

purely human sights, ever to be more than good-natured exercise. But now, out in the wild, the sunshine on one's shoulders is a reminder that man has cracked the ozone, that, thanks to us, the atmosphere absorbs where once it released.

The greenhouse effect is a more apt name than those who coined it imagined. The carbon dioxide and trace gases act like the panes of glass on a greenhouse—the analogy is accurate. But it's more than that. We have built a greenhouse, *a human creation*, where once there bloomed a sweet and wild garden.

The End of Nature (1989)

ROBERT D. BULLARD

When Robert Bullard (b. 1946) was a newly minted sociology professor, his lawyer wife asked him to collect data for a lawsuit she had filed against a company trying to site a landfill in the middle of a black middle-class Houston neighborhood. When he started looking at the evidence, Bullard told *Grist* magazine, "I saw that one hundred percent of all the city-owned landfills in Houston were in black neighborhoods, though blacks made up only twenty-five percent of the population. . . . That's how I got dragged into this"—"this" being a career devoted to chronicling the degree to which people of color were the victims of a disproportionate share of the nation's pollution. Bullard's work, and especially his landmark book *Dumping in Dixie* (1990), helped give birth to the environmental justice movement, which has challenged predominantly white mainstream environmental organizations to devote more of their time and resources to people paying the biggest price for "progress." This challenge at first rankled some white environmentalists, who felt they were under attack, but it has slowly yielded a more diverse movement and new ways of thinking about environmental equity. The stakes involved are revealed more clearly with increased awareness about climate change: the industrialized North continues to dump damaging emissions in the backyards of the Third World.

from *Dumping in Dixie*

The environmental movement in the United States emerged with agendas that focused on such areas as wilderness and wildlife preservation, resource conservation, pollution abatement, and population control. It was supported primarily by middle- and upper-middle-class whites. Although concern about the environment cut across racial and class lines, environmental activism has been most pronounced

among individuals who have above-average education, greater access to economic resources, and a greater sense of personal efficacy.¹

Mainstream environmental organizations were late in broadening their base of support to include blacks and other minorities, the poor, and working-class persons. The "energy crisis" in the 1970s provided a major impetus for the many environmentalists to embrace equity issues confronting the poor in this country and in the countries of the Third World.² Over the years, environmentalism has shifted from a "participatory" to a "power" strategy, where the "core of active environmental movement is focused on litigation, political lobbying, and technical evaluation rather than on mass mobilization for protest marches."³

An abundance of documentation shows blacks, lower-income groups, and working-class persons are subjected to a disproportionately large amount of pollution and other environmental stressors in their neighborhoods as well as in their workplaces.⁴ However, these groups have only been marginally involved in the nation's environmental movement. Problems facing the black community have been topics of much discussion in recent years. (Here, we use sociologist James

1. See Frederick R. Buttel and William L. Flinn, "Social Class and Mass Environmental Beliefs: A Reconsideration," *Environment and Behavior* 10 (September 1978): 433-450; Kenneth M. Bachrach and Alex J. Zautra, "Coping with Community Stress: The Threat of a Hazardous Waste Landfill," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 26 (June 1985): 127-141; Paul Mohai, "Public Concern and Elite Involvement in Environmental Conservation Issues," *Social Science Quarterly* 66 (December 1985): 820-838.

2. Denton E. Morrison, "The Soft Cutting Edge of Environmentalism: Why and How the Appropriate Technology Notion Is Changing the Movement," *Natural Resources Journal* 20 (April 1980): 275-298.

3. Allan Schnaiberg, *The Environment: From Surplus to Scarcity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 366-377.

4. See Morris E. Davis, "The Impact of Workplace Health and Safety on Black Workers: Assessment and Prognosis," *Labor Studies Journal* 4 (Spring 1981): 29-40; Richard Kazis and Richard Grossman, *Fear at Work: Job Blackmail, Labor, and the Environment* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1983), Chapter 1; W. J. Kruvant, "People, Energy, and Pollution," in Dorothy K. Newman and Dawn Day, eds., *The American Energy Consumer* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger, 1975), pp. 125-167; Robert D. Bullard, "Solid Waste Sites and the Black Houston Community," *Sociological Inquiry* 53 (Spring 1983): 273-288; Robert D. Bullard, "Endangered Environments: The Price of Unplanned Growth in Boomtown Houston," *California Sociologist* 7 (Summer 1984): 85-101; Robert D. Bullard and Beverly H. Wright, "Dumping Grounds in a Sunbelt City," *Urban Resources* 2 (Winter 1985): 37-39.

Blackwell's definition of the black community, "a highly diversified set of interrelated structures and aggregates of people who are held together by forces of white oppression and racism."⁵) Race has not been eliminated as a factor in the allocation of community amenities.

Research on environmental quality in black communities has been minimal. Attention has been focused on such problems as crime, drugs, poverty, unemployment, and family crisis. Nevertheless, pollution is exacting a heavy toll (in health and environmental costs) on black communities across the nation. There are few studies that document, for example, the way blacks cope with environmental stressors such as municipal solid-waste facilities, hazardous-waste landfills, toxic-waste dumps, chemical emissions from industrial plants, and on-the-job hazards that pose extreme risks to their health. Coping in this case is seen as a response to stress and is defined as "efforts, both action-oriented and intrapsychic, to manage, i.e., master, tolerate, reduce, minimize, environmental and internal demands, conflicts among them, which tax or exceed a person's resources."⁶ Coping strategies employed by individuals confronted with a stressor are of two general types: *problem-focused coping* (e.g., individual and/or group efforts to directly address the problem) and *emotion-focused coping* (e.g., efforts to control one's psychological response to the stressor). The decision to take direct action or to tolerate a stressor often depends on how individuals perceive their ability to do something about or have an impact on the stressful situation. Personal efficacy, therefore, is seen as a factor that affects environmental and political activism.⁷

5. James E. Blackwell, *The Black Community: Diversity and Unity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), p. xiii.

6. Richard E. Lazarus and Raymond Launier, "Stress-Related Transactions Between Persons and Environment," in Lawrence A. Pervin and Michael Lewis, eds., *Perspectives in International Psychology* (New York: Plenum, 1978), pp. 297-327; Bachrach and Zautra, "Coping with Community Stress," pp. 127-129.

7. See Anthony M. Orum, "On Participation in Political Movements," *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 10 (April/June 1974): 181-207; Daniel L. Collins, Andrew Baum, and Jerome E. Singer, "Coping with Chronic Stress at Three Mile Island: Psychological and Biological Evidence," *Health Psychology* 2 (1983): 149-166; Mohai, "Public Concern and Elite Involvement," p. 832.

Much research has been devoted to analyzing social movements in the United States. For example, hundreds of volumes have been written in the past several years on the environmental, labor, antiwar, and civil rights movements. Despite this wide coverage, there is a dearth of material on the convergence (and the divergence, for that matter) of environmentalism and social justice advocacy. This appears to be the case in and out of academia. Moreover, few social scientists have studied environmentalism among blacks and other ethnic minorities. This oversight is rooted in historical and ideological factors and in the composition of the core environmental movement and its largely white middle-class profile.

Many of the interactions that emerged among core environmentalists, the poor, and blacks can be traced to distributional equity questions. How are the benefits and burdens of environmental reform distributed? Who gets what, where, and why? Are environmental inequities a result of racism or class barriers or a combination of both? After more than two decades of modern environmentalism, the equity issues have not been resolved. There has been, however, some change in the way environmental problems are presented by mainstream environmental organizations. More important, environmental equity has now become a major item on the local (grassroots) as well as national civil rights agenda.⁸

Much of the leadership in the civil rights movement came from historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Black college students were on the "cutting edge" in leading sit-in demonstrations at lunch counters, libraries, parks, and public transit systems that operated under Jim Crow laws. In *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, Aldon D. Morris wrote:

The tradition of protest is transmitted across generations by older relatives, black institutions, churches, and protest organizations. Blacks interested in social change inevitably gravitate

8. Robert D. Bullard and Beverly H. Wright, "Environmentalism and the Politics of Equity: Emergent Trends in the Black Community," *Mid-American Review of Sociology* 12 (Winter 1987): 21-37.

to this "protest community," where they hope to find solutions to a complex problem.

The modern civil rights movement fits solidly into this rich tradition of protest. Like the slave revolts, the Garvey Movement, and the March on Washington, it was highly organized. Its significant use of the black religious community to accomplish political goals also linked the modern movement to the earlier mass movements which also relied heavily on the church.⁹

Social justice and the elimination of institutionalized discrimination were the major goals of the civil rights movement. Many of the HBCUs are located in some of the most environmentally polluted communities in the nation. These institutions and their students, thus, have a vested interest in seeing that improvements are made in local environmental quality. Unlike their move to challenge other forms of inequity, black student-activists have been conspicuously silent and relatively inactive on environmental problems. Moreover, the resources and talents of the faculties at these institutions have also been underutilized in assisting affected communities in their struggle against polluters, including government and private industries.

The problem of polluted black communities is not a new phenomenon. Historically, toxic dumping and the location of locally unwanted land uses (LULUs) have followed the "path of least resistance," meaning black and poor communities have been disproportionately burdened with these types of externalities. However, organized black resistance to toxic dumping, municipal waste facility siting, and discriminatory environmental and land-use decisions is a relatively recent phenomenon.¹⁰ Black environmental concern has been present but too often has not been followed up with action.

Ecological concern has remained moderately high across nearly all segments of the population. Social equity and concern about distributive

9. Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Free Press, 1984), p. x.

10. See Robert D. Bullard and Beverly H. Wright, "Blacks and the Environment," *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 14 (Summer 1987): 165-184; Bullard, "Solid Waste Sites and the Black Houston Community," pp. 273-288; Bullard, "Endangered Environs," pp. 84-102.

impacts, however, have not fared so well over the years. Low-income and minority communities have had few advocates and lobbyists at the national level and within the mainstream environmental movement. Things are changing as environmental problems become more "potent political issues [and] become increasingly viewed as threatening public health."¹¹

The environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s, dominated by the middle class, built an impressive political base for environmental reform and regulatory relief. Many environmental problems of the 1980s and 1990s, however, have social impacts that differ somewhat from earlier ones. Specifically, environmental problems have had serious regressive impacts. These impacts have been widely publicized in the media, as in the case of the hazardous-waste problems at Love Canal and Times Beach. The plight of polluted minority communities is not as well known as the New York and Missouri tragedies. Nevertheless, a disproportionate burden of pollution is carried by the urban poor and minorities.¹²

Few environmentalists realized the sociological implications of the not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) phenomenon.¹³ Given the political climate of the times, the hazardous wastes, garbage dumps, and polluting industries were likely to end up in somebody's backyard. But whose backyard? More often than not, these LULUs ended up in poor, powerless, black communities rather than in affluent suburbs. This pattern has proven to be the rule, even though the benefits derived from industrial waste production are directly related to affluence.¹⁴ Public officials and private industry have in many cases responded to the NIMBY phenomenon using the place-in-blacks'-backyard (PIBBY) principle.¹⁵

11. Riley E. Dunlap, "Public Opinion on the Environment in the Reagan Era: Polls, Pollution, and Politics Revisited," *Environment* 29 (July/August 1987): 6-11, 32-37.

12. Brian J. L. Berry, ed., *The Social Burden of Environmental Pollution: A Comparative Metropolitan Data Source* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger, 1977); Sam Love, "Ecology and Social Justice: Is There a Conflict," *Environmental Action* 4 (1972): 3-6; Julian McCaull, "Discriminatory Air Pollution: If the Poor Don't Breathe," *Environment* 19 (March 1976): 26-32; Vernon Jordon, "Sins of Omission," *Environmental Action* 11 (April 1980): 26-30.

13. Denton E. Morrison, "How and Why Environmental Consciousness Has Trickled Down," in Allan Schnaiberg, Nicholas Watts, and Klaus Zimmermann, eds., *Distributional Conflict in Environmental-Resource Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), pp. 187-220.

14. Robert D. Bullard and Beverly H. Wright, "The Politics of Pollution: Implications for the Black Community," *Phylon* 47 (March 1986): 71-78.

15. Bullard and Wright, "Environmentalism and the Politics of Equity," p. 28.

Social activists have begun to move environmentalism to the left in an effort to address some of the distributional impact and equity issues.¹⁶ Documentation of civil rights violations has strengthened the move to make environmental quality a basic right of all individuals. Rising energy costs and a continued erosion of the economy's ability to provide jobs (but not promises) are factors that favor blending the objectives of labor, minorities, and other "underdogs" with those of middle-class environmentalists.¹⁷ Although ecological sustainability and socioeconomic equality have not been fully achieved, there is clear evidence that the 1980s ushered in a new era of cooperation between environmental and social justice groups. While there is by no means a consensus on complex environmental problems, the converging points of view represent the notion that "environmental problems and . . . material problems have common roots."¹⁸

When analyzing the convergence of these groups, it is important to note the relative emphasis that environmental and social justice organizations give to "instrumental" versus "expressive" activities.¹⁹ Environmental organizations have relied heavily on environmentally oriented expressive activities (outdoor recreation, field trips, social functions, etc.), while the social justice movements have made greater use of goal-oriented instrumental activities (protest demonstrations, mass rallies, sit-ins, boycotts, etc.) in their effort to produce social change.²⁰

The push for environmental equity in the black community has much in common with the development of the modern civil rights movement that began in the South. That is, protest against discrimination has evolved from "organizing efforts of activists functioning through a well-developed indigenous base."²¹ Indigenous black institutions, organizations,

16. Richard P. Gale, "The Environmental Movement and the Left: Antagonists or Allies?" *Sociological Inquiry* 53 (Spring 1983): 179-199.

17. Craig R. Humphrey and Frederick R. Buttell, *Environment, Energy, and Society* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1982), p. 253.

18. Ibid.

19. Arthur P. Jacoby and Nicholas Babchuk, "Instrumental Versus Expressive Voluntary Associations," *Sociology and Social Research* 47 (1973): 461-471.

20. Gale, "The Environmental Movement and the Left," p. 191.

21. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, p. xii.

leaders, and networks are coming together against polluting industries and discriminatory environmental policies. This book addresses this new uniting of blacks against institutional barriers of racism and classism.

Alsen (Louisiana)

Alsen is an unincorporated community located on the Mississippi River several miles north of Baton Rouge, Louisiana's state capital. The community had a population of 1,104 individuals in 1980 of whom 98.9 percent were black. Alsen developed as a rural community of black landowners to its present status as a stable, working-class suburban enclave. The median income for families in 1980 was \$17,188. A total of 19.4 percent of Alsen's residents are below the poverty level, a percentage well below that of blacks nationally and in Louisiana. Typical homes in the area are woodframe or brick-veneer style. More than three-fourths (77.4 percent) of the year-round occupied homes in the community are occupied by owners and 22.6 percent by renters.²² The community still maintains much of its small-town flavor. Many of the local residents have roots in the community dating back several generations.

Alsen lies at the beginning of the 85-mile industrial corridor where one-quarter of America's petrochemicals are produced. The chemical corridor begins in Baton Rouge and follows the Mississippi River down to the southeastern rim of New Orleans. The tiny town of Alsen sits in the shadow of Huey Long's skyscraper-capitol building and the towering petrochemical plants that dot the Mississippi River. This area also has been dubbed the "cancer corridor" because the air, ground, and water are full of carcinogens, mutagens, and embryotoxins. The area has been described as a "massive human experiment" and a "national sacrifice zone."²³

The petrochemical industry has played an important role in Louisiana's economy, especially south Louisiana. More than 165,000 persons were employed in the state's petrochemical industry at its peak

22. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Neighborhood Statistics Program: Narrative Profile of Neighborhoods in Baton Rouge and East Baton Rouge, LA* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982), pp. 2-4.

23. David Maraniss and Michael Weisskopf, "Jobs and Illness in Petrochemical Corridor," *Washington Post*, December 22, 1987, p. 1; Brown, *The Toxic Cloud*, pp. 152-161.

in 1982. This single industry accounted for one out of every three tax dollars collected by the state.²⁴ The Baton Rouge area has paid a high price—industrial pollution—for the concentration of so many chemical companies in its midst. These companies discharge more than 150,000 tons of pollutants into the city's air each year. The bulk of these air pollutants are in the form of sulfur dioxides, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxides, and hydrocarbons.

Louisiana is not a large state. It ranks thirty-one in land area of all states. Despite its relatively compact size, it managed to import more than 305.6 million pounds of hazardous waste in 1983.²⁵ Much of this waste was shipped into south Louisiana. In 1986, the state had 33.2 percent of the nation's total permitted hazardous-waste landfill capacity among active sites. Much of Louisiana's hazardous waste generated by the petrochemical industries is dumped in the Baton Rouge area. The only commercial hazardous-waste site in the Baton Rouge area is the Rollins Environmental Services facility, located adjacent to the Alsen community.

The Rollins site was the fourth largest in the nation, representing 11.3 percent of remaining permitted capacity in 1986.²⁶ The Rollins hazardous-waste landfill and incinerator have been a constant sore point for the nearby Alsen residents. The waste site has been the source of numerous odor and health complaints from nearby community residents and workers at the plant. The plant was cited for more than 100 state and federal violations between 1980 and 1985 but did not pay any penalties. Mary McCastle, a 72-year-old grandmother and Alsen community leader, summed up her community's running battle with Rollins:

We had no warning Rollins was coming in here. When they did come in we didn't know what they were dumping. We did know that it was making us sick. People used to have nice gardens

24. Bob Anderson, Mike Dunn, and Sonny Alabarado, "Prosperity in Paradise: Louisiana's Chemical Legacy," *Morning Advocate*, April 25, 1985, p. 3.

25. Brown, *The Toxic Cloud*, p. 157.

26. Commission for Racial Justice, *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*, p. 66.

and fruit trees. They lived off their gardens and only had to buy meat. Some of us raised hogs and chickens. But not after Rollins came in. Our gardens and animals were dying out. Some days the odors from the plant would be nearly unbearable. We didn't know what was causing it. We later found out that Rollins was burning hazardous waste.²⁷

Air quality in the Alsen community became a cause for alarm. Local residents began to question the company's right to spew pollutants on their community. Complaints were filed with the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ) with no immediate results. Although local citizens registered their displeasure with the waste facility's operation, they got little attention from state environmental officials. Annie Bowdry, the director of the Alsen Community Center—a nonprofit human services program—described the state's response (or lack of response) to Alsen's needs:

Alsen is black and a nowhere place stuck out in the parish. It's not incorporated. It didn't count. It was not until after state environmental officials visited the community that citizen complaints were taken seriously. State officials could not believe that people endured everyday the terrible odors from the Rollins plant.²⁸

In late 1980, residents began organizing to stop the contamination of their community. Local leaders recognized the fact that they were going up against a giant corporation. The annual revenue in Rollins from hazardous waste alone was more than \$69 million. Citizens were also aware that the company provided jobs—although few Alsen residents worked at the company. Alsen residents were determined to take a stand based on what was best for the health and welfare of their community. In early 1981, local citizens filed a multimillion dollar class-action lawsuit against Rollins. The lawsuit and subsequent state monitoring of the air quality problem in Alsen forced the company to reduce the pollutants from the waste site. Public opposition to the

27. Interview with Mary McCastle, June 23, 1988, Alsen, Louisiana.

28. Interview with Annie Bowdry, June 23, 1988, Alsen, Louisiana.

Rollins hazardous-waste facility intensified in the mid-1980s when citizen groups and environmentalists (Greenpeace, Sierra Club, and some local grassroots groups) turned out in force to oppose an application by the firm to burn PCBs at its incinerator. This protest was successful in blocking the PCBs burn.

Alsen residents were outraged that their lawsuit against Rollins dragged on for so long. Local citizens were angry that Louisiana DEQ officials took so long to believe the horror stories of Alsen's air pollution problem. They wondered why it was so difficult to resolve this problem. Admon McCastle, a native of Alsen, saw racism as the root of his community's dilemma:

More than 15 years ago, a wealthy white property owner next to Rollins received a half million dollar settlement from the company for the death of his cattle after water spilled onto his pasture. Yet, Rollins has failed to recognize it is harming people, not cows, in the Alsen community. When I look at this, I have to say racism has played a big part in the company's actions and the state's inaction.²⁹

After dragging on for more than six years, the lawsuit was finally settled out of court in November 1987. The settlement, however, splintered the community. Residents were polarized into "money versus health" factions. Each plaintiff in the lawsuit received "an average of \$3,000 the day before Christmas."³⁰ There was a "take the money and run" atmosphere that prevailed in the battle-weary community. Opponents of the secret-settlement agreement point to the need for continual health monitoring in the community. This is not a small point since the plaintiffs were required to sign away their right to sue Rollins for any future health-related problems. Annie Bowdry lodged her opposition to the settlement:

We wanted to establish a health clinic in Alsen that would be administered by the state [Louisiana] and paid for by Rollins.

29. Interview with Admon McCastle, June 23, 1988, Alsen Louisiana.

30. Ibid.

Since Rollins made the people sick, they should have to pay for the operation of the clinic. All at once, someone mentioned money and the health clinic proposal went out the window. My feelings about the whole thing is a dollar cannot buy my health. But if I knew I was contaminated in time, then maybe a cure for me could be found. If not for me, then maybe for my children.³¹

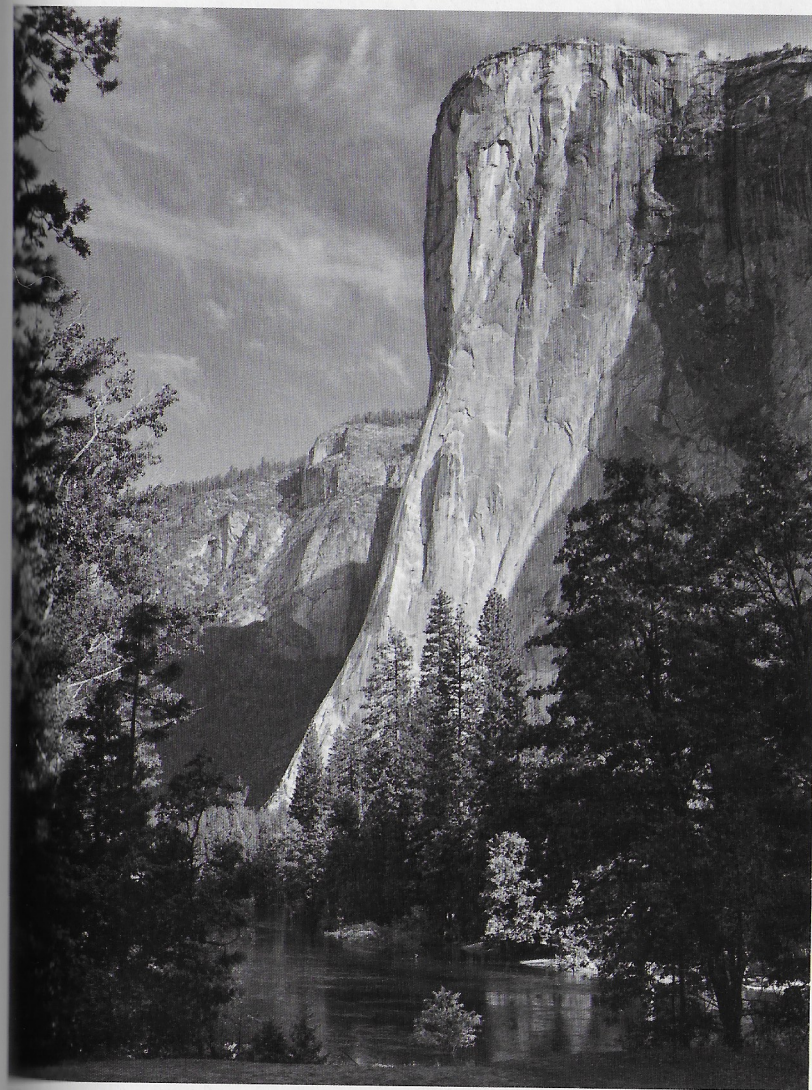
Overall, life in the Alsen community has improved since residents have become more informed on the hazardous-waste problem and convinced state officials to closely monitor air quality in their community. Although economic concessions were extracted from Rollins through an out-of-court settlement, the community was left without a health facility of its own. Moreover, the settlement agreement shielded the waste disposal company from any future health-related lawsuits by the Alsen plaintiffs. Alsen residents still must drive to Baton Rouge for health care services.

The community's pollution problem is far from over because numerous chemical plants are still clustered along the Mississippi River just a short distance from their homes. This problem will likely remain as long as the backbone of Louisiana's economy remains heavily dependent on its "chemical corridor." More important, increased public opposition and tougher environmental regulations have made it more difficult to site new hazardous-waste facilities. The Rollins hazardous-waste landfill and incinerator, thus, take on added state and regional importance.

Louisiana, dubbed the "sportsman's paradise," has become an environmental nightmare as a result of lax regulations, unbridled production of toxic chemicals, and heavy dependence on the petrochemical industry as the backbone of the state's economy.

31. Interview with Annie Bowdry.

Dumping in Dixie (1990)



Ansel Adams, *El Capitan, Yosemite National Park, California* (1952).