

Environmental racism: What is it and why does it still exist?

By definition by [Green Action](#), environmental racism is referred as:

“The institutional rules, regulations, policies, government, and/or corporate decisions that deliberately target certain communities for locally undesirable land uses and lax enforcement of zoning and environmental laws, resulting in communities being disproportionately exposed to toxic and hazardous waste based upon race.”

In 1982, Benjamin Chavis, a civil rights leader for African-Americans, noted the term “environmental racism” (Beech, 2020). In that year, the black community was burdened with PCB-laced [soil](#) in North Carolina (Lazarus, 2000).

However, this is happening worldwide and it’s just not [sustainable](#).

Why does environmental racism happen?



Protester's sign on racism. Image: [Clay Banks](#)

Different factors and reasons result in environmental racism. First, it's sometimes the perception of low-income land from people of colour or it could be due to the need for a receptacle for [pollutants in urban areas](#). Lastly, it could even be a lack of authoritative power in a government. When building a waste facility or having a polluted [waterway](#), these thoughts often neglect the people who live in those urban areas and, therefore, nothing is done regarding that, which is the beginning of environmental racism.

Where is environmental discrimination happening?

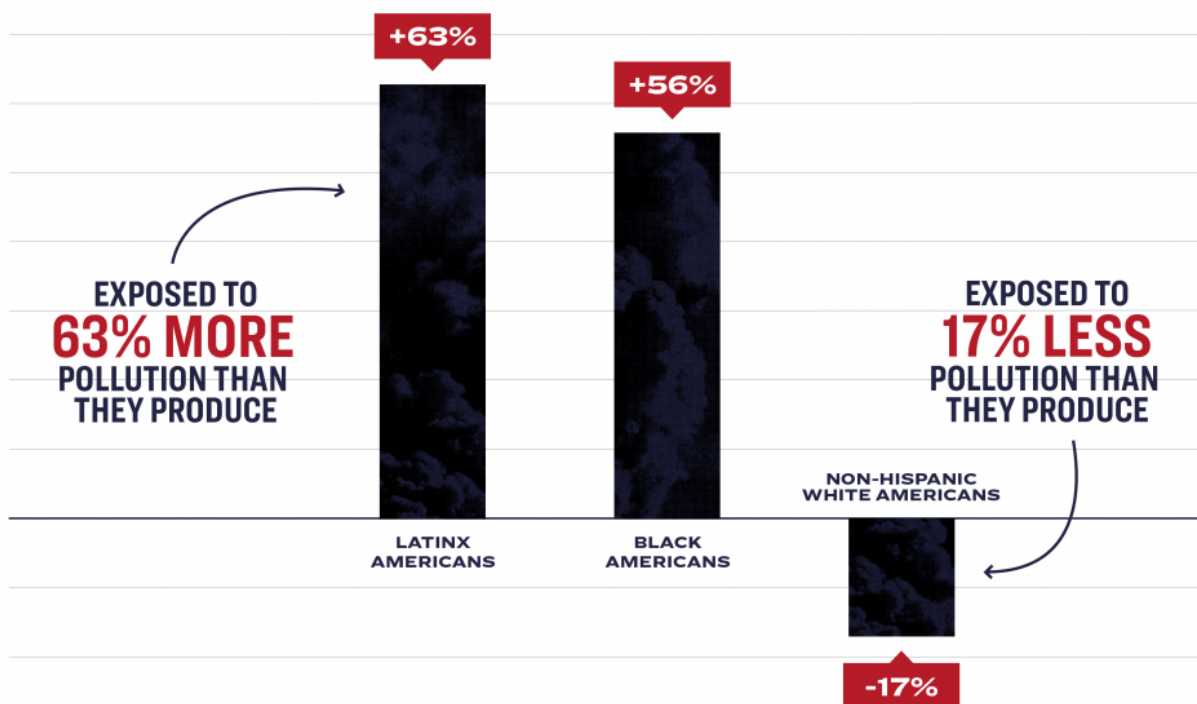
This form of racism is often seen in the USA, however, there have been reports of environmental discrimination occurring in China and in the UK.

For instance, Chinese residents in Guiyu have had their waterways poisoned by high lead concentrations, which was 190 times higher than the acceptable limit outlined by WHO (Beech, 2020), due to a nearby [e-waste](#) process facility (Huo et al., 2007). As a result, 80% of the children in the surrounding area have died due to poisoning (Beech, 2020). What's saddening is the reason for the facility's location was because the "implementation of a clean and safe high-tech recovery process was very expensive" and workers operating in Guiyu were using an unsophisticated process. This implies that the workers are "cheap" and have been harmed by the pollutants. View the following video for the conditions the workers are exposed to.

E-waste facility in Guiyu, China. Video: CNN

Furthermore, a UK governmental study had found children of color are exposed to environmental pollutants (particularly [air-pollutants](#)) 30% more than their white counterparts. Additionally, that same report found that white residents had a 14.9% lower risk of being exposed to road pollutants than any other ethnic race (DEFRA, 2011).

The recent [Black Lives Matter](#) movement in 2020 has reignited the uproar of environmental racism and more people are now conscious about this inequality. Studies in the USA have also found that non-hispanic white Americans are 17% less exposed to pollutants than those of color (Beech, 2020), where the following graph visualizes this clearly.



Exposure to pollution by race (2003-2015). Image: Elizabeth Warren

Moreover, a toxic waste stream is located nearby an estimated 70% of the USA's low-income population. Two million of these low-income residents and people of color also live approximately in a 1.5 km radius of one site that is vulnerable to [climate change](#)-related flooding (Bergman, 2019).

Final thoughts

A common adage is, "If you can't see it, it doesn't mean it's not happening elsewhere". That quote applies heavily to racism. Like a [pandemic](#), an individual's

[mental and physical well-being](#) will suffer when exposed to this form of injustice.

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