CHAPTER SIX

Environmental Justice and Detroit's Long Shadow

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Detroit Is Our Home, Our Toxic Home

At West Grand Boulevard and West Vernor sits the crossroads of the Latinx diaspora of Detroit, or at least how I have known it. The midway point between two Catholic churches, Ste. Anne's Parish and Holy Redeemer. As a girl, the Bowen library and the Honey Bee Market were the essential markers of our community. Detroit became the home for Mexican Americans during the Great Migration north, as laborers looked for work. By 1920 about 10,000 Mexican immigrants went north and landed in Detroit. One hundred years ago, the migration north was fueled by the desire for work, higher wages, freedom from slavery and civil war. My family was among the early migrants, working on the rail, selling canned goods, and shining shoes. They settled on the banks of the Detroit River, the northern border to Canada. We have been defined in many ways by this geography—our proximity to the borderlands, the Great Lakes, and the automotive industry. For five generations, my family has intermittently lived and worked within a two-mile radius, and like the diaspora itself, holding and recapitulating the landed memory of our people, fraught with the stories of movement across borders of place and identity.

Detroit is a changing landscape. As in many places across the United States, "border security" has dislocated the diaspora, pushing its boundaries away from its original core of SW Detroit to inner-ring suburbs. New immigrants coming from south of the border are locating in places that are more industrialized, in places where historically African American and working-class white people lived: in the shadows of factories.

Detroit is the quintessential story of environmental justice and

injustice. For over a hundred years Detroit has been involved in the heavy industrialization and proliferation of the automotive industry and steel plants, and before that machinists, forges, steam engines, and more. But most importantly, conceptualizing Detroit, the Motor City, as the birthplace of the assembly line—singularly responsible for catalyzing the global dependence on the combustion engine—is critical within the context of climate change because of the existential threat now presented by its very existence. Detroit built the first highway; we exemplify the idea of suburbanization. At the height of the economy, post-NAFTA, an estimated 16,000 cars and trucks traveled over the international Ambassador Bridge every single day.[1] Buying food from a high-quality full-service chain grocery store requires driving to the only Meijer at the city limit.

Aside from producing cars and trucks, Detroit has the state of Michigan's only oil refinery, Marathon Oil. It receives tar sands—heavy oil sands from Alberta, Canada—through pipelines that traverse the Great Lakes. For over five decades the production of the automobile has been buttressed by the burning of Rocky Mountain coal and coal removed through the strip mining from the Powder River Basin, transported to the Great Lakes on rail. Since the late 1950s Detroit's energy system has been 80 percent coal and 20 percent nuclear. The reliance on coal has been dominated by one utility that was guaranteed a monopoly and guaranteed a rate of return on equity that hovers at about 10 percent. High return on investments has incentivized its transition to methane gas, fracked from the ground of the Marcellus Shale and piped from Pennsylvania, Ohio, and the Rocky Mountains. Fossil fuels have been the bedrock of the Detroit economy. The longitudinal distribution of the goods, and the externalization of their toxins, are ill-accounted for. As such the corporeal and geographic proximity to those toxins must be examined so as to account for the inequitable distribution of each on different communities. Only by reviewing the entire life cycle of the fossil fuel industry can we balance the accounts in the process of forming the new regenerative economy towards an era of radical survivance in the age of climate change.

For example, after the passage of NAFTA, truck traffic on the Ambassador Bridge rose exponentially. I remember as a teenager in the 1990s semi-trailer trucks transporting goods, idling on the highways for hours. Lines of rear brake lights twinkled day and night like lights

on a Christmas tree through our community. We knew the increase of truck traffic was causing health issues. A public health scholar at the University of Michigan, Dr. Amy Schulz, tells of the socially disparate impact of pollution and increasing hospitalizations due to stroke and heart attack from roadway traffic. Those trucks that sat idling on the international bridge for hours released tiny diesel particulate matter exacerbating people's health issues, causing a spike in emergency room visits. The fossil fuel toxins released from combustion enter our airways and run through our veins. Particulate matter is so small it can break through the blood barrier—pushing people over the thresholds of asthma, stroke, and heart attack. Yet since the passage of NAFTA, household wealth has gone down, and health impacts from the transit associated with the movement of goods—and the restriction of free movement of people (mostly laborers) across the border—have gone up. We now have longitudinal data, our bodies, to account for the lived experience of long unaccounted for externalities.

The Black, Latinx, and Arab American populations that surround the industrial core have borne the brunt of health impact from industrialization as evidenced from elevated rates of asthma, heart disease, stroke, and lung cancer. Asthma is the number one reason for missing school in Detroit. In a time when we fight for equal education for per-pupil allotment, we are sending 84 percent of Black and 65 percent of Latinx children to schools in close proximity to contaminated sites, which impacts not only their health, but also their performance in school. This is not a situation that communities have "chosen," but the historic set of racialized geographies and economic factors have left communities of color geographically gridlocked in ways outside of their control. Our communities believe, in part, that the toxins and the associated health impacts are normal and/or necessary parts of our communities—when they are, in fact, the very reason for the degradation of our lands, homes, and bodies.

Now, I want to acknowledge that Black and Latinx people have only very recently migrated to Detroit or Waawiyatanong (the Anishinaabe term for Detroit, literally "where the water goes around"). And we cannot dismiss the very long-lived histories of Anishinaabe peoples whose residence on the land called Detroit over the last 14,000 years helped to maintain a healthy balance between the humans and other-than-human beings in the Great Lakes basin. The arc of environmental

injustice has been much longer in formation for Anishinaabe peoples from the settlement of the lands in Western Ontario and Great Lakes Basin. Anishinaabe people are also contemporaneously impacted by toxins, notably in the case of Aamjiwnaang, where 40 percent of all residents have asthma as a result of Chemical Valley in Sarnia, Ontario. The significance of the impact on Anishinaabe peoples in Canada—like residents of Detroit—of living in the shadow is deeply embodied over many generations. Occupational therapist Jim Brophy talks about the impact on tours he conducts with activists like Lindsay Beze Gray, testifying that the persistence of endocrine disruptors in the land and water have resulted in the disproportionate birth of girls over boys, a chemically induced gender-ratio imbalance. Anishinaabe people, unlike the Black and Latinx diaspora, are living on their original lands, an inseparable relationship of history, kin, belief systems reinforcing that connection.

As such, Anishnaabek have been and continue to be impacted not only by the toxins, but also by the dislocation of what Dr. Kyle Whyte, Anishinaabe philosopher at Michigan State University, calls a continuous disruption of the "moral landscapes" within the settler framework beyond contemporary definitions of environmental justice:

> injustice also occurs when the social institutions of one society systematically erase certain socio-ecological contexts, or horizons, that are vital for members of another society to experience themselves in the world as having responsibilities to other humans, non-humans and the environment. Injustice, here, involves one society robbing another society of its capacities to experience the world as a place of collective life that its members feel responsible for maintaining into the future.[2]

Environmental justice for indigenous people challenges non-native peoples on Turtle Island to think beyond just the distribution of the goods, products, or material harm caused, but also the very existence of its constructs as formations that make other societal manifestations possible.

So what does environmental justice mean in the Motor City? I propose that environmental justice goes beyond equal protection under the law. The laws themselves are inadequate to protect health,

ecosystems, and cultural and spiritual freedoms. They most obviously are not equipped to deal with the futurities exemplified by climate change. Instead, environmental justice must excoriate and repatriate the longitudinal aspects of justice—distributive, relational, spiritual, and corporeal—to restructure our economies in a way that rebuilds trust between peoples, restores the homes, lands, and sovereignty to nations, and regenerates the majestic splendor that has been devastated to sustain life on this earth. In this essay I will speak about my personal experience as a Latinx, Mestiza, Apache native in Detroit and the search for environmental justice in the age of climate change.

Forms of Justice

Typically, in the world of environmental justice, activists and advocates are fighting for two things: (1) a seat at the table and (2) a say in the decision that is made. Many people have heard the adage, "If you're not at the table then you are on the menu." This statement comes from the concept of procedural justice, the idea that if you are given a seat at the table with powerful decision-makers then you will be heard, you will be negotiating, you will be visible. Half the fight is just being seen, heard, or even believed. But there is a difference between having a voice and having a say. That difference is critical. The latter means possessing the *ability* to leverage and apply the political pressure necessary to deliver beneficial results. This is more than a notion because *by definition* environmental justice communities are vulnerable to toxins because of political disenfranchisement, systemic poverty, and racism. This latter issue is coined distributive justice: the idea that the goods (and harms) produced through industrial, economic, or colonial processes can be redistributed.

Much of the work in Detroit over the last ten to fifteen years has been committed to procedural and distributive justice. It is clear that the harms of the production of the automobile have resulted in disproportionate harm to Black, Latinx, Arab American, and Native peoples in southeast Michigan. We have four times the asthma rate of the rest of the state. According to activist Donele Wilkins, every single lot in Detroit was declared a brownfield—because they got so tired of counting *every lot,* the city itself was declared a brownfield. Southwest Detroit has a statistically significant higher level of bronchial and lung cancer. Detroit's children even have higher lead exposures than those

in Flint, Michigan. The harms are corporeal, ecological, even spiritual. Toxins are everywhere—and in each study it is revealed that these harms are disproportionately impacting people of color. Which forces us, as environmental justice activists, to think again about justice and retrospectively consider the conditions that made this possible.

Despite the magnitude of the problem, we are just beginning to calculate the newest manifestations of harm from the fossil fuel industry, broadening now from just the life cycle of toxins to climate impacts. We must, therefore, broaden the lens of justice beyond procedural and distributive justice to *transitional* justice. This third form of justice rests upon the idea that *we can,* in fact, restore our bodies, restore these lands, restore relationships with peoples and nations harmed in the formation of the fossil fuel economy, and potentially heal from these bloodied histories through political reconciliation. Esme Murdock, Black feminist scholar and environmental justice philosopher, pushes us to review the limits of transitional justice before acquiescing and necessarily examine indigenous lands, relations, and the history of settlement beyond the liberal limits of reconciliation: "we must think again exactly what is being reconciled and what precisely we are transitioning to when the outcomes of reconciliatory processes are not transforming colonial socio-ecological systems and structures."[3]

So what does that look like? And can we do that before it's too late? Or is it too late already? We are being asked to take on the most critical existential crisis ever known by humanity. If you acknowledge and accept that climate change is already underway, and for many peoples the crisis is underway, you understand the urgency of this question. But the moral question is *how do we rebuild trust, relationships, mutuality to increase the potential survivance of many peoples, especially the most vulnerable before hedging against the cliff?* Survivance, a concept elucidated by Anishnaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor, is "more than survival, more than endurance or mere response. . . . Survivance is an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy and victimry."[4] Or are we in a paradox in which we are willing to subjugate the peoples already victimized by this system, in advancement of CO_2 reductions regardless of its detrimental outcomes for those most vulnerable?

The different forms of justice described here—procedural, distributive, and transitional—are not in competition with one another, nor are they comparative in the sense that if one practices one, they are not

truly fulfilling the principles of environmental justice. But these forms absolutely cannot exist without one another; they must be in conversation to be accountable to a holistic future that centers and advances the connection between humans and other-than-human beings.

Detroit Case Study of Environmental Justice

The ZIP Code of 48217 is renowned as the most polluted community in Michigan; more pollutants are emitted there than anywhere in the state of Michigan.[5] It is at the most southern end of Detroit and primarily African American. 48217 resident Dr. Delores Leonard describes the settlement of Black soldiers to the area after World War II, as it was one of the few places where African American veterans were permitted to live and buy homes. In 2006, 48217 was negotiating a proposed expansion of a seventeen-acre Marathon Oil Petroleum facility, one that would process tar sands from Alberta.

Athabasca tar sands deposits are large, extremely heavy crude oil deposits located in northeastern Alberta, Canada. The Athabasca deposit in Alberta is the largest known reservoir of crude bitumen in the world and the largest of three major oil sands deposits in Alberta, making Canada the largest producer of oil outside Saudi Arabia and Venezuela.[6] The tar sands are piped through the Canadian Prairies, cross into the United States in northeastern North Dakota and travel across northern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan's Upper Peninsula before heading south toward Detroit. That has great significance. Enbridge's Line 5 travels under 89 percent of the United States's surface fresh water, the Great Lakes. Built in 1953, the pipeline has released over 1.1 million barrels into the watershed over its lifetime. Our precious watershed is nearly a quarter of the Earth's surface freshwater, a critical resource for fragile ecosystems, and a spiritual home for over 14,000 years, and it will be a precious resource in the coming era's unfathomable scarcity. Michigan is also home to Enbridge's Line 6B, which erupted in 2010, causing the nation's largest inland oil spill, resulting in 20,000 barrels of crude oil pouring into the Kalamazoo River. Both Enbridge Line 5 and Line 6B are linked to the Marathon Oil refinery.

Residents of Southwest Detroit were concerned about the impacts of additional pollutants in the neighborhood. The community is already overburdened by industry. The area of Southwest Detroit and

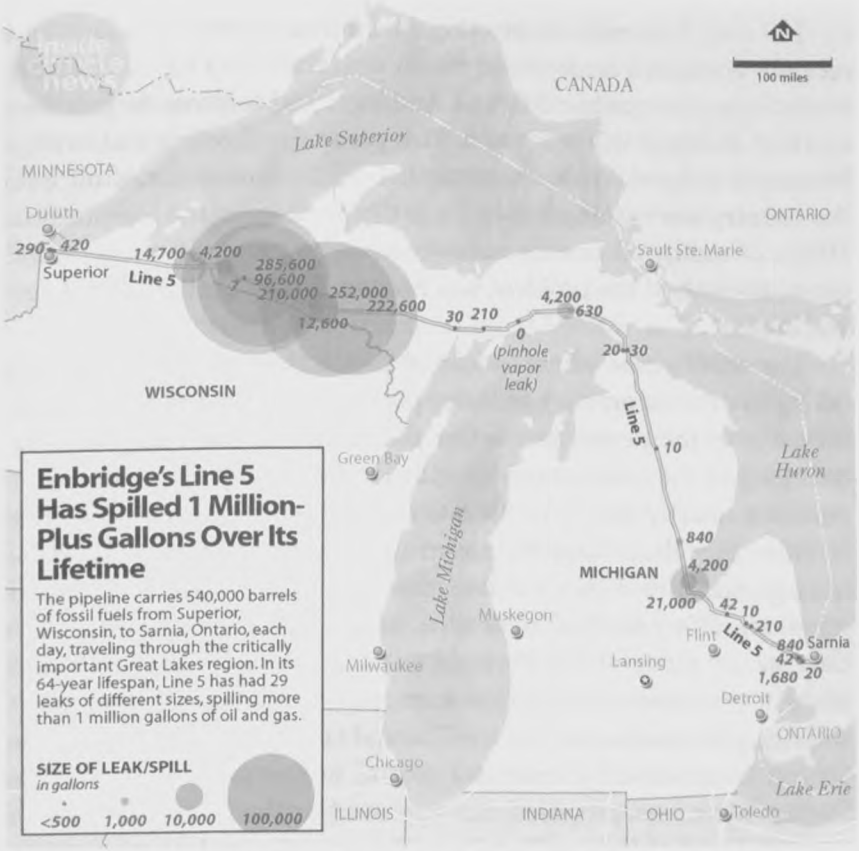

FIGURE 2. Gallons spilled from Enbridge Line 5 (*Source*: National Wildlife Federation. Image by Paul Horn, InsideClimate News)

neighboring South Dearborn produces cars, steel, and chemicals; refines petroleum; processes human waste; and burns coal and methane gas. The auxiliary storage of the waste products and its transports result in some of the heaviest and persistent pollutants. The goods and services of those industries are mined, piped, and transported across the border to Canada and the Western United States on rail, ship, and heavy diesel transit.

And the residential community of 48217 is directly adjacent to the industrial sector. There is absolutely no barrier between schools, playgrounds, churches, recreation centers, and industry. The outflow is directly processed and discharged into the River Rouge, a tributary of the Detroit River, or directly into the Detroit River.

In 2007, I attended a meeting in the community of 48217 as a recently graduated student and intern with the Sierra Club. Environmental Justice organizer Rhonda Anderson had told me to go down to 48217 and help where I could. This particular meeting was critical because it echoed what environmental justice communities all over the country were asking for—a fix to the problem of the longitudinal effects of industrial contaminants over the lifetimes of two or three generations. And the problem was not just of one facility, but of several dozens.

Detroit is a case where industrial production has seen a rise and fall, where the automotive industry peaked in the mid-twentieth century. But in the period just before the economic crash in 2008, and resurging in the 2010s, a doubling down on the industrial core compounded toxicity issues. In the late twentieth century, many of these facilities had closed and left superfund legacy sites, some of which were grandfathered into old laws that were not protective of health standards. Other facilities were either renovating and expanding—like the case of Marathon Oil. Previous to the economic collapse of 2008, many heavy industries in Detroit were conducting massive expansions, still riding on the coattails of NAFTA and lax regulatory regimes. The Detroit International Crossing, a second bridge to Canada over the Detroit River, was proposed and approved in the Southwest Detroit neighborhood of Delray. Hundreds of people showed up to testify at the Environmental Impact Statement public hearing for the crossing, yet the concerns of community about their respiratory health fell on deaf ears. Instead regulatory agency heads argued pollution would go down based on their models. Their models erroneously looked at tri-county regional transit flows—and not local congestion.

The Detroit Intermodal Freight Terminal, which proposed an expansion of freight that would combine three regional exchange terminals into one in the residential communities of Southwest Detroit, was approved but remains unfunded. And just forty miles downriver, a $2.2 billion expansion of the DTE Energy coal-fired power plant was approved for the energy monopoly utility headquartered in Detroit, making it one of the largest coal facilities in the United States—and it was permitted to burn tar sands waste, known as petroleum coke, for energy. Notably, DTE Energy received approval in 2017 for a new methane gas burning power plant forty miles up the Detroit River

in St. Clair County. Yet the regulatory regime outlined in the Clean Air Act treats each facility as if it were in a vacuum. It grants permits based on a pollution budget. The ambient air quality monitoring system, regulated by the state, is established according to federal law. The problem? It is woefully inadequate technologically, systematically underfunded, and underreported, as companies are also responsible for self-reporting their own environmental monitoring.

Unfortunately, the Marathon Oil facility came online in 2013—despite broad protest—yet that meeting in Southwest Detroit laid the political foundation for a long-term movement toward environmental justice. The community of 48217 is strong and organized, and it has gained a hard-earned seat at the table for environmental justice. The community still negotiates with the company directly, receiving several benefits like a new recreation center, filtration systems, and regular meetings with the company. For over a decade, people like Theresa Landrum and Dr. Delores Leonard have had to fight tooth and nail for their dignity. This advocacy has not stopped the pollution—and, in fact, the safety at the facility is rather poor, resulting in multiple illegal releases and a facility fire since opening. But this movement has resulted in another solution, what researchers now call the *cumulative impact* of pollution. I believe that meeting in 2007, where residents ended up screaming at the state agency, finally made possible a space for cumulative impact [CI] analysis. CI goes beyond the limits of the Clean Air Act, and it combines the ideas that pollution exposure, health outcomes, and sociological variables like race, poverty, education, and language accessibility can geographically map where the impacts of environmental injustice are the highest, and compare those with other areas.

So What? You Chose to Live There!

Richard Rothstein's *The Color of Law* (2018) very clearly links the historic markers of housing segregation to the history of slavery. "In 1866, Congress enforced the abolition of slavery by passing a Civil Rights Act, prohibiting actions that it deemed perpetuated the characteristics of slavery." At this point, housing was included in the ban, but in 1883 the Supreme Court rejected the notion that housing markets could be a badge or incident of slavery, and so housing segregation was supported and enacted by governmental policies, social norms, and banking

institutions. Until 1968, when the Supreme Court overturned that decision in *Jones v. Alfred H. Mayer Co.*, in which a developer refused to sell a home to Mr. Joseph Lee Jones in St. Louis solely based on race, the parameters of the Fair Housing Act were unregulated.[7] Detroit was not exempt from the implications of racism in housing policy and the downstream effects on their localities. The homes and the areas available to postwar Black families were directly adjacent to the industries we have discussed. And the combination of anti-Black racism, housing discrimination through redlining, and workforce inequity resulted in many of the dynamics that have compounded into environmental injustice and racialized geographies, making Detroit one of the most racially segregated metropolitan areas in the United States today.

Data available from the 2015 American Community Survey reveals the extent of this segregation in the Detroit Metropolitan Area. Though housing segregation prevented many families from moving into affluent suburbs forty to fifty years ago, it also codified *generations* of people into a racialized geography. At the same time that Detroit experienced "white flight," it also was hammered by urban disinvestment and capital flight, culminating in the collapse of the municipal financial system, marked by Detroit's 2013 municipal bankruptcy—the largest municipal bankruptcy in American history. Those who were fortunate to maintain any personal wealth while living in Detroit in the latter end of the century experienced a multitudinous loss in property values, intergenerational wealth, opportunity, quality of education, and public safety. According to the US Census Bureau, the median value of owner-occupied housing in Detroit from 2014 to 2018 was $48,700. That is the median. Many homes (upwards of 24,000, in fact) went into foreclosure either by the bank or the county and were valued at only $500 in 2015. Compare that with Ferndale, Michigan, a historically working-class white neighborhood just north of the city's limit of 8 Mile Road, whose median home value was $148,100 for the same period.[8]

Cumulative Impact [CI]

As communities in Detroit were asking for a respite from the pollution that accounted for past harms, so were other communities all over the United States. The infrastructure built or expanded in the postwar era across the United States is now in decline. Many of the pipelines, power

plants, and production facilities have reached the end of their life cycle. The roads, bridges, highways, and waterways are at a crossroads. And the question that continues to plague us is: What system will we build and how will we pay for it? The question is under extreme scrutiny by thought leaders and those victimized by environmental injustices and its ravages. In a field hearing, Senator Gary Peters listed the costs associated with the 2014 flooding around Detroit as more than $1 billion. In Warren, an estimated 18,000 structures—about one in three homes—were damaged. In 2017, Isabella County flooding caused about $90 million dollars in damage. More than $20 million worth of crops were lost. In Michigan's Upper Peninsula last year, flooding in the Houghton area caused nearly $100 million in damage to public infrastructure.

Some areas of Michigan have seen more rain in 2019 than ever before recorded. Environmental justice advocates are now taking up space in the climate arena, insisting that *past* harms cannot be ignored as we plan for *future* systems. Cumulative impact [CI] is one tool that environmental justice activists and advocates have been developing to demonstrate how people of color and indigenous communities should be first in line for the investments of the future, as we have borne disproportionate impacts of the fossil fuel economy.

In 2017, the Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition began working with scholars at the University of Michigan's School of Environment and Sustainability to complete a study on the cumulative impact of environmental harms on communities of color across the state. We knew that, after five years of the Flint Water Crisis, the expansion of the fossil fuel industry on the Great Lakes and the magnitude of the climate crisis needed to be addressed systemically. The first step in any climate policy *must be* cumulative in its impact analysis. The ability to distribute the goods of any system requires the identification of the harms. In California, cumulative impact is a policy that is codified through CAL Screen. It combines pollution exposure and socioeconomic data to create maps of the hardest hit communities. California, for instance, uses this methodology to direct investments for clean energy technologies. The researchers at the University of Michigan not only interviewed environmental justice advocates but conducted the first statewide assessment of environmental injustice in Michigan.

Results indicated that when you combine pollution burden with population characteristics you create an environmental justice burden

index that is comparable across the state. Urban areas, such as Detroit, Grand Rapids, Flint, Saginaw, and Lansing, show how environmental justice hotspots are present throughout the state. Both qualitative and quantitative data demonstrated that environmental goods and harms are inequitably distributed in the state of Michigan:

> Vulnerability is exacerbated by instances of procedural injustice, such as decision-making by emergency managers instead of elected leaders; distributive injustice, such as income earned from energy production leaving communities; and corrective injustice, such as lack of compensation for damages. A long list of barriers, such as lack of transportation and feeling ignored by the government, hold back community members' efforts of improving the health of themselves and their communities.[9]

Interviews revealed that environmental justice leaders characterized affected communities as resilient despite adversity. The network of social justice advocates and activists is the social capital that makes the leadership and political potential possible. Others cited a myriad of environmental, social, and health impacts, including lack of air and water quality, gentrification, asthma, and cancer. Those interviewed also spoke to the psychological impacts not only of being personally affected or witnessing these issues, but also of fighting what seemed like "an insurmountable battle for justice."[10] Additionally, participants described numerous barriers to achieving environmental justice, most notably lack of political will and the erosion of democratic processes. Participants disclosed utilizing a variety of tools to advance environmental justice and expressed a desire for a Michigan-specific tool to measure cumulative impacts. However, they expressed that the tool must be accompanied by strong state-level environmental justice policy in order to be effective.

The quantitative aspects included quantifying eleven environmental indicators: air toxics cancer risk, air toxics respiratory hazard index, diesel particulate matter (PM), ozone level, PM 2.5 level, traffic proximity and volume, lead paint indicator, proximity to National Priority List sites, proximity to risk management plan facilities, proximity to treatment storage and disposal facilities, and a wastewater discharge indicator. The six social indicators used in the study were: percent

minority residents, percent of households living below twice the federal poverty level, unemployment rate, percent of residents with less than a high school education, percent of households living in linguistic isolation, and percent housing-burdened low-income households.[11] By combining social and environmental indicators and placing them on a map, we can see very clearly that racialized geographies are present in relation to exposure to and impact from environmental toxins—yet the political capital to course-correct seems insurmountably unattainable.

Overall the study also found that when you layer the environmental and social data that is publicly available, the top 5 percent most polluted areas are composed of 81.5 percent people of color, compared with 25.1 percent of the general population.[12] This is a classic environmental justice issue, proving that environmental racism is alive and well in Detroit. But the limitations of this study are that we cannot and have not been able to access other critical data that more broadly addresses the impact of environmental justice. For example, exposure to chemical fertilizers within farm worker populations is not characterized here. The violation of sacred sites in mining on indigenous landscapes are not included. This study is not the panacea we all hoped for, but it provides an opportunity to understand and codify the distribution of harms, so that we may repair the trust and relationships—and perhaps increase survivances—in the future we all steward.

Identification of environmental injustices using a tool like cumulative impact assessment is a critical first step in the creation of any environmental or climate policy. If we cannot identify who has borne the impact and where they live within the current system, we cannot understand the vulnerabilities set in place as the climate crises unfold, nor can we establish the boundaries of the creation of a new economy that addresses the historic harm to systematically dismantle the patterns of injustice for the future. We do not pretend this will solve all of the problems associated with the climate crisis. And, as we know with some certainty, each and every geography has a different and unique set of histories and economies at play when discussing adaptation or mitigation. But this tool does provide us a framework from which we can engage the question of racially disparate impact.

The wicked question before us, then, is after identifying those who have been impacted, how can we create policies that would first limit the continued pollutants and then invest in renewable energy

structures that invest wealth back into communities, divesting from climate-changing industries. Different places all over the country are turning towards retooling our economy, building workforce programs for veterans and returning citizens, investing in solar in schools to offset education costs in public schools, decentralizing energy systems and creating resilience centers, and tying affordable housing financing to clean energy credits—all wealth building opportunities that will alleviate and eliminate poverty *and* the climate crisis. Our movement is solutions-rich and resource-poor. Figuring out how to actualize the economy through local food systems, clean affordable transit, and off-grid solutions is proliferating. But our finance systems are falling behind; in fact, they are actually intensifying the climate crisis. More troubling, they are denying the conditions which facilitate the trust needed to heal historic harm and reconcile the deeply unequal fastenings of the settler state.

A recent report created by the Rainforest Action Network, Bank Track, Sierra Club, OilChange, Indigenous Environmental Network, and Honor the Earth indicates that thirty-three banks all over the world have invested upwards of $1.9 trillion in the fossil fuel industry since the Paris Agreement—each year investing incrementally more. That is more than all of the currency in circulation in the United States. The worst of those banks are the US-based JPMorgan Chase, leading all others by almost 30 percent. JPMorgan Chase, Wells Fargo, Citibank, and Bank of America represent the top four. These banking investments are not in a vacuum. The United States *direct* governmental subsidies are reported to be exceeding the budget of the Pentagon. At a time when we should be investing in solutions through an equity lens, banking in the United States is fueling the climate crisis in very literal ways.

Conclusion

The compounding evidence of environmental racism has been proven globally—and locally—over and over again. It is true in Michigan. It is true in Detroit. The data contends and supports the claims made by communities over the last decades and beyond—that the cumulative and longitudinal impacts of industrialization are wearing at the quality of life and life itself. There are efforts toward identification of those hardest hit by these toxic inequities, which have manifested over the life

cycle of the fossil fuel industry. There are also policy and technological solutions to alleviate current conditions and ameliorate future harms.

But the growing and indisputable truths of an unfolding climate disruption are exacerbating political and socioeconomic inequities at an even more alarming rate. When you begin to uncover the historic underpinnings of the systems motivated by profit and disinvestment, it is heartbreaking. When we sit at home and read headline after headline about the devastation from typhoons in Japan, flooding in the Philippines, hurricanes in the Caribbean, droughts and hunger in the Middle East, historic rainfall or crop loss, an undercurrent of catastrophism takes over. What is it that we can do? These questions are not new. Disruption, dislocation, and unsettled deterritorialization are and have been the underaccounted for or totally erased history of people of color.

We know there are pathways out of the crisis; we *must* hold that vision. There are ways of being that will alleviate the crisis we are in, so we must take bold political action to make them possible. There is an abundance of compassion, yet it takes a wildly controversial form of love for others beyond borders and cages. There is a wave of bravery and perseverance giving everyone who believes that human beings—regardless of their race, income, or national status, regardless of their gender identity, their physical or cognitive abilities, or the God to whom they pray—*all* have a right to live, *all* have a right to migrate and drink water, and *all* have a right to participate in restoring our relationships and our communities. We must *believe in the right* to rehabilitate our connection to nature, to repatriate lands to peoples and reconcile those ways of knowing across difference—but it takes everyone. Because even if *every* single human in the United States spent every single penny they have on solutions, it would not amount to the total that banks have given the greedy and catastrophic fossil fuel industry in the last three years alone. It will take more than money. We must collectively learn how to be totally fearless in defending the political potential of life and its restorative powers, because the solutions themselves can *only* be born from the immaterial and magical moment of unknowing created when two minds, different ways of being, and worlds come together to restore the damage of segregation and colonization. It is happening all around us. All you need to do is look, and then get to work.

Notes

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