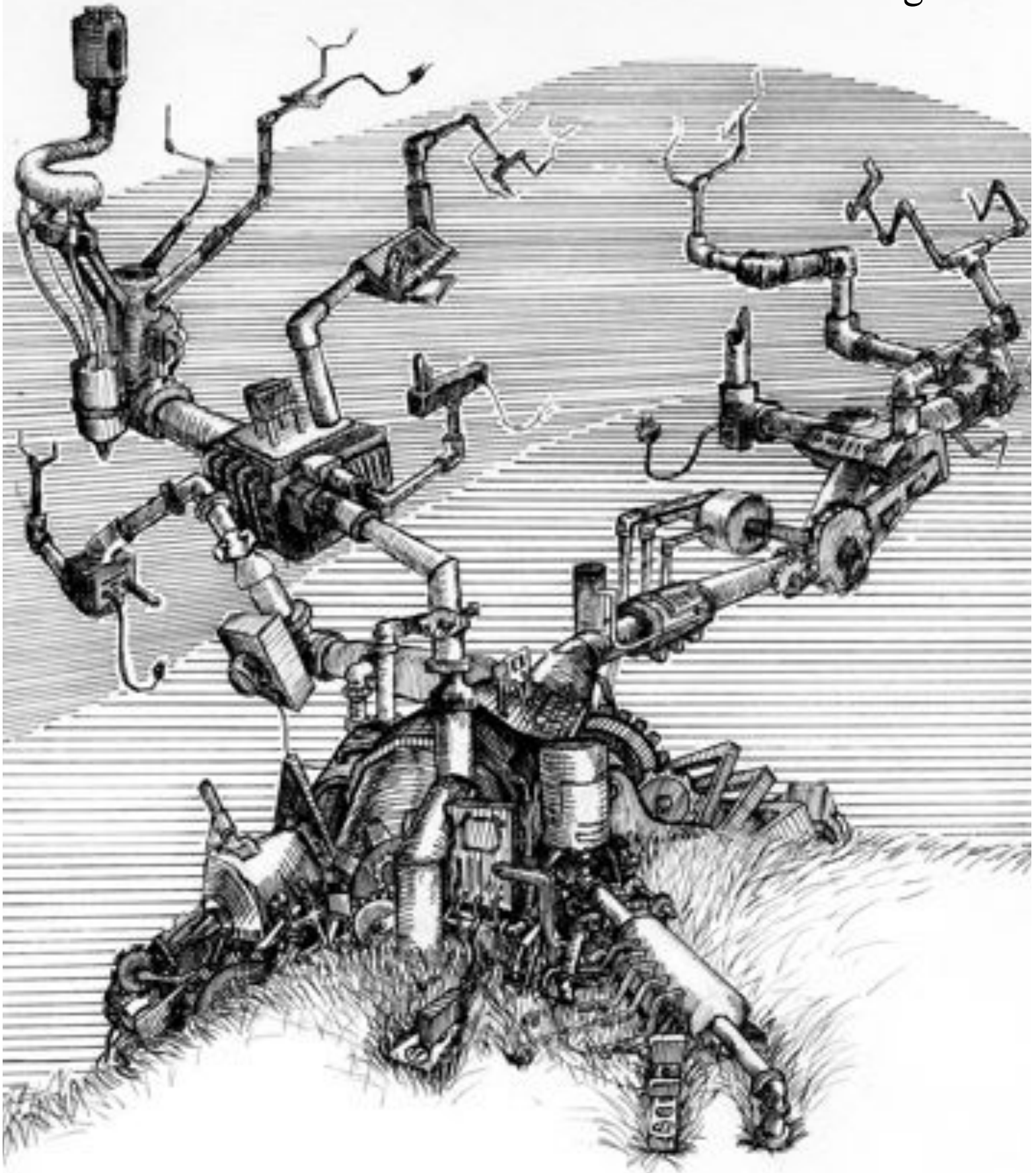


The State of Environmental Justice in Washington



OUR AMERICAN GENERATION
RESEARCH FOR REFORM

“The State of Environmental Justice in Washington”

What is Our American Generation?

Our American Generation is a youth run think tank that facilitates research and offers policy proposals concerning social justice issues crucial to the future of our country. OAG wants to engage *you(th)* in critical discourse and hopes to create a strong and diverse community of young Americans; a community that will not be reluctant to take on our nation's largest challenges.

We are always accepting applications for new research projects. OAG wants to help you achieve the whole process, from your inspiration to make reform, to researching the topic, to distributing a publication. Volunteering to research with OAG is a great way to build a resume, develop your skills, and be part of a progressive community all at once.

In the meantime, you can keep up with OAG through our Facebook (Groups: Our American Generation), and Twitter (@SupwithOAG). Also, contribute to the discussion on OAG's blog, where members share thoughts, news, and projects that they speak to the biggest issues that face our generation. >>> ouramericangeneration.org/blog
This magazine is only small part of the research done by OAG. If you are interested in reading more, keep an eye on our website for a other social justice topics.



Our American Generation is less than one year old now, and was first formally established as a registered student organization at the University of Washington in the spring quarter of 2008. We are registered as a Non-Profit Corporation in the State of Washington, and federally as a 501c(3) Tax-Exempt Non-Profit organization.

www.OurAmericanGeneration.org

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Director's Corner

"Although young Americans are not responsible for the current state of this country, it is time for us to take



responsibility for its future. Together, this generation can, and must, transform our nation into one that is both secure and socially just. The first step to realizing the change America needs is thorough research and the mobilization of dedicated youth. With that, I am proud to present OAG's first research publication." **-Sam Withers**

What is Environmental Justice?

Environmental Justice (EJ) regards the distribution of environmental problems in our communities with special attention paid to the role of race and class. For all the progress of industry, we have created pollution in our air, water, and soil, and this pollution is not spread fairly.

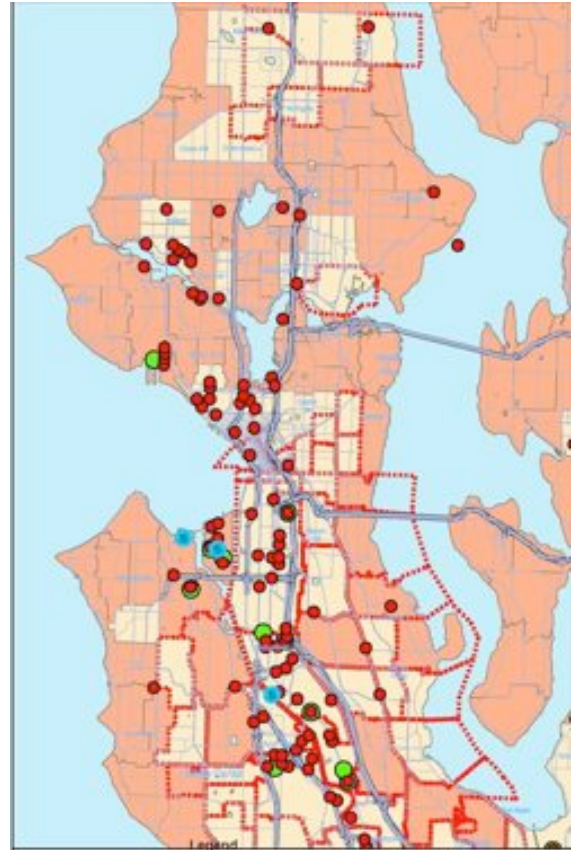
In EJ the “environment” is defined as the place you live, work, play and pray. Everyone has a right to a healthy environment. Those who have historically been targets of racism are frequently victims of environmental injustice, and for this reason, EJ is often referred to as environmental racism. Poor communities in WA State are consistently subject to more pollution than wealthier citizens. The map on the right illustrates how toxic sites are distributed unevenly amongst Seattle communities.

Seattle’s history, like America’s, has been influenced by racism. Although reports of cooperation between settlers and Native Americans can be found early on, eventually natives were driven off their lands that historically provided them with subsistence. Natives continue to be marginalized today, and play a part of many of the issues we highlight in this magazine. Seattle also upheld zoning laws that required property to be sold and distributed on the basis of race until the 1970s, limiting nonwhites to particular parts of the city. Today, Natives, Blacks, and Latin Americans have the greatest percentage of poor individuals within their demographic (20,19, and 18% respectively).

In Washington State as a whole, nonwhites and low-income persons live in the most polluted environments as well. Nonwhites are 33% of the population, yet live with 36% of polluting facilities. 39% are low-income, and are living with 47% of the total facilities. Conversely, medium-to-high-income whites make up 49% of the population yet only have to live with 41% of the toxic facilities. Six of Washington’s 8 biggest counties follow this same, unjust trend.

As OAG explored the history of the Environmental Justice close to home, we found a vibrant movement of dedicated organizations across WA State fighting for environmental justice in their communities. This magazine highlights a few of these organizations, introduces the communities and offers ways to get involved. We hope you enjoy reading this publication, and that you take action for environmental justice.

“Race, Income, and Toxics in Seattle and Washington State”



- -Sites that release toxics
- -Sites that store, treat, or dispose of toxics
- S -Federal Superfund Cleanup Site*
- -Sites under consideration for Superfund Cleanup*
- Nonwhite percentage greater than city average
- Median household income BELOW city median
- Median household income ABOVE city median

*Superfund is the federal program to address the country’s most polluted sites

Pollution and Race in Washington State

Percentage of population, by race, living in areas that do not meet air quality standards.

Pollutant	White	African American	Latin American
Particulates	14.7%	16.5	34.0
Carbon Monoxide	33.6	46.0	57.1
Ozone	52.5	62.2	71.2
Sulfur Dioxide	7.0	12.1	5.7
Lead	6.0	9.2	18.5

Data provided by Washington State Board of Health, 2001

* Concerned Citizens of the Yakama Reservation *

Not Your Childhood Field Trip: In September 2009, OAG was invited by Jan Whitefoot, founder of the Concerned Citizens of the Yakama Reservation (CCYR), to observe dairy farms in the Yakima Valley. Yakima County contains more than 70 dairies and 62,000 milk cows, many of which are located in and around low-income communities, and reservation land. Jan is a local artist who has taken on extensive efforts to get the State Departments of Health and Ecology to regulate the dairy operations. She drove our researchers on a tour of the dairy farms, technically “concentrated animal feeding operations”, and talked to us about their effect on the air and ground water, and consequently the local population. Wells in the area are polluted with nitrates (and possibly more contaminants), and the air is polluted as well.

Locals have been spending significant amounts of their own money to secure safe wells, as they are residents’ primary source of drinking water. In one case, a couple-thousand dollar reverse osmosis water purifier could not even cleanse a well on the Trust Lands of the Yakama Tribe. Concentrations of nitrates in water at 10mg per liter are considered to be dangerous, and 5-10 is considered to be elevated. In the area surveyed by OAG, which contains the towns Granger, Grandview, Outlook, Mabton, and Sunnyside, 21% of wells were above the 10mg/l mark, and the worst contained 55.2mg/l. Chloride, which is also known to be present in animal wastes is found in 62% of wells in this region.



Feeding Pens – The cows are seen here standing in their own urine and feces. Photos for this entry taken by OAG researchers.

Several dairies operate on Yakama Reservation Trust Lands. The Trust Lands are supposed to be used solely for the betterment of the Tribe and it would appear that the dairies are a direct detriment. Although the properties were purchased legally, it is poverty that leads the tribes to sell the real estate to private interests outside the community.

The Worst Dairy Farms: Notably, the farms we visited are, according to Jan, the worst polluters in the valley. Certain practices are consistent amongst all of the farms. The problems all concern the improper (more often nonexistent) treatment and storage of the feces and urine of the 1000+ cows on each dairy farm. The sewage is sometimes called compost, however at the point during which the sewage is applied to the land, it is raw and nitrogenous beyond the point that the soil can absorb. Nitrates thus make it into the local water supply. The wells that have been tested in the Yakima Valley are far beyond safe levels.



A giant mound of cow feces. These mounds are dry during summer, releasing fecal coliform particles into the air, and liquid in the winter, moving contaminants through the soil and into ground water.

The sewage is stored in several different ways:

1. Held in “lagoons,” man-made pools that lack any lining between untreated sewage and the soil.
2. Piled in enormous mounds (pictured above). In the summer months, when the sewage is dry, and air pollutants reach dangerous levels. This helps to explain why Yakima County has the highest rate of asthma of any county in Washington State. In cold months, the sewage is liquid and runs easily into the groundwater. All year long, the stench annoys locals and attracts hordes of flies to their homes.

3. Sprayed through sprinklers onto crops used for animal feed. Some farms have had to purchase additional acreage simply to soak up the sewage.
4. On the reservation, locals have claimed to see dairy farmers dumping waste directly into their creeks without a permit. When complaints are lodged with the dairy operators, blame is often shifted to immigrant workers.



Tanker loaded with manure sprays it in rows onto the fields. The manure contains far more nitrogen than the soil can absorb.

Finding Justice: All of these methods we just visited pollute the air and water. It is important to note that those most adversely affected are members of already marginalized communities, largely because they lack political and economic clout to challenge the dairy industry. In Granger, a town downstream from several enormous farms, the local river runs yellow. The water table beneath the dairies is only 6 ft. deep, and it is naive to expect the land to hold thousands of pounds of raw sewage deposits. Granger is a mobile-home community, whose residents are predominately nonwhite, and depend on wells for drinking water. The local public school's water was tested in a previous environmental justice study and proved to contain almost double the safe level of nitrates for adults. As is typical of environmental justice issues, the problem continues to persist years after it is drawn to the attention of government and dairy operators. For the dairies to rectify these problems they would need to either significantly increase acreage per animal or devise better waste disposal methods. This will impose costs upon these farms, but the quality of life provided to the people of the Yakima Valley will be improved.

A Conversation with Darigold: All of the farms that OAG visited are member-owners of the Northwest Dairy Association co-operative and sell their products under the "Darigold" brand. Darigold supplies almost all of the dairy products at the University of Washington (attended by many of the researchers). OAG started a discussion between UW Housing and Food Services' Michael Meyering and JR Fulton, several Darigold executives and employees, and our own Environmental Justice team. Those from the dairy-side included Steven Rowe, Executive Director of the Northwest Dairy Association, and Jay Gordon, President of the Washington State Dairy Federation, the state's lobby group for dairies. During the meeting Darigold insisted that their farms were not *necessarily* responsible for the pollution, although they offered no alternative culprits other than private septic tanks. The executives did illuminate the difficulty of assigning blame. Darigold operates as a co-operative and not a corporation, which means each farm owner has autonomy over how to run her or his farm. Darigold guaranteed that nutrient-management plans are conducted by nearly 99% of farms and reviewed by the Dep't of Agriculture (which theoretically ensures that dairy waste is disposed of in a manner that will not lead to ground water contamination). Ultimately, Darigold committed to HFS to oust any member-owners that are proven to be breaking the law.

So Who's Responsible? Despite the confidence the dairy representatives showed, the water is still polluted. Low-income and nonwhite communities in Yakima County are still drinking bad water, and breathing bad air, and need a remedy. Darigold should demand better practices from its farmers. It also should allow the Departments of Ecology and/or Health to review the Nutrient Management Plans.

Unfortunately the state government is fumbling its opportunity to regulate by trying to transfer authority for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations to the Department of Agriculture. All of the authorities that should be in charge are seemingly aware of the issue. However, the EPA, the WA State Department of Ecology, WA State Department of Health, and the WA State Department of Agriculture have been perpetually disagreeing over who is going to make the tough decisions.

* Community Coalition for EJ *



In this picture you can see the extent of the manure, both on the ground, and dried on the underside and utters of the cows.

Get Involved: Yakima recently was identified by the EPA as one of ten Environmental Justice Showcase Communities, which granted the EPA region 10 office \$100,000 in order to try to right the injustice. Discussions are currently taking place between different stakeholders to determine how the money should be spent. Sadly, the president of the WA State Dairy Federation contends that the \$100,000 will not even be enough to determine once and for all who is causing the pollution. Keep track of the Yakima Grant process to ensure that the money is actually being used to improve the health of those in the most marginalized communities. The point person in the EPA for the grant is Sandra Halstead, and her email address is halstead.sandra@epa.gov. You can let her know that ensuring a safe water supply should be a priority in the project, and ask questions about their progress. Jan Whitefoot provides consistent updates about the EJ issues in Yakima and the work of CCYR by request at jafoot72@embarqmail.com. The only way to overcome this injustice is to stay informed and advocate for these communities through all possible channels.

Vulnerable Seattle Communities:

Formed in 2005, the CCEJ serves the South Seattle communities of South Park, Rainier Valley, Beacon Hill, Central District, Georgetown, White Center, and Columbia City. These neighborhoods are on average 67% people of color, with 21% of the population living below the poverty line. These communities are plagued by toxics above and beyond the rest of Washington's population. The South Park community, for example, one residential neighborhood has 40+ toxic facilities within a 5-mile radius. South Park's residents experience higher mortality rates, lower life expectancy, and higher hospitalization rates for respiratory diseases than the rest of Seattleites.



The Seattle area is host to many environmental justice organizations and CCEJ has created a working network between these groups in order to share tactics and goals. Although each community is culturally unique, there are four common obstacles to achieving environmental justice.

1. Greater exposure to toxics due to a disproportionate number of toxic facilities in their neighborhoods.
2. Health problems are exacerbated because nonwhite and low-income communities have limited access to medical care and quality nutrition.
3. In communities where English is a second language, warnings by local government about pollution exposure (for example, "don't fish here, toxic pollution") have not been widely understood. With direction from EJ in Seattle, many of these signs and placards are being translated. Again, environmental justice problems are consistently protracted because people of color and poor communities have very limited political and economic clout, and very little economic flexibility,

“We are best known for our effective alliance building, grassroots outreach and base building efforts in communities of color.”

which suppresses their ability to advocate from themselves. A 2005 survey by the WA State Department of Health revealed that there are many health disparities in Washington, a fairly reliable indicator of environmental injustice. Nonwhites have higher rates of at least six diseases including HIV/AIDS, cardiovascular disease, tuberculosis, cancer, diabetes, and asthma.

A Bold Mission: CCEJ's mission is to achieve environmental and economic justice in low-income communities and communities of color. The CCEJ is dedicated to the environmental justice movement, and the fundamental belief "that everyone, regardless of race or income, has the right to a clean and healthy community" is intrinsic to all of their work. This bold objective is translated into substantive projects that improve air quality in South Seattle, mobilize support for low-income housing, and engage youth of color in EJ campaigns. Through community organizing, education, and political advocacy, CCEJ has eliminated two sources of air pollution in South Seattle, passed the WA State EJ Act, formed the first regional EJ alliance and is continually pressing for health and regulatory agency action on environmental justice issues. CCEJ also holds numerous public education events, including an annual conference.



Current Campaigns: No Coal on Native Lands - Because coal plants are undesirable neighbors, they are often placed where residents do not have enough power to effectively fight back. Low-income and nonwhite communities, as well as Native lands, are the most frequently used sites. Living nearby a coal plant leaves you extremely vulnerable to inhaling coal ash, which can lead to asthma and acute breathing problems. Just north of our Seattle, the Sagkeeng reservation have become seriously polluted. A video/slide show was put together that depicts some images of the Sagkeeng people and the state of their land and property. Check it out on you

tube by searching "environmental justice in Sagkeeng".

Toxic Beauty - This campaign was collaboration between CCEJ and the Environmental Coalition of South Seattle (ECOSS). It highlights nail salons in low-income communities and communities of color that use non-toxic products. For one, the patrons and employees of these nail salons are safer with non-toxic products. Additionally, local air and water will not be polluted when the products are applied, washed off, or discarded. Toxic products are cheaper and more prevalent in poor communities, and a broad awareness about the dangers of these products is lacking. CCEJ is helping young people of color in poor communities carry out their lives in the safest way possible, by raising their knowledge about the risk of exposure that they face.

The Power of People & What We Can Do:

The power behind environmental injustice is different for every campaign that the CCEJ takes on. Their work highlights the importance of community members understanding the issue, speaking up for their rights, and implementing environmentally just practices at the ground level (such as the toxic beauty campaign). Coalitions of interest groups and individuals aggregate bargaining power, and this is what makes the CCEJ a force to be reckoned with.

Lend a hand by donating, volunteering your time, or interning.

By reading their newsletters, and supporting their individual campaigns, you are adding to your understanding of local environmental justice issues, and furthering the mission of the CCEJ. Email justice@ccej.org, or call 206-720-0285 and ask how you can help right now. The group's website can be found at <http://www.ccej.org/>.



The CCEJ teaches over 2,000 people each year about EJ

* Heart of America Northwest *

The Most Contaminated Site: Heart of America Northwest is devoted to lobbying for a quick clean up of the Hanford Nuclear Reservation. It is a “superfund” site, or one of the nation’s most dire polluted areas. *It's the most contaminated site in the western Hemisphere.* Nuclear waste is still stored at Hanford from over 60 years of nuclear fuel production. The Hanford Reservation contains the traditional hunting grounds of the Yakima, Nez Pierce, Umatilla and Wanpun tribes. Tribal representatives are actively involved in lobbying for cleanup because their tribes practice subsistence fishing and hunting within the Hanford Reservation, and their entire environment is becoming radioactively contaminated. In the 1950’s, a large amount of waste was dumped directly into the river. Because the half-life of this waste ranges up to tens of thousands of years, this half-century-old mistake is still creating problems for the natives. Additionally, these chemicals accumulate as they move through the food chain, from plants, to fish, to wildlife, and are now present in almost all of the natives’ traditional food sources. There are also three towns nearby Hanford that are affected, Richmond, Pasco and Kennewick. These towns were created solely from the demand for work at the Hanford site. It has now been found that Hanford workers have 11 times the mesothelioma, 30 times the asbestosis, and 3 times the leukemia rates of the general population.



A view of Hanford from the Columbia River

The Work of Heart of America Northwest: Heart of America (HoA) was started in 1987, after a successful Washington state ballot referendum that blocked Hanford from being the nation’s first high-level nuclear waste dump. Today, HoA is trying to maintain the schedule of cleaning up faulty nuclear waste tanks, which have already leaked over a million gallons of radioactive waste. It is also lobbying to establish a uranium groundwater treatment system, although that project has suffered from political slowdowns and delays, which have been too common in the Hanford issue in general. A large portion of the national economic stimulus money for Washington State has gone to the Hanford, but the Department of Energy continues to postpone the cleanup.

Heart of America is working on a campaign to limit workers’ and natives’ exposure by demanding improved storage conditions. HoA has gained a seat at the bargaining table by crafting its own legislation and suing the Department of Energy. Although bureaucrats make the timelines for cleanup, the power to speed up the process is in the taxpayer who is footing the bill.



Radioactive waste being dumped into unlined trenches

What We Can Do: Heart of America encourages us to be activists from home, sending emails and making phone calls to the tri-party stakeholders (Environmental Protect Agency, Department of Energy, and the WA State Department of Ecology) and legislators. For students, volunteer and internship opportunities are available with Heart of America. They have also created an activist network of citizens who go to hearings, monitor groundwater, and lobby on behalf of faster cleanup. More information on HoA can be found at <http://www.hoanw.org/index.cf>

International District Housing Alliance

Smog Capital of Seattle: The International District (ID) is one of Seattle's oldest communities, made up of Little Saigon, Chinatown, and Japan Town. The neighborhood is a hub for many regional and local transportation lanes. The ID is surrounded by I-5, I-90, Route 99, Amtrak station, light rail, the bus terminal, and serves as a corridor for big-rigs travelling to and from South Seattle's industrial sites. The combined effect of so much exhaust is a severely reduced quality of air in the ID. Residents have 50% higher asthma rates than the city average, and 102% higher rates of contracting air-borne diseases. Transportation is the most prevalent source of air pollution. Mobile sources make up 85-95% of air pollution according to the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency. Studies show that regular exposure to freeway pollution within a radius of at 250 feet results in a host of respiratory problems such as reduced lung function and higher incidence of allergies, and asthma. Considering the high levels of pollution and resulting adverse health effects, it is important to also turn a critical eye on the composition of ID communities. The population is 81.5% nonwhite, compared to the city average of 29.9%. The median household income in the ID is \$13,052 per year, with half the population living below the poverty line, while Seattle's average income is \$45,736. It is also troubling to note that ID residents are largely not responsible for the air pollution, as the majority of the residents cannot afford a vehicle of their own, according to Casey China of the International District Housing Alliance (IDHA).

Helping Residents Navigate the Injustice:

The IDHA's began in 1997 as an outdoor experiential program that brought low-income city kids into the wilderness and provide them with environmental education. This evolved into a partnership between the youth and elders to define and address the neighborhood's social and environmental issues. The primary task ever since has been to build awareness about local air pollution. In collaboration with University of Washington researchers, the IDHA documented the full effects of transportation in the ID through a survey entitled *Breathing Room*. The report estimates that I-5, I-90, and Route 99 carry a combined average of 421,000 vehicles each

day. 10,000 vehicles pass directly through the ID each day. Sporting events draw even greater traffic to the neighborhood; surveyors counted 2,500 cars at three intersections in a three-hour period during a Mariner's game. The researchers also counted volumes of buses and trucks moving through the neighborhood. From this data they created a walking map for IDHA residents that dictates which streets to avoid.

One of the most blatant problems discovered was idling big-rigs, which accounts for an average 27% of fuel use. The group responded by initiating a campaign with local businesses to place "No-Idling" signs in storefronts throughout the neighborhood. IDHA also works with the local "Inter Im" community development agency to create green space and plant trees throughout the ID in order to improve air quality.



"WILD" Youth working in the International District

What We Can Do: Volunteering for the IDHA is the most effective way of addressing environmental justice issues in the International District. Seattle youth can get involved with the Wilderness Intercity Leadership Development program (WILD). There is also a need for more research projects such as "Breathing Room" that provide practical knowledge to local residents.

You can reach the International District Housing Alliance at (206) 623-5132, or find out more information at <http://www.apialliance.org/>.

Duwamish Tribe and Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition

A River Teeming with History and Toxics:

Environmental *injustice* has afflicted the Duwamish River since the turn of the century when Seattle was undergoing its 2nd settlement, primarily by Scandinavian immigrants. The Duwamish River is the historic home of the Duwamish people, or more properly, the D_kh^wDuw'Absh. Although anecdotal accounts show that natives and settlers originally cooperated, Duwamish Tribe longhouses were eventually burnt to the ground. Chief Si'ahl (Seattle) and Duwamish sub-chiefs signed the Point Elliott treaty, to become a legally recognized tribe of the United States. They were promised a reservation, hunting and fishing rights, as well as monetary compensation for 54,000 acres of their land. Today this land includes the cities of Seattle, Renton, Tukwila, Bellevue, and Mercer Island. As was sadly characteristic of the times, the treaty was never respected. Not a single cent was paid to the tribe, causing native rebellions from 1855-1858.

To this day the tribe still lacks formal recognition, and this means that they are disenfranchised even beyond the average Native American tribe. The greatest environmental injustice facing the tribe is that fishing, farming, and subsistence rights are not recognized, and that no health care assistance is provided.

Because subsistence rights are not recognized, the government has given little concern to the fact that the tribe's main source of food, the Duwamish River, has become terribly polluted.

OAG visited the Duwamish Tribe at their one and only longhouse, where tribal members shared stories of the difficulties they face.

Dioxin, Hydrocarbons and Arsenic, Oh My!

If you take a trip down the Duwamish River, do not expect a scenic tour. The river is lined with cement producers, heavy manufacturing, and an old Boeing plant that built warplanes during WWII. "PCBs" (polychlorinated biphenyls), hydrocarbons, arsenic, and dioxin are the chemicals in the air and river sediment that pose the greatest danger to human health. Most of all they are associated with greater risks of developing cancer. The lower 5-mile stretch was declared a Superfund site in 2001. In 1998, King County made the disturbing discovery that fish and crab caught in the Duwamish have up to seven times

the "safe" amount of cancer causing chemicals. Mercury in the river bottom sediment is measured at 4x the safe levels, and nearly all of the salmon in the Duwamish have been discovered to harbor PCBs. The county issues warnings about consuming salmon from the river, and even harsher warning about shellfish and critters who live in the river year round, but due to cultural and economic reasons the Duwamish tribe and other local peoples continue to count on the river for their subsistence. Furthermore, it has recently been found that soil just beyond the river is contaminated as well, in the neighboring communities of Georgetown and South Park. While consuming river-life poses the greatest risk of harm, one can also be exposed to chemicals simply by playing on the beach. To foul a river that provides Seattleites with subsistence is an obvious and grave environmental injustice. To lose an aesthetic and natural asset of our city is something to be lamented as well. The Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition has responded by fighting for the predominately nonwhite communities that lie by the river.



The Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition

(DRCC): The DRCC holds public boat and kayak tours to give citizens an up close and personal view of the state of the Duwamish River. OAG had a unique vantage of the history of Seattle on one of these tours, witnessing the dirty side of the city's industry. The history of the Duwamish River is inseparable from Seattle's history. The development along the river reflects our own development. Those in the city flourish, while those who live by subsistence are poisoned. Learn the story of the river and its present day travails at: <http://www.duwamishcleanup.org/>. You can also explore the activity of the Tribe, and their fight for federal recognition at:

<http://www.duwamishtribe.org>

* The SHAWL Society *

Sovereignty, Health, Air, Water, and Land

Uranium Mining in Spokane: The Cold War appears to be done and tucked away in the past, but upon closer inspection, repercussions continue to reverberate. In Spokane, the vestiges of war still linger. The Spokane Indian Reservation, located 45 miles outside of Spokane and home to 2,464 people, was the site of uranium mining to develop nuclear capabilities. Tribal members were the primary work force, conducting the milling and mining operations. Beginning in the early 1950's, the United States rushed to develop more devastating weaponry in competition with the Soviet Union. Caught up in the frenzy of war, little interest was paid to long-term effects of weaponry development on society or the environment.



Deb Abrahamson, founder of SHAWL, at Midnite Mine

Today, the impacts of negligence are visible. Midnite Mine and Sherwood Mine were the two largest uranium extraction sites and still require clean up. The Spokane Indian Tribe has suffered from direct exposure to by-product materials and having critical resources be contaminated. For a community and culture that is self-sufficient, such degradation of the land presents a crisis. Food and water supplies are too dangerous to consume. The waste reaches the environment because surface water at Tshimkian Creek is exposed and then spread into the Spokane River. Additionally, a 26-mile highway that runs through the heart of the Spokane reservation served as the route for transporting radioactive sludge for almost 30 years. Today, there are over 40 hot spots for radiation exposure along

this road, perpetually exposing numerous townships and the school system to radiation.

Midnite Mine was declared a Superfund Site in 2000 and currently a lawsuit is underway between the EPA and Newmont Mining Company concerning the liability of damages. The Spokane Indian Tribe has limited access to resources in addressing contamination, although they have successfully organized through SHAWL. Still, the tribe has largely been left out of the decision-making process.

SHAWL: The SHAWL Society was established as a space for natives to address government agencies and gain influence in the decision-making process. The grassroots organization seeks to provide tools to empower the public to become engaged and receive due compensation for their losses in health and environmental quality. Education is fundamental to SHAWL's mission in expanding public awareness about the health problems cause by uranium mining. Current campaigns include providing educational materials about the health impacts of uranium exposure, having adequate safety measures installed to protect the public and prevent further contamination, conducting health studies to better understand the relationship between uranium exposure and health, and to hold the Newmont Mining Company accountable.

What We Can Do: You can get involved directly in any of these campaigns by directly contacting SHAWL Director, Deb Abrahamson at shawlsociety@yahoo.com. SHAWL's website is always updated with news, and calls for action. You can access the site at

<http://shawlsociety.blogspot.com>.

Information about Uranium mining projects and legislation across America can be found at <http://www.wise-uranium.org/upusa.html>. Learning from the past will allow us to prevent problems in the future.

Additionally, make sure your representatives know about the health problems on the Spokane Reservation, and that you expect this environmental injustice to be corrected. The easiest direct action that you can take is to simply share with your family, friends, peers, or the person you sit next to on the bus, what you have learned. Raising awareness of the issue is the critical first step and it starts with you.

The Researchers

Scott Davis

Age: 20

School: University of Washington

Subjects: Political Economy, Environmental Science

Michelle Harvey

Age: 21

School: University of Washington

Subjects: Anthropology, Urban Planning

Emilia Ptak

Age: 21

School: University of Washington

Subjects: Environmental Politics, Journalism

Dorothea (Thea) Reinert

Age: 21

School: University of Washington

Subjects: Biology, Norwegian

Allison Pollack

Age: 21

School: Seattle University

Subjects: English



The Editors

Jane Kim

Age: 20

School: University of Washington

Subjects: Economics, Arabic, International Studies

Taishi Kohjima

Age: 25

BA in English from University of Washington

Currently teaching English in Toyota, Japan

Samuel Withers

Age: 21

School: University of Washington

Subjects: Law, Societies, and Justice, and Sociology

The Artists

Aidan Fitzgerald

Cover Art

Jonny Sikov Castellano

Banner Design

Pass this magazine on to a friend or a neighbor and spread the word.