

10/31: Workshop: Understanding Environmental Racism

- Our class: from environmentalism to Dust Bowl, with paper; now, environmental movement to environmental racism, with your own project (poster presentations, groups of 2-3)
- Primary sources
 - ex: letters, paintings, newspapers, photographs, interviews, journals → first-hand accounts from the time/period of study
 - we have to *examine* these sources, engage with them → everything that is said or shown can't always be believed (who is writing it? what is the intended audience? what is its purpose, etc?)
 - e.g. WPA slave narratives (issues with them because how much later they were written after end of slavery, the circumstances in which the interviews were conducted), “Custer’s Last Stand” painting of the Battle of Little Bighorn – an invented narrative that has overshadowed the actual history
 - *Questions we want to ask...*
 - Who are they? Where do they come from? What’s their deal?
 - Why are they writing? What’s their motivation? What is their argument?
 - When was this produced? What is its context? Who is the audience?
 - Or sometimes: how or why are sources collected?
 - * Going through each primary source and conducting this checklist helps us find bias, context
- Looking at primary sources in our text: *Environmental Justice in Postwar America: A Documentary Reader*
 - Part 1: Thinking about spatial setups - the nature of segregation → photographs, data sheets, real estate covenants, contemporary commentary, government documents
 - Part 2: How things have evolved over time

- Part 3: Environment and justice in sustainability era
- Segregation
 - A way to organize two separate societies within one geographic space after the Civil War
 - Everything was segregated (neighborhoods, restaurants, bathrooms, etc.)
 - Strict rules created two different worlds; Civil Rights movement was based in tearing down this laws, cultural walls, societal limitations to Black people → and as it began to collapse, “de facto segregation” spread across the country even further

11/2: Workshop: Understanding Environmental Racism (cont.)

- Fundamental takeaway from Wells in *Environment Justice in Postwar America*
 - distinction between environmental movement (protecting the places that we go to have a “sublime” experience) and environmental justice (protecting where we live)
 - idea that environmental history isn’t just studying nature spaces
- More historical background about environmental racism, segregation
 - “space” in American history
 - post-WWI and 1920s housing boom (“kit houses”, lower costs; but still financing difficult for many)
 - post-WW2 society - private industry takes government construction techniques from the war to build houses
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 - e.g. “Levittown” - William Levitt bought a ton of land, pre-built models for homeowners - buying in bulk lowers costs, lowers prices

- G.I. Bill
 - 1.) designed to ease soldiers' entry into workplace
 - 2.) reward for service (college for free, creating ways to own their own home - "financing" with 5% down)
- postwar boom: expansion of American economy (more jobs, more money)
- consequences: pretty much all of these new homeowners in suburban neighborhoods are from the same lower social class, white, Christian, Anglo-Saxon Protestant; how did they learn to adapt to the new environment? media (magazines, TV - e.g. "I Love Lucy")
- Financing - self-perpetuating racism
 - created all-white protestant enclaves
 - then: 1940s-1980s - slow emptying out of inner city neighborhoods (one reason: "white flight" from people of color)
- At the same time: governments had to figure out how to solve new "poisons of the economy"
 - golden era of "experts" (governments turned to them); for the most part they aren't actively racist, but their actions had major consequences for communities of color
 - then a trend of questioning the experts (EPA)
- 1970s-1980s: Americans begin to reject expertise/authority/institutions
 - news/media
 - educational institutions
 - government/military

[previously anchors of the nation]

- Discussion of primary sources throughout *Environment Justice in Postwar America*
- Plans for group project on environmental racism