

EXPLORING CONNECTIONS

6. How might Richard Louv's exploration of the "know-it-all state of mind" (p. 664) help explain the attraction of the geo-engineering technologies described by Wood? Do you think that our growing faith in technology will make a hi-tech approach to solving the climate crisis inevitable? Why or why not?
7. Write an imaginary dialogue between John (Fire) Lane Deer (p. 686) and Bill McKibben (p. 743) on the promise and meaning of geo-engineering. How do you think they would view technological solutions to the climate change crisis?
8. What might the final "future" panels of R. Crumb's "A Short History of America" (pp. 695–98) look like if, as Wood suggests, we eventually opt for an eco-engineering solution to the climate crisis?

EXTENDING THE CRITICAL CONTEXT

9. Do some online research to learn more about organized attempts to limit carbon emissions since the signing of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. Why has it been difficult to get nations to agree on a single approach to reducing greenhouse gases? How likely do you think such an agreement will be in the future?
10. Research these and other promising geo-engineering solutions to the climate crisis to determine how they are currently viewed. How much interest do environmentalists, politicians, and business groups have in geo-technological solutions to the global warming crisis? Do the kinds of solutions described by Wood seem more or less reasonable or attractive than technologies like nuclear power?

In Search of Justice

NYDIA M. VELÁZQUEZ

In 1992, Nydia M. Velázquez made history by becoming the first Puerto Rican woman to be elected to the United States House of Representatives. Serving New York's Twelfth Congressional District — one of the most culturally diverse and economically challenged urban areas in the nation — she has emerged in her ninth Congressional term as a leader on issues of public health and the environment. As Representative Velázquez argues in this selection, ecology isn't just a concern for hikers and survivalists. In urban neighborhoods like those she represents in Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan's Lower East Side, pollution and waste disposal have a direct impact on the

lives of millions of low-income American families. As she sees it, sustainability is a matter of social justice — not just a matter of good ecological hygiene. This selection appeared in Sustainable Planet: Solutions for the Twenty-First Century (2002), edited by Juliet B. Schor and Betsy Taylor.

Jacob Riis's¹ groundbreaking 1890 book *How the Other Half Lives* chronicled the lives of thousands of families living in squalor in New York City. A horrified public cried out for reform, and the public-housing movement was born. Over the next fifty years, a bold progressive movement brought extraordinary change in America — an income tax began to bridge the gap between rich and poor, a social-safety net provided basic protections for workers, and we began to understand that a just society was a social and moral imperative. What happened?

Today, although we have a much more sophisticated understanding of what social justice means, low-income families nevertheless find themselves in more or less the same relative circumstances they were in over a century ago — struggling to overcome desperate poverty, living in communities that are tragically unhealthy as the result of pollution and neglect, and laboring against a culture that considers material possessions the absolute measure of social value.

The simple fact is that our current unsustainable "more-is-better" culture undermines any hope of achieving justice — at home or abroad. We often hear about how the United States consumes a vastly disproportionate amount of resources relative to the rest of the world. Americans are building bigger houses, driving bigger cars, consuming more and more of everything than just about anyone else anywhere.

This is certainly true, and the long-term environmental effects of this overconsumption may well prove disastrous. But we also forget that the gap between the rich and the poor in this country is just as severe as, if not worse than, it is elsewhere. Amazingly, the richest 196 people in America have more wealth than the poorest 56 million Americans.

And one thing is for sure — Americans certainly are not doing all this overconsuming in congressional districts like the one I represent. The residents of Greenpoint / Williamsburg, which makes up the heart of New York's Twelfth Congressional District, are among the poorest in the country. Forty-five percent of the households earn less than \$12 thousand annually. In some schools, nearly every child qualifies for the federal school lunch program.

My district is by no means unique. Across America, there are pockets of dire poverty that are a national disgrace. Perhaps this poverty is not on the

¹Jacob Riis: Danish-born Jacob August Riis (1849–1914) was a journalist, photographer, and social reformer.

scale of some developing-world countries, but it is crushing poverty nonetheless. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that nearly 3 million American children suffer from moderate to severe hunger. More than 9 million children report having difficulty obtaining enough food, suffer from reduced quality of diets, express anxiety about their food supply, and are increasingly resorting to emergency food sources and other coping behaviors. And nearly 7 million Americans are classified by the U.S. Department of Labor as being the "working poor," by spending more than twenty-seven weeks in the labor force, but earning below the official poverty level.

In my district, crime is high, test scores are low, schools are crumbling, and the "American dream"—however you choose to define it—is very, very difficult to attain. For many, hope is represented by a trip to the bodega² to buy a lottery ticket. Side by side with the "more is better" dominant culture is an unnoticed "anything is too much" underclass that scrapes for crumbs in the shadows. How can a nation with our riches allow such misery to exist?

An Environmental Catastrophe

One of the first things you are likely to notice when you visit neighborhoods in my district, and others like it, are the trucks. Not trucks heading out, packed with manufactured goods produced in clean, modern, high-tech facilities full of good-paying jobs. No, the trucks are delivering garbage from the rest of the city to waste-transfer facilities located cheek by jowl with schools, apartment buildings, and small businesses struggling to keep afloat. It's illegal to put a cigarette billboard near a child's school. It's perfectly legal to have a garbage dump next to her house.

Amazingly, the waste transfer stations aren't the worst of it. The tour of environmental shame continues on to highly toxic empty lots—so-called "brownfields." Usually, brownfields are the remnants of polluting industries sited in poor communities whose owners have fled, leaving virtually undevelopable property in their wake. Cleanups do occasionally occur, at enormous public expense, while polluters walk away, often to set up shop in another unwitting community. Political opponents may cry "class warfare," but I've personally never seen a waste-transfer station on the upper East Side of Manhattan, or in the Hamptons.³ In some communities, residents complain about the presence of federal buildings, which generate no real estate tax. We'd take a federal building or two in the twelfth district in a New York minute.

The environmental scorecard in my district is appalling. There are over eighty waste-transfer stations in New York City, and thirty of them are in my district. Greenpoint/Williamsburg has 137 sites that use hazardous

²bodega: A small neighborhood convenience store.

³upper East Side . . . Hamptons: Affluent areas in or around Manhattan, New York.

substances, called right-to-know sites, fifteen toxic-release inventory sites, twenty-four waste-transfer stations, and one low-level radioactive waste site, all within a five-and-a-half-mile radius. Red Hook has six waste-transfer stations, seven sites that may warrant Superfund⁴ designation, and three hazardous waste facilities, all within a one-mile radius. Greenpoint/Williamsburg sits on a 17-million-gallon oil spill. (The Exxon Valdez,⁵ by contrast, spilled 10 million gallons of oil. Of course, they at least tried to clean that one up.) The Newtown Creek Sewage Treatment Plant treats the highest volume of hazardous waste and is the biggest producer of hazardous pollutants in the city. The neighborhood is also home to eight coal-burning industrial furnaces and the highly toxic Brooklyn Navy Yard (a federal facility we'd gladly give up).

Hardly a day goes by when we don't hear about how our nation's cities have experienced a renaissance. Although crime rates have dropped in many large cities, people of color are being victimized by toxic polluters and brownfield perpetrators who have managed to escape the wrath of a well-meaning environmental movement that doesn't seem to realize that the "environment" does not begin at the suburb's edge. Believe me, Latinos and African Americans know what the environment is. It's air they can see and water they can't drink. Polling consistently shows that African Americans and Hispanics put a higher priority on protecting the environment than nonminority voters. And no wonder. Study after study has shown that racial minorities disproportionately bear the brunt of this pollution.

- A 1992 EPA study showed that minority populations are disproportionately exposed to air pollutants and hazardous-waste sites.
- A 1990 University of Michigan study showed that minority residents are four times more likely to live within one mile of a commercial waste facility than whites, and that race was a better predictor of proximity to such sites than income.
- A 1994 study by the Center for Policy Alternatives concluded that three out of every five Latinos and African Americans live in a community with one or more toxic-waste site.

The effect of this pollution is a silent national tragedy on a par with Jacob Riis's alarming discoveries. In the predominantly African-American area between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, dubbed "Cancer Alley," where over 130 petrochemical plants, medical waste incinerators, and solid-waste landfills emit highly toxic levels of pollution, people suffer from much higher

⁴Superfund: Common name for the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), a 1980 federal law designed to clean up hazardous waste sites.

⁵Exxon Valdez: In 1989, the Exxon Valdez oil tanker ran aground in Prince William Sound, Alaska, spilling an estimated 10.8 million gallons of crude oil.

rates of miscarriage, cancer, tumors, and other chemical-related illnesses. A study by the Louisiana Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights found "Cancer Alley" to have disproportionate levels of all cancers. The Latino south side of Tucson is exposed to twenty times the acceptable levels of trichloroethylene,⁶ and rates of cancer, birth defects, and genetic mutations in that neighborhood far outpace national averages.

I don't have to walk very far in my district to see a community in the throes of a health crisis. New York City has the second worst air quality in the nation, and the Greenpoint/Williamsburg area has the worst air quality in New York. And it is no surprise that the people who live in this neighborhood are getting sick and dying at an alarming rate.

A 1993 New York Department of Health study showed that in one census tract, childhood cancers are twenty-two times higher than the national expected average. Twenty-three census tracts showed disproportionately higher rates of stomach and lung cancers. Four showed statistically elevated incidences of leukemia. Hundreds of cases of lead poisoning in children have been reported in the past decade. Childhood asthma rates in Brooklyn have tripled in the 1990s. At 13 per 1000, the infant mortality rate rivals that of Estonia, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic.

I have a constituent whose cousin died of an asthma attack on an Ozone Alert day — at age twenty-two. Her two-year-old daughter now lives with her grandparents. Another constituent's grandchildren suffer regular asthma attacks when they come to visit, only to see the attacks subside when they leave.

It's outrageous that basic environmental-justice protections languish in Congress. There are those in Washington who claim that they want to make sure that "no child is left behind,"⁷ yet the hollowness of the claim leaves a deafening echo.

It goes without saying that the communities most adversely affected by the actions of these polluting industries don't have the resources to fight back, and it's little wonder that the many waste-treatment facilities in Williamsburg process garbage from outside the neighborhood.

The residents of Greenpoint/Williamsburg and other poor communities, fighting disease and living in poverty, are no match for wealthy companies who have an unlimited ability to litigate. Unless we bring the full force of the federal government to bear on these polluters, they will continue to poison our air and water and slowly and silently subject our children to a toxic environment with impunity. Where is Jacob Riis when we need him?

⁶*trichloroethylene*: A chemical compound commonly used as an industrial solvent that is categorized as a probable carcinogen.

⁷*"no child is left behind"*: In 2001 Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act, which requires states to assess and report on student learning and provides sanctions for schools that fail to increase learning outcome measures. The act has been criticized for not providing adequate funds for its implementation and for school improvement.

We know that protecting the environment is a long-term necessity and that global-climate change puts future generations at risk, but we need to understand that the environment is a matter of life and death right now in our inner-city communities. As our children are slowly poisoned, their ability to learn and to work and to become active, productive participants in this society is being taken away. We are quite simply writing off millions and millions of American children because they happen to be poor.

A Desperate Social Challenge

If the environmental impacts of being poor in today's America are bad, the social effects may be even worse, if that's possible. Those Americans who drew the short straw and live in poverty are systematically shut out of the blessings of American society, Horatio Alger⁸ success stories notwithstanding. Talk is cheap in Washington, and talk about "values" is cheaper still. If we really valued work, then the janitors and garbage collectors and sweatshop workers and the rest of the hardworking poor would be able to put food on the table. If we really valued children, we'd make sure that the poorest of our children weren't taught in hallways and broom closets or in shifts and we'd guarantee that they all had textbooks and qualified, well-paid teachers.

A poor child in today's America labors against a dizzying array of social challenges. He lives in a culture that says that what you have is more important than who you are. The message from advertisers and marketers who target kids is quite clear — you gotta have it. And it doesn't really matter what the "it" is. From clothes to computers to cell phones to houses to cars, no American child is immune from the underlying suggestion that owning these *things* defines success. While the message of excess materialism is toxic for all our children, it is especially cruel for the one out of six American children living in poverty. I often wonder how sporting goods executives sleep at night after marketing basketball shoes to low-income children that cost a minimum-wage-earning parent nearly a week's salary to pay for.

Our role models are athletes and movie stars and billionaires. How can we expect our poorest children, malnourished and undereducated, to feel good about themselves when we present these false notions of success? Our real role models should be neighborhood volunteers, nurses, teachers, parents, and small business owners, and all those caring, hardworking people who create jobs, watch over us, and give a community a sense of cohesion, connectedness, and purpose. One of the few good things to be taken from September 11 was the emergence of blue-collar heroes. Let's hope it lasts, but the smart money is still on Michael Jordan and Britney Spears.

⁸*Horatio Alger*: American author (1832–1899) best known for novels featuring "rags-to-riches" success stories. (See p. 258.)

Blueprint for a Just Society

People fighting for justice in this country and around the world have every reason to be discouraged, but in fact there are signs of hope that we should be aware of. Anyone familiar with my work in Congress knows that I don't give up easily. If anything, I've just gotten started. Even now, in the face of extraordinary challenges, I am excited about the emerging opportunities in my community and others like it . . .

Environmental Justice

To its credit, the Clinton administration⁹ acknowledged what those of us familiar with such communities knew for years — that people of color have been unfairly treated with regard to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

Under former administrator Carol Browner, the Environmental Protection Agency established the Office of Environmental Justice, whose mission is to address the problem of environmental discrimination and set up programs designed to assist what it acknowledges are “disproportionate risks faced by . . . low-income and minority populations.” Under the Bush administration,¹⁰ the program saw its already meager budget reduced.

In 1994, President Clinton signed Executive Order 12898, which applies Title VI of the Civil Rights Act to entities receiving federal financial assistance and bars them from using methods or practices that discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin. It was a good start to begin to undo generations of wrongs that have been visited upon people of color.

One of the first fights I took up in Congress was to ensure that minority communities receive equitable treatment under environmental law. I did this by introducing legislation to apply this nation's civil rights laws to our environmental regulations. If enacted, my legislation would take the former president's Executive Order an important step further by applying Title VI to actions taken by any company whose pollution disproportionately impacts a particular racial or ethnic group. Title VI is most commonly used in discrimination cases involving public housing and education, but there is no reason that it couldn't be extended to environmental concerns as well.

After all, can anyone say that the health crisis that currently affects people of color in this country is any less important than acts of housing or education discrimination currently protected under Title VI? My proposed legislation targets both potential violators and chronic polluters. Companies would have to show that proposed projects would not pollute in a manner

⁹*the Clinton administration:* William Jefferson Clinton (b. 1946) served as the forty-second president of the United States from 1993 to 2001.

¹⁰*the Bush administration:* George Walker Bush (b. 1946) served as the forty-third president of the United States from 2001 to 2009.

that would adversely affect a particular racial group — the burden of proof currently used under Title VI. Existing polluters would be forced to prove that their pollution does not target minority communities.

My sense is that the effect of environmental justice laws could also ripple through the manufacturing sector. Producers might just find themselves dematerializing their production process if they no longer were able to dump waste in the nearest poor neighborhood. They might just start making cleaner products if they were unable to release toxic chemicals with impunity. The nascent green revolution could get a much-needed shot in the arm from an unlikely ally — the justice movement.

While a law to ensure environmental justice would make a tremendous difference for the lives of millions of poor people in this country, it's honestly not enough to just keep polluters out of our communities. To have true environmental justice, we also have to provide safe, open space, parks and community gardens that make neighborhoods worth living in. In my district, there is a desperate struggle underway over the fate of the abandoned Brooklyn waterfront. This was once a highly active shipping and manufacturing center, and if you look past today's rotted piers and disrepair, you can't help but see the promise it holds. With its easy access to transit and a breathtaking view of Manhattan across the East River, the waterfront is perhaps New York City's most potentially valuable real estate. Developed properly, with cooperation from the community and visionary investors, we could create a truly inspired vision of a sustainable community that incorporates open space, creates opportunities for nonpolluting businesses and the jobs that go with them, and that could become a model for urban infill development across the country. This is an opportunity to build an urban development project applying principles of sustainability and combining ecological and economic objectives.

ENGAGING THE TEXT

1. Why, according to Velázquez, are low-income neighborhoods more seriously affected by pollution than more affluent communities? Did you see any evidence in the neighborhood where you grew up of the kinds of disproportionate ecological impacts she describes in her district?
2. To what extent would you agree with Velázquez that America's “more is better” culture undermines efforts to promote social and ecologically safe neighborhoods? Would you agree that American consumer culture is particularly “toxic” or “cruel” for children living in poverty? Why or why not?
3. In your opinion, what would it take to get poor children to see “neighborhood volunteers, nurses, teachers, parents” and other “blue-collar heroes” as role models in place of athletes, movie stars, and billionaires? What good would this do the environment?
4. What does Velázquez mean by “environmental justice”? Do you think environmental justice can or should be legislated? Why or why not?

EXPLORING CONNECTIONS

5. How might Velázquez's observations on the ecology of low-income communities complicate Richard Louv's assessment of the role that nature plays in children's lives (p. 664)? Do you think that children growing up in urban areas like Greenpoint / Williamsburg experience nature in the same way as do children who grow up in the suburbs or rural areas?
6. Working in groups, reconsider R. Crumb's "A Short History of America" (pp. 695-98). Instead of thinking of Crumb's drawings as representing a historical progression, try to label them in terms of different socioeconomic or geographic communities. Where are the Hamptons? Where is Greenpoint / Williamsburg? To what extent does a person's experience of "nature" depend on race and economic status?

EXTENDING THE CRITICAL CONTEXT

7. Working in groups, research and map the location of hazardous waste and toxic industrial sites in different areas of your city or town, including the location of dumps, waste-transfer stations, "brownfields," "right-to-know" sites, and polluting industries. What correlation can you find, if any, between pollution and the socioeconomic status of the various communities you map? (You can find neighborhood environmental mapping tools at the Environmental Protection Agency's "Environmapper" website: www.epa.gov/enviro/html/em/index.html and at the EPA's "Environfacts" site: www.epa.gov/enviro/.)
8. Map the "greenspaces" that are available in various neighborhoods in your town or city. Do you see any correlation between socioeconomic status and the number of parks, playgrounds, public gardens, and other forms of open space available in a given neighborhood?

Our Unhealthy Future Under Environmentalism

JOHN BERLAU

How far would you go to save the earth? That question has troubled environmentalists ever since famed ecological activist Edward Abbey invented the concept of "monkeywrenching"—the use of sabotage to stop industrial development and urban expansion. Inspired by Abbey's writings, a generation of "eco-warriors" has resorted to forms of direct action in the name of environmental defense. But as John Berlau points out in this selection, some

feel that organizations like the Earth Liberation Front and the Animal Liberation Front have gone too far. Classified as domestic terrorist threats by the FBI in 2001, these and other eco-anarchist organizations are said to have fire-bombed ski resorts and ranger stations, blown up animal research facilities, and even staged the release of hundreds of wild horses—all in the name of protecting the planet. As Berlau sees it, such "eco-terrorists" are simply criminals, and they don't work alone. In his view, mainstream advocates of sustainability and environmental consciousness also bear responsibility for promoting ecological violence. John Berlau is a fellow in Economic Policy at the Competitive Enterprise Institute and a former correspondent for Investor's Business Daily and Insight magazine. He has also served as a media fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. This selection comes from his book Eco-Freaks: Environmentalism Is Hazardous to Your Health! (2006).

It was 19 September 2001. A deeply wounded nation was still in shock and on high alert for possible follow-ups to the al Qaeda attacks on the 11th. Of particular concern were any buildings or structures that could be seen as symbols of America and the West. And certainly, hardly anything in the world is seen as a symbol of America more than McDonald's. Some restaurants had already been targets of arson by eco-terrorists.

Still, hardly anyone thought that any kind of terrorist attack would occur at a Ronald McDonald House. Although largely supported by the McDonald's Corporation and local owners of franchised McDonald's restaurants, the nondescript houses are mostly in residential areas. They also serve a noble, noncontroversial purpose: a home-like setting for the families of sick children getting treatment at nearby medical facilities.

But on that September morning at the Ronald McDonald House in Tucson, parents, children, and employees came upon a horrifying sight outside. The four-foot statue of Ronald McDonald, intended to be a welcoming face for the children who love his commercials, had been brutally attacked. Swastikas and obscenities swirled around Ronald from his face to his feet. Given the events that had gone on in New York and Washington and the arsons at McDonald's, those at the house were very frightened. "I became concerned because of the arson and the fact that we've got a full house right now," the House's executive director, Mary Kay Dinsmore, told the *Arizona Daily Star*.¹

Close to the swastika on Ronald's face appeared sets of three letters that have become all too familiar in the past few years to investigators of domestic terrorism: ELF and ALF.

¹M. Scot Skinner, "McDonald House Statue Is Vandalized with Graffiti," *Arizona Daily Star*, 20 September 2001, 1. [All notes are Berlau's unless otherwise indicated.]