NUCLEAR RACISM

The nuclear industry, both weapons and energy could not survive without institutionalized racism. Virtually every phase of the nuclear chain is done on the backs of Indigenous Peoples and People of Color. Without the deliberate contamination and disregard for the health of Indigenous Peoples and, People of Color, the real costs to the nuclear industry would bring an immediate end to the use of nuclear power plants for the production of electricity and nuclear weapons of war.

AN EXTREME IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE

To Indigenous Peoples, and other People of Color all things are connected. Human beings are only one part of the whole. This concept was old in 1854 when Chief Seattle said, “Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.”

Native Hawaiians identify themselves as “Keiki hanau o ka aina, child that is borne up from the land.” A Japanese belief says a butterfly, fluttering its wings, causes tidal waves.

Mother Earth is alive. Mother Earth is sacred. These concepts are at extreme odds with those that would exploit and develop the natural resources of Earth for profit and personal gain at the expense of all future generations. The poisons and wastes from the nuclear chain are the ultimate threat to our health and the health of all living creatures for geological time.

“Nuclear energy and it’s waste were created in arrogance and corruption and continue to expand the power of wealth and corruption throughout the entire world by the sacrifice of people of color upon Its unholy alter”

Rufina Marie Laws
Mescalero Apache

Racism Links in the Nuclear chain

Environmental Justice

Principles of environmental justice
**RACISM LINKS IN THE NUCLEAR CHAIN**

- “Mining and milling of uranium is done on Hopi, Dineh (Navajo), Pueblo, and Cree lands in North America and on Aboriginal homelands in Australia and South Africa.1

- The Laguna Pueblo is the site of the largest open pit uranium mine in the world. Uranium tailings the left over mining and milling debris which retains 85% of the original radioactivity of the ore were used to pave the roads in the Pueblo community.

- The Nevada Test Site, the US nuclear weapons testing ground, is within the Treaty of Ruby Valley land base of the Western Shoshone Nation. Over 1,000 nuclear weapons have been detonated there.2 The proposed United States permanent nuclear waste dump for 70,000 metric tons of high level waste is Yucca Mountain, also within the Western Shoshone Nation.3

- **Northern States Power Company** built the Prairie Island nuclear reactors on the sacred ancestral burial mounds of the Prairie Island Mdewakanton Dakota People. The Prairie Island Community is forced to live with the radioactive emissions from routine operations (6x the MDH state policy guidelines) of NSP’s nuclear plant and now a nuclear waste dump.

- The now defunct Monitored Retrieval Storage program for the temporary storage of high-level nuclear waste in the United States had 20 applicants in 1992. Seventeen requests were from Indigenous Nations including Prairie Island Mdewakanton Dakota, Mescalero Apache, and Skull Valley Goshute.4

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**“My skin peeled like a snake”**

Tama, Moruroa Atoll, South Pacific

- Asians and Pacific Islanders, in addition to the Western Shoshone, have been the victims of the experimentation of the nuclear weapons of war. Britain, France and US have all detonated atomic weapons in the Pacific. The Japanese from Hiroshima and Nagasaki as well as the Tahitians, Marshall Islanders, Johnston and Christmas Islanders, Monte Bello Islanders and Aborigines in Australia have all disproportionately suffered the effects of nuclear weapons testing for over 40 years.5

- Radiation experimentation was conducted at the expense of Alaskan Natives. Project Chariot took 1200 pounds of radioactive soil from ground zero at the Nevada Test Site and placed it in close proximity to the Native Village of Point Hope, Alaska. The purpose of the experiment was to study the bio-accumulation of radiation in the lichen, caribou, and human life-cycles.6

- The first victory for environmental justice under President Clinton’s Executive Order 12898 denied the siting of Louisiana Energy Services (LES) uranium enrichment plant. The plant was sited between the African-American communities of Forest Grove and Center Springs in Claiborne Parish, Louisiana, which are 97% African-American. A three-judge panel of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission found that racism was the primary criteria LES utilized for siting the project. 7
- Sequoyah Fuels Corporation (SFC) is located in the Cherokee Nation at Gore, Oklahoma. The facility processed uranium for nuclear fuel, and was closed in 1993. SFC has yet to be decommissioned. The county where SFC is located has a population of 34,000 and of those 500 have died from cancer since 1975, and many more are still struggling to survive the disease.8

- A low-level nuclear waste dump proposed for Sierra Blanca, Texas would be sited in a poor Mexican-American community.9 Another low-level dump is proposed for land sacred to the Mohave in Ward Valley, California along the Colorado River.10

- The Hanford Site (Hanford Nuclear Reservation) in Washington was established in 1943 for plutonium production. The site is in close proximity to the Yakima, Umatilla, Nez Perce and six other Indigenous Nations.11 An estimated 725,000 curies of radioactive iodine-131 was intentionally, but secretly released into the air between 1944-1957.12

**Environmental Justice**

The United Church of Christ’s Commission on Racial Justice landmark report, *Toxic Waste and Race* was published in 1987. It states that 60% of all African American and Latin Communities and 50% of all Asian American and Indigenous Peoples Communities lived near toxic waste sites. The social justice community noted environmentalists first saw the racist pattern and started action.

The goals of Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice are:

- No segment of the population, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, as a result of EPA’s policies, programs, and activities, suffers disproportionately from adverse human health or environmental effects, and all people live in clean, healthy, and sustainable communities.

- Those who live with environmental decisions — community residents, State Tribal, and local governments, environmental groups, businesses — must have every opportunity for public participation in the making of those decisions. An informed and involved community is a necessary and integral part of the process to protect the environment.

Proceedings of the National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held on October 24-27, 1991, in Washington DC.

Principles of Environmental Justice

PREAMBLE

We, the people of color, gathered together at this multinational People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to begin to build a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities, do hereby re-establish our spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth; to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves; to insure environmental justice; to promote economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods; and, to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples, do affirm and adopt these Principles of Environmental Justice:
1. Environmental justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.

2. Environmental justice demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.

3. Environmental justice mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.

4. Environmental justice calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food.

5. Environmental justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.

6. Environmental justice demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.

7. Environmental justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.

8. Environmental justice affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.

9. Environmental justice protects the right of victims of environmental, injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.


12 Environmental justice affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and provided fair access for all to the full range of resources.

13 Environmental justice calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.

14. Environmental justice opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations,

15. Environmental justice opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.

16. Environmental justice calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.

17. Environmental justice requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth’s resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our lifestyles to insure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.


Notes:


8. GREEN COUNTRY NEIGHBOR. Vol. IV, No 031, February 13, 1992, (PO Box 1839 Tahlequah, OK 74465).
Photo credit: Rob Meyer
Prairie Island Coalition Vigil for Survival, 1994
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