



# Intersectional Environmentalism!

By: Grace Cammarata





1.  
What is intersectional  
environmentalism?



# What is intersectional environmentalism?

## → INTERSECTIONAL

“the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect, especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups

“Involving members of multiple social categories”

## → ENVIRONMENTALISM

“advocacy of the preservation, restoration, or improvement of the natural environment”

## INTERSECTIONAL ENVIRONMENTALISM

“inclusive form of environmentalism that advocates for the protection of all people + the planet. It identifies the ways in which injustices affecting **marginalized communities** + Mother Earth are interconnected. Intersectional Environmentalism not only acknowledges these links, but brings them to the forefront of environmental activism without minimizing or silencing overt + discreet forms of oppression”



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## 2. Who Created Intersectional Environmentalism?



# Who Created Intersectional Environmentalism?

- Framework of intersectionality first developed by **Kimberlé Crenshaw's**
  - Black American lawyer, civil rights advocate, philosopher, and scholar on critical race theory
  - Professor at Columbia and UCLA
  - Developed the theoretical framework of intersectionality that explains how aspects of someone's identities (race, class, culture, sex, gender, etc.) can overlap and largely influence how someone experiences prejudices and privileges
  - Became mainstream when published in the Oxford English Dictionary in 2015
  - Popularized further during Women's March in 2017





[illegible]





"WE CAN'T SAVE  
THE PLANET  
WITHOUT  
UPLIFTING  
THE VOICES  
OF ITS PEOPLE,  
ESPECIALLY  
THOSE MOST  
OFTEN  
UNHEARD,"

*Leah Thomas*





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### 3. What is Environmental Racism?



# What is Environmental Racism?



## → Benjamin Chavis

- African American Civil Rights Movement leader
- Created the term “environmental racism” in 1982 as “racial discrimination in environmental policy-making, the enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of colour for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in our communities, and the history of excluding people of colour from leadership of the ecology movements”.

- “a **form of systemic racism** whereby communities of colour are disproportionately burdened with health hazards through policies and practices that force them to live in proximity to sources of toxic waste such as sewage works, mines, landfills, power stations, major roads and emitters of airborne particulate matter”





# 70%

Of the contaminated waste sites in the US are near low income areas

# 40%

Of those living critically close to hazardous chemical facilities are Black or Latino

# 50%

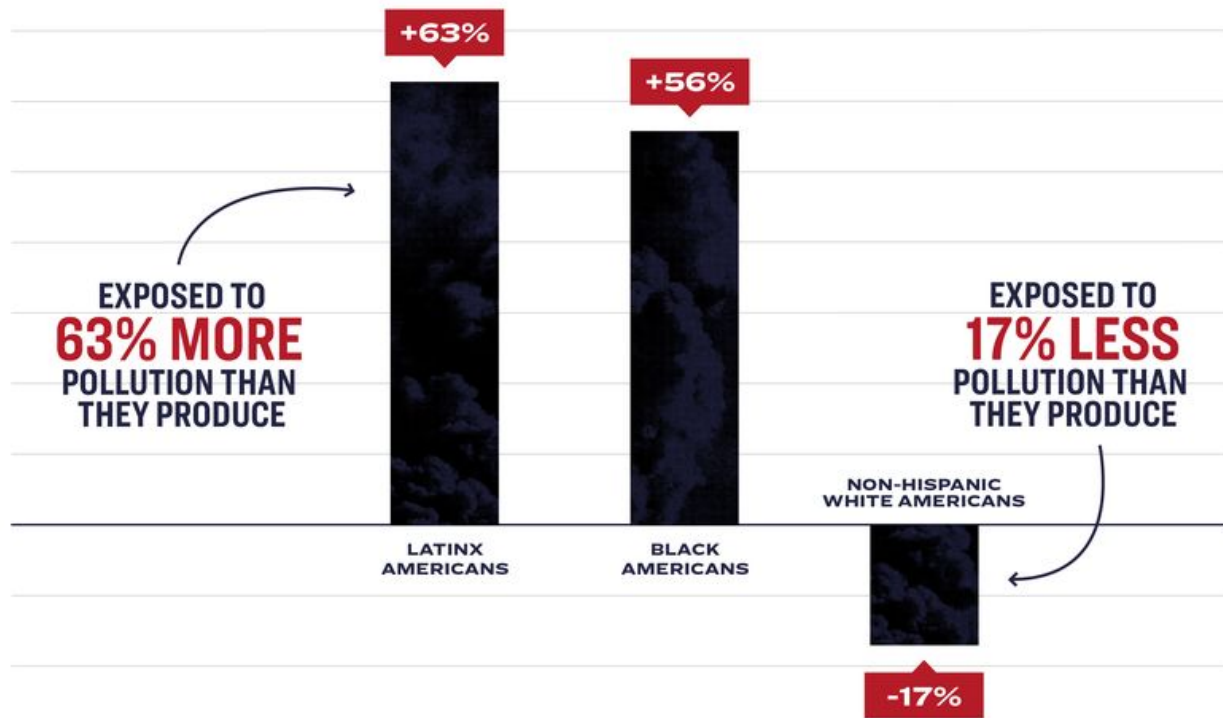
The percent that Black people are more likely to be exposed to pollution than white people

# 40%

The percent that communities with more POC are likely to have unlawfully unsafe drinking water



## POLLUTION EXPOSURE BY POPULATION (2003–2015)



Source: Christopher W. Tessum et al., "Inequity in consumption of goods and services adds to racial-ethnic disparities in air pollution exposure," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (March 2019).



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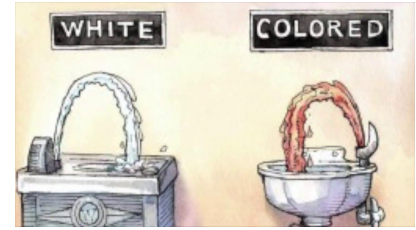
## 4. Examples of Environmental Racism



# Flint Michigan

## What Happened?

- In 2014 the city's government switched the water supply to the Flint River to save money
- Failed to treat the new water supply and exposed the city's over 100,000 predominantly Black citizens to dangerous lead from the eroding pipes
- 12 people died from Legionnaires' disease
- Health effects including hair loss and rashes for 18 months before city response



## Why?

- The Michigan Civil Rights Commission concluded that the delayed response was a “result of systemic racism”



# Dakota Access Pipeline

## Context

- Indigenous Peoples often subject to environmental racism in the form of large amounts of nuclear and other hazardous waste
- Federal government holds native land in “trust”

## What Happened?

- 2016-2017 1,172 mile long oil pipeline
- Threat to Standing Rock Indian Reservation’s water supply
- Interfere with burial grounds and historic sites
- Unsuccessful due to public outcry and attention by Bernie Sanders

## Why?

- Most times these events do not become mass public knowledge
- “environmental racism occurs because communities lack the resources to raise awareness or fight a costly legal battle – resources which are available to wealthier white communities”





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## 5. How to be an Intersectional Environmentalist?





# 1. Acknowledge Environmental Racism

- “When it comes to exposure to poor air quality and water quality, BIPOC are disproportionately impacted. Underrepresented and low-income communities are also more likely to be concentrated in areas with nearby toxic waste sites, landfills, and other environmental hazards”
- Don’t mitigate important data, further look into systemic racism and the many environmental protections that have not been extended to specific areas and their demographics
- Keep asking WHY. Government actions are not coincidences, but deliberate.





## 2. Amplify Unheard Voices

- Avoid the savior complex mindset!
- Being an intersectional environmentalist is **NOT** asking “how can I save these people?” but it **IS** asking “how can I use my privilege to amplify the work that is already being done”
- Follow activists working against environmental racism on social media
- Look for any events or rallies happening in your neighborhood
- Sign petitions when available and reliable
- **VOTE** in federal AND state AND local elections for candidates supporting environmental justice





### 3. Learn and Unlearn

- Our history determines our future
- Look into the history of environmental racism and key figures such as Benjamin Chavis and Kimberlé Crenshaw
- Move away and **be cautious of the white lensed environmental narrative**
- If you're not sure, **ask!** or **read!** None of us know everything but we can commit to doing our best to understanding and advocating for issues even when they don't directly affect us.



# 4. Intersectional Environmentalism Resources

## People/Organizations

- Leah Thomas:  
@greengirlleah on  
all socials
- @Intersectionalenvi  
ronmentalists on all  
socials

## Books

- “Braiding  
Sweetgrass
- “Black  
Nature”

## Podcasts

- “Dismantled” by  
IE
- EcoChic Episode  
111
- “She Explores”  
Episode 157

## Take the Intersectional Environmentalist Pledge!

<https://www.intersectionalenvironmentalist.com/take-the-pledge>

## Download the Intersectional Environmentalist Guide!

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/600df8c214961b0dfed918b1/t/604aedef3cf1c161cd03598fa/1615523339560/Digital%2BDownload\\_%2BWhat%2Bis%2BIntersectional%2BEnvironmentalism.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/600df8c214961b0dfed918b1/t/604aedef3cf1c161cd03598fa/1615523339560/Digital%2BDownload_%2BWhat%2Bis%2BIntersectional%2BEnvironmentalism.pdf)

## Other Resources/Guides!

[Resources](#)



# Discussion Questions!

1. Have you ever heard of the terms intersectional environmentalism or environmental racism?
2. What are your opinions on mainstream environmentalism?
3. What steps would you like to take to learn more about this topic and ways to support the IE movement?