

A Place at the Table

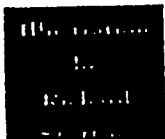
THE ERA OF AN AMERICAN ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT DOMINATED by the interests of white people is over. The beginning of the end came in September 1982, in Warren County, North Carolina, when more than 500 predominantly African-American residents were arrested for blocking the path of trucks carrying toxic PCBs to a newly designated hazardous-waste landfill. Among those taken into custody was the Reverend Benjamin Chavis, executive director of the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice (CRJ). His suspicions as to why North Carolina would choose a black community as a dump for its poison were confirmed in a milestone report by the CRJ in 1987, which demonstrated that the single most significant factor in the siting of hazardous-waste facilities nationwide was race. A subsequent report, by the *National Law Journal*, found that the EPA took 20 percent longer to identify Superfund sites in minority communities, and that polluters of those neighborhoods were fined only half as much as polluters of white ones.

Armed with proof of what has become known as "environmental racism," a loose alliance of church, labor, civil rights, and community groups led by people of color arose to demand environmental justice. Part of doing so meant confronting the so-called "Group of Ten," the nation's largest—and largely white—environmental groups, and bluntly accusing them of racism.

The charges came in early 1990 in a jolting series of letters from Louisiana's Gulf Coast Tenant Leadership Development Project and the Southwest Organizing Project in Albuquerque (see "The Letter That Shook a Movement," page 54). Abashed, many of the mainstream groups vowed reformation, if not transformation. Last May, in a speech celebrating the Sierra Club's centennial at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, then-Executive Director Michael Fischer called for "a friendly takeover of the Sierra Club by people of color." The alternative, he said, was for the Club to "remain a middle-class group of backpackers, overwhelmingly white in membership, program, and agenda—and thus condemn[ed] to losing influence in an increasingly multicultural country. . . . The struggle for environmental justice in this country and around the globe must be the primary goal of the Sierra Club during its second century."

Recently *Sierra* invited some of the leading proponents of the environ-

A
Sierra
Roundtable on
RACE,
ENVIRONMENT



mental justice movement to San Francisco to explore how we might arrive at that multicultural future. Attending were the Reverend Chavis; Richard Moore, co-chair of the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice in Albuquerque and longtime community organizer; Vivien Li, chair of the Sierra Club's Ethnic Diversity Task Force and director of the Boston Harbor Association; Scott Douglas, then community organizer with the Sierra Club's Southeast Office (he has since been named director of Greater Birmingham Ministries); and Winona LaDuke, director of the White Earth Recovery Project in Minnesota. The discussion was moderated by Carl Anthony, president of Earth Island Institute in San Francisco and founder of its Urban Habitat Program.

Carl Anthony: We've all been involved in the struggle for environmental justice for a very long time, even if we didn't always call it that. Reverend Chavis, you invented the term "environmental racism," didn't you?

Benjamin Chavis: We coined it, but the reality was out there—we just gave language to it. This movement for environmental justice is a definitive movement: we're redefining our realities. Our guiding principle is that our work must be done from a grassroots perspective, and it must be multiracial and multicultural. We are learning how to do that. There's no blueprint, but there are guiding principles that emerge, and that's what we want to share with you.

The good news is, we're being inclusive, not exclusive. We're not saying to take the incinerators and the toxic-waste dumps out of our communities and put them in white communities—we're saying they should not be in *anybody's* community. When the movement first got going, I think some whites actually became afraid, because they thought it was a movement of retribution. It is not a movement of retribution—it is a movement for justice. You can't get justice by doing an injustice on somebody

mental justice movement from a 30-year-long career in the civil rights movement, in the fight for racial justice. I find that the environmental justice movement is emerging as the bridge movement, bringing diverse racial and ethnic communities together in a profound way, a way no other issue even has the potential to do.

Richard Moore: It's certainly the first meeting that I've attended where we've been asked to come together and have this kind of dialogue. We appreciate that—that's what the letters and all that was about in the first place.

Anthony: Richard, you've written quite a few letters, and they all made a lot of waves. Could you tell us about the one



“We have to be careful we do not allow ourselves to be pitted against each other, divided and conquered.”

else. When you have lived through suffering and hardship, you want to remove them, not only from your own people but from all peoples.

By the way, I'm a history buff, and I would like to note that the Sierra Club is the first one of the Group of Ten to actually invite members of the environmental justice movement to its national headquarters. I've come to the environ-

that you wrote to the big environmental groups?

Moore: Back in 1990 we had classes at the Southwest Network in how to write. A lot of our people don't know how, and we figured if we were going to offer literacy classes, we should at least do something productive. It was very difficult for us; we spent a lot of time talking about it, because we knew that there would be ramifications. It meant a lot to people because it was the first time that we've had the opportunity, as poor people, as working-class people, as people of color, to sit down and talk about how we feel about things and then transfer that to paper.

Basically, we raised three issues. One, the issue of some—

not all—of the mainstream environmental organizations accepting money from the same corporations that are killing our people.

Secondly, we had concerns about the staffing of mainstream environmental organizations and the composition of their boards. If you put one black person or brown person or red person or yellow person on the board and think, "OK, everything's going to be cool," that's not what we're talking about. We have not seen the kind of forward movement that we would have hoped to see. We knew nothing was going to change overnight, but at the same time we have not seen that movement.

The third one is more basic. Who is it you are advocating for? In New Mexico, where I've lived 25 years now, there has been a history of problems and conflict between our communities and environmental organizations. We're talking about land issues, water issues, regulations that environmental organizations have been pushing forward—for the protection of who? For what? If it's for the protection of us, then how come we haven't been involved in it? Why do we have to hear something third down the line, sixth down the line, or never down the line? If it is to protect our interests, then bring us to the table, because we do very fine at protecting our own interests.



CARL ANTHONY

“The traditional movement distances itself from cities, denying that they are even part of the environment.”

Anthony: A good example of the attitudes of the more established groups toward communities of color is *Blueprint for the Environment*, which was submitted to George Bush when he took office. It contained 750 detailed recommendations from 18 established environmental groups, including proposals for every Cabinet department except two: the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Labor. The groups could have made recommendations about lead poisoning, energy conservation in public housing, siting of affordable housing near transportation corridors, occupational health-and-safety issues in the workplace. But they didn't. In retrospect, it is clear that ignoring these two departments clearly reflected the movement's racial and class biases.

Your letters made public what a lot of us in social justice movements were feeling. At first, many of the environmental groups denied charges of racism. But then, gradually, they realized that the charges were serious. It was a kind of wake-up call. Vivien, how did the Sierra Club respond?

Vivien Li: The Sierra Club started looking at the issue of environmental justice in the 1970s. We cosponsored, with two other environmental groups and the National Urban League, a conference in 1978 in Detroit that brought together 700 people from around the country, people of color as well as more traditional environmentalists, to look at how the civil rights movement could work together with the environmental movement.

Unfortunately, once the Reagan/Bush administration came in, people went back to protecting their own turf. Had there been a continuation of that kind of coalition effort at the grassroots level, I think we would be a lot further ahead today. I think your letters were important, because they focused people's attention on working together again.

As to the funding issue, I've served for three years on a three-person committee that reviews every corporate gift to the Sierra Club over \$1,000. We do not take money from the oil industry, from the paper industry, from chemical companies, tobacco companies, or major polluters. If there is ever any doubt about a corporation's environmental record, we don't take money from them.

The diversity of our staff and board is an issue that concerns the Club. We don't have an easy fix for it, but we're committed to trying to change, starting at the grassroots and

The Letter That Shook a Movement

THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE movement, a loose coalition of hundreds of grassroots groups led by people of color, was born out of a challenge to the country's largest environmental organizations. Below are excerpts from a letter sent by the Southwest Organizing Project on March 15, 1990, to what's known as the "Group of Ten": the Sierra Club, Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, Friends of the Earth, The Wilderness Society, National Audubon Society, Natural Resources Defense Council, Environmental Defense Fund, National Wildlife Federation, Izaak Walton League, and National Parks and Conservation Association.

We are writing this letter in the belief that through dialogue and mutual strategizing we can create a global environmental movement that protects us all. . . .

For centuries, people of color in our region have been subjected to racist and genocidal practices, including the theft of lands and water, the murder of innocent people, and the degradation of our environment. Mining companies extract minerals, leaving economically depressed communities and poisoned soil and water. The U.S. military takes

lands for weapons production, testing, and storage, contaminating surrounding communities and placing minority workers in the most highly radioactive and toxic work sites. Industrial and municipal dumps are intentionally placed in communities of color, disrupting our cultural lifestyle and threatening our communities' futures. Workers in the fields are dying and babies are born disfigured as a result of pesticide spraying.

Although environmental organizations calling themselves the "Group of Ten" often claim to represent our interests, in observing your activities it has become clear to us that your organizations play an equal role in the disruption of our communities. *There is a clear lack of accountability by the Group of Ten environmental organizations towards Third World communities in the Southwest, in the United States as a whole, and internationally.*

Your organizations continue to support and promote policies that emphasize the cleanup and preservation of the environment on the backs of working people in general and people of color in particular. In the name of eliminating environmental hazards at any cost,

across the country industrial and other economic activities which employ us are being shut down, curtailed, or prevented while our survival needs and cultures are ignored. We suffer from the end results of these actions, but are never full participants in the decision-making which leads to them. . . .

We . . . call upon you to cease operation in communities of color within 60 days, until you have hired leaders from those communities to the extent that they make up between 35 and 40 percent of your entire staff. We are asking that Third World leaders be hired at all levels of your operations. . . . Also provide a list of communities of color to whom you furnish services, or Third World communities in which you have organizing drives or campaigns, and contacts in those communities. . . .

It is our sincere hope that we can have a frank and open dialogue with your organization and other national environmental organizations. It is our opinion that people of color in the United States and throughout the world are clearly an endangered species. Issues of environmental destruction are issues of our immediate and long-term survival. We hope that we can soon work with your organization in helping to assure the safety and well-being of all peoples.

working all the way up. It should never be a question of a token minority on the Board of Directors. One of the things that we're trying to do is to ensure that diversity is an issue throughout the Sierra Club, for both staff and volunteers.

This past year, we funded 12 grassroots organizing projects proposed by Sierra Club activists. These ranged from a lead-poisoning prevention effort in San Francisco's Chinatown to a campaign against toxic dumping on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. We're trying to connect traditional Sierra Club work with community-based efforts.

The type of change we're talking about is very fundamental, and it will not happen in one or two or even five years. The Sierra Club is a hundred years old, and some of the baggage that we carry, frankly, goes back a long time. I think we've made significant progress, but clearly we're not totally there yet.

Chavis: I was very happy when I heard that the Sierra Club had hired Scott Douglas; I think that was an indication of the Club's seriousness.

Scott Douglas: You know, I think my position as grassroots organizer owes its existence to those letters. The writing project worked, Richard, at least that aspect of it.

My commitment, coming out of the civil rights movement and the peace movement, is to renegotiate the relationship between peoples, and between peoples and the earth. Some of the best models for that process are from Native American traditions. They teach us that part of that renegotiation is mutuality and respect for people's cultures, respect for the lessons that they have learned. We're erasing peoples at a hellish pace, and with them goes their body of knowledge. We erase indigenous peoples, and then give some university a \$10-million grant to discover one-tenth of what those people had accumulated over eons. That's not very efficient.

Anthony: We often forget that there are 60 million people of color in the United States; soon we aren't going to be "minorities" any more. Already more than a third of the actual physical territory of the North American continent has in-

indigenous people as its majority population. Winona LaDuke, are Native Americans ready to be part of the "mainstream"?
Winona LaDuke: We are not part of and do not wish to be part of the mainstream of America. We are different. America has to come to terms with our difference, and to recognize our need for territorial integrity and self-determination.

Scouts of America, who own thousands of acres there.

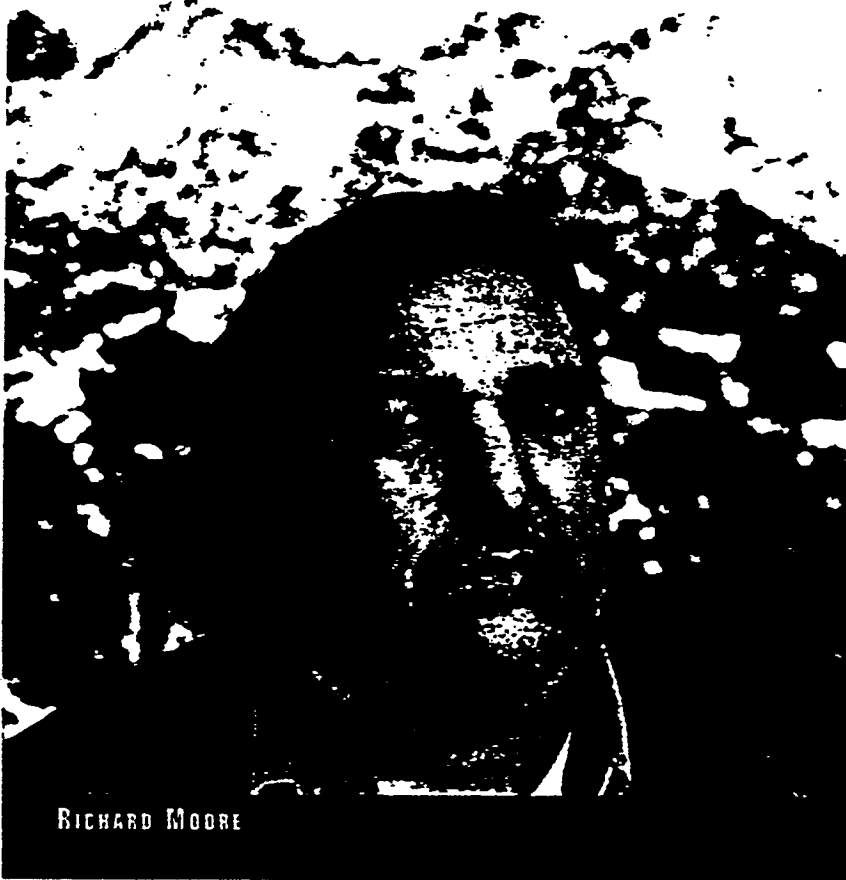
We've also had federal legislation introduced for the return of 50,000 acres—the Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge. Right now the refuge is pretty much used as a hunting ground for sport hunters from Minneapolis; nine times as many deer are taken by non-Indians as by Indians there, and only 40 percent of the lakes are closed to duck hunting. We hunt, but only for subsistence. We hunt because we're poor, because we need that food, because that's what we've always done.

I have to say that historically, environmental organizations, including the Sierra Club, have sometimes opposed land transfers back to Indians. We're hoping that that doesn't occur in our case. So far it's been pretty good.

Chavis: I would like to pay deference here to our Native American sisters and brothers, who have been trying to focus the attention of the environmental justice movement on the sacredness of the air, the water, the land, the sacredness of the Creation. Social justice movements often leave spirituality out, but the environmental justice movement holds spirituality as a very key element.

LaDuke: In my language, most nouns are animate. A rock, *asin*, is animate, and *mandamin*, corn, is animate. They have standing on their own, they have spirit. They are not recognized as objects or resources; they are instead recognized as vital living things that we have to respect and have a relationship to.

Native people consider themselves a part of nature. There's no separation, like the one that necessarily exists in the industrial mind. Unfortunately, most environmentalism comes out of that mind, not out of the indigenous



RICHARD MOORE

“After a bill is already developed, someone says, ‘This affects

Indian people — we better find an Indian and see how they feel about it.’”

My reservation is in northern Minnesota, 36 miles by 36 miles, located between Bemidji and Fargo, one of seven Ojibwa reservations in the North. We were ceded a huge area under a treaty of 1867, a land we call the White Earth. It's a wealthy land full of lakes, pinelands, farmlands, prairie, and most of the medicines our people have used for centuries. That's why we don't have it today. By 1920, 90 percent of our reservation was in non-Indian hands, seized by a bunch of illegal land transactions. Most of our people were forced off the reservation and into poverty. Three-quarters of them are refugees. Most Native Americans, in fact, are refugees.

Our work is about trying to reclaim our land base. We've tried every legal recourse, but have had no success in the court system. So we are trying to reclaim that land through other processes, including negotiations with large absentee landholders like the Potlatch timber company or the Boy

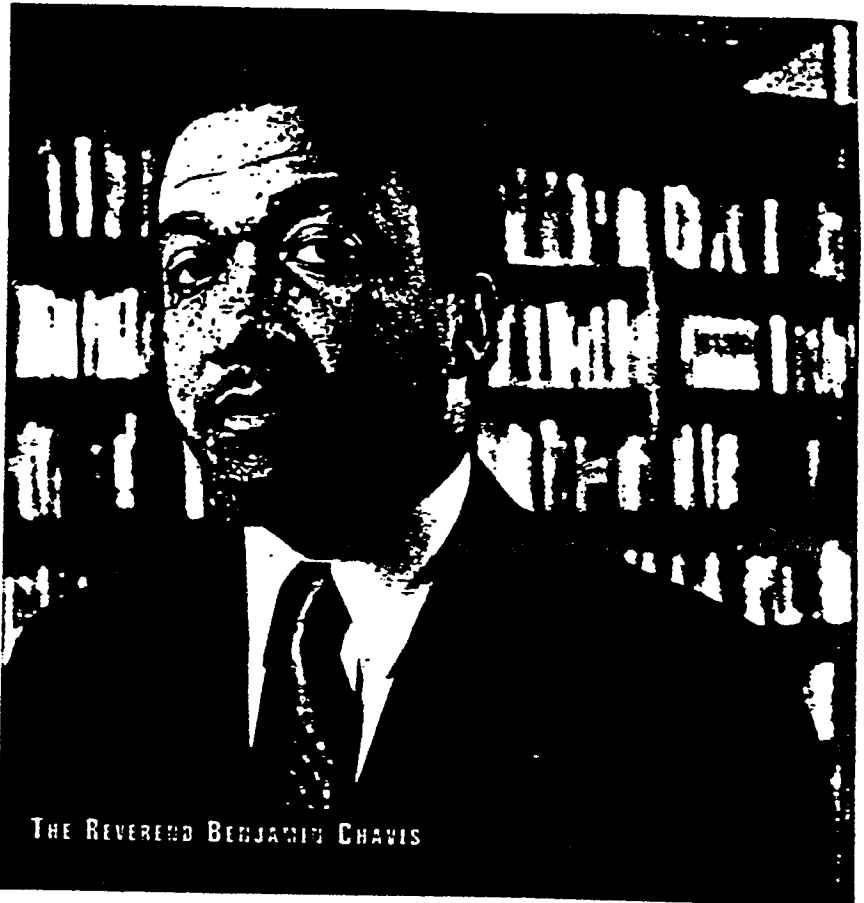
mind. The challenge faced by environmentalists is to decolonize their industrial minds.

Anthony: It's interesting the way language and culture work. I would say most African-Americans and Latinos have long been aware that our neighborhoods were dumping grounds for locally unwanted land uses, but not until Ben Chavis invented the term “environmental racism” did we have a name for it. When the United Church of Christ Commission on Racial Justice published *Toxic Waste and Race*, which docu-

mented the disproportionate siting of hazardous-waste facilities in our communities, everyone knew right away what they were talking about.

Li: For Native Americans subjected to toxic and hazardous-waste facilities, we're talking about very detrimental health effects. For example, Native American infants suffer from the highest rates of sudden-infant-death syndrome—also known as crib death—in the country. Doctors don't know why Native Americans are afflicted more than any other group, but exposure to environmental poisons can't help.

LaDuke: There have been a hundred separate proposals to dump toxic wastes on Native communities. [See "Their Mother's Keepers," March/April.] Fifteen of the 18 federal research grants for Monitored Retrievable Storage Facilities [for nuclear wastes] went to Indian reservations. One-third of all low-sulfur coal and two-thirds of the uranium mined in this country are on Indian reservations. We have nuclear radiation all over our land, but no major environmental group in this country has a uranium campaign. No major environmental group in this country has dealt consciously with the issues of Native people. Our communities are bearing the brunt of America's energy policy,



THE REVEREND BENJAMIN CHAVIS

“The destroyers of the environment are also the destroyers of our neighborhoods and communities.”

yet no one has seen fit to address our concerns in their policy-making.

Anthony: Few people realize how much communities of color suffer from bad energy policies, from inappropriate hydroelectric dams and nuclear power projects to over-reliance on fossil fuels. Navajo teenagers still suffer from radiation exposure from uranium mining. Several years back, the Center for Third World Organizing in Oakland found that these exposures were causing cancer at a rate 17 times the national average.

It's not just nuclear energy; dependence on fossil fuels also places burdens on our communities. From the extraction of fossil fuels to their distribution, use, and waste, our communities get fewer benefits and pay a greater price. Stripmining in the Four Corners region for energy users hundreds of miles away creates a national sacrifice zone on sacred Native lands, without even providing for local energy needs. Poor people of color in the cities use up to 35 percent of their income to purchase energy; renters get none of the incentives to weatherize their homes, but they are stuck with

big heating bills. And even though people of color drive fewer vehicle miles per year than other city dwellers, freeways often cut their communities in half, destroying their economic and social lives in addition to exposing them to a disproportionate amount of air pollution.

My own work in the Urban Habitat Program focuses on these issues, trying to build a multicultural urban environmental leadership. I'm sorry that we haven't heard much yet today about the cities. Historically, people of color have been concentrated in barrios and ghettos without adequate neighborhood services, schools, or open space. This concentration is the result of a long history of discrimination.

Li: Think back to how Chinatowns were started. They were the only place that Chinese people could work and congregate and have an identity. Up until the early 1960s, Chinese immigration was greatly restricted, and Chinese tended to settle along the two coasts where they had gained entry. Since they were considered inferior to Caucasians, no one wanted to work with them, so they developed their laundries and their restaurants, frankly for economic survival.

It's been different since the 1960s and '70s. Now there are Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians who have come not just to seek a better future but because they have been subjected to political persecution in their native lands. Many of them tend to be poor and less well-educated; they have more

PHOTO BY MARY ANN MURPHY

ANN MURPHY PHOTO

difficulty identifying a cultural niche for themselves. Here in San Francisco, the Chinese are very well-organized politically, as is the Japanese community, but amongst Laotians and Cambodians it has been much more difficult. In order for them to get attention paid to urban environmental issues like rodent control and lead poisoning, they must first develop that political power.

Anthony: I think it's very important for us to understand and connect to our history. When we talk about history, of course, we're really talking about peeling an onion, because we begin to see connections that we didn't see before. I'm thinking about Thoreau, who was imprisoned for protesting the Mexican-American War, which relates to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo; or Martin Luther King, who was shot in Memphis protecting garbage workers. The connections between the civil rights movement and the environmental movement are really quite rich.

LaDuke: In our case, unfortunately, the trouble is that environmental groups have, historically, come from a Eurocentric perspective. That is not an inclusive perspective, and it's not something we can relate to. Many times, in fact, environmental groups make decisions that affect other communities without the input of those communities. One of them even purchased land on our reservation without ever talking to us about it, and restricted our use of an area that had medicinal plants.

Douglas: In Alabama, we have the largest hazardous-waste dump in the country, at a place called Emelle. It got put in Alabama because white environmentalists negotiated the site with Chemical Waste Management without talking to the black community, which was getting the message that there was going to be a brick factory there. These guys had the audacity to negotiate that country's future—and still think they were doing it in our interest!

Moore: After our letter went out, we got calls from communities all over northern New Mexico thanking us. "For the first time," they said, "legislators called us and said, 'We're developing a bill. Do you want to come to the meeting and help us?'" Because what usually happens is that after the bill is already developed, someone says, "This bill affects some Indian people—we better find an Indian person and see

We are talking about providing grassroots organizations the possibility of bringing issues to the table. That's what it's all about. It's about us speaking for ourselves. It's not about what's taking place under the table, it's about what's taking place on top.

LaDuke: I've been working for 16 years on Native environmental issues: with groups that have five members in the middle of the Navajo Reservation to Innu from northern Labrador who have been fighting the siting of a military base and a bunch of dams up there. Those groups are frontline environmental groups, but they are seen instead as *Native* groups, because the big environmental movement wants to position itself clearly as *the* environmental movement. We need to broaden the definition and to recognize these grassroots groups that have been struggling over these issues for



WICOMA LADUKE

"Unfortunately, most environmentalism comes out of the industrial mind, not the indigenous mind."

how they feel about it." You know how it goes—it comes on down through the fax machine, and you have 15 minutes to decide: "We'd like to give you more time but we're in a hurry, 'cuz it's got to go to Senator So-and-So..."

all these years. What we need is a place at the table.

Anthony: With its focus on wilderness, the traditional environmental movement on the one hand pretends there were no indigenous people in the North American plains and forests. On the other, it distances itself from the cities, denying that they are part of the environment. It's interesting what we talk about and what we avoid talking about. For example, in this roundtable at the headquarters of the Sierra Club, it occurs to me that we, as people of color, have had



SCOTT DOUGLAS

“Seldom do you go to a low-income black community where the only problem is the incinerator.”

very little to say about nature. Some people may think that people of color are insensitive to plants and animals, that we don't care about the biosphere . . .

Chavis: I agree it's important to be able to see through a lens that doesn't filter nature out of this discussion. One of the things that has emerged is the bifurcation between wanting to protect animal species and protecting the human species. That is a false bifurcation. The notion that you can protect the ozone layer from further deterioration without seeing the degradation in the neighborhoods, the barrios, and the ghettos is a false notion.

Douglas: My job assignment in Birmingham is to assist grassroots groups working against the imposition of injustice in the environmental field. As I went to those communities, I noticed that they didn't separate the hazardous-waste incinerator from the fact that lead poisoning is not being dealt with in their schools, from the fact that their schools have been underfunded, that they have no day care, no jobs, no access to jobs. They don't separate it, because their quality of life as a whole is going down. So who was I when I came to visit their community organizations? Was I Scott Douglas the environmentalist, or Scott Douglas the get-out-the-vote guy? These problems are all wrapped up together, and it teaches us a very important lesson: oppressed people do not have compartmentalized problems. Very seldom do you go to a low-income black community, and the

only problem is the incinerator: “Man, if we got rid of the incinerator, we'd be fine!” The incinerator is merely the external reflection of a whole host of problems.

Anthony: The people that I work with, young people, don't make artificial divisions between homicide in the inner city, gang violence, toxics that come from incinerators, and the slaughter of dolphins. They don't make all these distinctions that other people do when they have budgets to submit to foundations.

Moore: Sometimes the big environmental groups seem to think that we're imagining things. If you choose, you *can* come to the conclusion that we're just a bunch of crazy people who are trying to raise some hell and get our names in the paper. And you would be making a very serious mistake.

Li: Richard, I've yet to hear anybody here in the Sierra Club differ with you on the issues. I think you could probably cite some examples, but overall the kinds of things that you're talking about are exactly the same types of things that Sierra Club activists at all levels have been talking about. No one wants more lead paint. We're not pushing for more landfill dumps. We're not pushing for incineration. We were the ones who got \$10 million for job re-training into the Clean Air Act . . .

Moore: Let's not act as though what we're saying is not a reality. The Sierra Club has been responsible, has been a co-conspirator in attempting to take away resources from our communities. Like we said in our letter: your organizations are supporting policies that emphasize the cleanup and preservation of the environment on the backs of working people, and people of color in particular. When you come into our communities talking about closing down the plant, who's working in the plant? We've had to close down plants, let me tell you that. In the final analysis that plant may have to go: it's killed people inside, and has also poisoned our groundwater and our air and our children outside. But we went through a process first, attempting to bring workers into the decision.

Li: I think we have to be careful we do not allow ourselves to be pitted against each other—people of color should not be divided and conquered. All of us care about jobs, be it Sierra Club people, people in the community, whoever. But what is happening, frankly, is that you believe that there is a split between jobs and the environment. And if you believe

Continued on page 90

A PLACE AT THE TABLE

Continued from page 58

that, then mainstream America has succeeded in dividing the civil rights movement and the environmental movement.

Douglas: This is important: people, if given a choice, will choose safe, clean water, land, and air over "economics"—but only if they're given a choice. They're not given a choice in places like Sumter County, Alabama, where you can lose your livelihood—and sometimes your life—if you speak out against the biggest polluters. People aren't choosing between jobs and the environment; they're choosing between death—their jobs are killing them—and unemployment. It's a sick choice. The workers are choosing early death so their families can eat. They know they're going to die.

This is the sickness we're up against. This is the same sickness as racism. Until we're able to address it, we won't

be able to protect ourselves against it. Unless we can immunize ourselves against it, there's always a tool that can be used against us.

Racism is what makes foreigners of people in their own lands. We have a society that makes foreigners out of Native Americans. We're very selective about who we make foreigners of now, with our immigration policy. Until we begin to address the use of that fear to get people to act like lemmings, they will stampede off the cliff, killing themselves, their families, their inheritance, and their legacy, because they've been successfully panicked.

Chavis: The denial of racism in this country perpetuates it. One of the things that we are demanding in the environmental justice movement is a coming to grips with the phenomenon of environmental racism, and coming to grips with the broader phenomenon of racism in general. You have to understand that racism is not natural. There's a purpose for racism: it serves the economic interests of those who

would exploit. That is the history of racism in the world, not only in the United States. Apartheid in South Africa exists not just because some whites in South Africa don't like black people; it's because some whites in South Africa want to live in a privileged position, and take the diamonds and the gold and the natural resources of the people. Racism has always been used to justify the rape of the environment and the rape of people, and to deprive them of economic rights.

One of the things I've come to appreciate in dealing with the environmental justice movement is patience. We should be impatient with injustice; we have to confront it, we have to challenge it, but we have to be patient with the victims of injustice. There will not be an overnight cure.

Li: It's very important that the environmental agenda we develop is one that is developed *with* communities of color. Not imposed on them, but rather forged together in the spirit of mutual respect and trust. That's a very hard



Resources

- **Campaigns**-- join other students in unified action to achieve victory!
- **Newsletters**-- the national monthly *Threshold* and the regional newsletter
- **Field Organizing**-- visits by trained organizers to help your group grow in strength and numbers
- **Conferences, Trainings, and Strategy Sessions**-- meet other student activists, learn skills, and plan action
- **Clearinghouse**-- access to information on issues and skills
- **Buddy Program**-- links schools to provide mutual support

thing to do, be it in this room here or anyplace else. It's hard not to try to dominate, hard not to tell people "This is how it should be done."

Douglas: One of the problems I face in trying to increase the troops working on environmental justice issues within the Sierra Club is that we don't have enough activists to go around. When I got the Sierra Club job, two friends of mine, both of them European-Americans, walked up to me in Birmingham and said, "I'm glad you got the job. I'm a member of the Sierra Club." I said, "You are? I never knew that." The first one was a woman who is very active in low-income housing; she's a technical assistant, she teaches people to read through HUD regulations so they can access some of these crazy grants. The other one is a church-related person who works with families about to be evicted, providing emergency food, housing, and utilities. Unless this is a very rare coincidence, I bet there are some other folks in the present membership who have daily connections with people in the struggle. They don't bring it to the Sierra Club because that's not the agenda.

When was the last time the Sierra Club did a survey to determine what the members are active in when they're not doing the traditional conservation issues? If you could find that out, you'd also find out your points of connection with the rest of the community. We have the skills in-house, but they just haven't been pulled together yet.

LaDuke: We have totally common issues, but environmental groups have to embrace a broader position. Last year the Greenpeace board of directors adopted a position in support of the sovereignty of Native people. The Sierra Club should adopt a similar policy. Environmental groups need to not feel threatened by the taking of land out of the so-called public domain and returning it to Native people; instead, they need to recognize that our traditional stewardship of land has been very sound to the extent that we are able to restore our traditional values and continue our traditional spiritual practices. Sure we've got problems,

like tribal councils that are trying to site toxic-waste dumps. But what environmental groups need to do is shore up their relations with traditional people, because traditional people don't subscribe to the ethics of pollution.

Chavis: I said to The Nature Conservancy a little while ago: if you really want to conserve the earth, then join the environmental justice movement, because this is the movement that is going to constrain the destroyers of the earth, because the destroyers of the en-

vironment are the destroyers of our neighborhoods and our communities.

I'm very optimistic about the extent to which we can continue to build the environmental justice movement from the grassroots up. This is not a fad, this is not a momentary blip on the social-justice graph of this nation, but an effort that will have very long-term implications for the future of our nation and the future of our world. ■



Merchandise

Buy in bulk for fundraising!

- Buttons

\$1 each. \$.50 for 30 or more

- Stickers

\$.75 each. \$.50 for 30 or more

- T-shirts

Contact the National Office for prices and choices



- Campus Ecology

A comprehensive guide to evaluating the environmental impact of your campus. \$10 for members. \$15 for non-members.

- SEAC Organizing Guide

More skills for more activism! Comes free with a SEAC group membership. \$5 for members. \$10 for non-members

- SEAC memberships

Individuals are \$15 for a year.

Groups are \$35- \$100+ for a year.

Contact the SEAC Regional Office. Address is on the inside front cover.