on human dignity, the EJM should consider creating or better

⁹⁸ Appendix B the Principles of Working Together Principle 2: Core Values see 2E.

publicizing Environmental Justice Rights much like Civil Rights. If the EJM could demonstrate the right to Environmental Justice as the CRM demonstrated and articulated the right to racial equality, that may be the first step in achieving the kind of legislative and judicial success the CRM has attained. The call for 'universal protection' and the 'fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food' in the "Principles of Environmental Justice" have set the process in motion. What remains now is a needed recognition and promotion of environmental protection that acknowledges these environmental rights as human rights.

Future Research

The results of this paper lead to some natural questions for further research. If the Environmental Justice Movement is similar to but also different from the Civil Rights Movement, what kind of specific strategies should it implement to achieve national success on the level of the Civil Rights Movement? How can the EJM utilize more resources, as the CRM did, including churches, students, the media and political power? To answer these questions, gathering additional empirical evidence, perhaps using social movement theory or other frameworks as a guide, is essential to continuing to address continuing environmental injustices and degradations.

Closely studying the history of the Detroit Environmental Justice movement and its relationship with the Civil Rights Movement as well as analyzing just a small number of Detroit Environmental injustices provides an excellent learning opportunity. Detroit serves as a microcosm of Environmental Injustice, in part because of the perfect storm of its socioeconomic problems, industrial past and racially stratified geography. I would make the case, like several scholars before me that much further research into the causes, problems and solutions of Detroit's Environmental Injustices would help resolve some of the inequities in a manner consistent with the EJ movement's motto of "We Speak for Ourselves".

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Appendix A

The Principles of Environmental Justice

Adopted at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit Washington, DC, October 24-37, 1991.

We, the people of color, gathered together at this multinational People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to begin to build a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities, do hereby reestablish our spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth; to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves; to insure environmental justice; to promote economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods; and to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples, do affirm and adopt these Principles of Environmental Justice:

1. Environmental justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
2. Environmental justice demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.
3. Environmental justice mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.
4. Environmental justice calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food.
5. Environmental justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.
6. Environmental justice demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.
7. Environmental justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement, and evaluation.
8. Environmental justice affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment, without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.

9. Environmental justice protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparation for damages as well as quality health care.
10. Environmental justice considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.
11. Environmental injustice must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples in the U.S. government through treaties, agreement, compacts, and covenants which impose upon the U.S. government a paramount obligation and responsibility to affirm the sovereignty and self-determination of the indigenous peoples whose lands it occupies and holds in trust.
12. Environmental justice affirms the need for an urban and rural ecological policy to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and providing fair access for all to the full range of resources.
13. Environmental justice calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.
14. Environmental justice opposes the destructive operations of multinational corporations.
15. Environmental justice opposed military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.
16. Environmental justice calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.
17. Environmental justice requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and to make the conscious decision to challenge and re-prioritize our lifestyle to insure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

Appendix B

Principles of Working Together

Adopted at the Second People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit
Washington, DC, October 26, 2002.

Principle 1: Purpose

1A. The Principles of Working Together uphold the Principles of Environmental Justice, including the commitment to eradicate environmental racism in our communities.

1B. The Principles of Working Together require local and regional empowered partnerships, inclusive of all.

1C. The Principles of Working Together call for continued influence on public policy to protect and sustain Mother Earth and our communities and also honor past promises and make amends for past injustices.

Principle 2: Core Values

2A. The Principles of Working Together commit us to working from the ground up, beginning with all grassroots workers, organizers and activists. We do not want to forget the struggle of the grassroots workers. This begins with all grassroots workers, organizers and activists.

2B. The Principles of Working Together recognize traditional knowledge and uphold the intellectual property rights of all peoples of color and Indigenous peoples.

2C. The Principles of Working Together reaffirm that as people of color we speak for ourselves. We have not chosen our struggle, we work together to overcome our common barriers, and resist our common foes.

2D. The Principles of Working Together bridge the gap among various levels of the movement through effective communication and strategic networking.

2E. The Principles of Working Together affirm the youth as full members in the environmental justice movement. As such, we commit resources to train and educate young people to sustain the groups and the movement into the future.

Principle 3: Building Relationships

3A. The Principles of Working Together recognize that we need each other and we are stronger with each other. This Principle requires participation at every level without barriers and that the power of the movement is shared at every level.

3B. The Principles of Working Together require members to cooperate with harmony, respect and trust—it must be genuine and sustained relationship-building. This demands cultural and language sensitivity.

3C. The Principles of Working Together demand grassroots workers, organizers and activists set their own priorities when working with other professionals and institutions.

3D. The Principles of Working Together recognize that community organizations have expertise and knowledge. Community organizations should seek out opportunities to work in partnerships with academic institutions, other grassroots organizations and environmental justice lawyers to build capacity through the resources of these entities.

Principle 4: Addressing Differences

4A. The Principles of Working Together require affirmation of the value in diversity and the rejection of any form of racism, discrimination and oppression. To support each other completely, we must learn about our different cultural and political histories so that we can completely support each other in our movement inclusive of ages, classes, immigrants, indigenous peoples, undocumented workers, farm workers, genders, sexual orientations, and education differenced.

4B. The Principles of Working Together require respect, cultural sensitivity, patience, time, and a willingness to understand each other and a mutual sharing of knowledge.

4C. The Principles of Working Together affirm the value in our diversity. If English is not the primary language, there must be effective translation for all participants.

Principle 5: Leadership

5A. The Principles of Working Together demand shared power, community service, cooperation, as well as open and honest communication.

5B. The Principles of Working Together demand that people from the outside should not come in and think that there is no leadership in the grassroots community. The people in the community should lead their own community and create a legacy by teaching young people to be leaders.

5C. The Principles of Working Together demand that people from grassroots organizations should lead the environmental justice movement.

5D. The Principles of Working Together demand accountability to the people, responsibility to the complete required work, and maintenance of healthy partnerships with all groups.

Principle 6: Participation

6A. The Principles of Working Together demand cultural sensitivity. This requires patience and time for each group to express their concerns, and their concerns should be heard.

6B. The Principles of Working Together require a culturally appropriate process.

6C. The Principles of Working Together have a commitment to changing the process when the process is not meeting the needs of the people. The changes should be informed by the people's timely feedback and evaluation.

Principle 7: Resolving Conflicts

7A. The Principles of Working Together encourage respectful discussion of our differences, willingness to understand, and the exploration of best possible solutions.

7B. The Principles of Working Together affirm the value in learning and strengthening mediation skills in diverse socio-economic and multicultural settings.

Principle 8: Fundraising

8A. The Principles of Working Together recognize the need for expanding sustainable community based avenues for raising funds, such as building a donor base, membership dues, etc.

8B. The Principles of Working Together oppose funding from any organization impacting people of color and indigenous communities. In addition, the Principles oppose funding from any organization that is the current target of active boycotts or other campaign activity generated by our allies.

8C. The Principles of Working Together encourage larger environmental justice organizations to help smaller, emerging environmental justice organizations gain access to funding resources and information with other organizations in need.

Principle 9: Accountability

9A. The Principles of Working Together encourage all partners to abide by shared agreements, including, but not limited to, oral and written agreements. Any changes or developments to agreements/actions need to be communicated to all who are affected and agreed upon.

9B. The Principles of Working Together encourage periodic evaluation and review of process to ensure accountability among all partners. Any violation of these agreements or any unprincipled actions that violate the EJ principles either must attempt to be resolved among the partners or will end the partnership if not resolved and, then, will be raised to the larger EJ community.