

Abstract

The main goal of my research is to shed light on the inequities that exist today, in regards to climate and other subjects related directly to climate and the environment. The research covers topics such as the cruel and unsensible treatment of our forests, waters, and air as we contaminate and burn what we can without regard for those who cannot protect themselves. Such as the hundreds of thousands of animals that die every year, month, and day as a result of deforestation and even the other, more vulnerable people also impacted by the loss of habitat. My goal is to bring together, and to share ways in which we can learn to make conscientious choices while being mindful of our impact and carbon footprint on Earth. I also want to show the trends of environmental destruction over the past 150 years. The issues in regards to environmental impact and damage are similar to the issues being caused at the start of the industrial revolution, with the expansion of coal use, machinery, and mass-scaled agriculture. Issues that we in fact continue to face to this day. In 1849, French writer Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr wrote “plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose “ – the more things change, the more they stay the same... this is an apt quote to describe the fight for climate justice yesterday, and today.

Key Words: Justice, Climate, Accessibility, Race, Location.

Introduction

I was born and raised in Venezuela until October of 1995. This was the most impactful and saddening October of my life. That is the year when my parents foresaw the destructive nature of that which awaited my nation, Authoritarianism, wrapped in a message of Communism. So they decided to gather what they could afford, and provide an opportunity to at least one of the three daughters they had together. They chose me because I was the youngest. They still held a deep hope for my future. Naturally, being only 14 at the time, I did not see any of this as a blessing. It seemed to me that for absolutely no reason, I was being forced to leave my family, friends, and life behind. It felt almost as if I was actually being punished. I was simply being shipped off to a foreign country I did not want to go to, all alone. When I arrived, I moved to the City of White Plains and lived with extended family. I attended White Plains High School, I made friends and did well in school, but I was depressed. I was without one thing that I considered all-important, a family. I wanted and needed something more. So, at the age of 16, I decided to have a son, someone that I could love, and grow with. Someone who I could feel is truly family. I had my **son** in June of 1997. Despite the hardships of having a child so young, and taking care of him on my own, I have loved every day of motherhood. From raising a son, to teaching them about life, imparting skills, and so on, I have not only helped him grow, but I have grown beyond my own limitations many times over. Having him has pushed me to do my best in all things, even encouraging me to further my education even today. This is one of the largest pieces of my story that has made me who I have become now.

I used to work in a deli, and when they were going to close for good in 2005, an attorney invited me to work for him as his secretary. I told him I didn't even know how to turn on a computer, but both him and his wife gave me guidance, and taught me all I needed to know to do

my work. They were kind, and patient. Little did I know at the time that this opportunity would be a pivotal point in my life. At that point I had many dreams, but had not taken any actionable steps to bring those dreams into reality, but being given this opportunity made me realize that it was time to work for what I had dreamed of for so long. Even though I was able to complete the tenth grade, I promised my son that I would finish school when he grew up. When he turned 8, I signed up for the BOCES of Northern Westchester and Putnam GED program. I studied, worked, and eventually I finished my GED; despite being a course to complete a high school diploma, this was a challenge for me. Having to leave my son many nights to attend school, I needed to make sure it was done, and done well. When he turned 12, in 2009 after a long break from school, in part due to fear and self-doubt, I went to Westchester Community College and joined the Paralegal Associate Program. I felt a sense of belonging there, as if this is what I was born to do. I felt as if I had found the field that ignited a passion in me, and that I could use to help myself, and others like me. I completed my associate degree in Paralegal Studies at Westchester Community College in May 2012. I did all this to lead by example for my firstborn. Today he is 23 and a graduate from SUNY New Paltz. He majored in International Relations, and is considering following my influence and furthering his studies in Law. Meanwhile, as I promised all those years ago, I am now in school, trying to accomplish my own dream.

I did all of my initial school while working for one attorney who believed I could achieve the things I had set out to, and at one point didn't even know I wanted. Eventually, his firm closed. I continued on my path, and wanted to work a position that was still relevant to the field I had found a passion for. I became a Court Clerk, and I still work at the court ten years later. Thankful for my job, I continue chasing after a dream of having a career and not a job, actions driven by passion, and not just a list of tasks to check off, one by one. I find law absolutely

fascinating! Justice is the root of our nation. It is the cause that many fought for in the country's birth, and has been fought for repeatedly. From independence, to slavery, to the second World War. America has time and time again, been a country that has stood up for justice, and all the forms it can take. To me, justice and law are inseparable, and law is a way to make the idea of justice real. We write laws to achieve in reality what we believe justice to be in our hearts and minds. But laws are not the beginning and end of what justice is. We can enact justice in many areas of life, through many forms of action. Especially when it comes to our communities, and the environment that we form our communities in. I believe I will demonstrate that our current system fuels and enacts human rights violations, violence, injustice, and the purposeful destruction of the environment at a local and global scale, mainly for profit.

Background

Environmental Justice is more urgent day after day more than ever before. Climate change is a reality and we cannot afford to avert our eyes from this uncomfortable reality. We must take action to address this ever-compounding issue. There are many wide reaching ramifications of climate change, particularly greenhouse gasses. Looking at their effects, what might happen in the future, the science that backs these findings, and the proposed solutions; including what we can do to bring a change to the existing conditions. However, what can people do without the government's support, policies, laws, regulations, and most importantly, enforcement? It's officials and agencies that must be there to ensure that the procedures and steps are taken in every aspect of our lives to protect not only us but also the Earth and its climate. Nothing we do in a small area is contained to that specific area; it affects climate as a whole and

this is why we need environmental laws, lawyers, and advocates who care for the wellbeing of our Earth. Without a strong government infrastructure to prop this shift, climate justice is a far-flung dream, and doomed to stay that way.

It is worth noting that while environmental injustice affects everyone, as we all share one global ecosystem, it is not equal in how it affects us. Low-income communities are the most intensely affected, particularly those of Black, Indigenous, and other non-White people. It is environmental injustice. But what is it, who is affected, and why? These are a few of the questions I would like to answer herein.

We all breathe the same air, so it seems. But in reality, no, we don't. That is where lawmakers, institutions, and advocates come into place. People such as Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez have brought to light the inequality of the low-income communities in the Bronx. Among this inequality is the lower quality of air, water, and food. Not only are these things of lower quality, being higher in pollutants and harmful chemicals, but access to cleaner water, air, and especially food is also harder to come by. Ocasio-Cortez lays out the severity and urgency of our situation in regards to climate change and how it's harming our communities, when she said "You want to tell people that their concern and their desire for clean air and clean water is elitist? Tell that to the families in Flint whose kids have — their blood is ascending in lead levels. Their brains are damaged for the rest of their lives ... People are dying. They are dying." (Ocasio-Cortez's righteous — and accurately — angered about poverty and the environment - Washington Post, 2019). Global warming and the way it expresses itself in our systems, is affecting more Afro-American communities and poor countries than it affects rich countries. One can see this in the water laced with lead in poorer communities, the food deserts, and lack of green space.

An analysis of over 300 years of recorded data shows an increment of about 0.8C(1.4F) degrees in the average surface air temperature of Earth when comparing the period of 2003-2012 to 1850-1900 (The Thinking Person's Guide to Climate Change, 2nd Edition pg. 3). While this increment may seem insignificant to many, as our local temperature can fluctuate by tens of degrees in hours, on a global scale, such a small difference is astronomical in its effects. It has a great impact on our fauna, flora, and of course on us, humans. Humans are adapted to live in a very specific global climate. We can overcome cold with the development of clothing, and in modern times we are alleviated of the heat by technology. But in nature, the climate that we have adapted to is a rather specific one. If this deviates too far, we will not be able to thrive, and this is true especially of our main food sources, such as other animals and our crops. Humans are ultimately the main driver behind much of Earth's climate change. But how could humans have changed the climate so drastically, and so quickly? Humans have transformed the Earth's atmosphere by adding a great amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gases such as methane into the existing levels over the last 150 years, since industry, machinery, and industrial agriculture became widespread in the West. Said gases warm up the atmosphere by trapping heat on the surface of the planet, causing drastic changes that affect all living things. Some scientists like to point out that this is not evidence that humans are the cause of such changes as Earth's atmosphere has gone through countless temperature changes within its 4.54 billion years (Robert Henson 2019). Some people believe that the shift in climate is a part of the natural climate fluctuations that have brought us many ice ages that have been followed by warmth, expansion of plant life, and so on.

But this issue has been carefully looked into by a constantly growing body of research, compiled and assessed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a unique

group that has compiled the work of more than 1,000 scientists over 25 years of research. To support such claims, scientists rely on the results from two critical types of studies: detection and attribution. Detection research is meant to establish only that an unusual climate change has occurred. Attribution tries to find the likelihood that particular factors including human activities are involved. When we talk about human activities we are talking in general, from the neighbor that throws litters and idles his large SUV, to the big meat company such as Tyson. Every human has some degree of responsibility to the planet on which we live. Understanding this simple statement can bring us closer to seeing, and then understanding the various types of injustices caused by climate changes and those contributing towards such changes without regard for the ways they're affecting other people. .

Discussions on our air quality, food production, and land use are some of the most important debates of this generation. Earth, by its design, normally has a balanced ecosystem, and its land-based area absorbs more CO₂ than it releases, but deforestation is on its own as a major source of carbon dioxide, while also lowering the environment's ability to absorb it at the same time. (Baccini et al., 2012) Deforestation has, however, decreased significantly during the last few years, and continues on a downward trend (Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, "State of the World's Forests 2020) but it still counts for 10%-15% of recent human-produced CO₂ emissions (Mongabay, 2020). This is due in part to the heavy machinery used to complete the tasks, and also due to the burning and clearing of the rainforests as well as temperate forests, regardless of how it is done. Even if left alone to grow back it will take decades for it to return to previous levels and begin doing its part to help clean the air and retain soil. But how does this affect us? When Katrina took place in 2005 many scientists questioned how climate change, particularly global warming, influenced the storm. Evidence collected by

these scientists demonstrated that had Katrina taken place in the 1900's, it would not have been as strong or as destructive as it was in 2005. Raised sea levels in tandem with the warmer temperature of the ocean that fuels the hurricane as they travel over the Atlantic made it into the monster it became (The Thinking Person's Guide to Climate Change, 2nd Edition, 2019). But the storm may have to be the least of the problems despite the death toll, which was mostly of Black, Brown, and lower class people, of course.

In "How to Kill a City", Purchase Professor P.E. Moskowitz, addresses this issue in a very deep and detailed way. Low-income, Black Americans, not only lived in the public housing projects but also lived in the lower parts of the city of New Orleans, and therefore were impacted at a disproportionate level. For some, it may have been a stroke of luck to be taken by the storm because those who survived had to endure not only the loss of loved ones, the changes in the land, but also the lack of resources to get back on their feet. Events such as this are happening in many developing countries, such as Brazil.

Literature Review Though we live far away from the forest located in South America, the injustice suffered by those who have no voice comes to mind. The deforestation that took place in Brazil in 2019, 9,166 square kilometers (3,539 square miles) cleared was the highest number in at least five years, according to Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (**Reuter's Brazil Amazon deforestation jumped 85% in 2019 vs 2018: government data, 2020**). In 2018, the deforested area was 4,946 square kilometers. The sharp increase overlapped the first year in office of President Jair Bolsonaro, a climate change skeptic who has eased restrictions on exploiting the Amazon's vast riches. This data was collected by the satellite-based DETER system, which monitors deforestation in real-time. It comes after fires ravaged swaths of the Amazon basin last year, igniting a

global outcry and diplomatic feud between Bolsonaro and European leaders. The number of fires in the rainforest rose 30 percent to 89,178 in 2019, compared with the previous year, the latest official data show. **(Reuter's, 2020)** Human Rights Watch called on Bolsonaro to reverse his environmental policy, which the campaign group says has accelerated land clearing and encouraged attacks on forest defenders, many of which are natives to the land. In recent months, three indigenous people have been killed in two separate incidents in the northeastern state of Maranhao. One of them died after being ambushed by loggers. The others were killed in a drive-by shooting. (Mongabay, Sam Cowie 2020) Some people, as well as animals, are killed by the actions of those empowered to manage our natural resources. Ironically enough, those entrusted with our natural resources are the very ones who will destroy them in exchange for money and profit ignoring the consequences or the safety of the ecosystem as a whole, and destroying the very resource they profit from in the long term. This can be considered just a small example of what is going on in the world as Brazil is, after all, a Black majority country where climate injustice is an everyday reality. It is an obvious cause of contamination and pollution for those who live there. Just like those who live in Louisiana, Brazilians have been the victims of the environmental injustice caused not only by geographical conditions but also political, economic, and racial discrimination. Environmental discrimination takes place in every continent, country, state, and even at the local level. For example in Roma settlements on the outskirts of villages and towns throughout Europe, they are separated from the majority population in these countries by roads, railways, or other barriers, disconnected from water pipelines and sewage treatment. (NPR, Noel King 2021) Why are some people (or groups) better off than

others when it comes to the distribution of environmental benefits? In order to understand the present situation and identify ways to address the impacts of these inequalities we must understand the past and mechanisms related to the differentiated treatment. The situation and discrimination of the Roma ethnic minority in Slovakia are examined from the perspective of environmental conditions and injustice. There is no simple answer as to why there is environmental injustice. Environmental conditions in Roma settlements are just one of the indicators of failures of policies addressing the problem of poverty and social exclusion in marginalized groups, structural discrimination, and internalized Roma problems. In the United States, according to "How to Kill a City", we see the abuse of power and resources of those that survived Hurricane Katrina, not too many Black Americans were made part of the next chapter of New Orleans. On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina's monstrous winds and surging water overwhelmed the protective levees around low-lying New Orleans, Louisiana. Eighty percent of the city flooded, in some places under twenty feet of water. Property damages across the Gulf Coast topped \$100 billion. One thousand eight hundred and thirty-three people lost their lives, and many more had theirs irreparably damaged. The tale of this historic storm and the drowning of an American city is one of selflessness, heroism, and courage and also of incompetence and racism. What is Climate change? According to NASA Climate change is a change in the range and trends of weather, or climate, in a specific place. (NASA, 2014) This could be a change in how much rain a place usually gets in a year or it could be a change in a place's common temperature for a certain month or season. Climate change is also a change in the overall Earth's climate. This could be a change in Earth's average temperature or it could be a change in where rain and snow usually fall on Earth.

Weather can change in just a few hours. Climate takes hundreds or even millions of years to shift dramatically. After defining what climate change is, then we must ask, how does this affect us? Climate change impacts the poorest more than the wealthy: Climate impacts are felt globally, but wherever we are, our ability to cope depends on what is in our purse. The wealthy have funds or insurance to cover a quick retreat to safety, temporary accommodation, and rebuilding or relocation costs. They also tend to have access to more resilient infrastructure, and better access to any infrastructure at all. But the poor may not be able to evacuate, may not have reliable access to food, water, housing, or energy, and insurance may be unavailable or unaffordable. They may also have been victims of discriminatory state and corporate policies that disproportionately exposed them to risks that could have been better managed or outright avoided, such as deforestation in Brazil.

Many factors beyond our control: our gender, age, economic status, and location, all influence our ability to respond to the shift in our global climate. While those most responsible for climate change are relatively insulated from its impacts, those least responsible are stripped of basic freedoms and dignity. They have to survive ever-greater adversities with increasingly limited resources. Research by Oxfam shows that the world's richest 10% of people directly or indirectly cause 50% of emissions. This group also claims over half of the world's wealth, and most live in the so-called "developed" world. The world's poorest 50% of people contribute approximately 10% of global emissions and receive about 8% of global income. Data from the World Bank show that the average person in the UK emits 65 times more carbon compared to someone in Malawi. US, Canadian and Australian citizens emit over 150 times more.

These already unbelievably disproportionate numbers can not fully account for the carbon emissions that go into making and shipping the technology we're using, the food that we're eating, or clothes we're wearing. While not creating much of the global emissions, or consuming as many resources as Western nations, the sixth poorest country in the world, Mozambique, shoulders the burden of over \$3.2 billion in loss and damage following two unprecedented cyclones in 2019. According to Civil Society Review, the global bill for damage related to climate change is likely to hit \$300-700 billion per year by 2030.

Environmental Justice coverage includes impacts on the environment, environmental public health, environmental justice science, health equity, climate justice, human rights, science, technology, and the environment, land use planning and management, public policy, Environmental history, legal history, and current debates related to environmental justice sociology and anthropology of environmental health disparities, community science, grassroots initiatives, social movements, voices in the field.

Conclusion Paragraph

My research looks to add to and enhance our understanding of environmental justice. Environmental justice research is of course, very broad. More research needs to be done in economics, infrastructure, and agriculture. Nearly all aspects of our society shape how we interact with our environment around us. Despite the wide berth of existing, and ongoing research, there is currently no true justice for those of less. Whether it be through economics, politics, or racial discrimination. It is unfortunate that many of us in the West cannot think beyond our commodities and convenient lifestyles to understand how that commodity got to us, the cost paid for that product in regards to carbon emissions, and extraction of resources. We

should all have access to more, but we need to balance our access to goods and convenience with the effect we want to have on our environment. I want readers to understand that what we have, particularly in the United States, does not come without a price at every level. Human life, animal suffering, and environmental degradation. We need to understand this, and take steps to not only mitigate, but absolutely stop the trend and possibly even reverse it. It would be a daunting undertaking that would require a total reshaping of our habits, housing, transport, economics, and culture. I would hope this paper at least encourages readers to continue their own research, and shift the way they consume and vote in their day to day lives. Either at the ballot box, or with their dollars.

Resources

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