Combating Environmental Racism in Black Communities: A Case Study Utilizing the Indigenous Perspective of Social Movements

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by
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* * * * *

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This thesis is respectfully dedicated to my mother Maxine Smith; to my step-father Smitty (1929-1992) for fighting back until the end; and to the Southfield community.
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Many people contributed to the completion of this document, and to all of them I express my sincerest appreciation. My deepest gratitude is expressed to Professor Paulette Pierce for her lasting belief in me, continued patience, guidance, and insight; but most of all for always encouraging me to use my voice. Special gratitude is also expressed to Professor William E. Nelson for being a constant source of wisdom, strength, and encouragement; and to Professor James N. Upton for teaching and encouraging me to always think analytically. Gratitude is also expressed to graduate colleague and close friend, Karen Washington who, without realizing it, taught me the true meaning of sisterhood.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE MANIFESTATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

"Environmental racism" is a covert form of new racism. Civil rights leaders such as Reverend Benjamin Chavis, Jr. Executive Director of the United Church of Christ, have identified this as an "insidious form" of racism prevalent in minority communities (Lee, 1987). While studies have shown that environmental racism is real there are critics who contend it is nothing more than "the newest ecological buzz word" (Satchell, 1992, p. 34). Such contentions about the convergence of racism and the environment have sparked a volatile and hot debate between policy-makers and black citizens' groups. In the opinion of one environmental writer, the topic has become "one of the most politically explosive environmental issues yet to emerge" (Satchell, 1992, p. 35).

For its victims environmental racism is more than an ecological buzz word or a hot debate. Racism in any form is an insidious, infectious disease. Because of its variable nature, at times it will manifest itself in overt ways that are easy to identify and combat. When its symptoms are easily
identifiable, as they were prior to the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, its victims are alerted to the dangers of the disease and their awareness facilitates arriving at strategies and tactics to combat its manifestations. But when its symptoms are covert, obscured by policies and decisions that are touted as being probable cures, racism then becomes a silent killer which strikes sporadically and takes its victims by surprise.

What is environmental racism and who are its victims? University of California sociologist Robert Bullard identifies environmental discrimination as the "disparate treatment of a group or community based on race, class, or some other distinguishing characteristic" (1990, p. 9). Environmental racism, Bullard writes, violates the basic right that all Americans have to live in a clean, healthy environment (Bullard, 1990, p. xiii). That the basic right to breathe clean air is being denied to some people based on race, crystallizes the fundamental problem of environmental racism as a human rights violation. Further the victims of this human rights violation are disproportionately, black Americans and the fight against its manifestations is a continuation of black Americans’ civil rights struggle for equity, fairness and social justice (Bullard, 1990).

Black communities nationwide are becoming aware of this particular dimension of racism and are launching local movements to combat it. Such movements have transformed
everyday working class people into black environmental activists who are mobilizing indigenous resources to fight against this particular form of racism. The activists are primarily grassroots people who are mobilizing their resources against the threat of "toxic terrorism" in their own backyards. While much attention has focused on analyzing the success and failure of grassroots or "poor people's movements" in the United States (Piven and Cloward, 1977), there remains "a dearth of material on the convergence (and divergence, for that matter) of environmentalism and social justice advocacy" (Bullard, 1990, p. 2).

Researchers who have chosen to study emerging black environmental protests find it useful to refer to methods employed to combat racism during the Civil Rights Movement (Bullard, 1990). Among other things these methods include participants utilizing a number of preexisting indigenous resources to organize and sustain their protest activity (Morris, 1984). A major focus of research attention on black environmental protests has, therefore, been on the movement's ability to sustain itself through a "well-developed indigenous base" (Bullard, 1990, p. 6; Morris 1984, p. xii).

The Indigenous Perspective

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe how black participants in one environmental movement mobilized their indigenous resources to fight against environmental
racism in their neighborhood. A major question this study seeks to answer is how black environmental activists transform their "indigenous resources into power resources and marshals them in conflict situations to accomplish political ends" (Morris, 1984, p. xii). The accomplishment of political ends in this study refers to the fight against environmental racism and its manifest goal of eliciting appropriate policy responses to the cry of environmental racism. A second major question this study seeks to answer is how the protest group uses its indigenous resources to overcome institutionalized obstacles and constraints which are intended to thwart their mobilization efforts in their fight against environmental racism.

The approach chosen to study how the residents mobilized their resources against the chemical company is the indigenous perspective, first used by Aldon Morris in 1984 to study the Civil Rights Movement. This study seeks to utilize his theoretical approach to analyze a different case, environmental racism, and determine whether its scope is broad enough to adequately explain one protest group’s mobilizing efforts, and if need be suggest how the indigenous perspective might be amended.

Similar to resource mobilization theory, the indigenous perspective’s emphasis is on "resources, organization, and rationality" (Morris, 1984, p. 282). The indigenous perspective focuses on the initial use of such resources as
institutions, organizations, leaders, communication networks, money and organized masses which function within a dominated group (Morris, 1984). A crucial difference between resource mobilization theory and the indigenous perspective, however, is that in the early stages of mobilization it is the indigenous resource base which enables protest to take place and not the supply of outside resources. Activists who are well-entrenched in this base utilize indigenous resources, rather than those supplied from outside elites, to organize and initiate protest activity. Outside resources, from this view, are helpful during later stages of the mobilization when it becomes necessary to sustain the movement (Morris, 1984, p. 283).

The indigenous perspective is a presentation and analysis of history and social change from the vantage point of the empowered rather than the powerless. Stated differently the indigenous perspective observes and analyzes protest group power from the bottom-up rather than the top-down, as in classical resource mobilization theory, in an effort to analyze the potential power of the movement's internal indigenous structure.

Aldon Morris (1984) succinctly states key concerns of the indigenous perspective:

The indigenous perspective is concerned with movements by dominated groups. A dominated group is defined as one that is excluded from one or more of the decision-making processes that determine the quantity and quality of social,
economic, and political rewards that groups receive from a society. Because of this exclusion, dominated groups at different times attempt to change their situation of powerlessness by engaging in non traditional and usually non legitimized struggles with power holders. The task of the indigenous perspective is to examine how dominated groups take advantage of and create the social conditions that allow them to engage in overt power struggles with dominant groups (p. 282).

Morris' critique and alternative are cast as compensation for a major flaw in classical resource mobilization theory. This theory describes organized protest activity as heavily dependent upon continued infusion of resources from outside elites. Outside elite infusion includes help from "governmental leaders, courts, affluent liberals, and philanthropic organizations" and overlooks the movement's preexisting indigenous base" (Morris, 1984, p. 280).

The indigenous perspective does not negate the fact that this type of help is sometimes necessary (Morris, 1984, p. 286). At times, as the case study in this thesis will illustrate, other actors may intervene without displacing or minimizing the indigenous power of the protest group. There is, however, an important distinction between resources voluntarily supplied to the indigenous movement from those who identify with the goals of the movement and those which are supplied "in response to political crisis created by the movement:" Morris states:
Resources and activities by political actors ... should be conceptualized as part of the social change activity sought and politically established by the movement. Hence those resources non-voluntarily supplied by actors are outcomes of movements rather than assistance to them. On the other hand, when groups and individuals outside an indigenous movement voluntarily provide that movement with resources, they facilitate the social change efforts of the dominated community (p. 286).

The similarity between the two types of outside responses, Morris continues, is "that both depend on the strength of an indigenous movement and the scope of change it seeks" (1984, p. 286).

**The Analytical Framework**

Black social movements in this country have always faced tremendous obstacles and constraints from the larger political environment when organizing and protesting for change. However, despite these obstacles, constraints and difficulties black protest groups have managed to make tremendous political gains which have effectively changed discriminatory public policies. Discovering how black groups have managed to successfully mobilize despite institutional constraints is one of the great benefits of Morris' indigenous perspective.

When considering the scope and explanatory power of the indigenous perspective it is important to remember that it is a bottom-up analysis of protest activity which emphasizes how non-elites in social movements employ their preexisting
resources without the help of outside elites. Outside elites who operate in the larger political arena, dictate the "climate of the larger political environment" (Morris, 1984, p. 279). Within resource mobilization theory, this climate is "accorded importance in facilitating or inhibiting the development of collective action" (Morris, 1984, p. 279). But, as Morris points out, this analysis does not reveal the scope or the capacity of the protest movement's indigenous base (Morris, 1984, p. 281). The indigenous base, which includes financial resources and indigenous institutions, can, as Morris showed in the case of the Civil Rights Movement, provide the leverage needed to overcome institutionalized obstacles intended to perpetuate a system of racism and domination.  

Conflict theorists such as Parenti (1973) have emphasized the obstacles, constraints, difficulties and problems which protest groups encounter during the mobilization process when they are trying to elicit appropriate policy responses. However, Parenti contends that "any assessment of non-elite influence should take into account actual outcomes: that is to say, to determine whether the protest group does or does not prevail we need to look at the effects of the contested decision" (1973, p. 245). While Parenti also observes power from the bottom-up, this study, taking a different view of how one should assess the outcomes
of social movements of the oppressed, rejects Parenti's criterion of social movement success as too limited.

With regard to black social movements in general, and the black environmental movement in particular, Parenti's view suggests that the way a dominated group might transform and develop itself in the process of mobilization is irrelevant if the action does not result in some observable public policy outcome. According to Bullard, "institutional barriers have locked millions of blacks in polluted neighborhoods and hazardous, low-paying jobs, making it difficult for them to vote with their feet and escape these health-threatening environments" (1990, p. 105). Under such circumstances the creation of a new sense of community spirit and power, and or the emergence of new grassroots leaders, are significant outcomes even if the mobilizing group is not able to immediately change public policy or alter the structure of decision-making.

Indigenous groups can wield power even though indigenous players are often restrained and their movement is denied legitimacy. An important contribution of Parenti and other conflict theorists is their analysis of the obstacles which can block the transformation of indigenous resources into power resources. The power of elite decision-makers to "predetermine the agenda and limit the scope of issue conflict" (Parenti, 1973, p. 242) is one example. Another example includes what Bachrach and Baratz (1980) describe as
the "mobilization of bias" in communities, a phenomenon which denies the abilities of indigenous groups and tends to favor the vested interests of one or more groups, relative to others" (1980, p. 153). Also preexisting leaders, an important indigenous resource variable, are sometimes confronted with centrifugal, or factional, tensions from within the group which limits their overall success. Additionally, leaders often operate with a low resource base which also impedes their capacity for effective organization and resource mobilization (Holden, 1973).

With regard to the black environmental movement's fight against toxic waste sites, an important component of the fight, racism, is the primary obstacle which can block the mobilization of their indigenous resources. Racism has many forms which can manifest itself in any of the above constraints and difficulties; however, because environmental racism is a political debate, in the political arena acts of racism have systematically disconnected and precipitated the "persistent isolation of disadvantaged minorities from the American political process" (Kimball, p. 1972, 3). Nelson and Meranto (1977) write that:

Racism has been a pivotal stumbling block to the development of supporting resources for political mobilization in the black community. One manifestation of racism that has served as a formidable obstacle to black political mobilization has been the system of control that has effectively locked blacks out of the arena of influence and competition in which important public policies are made (p. 26).
The Political Debate Surrounding Environmental Racism

Linking such words as racism and discrimination with environmental issues causes alarm from critics who refer to the accusation of toxic waste disparities based on race as the new "racism theory" (Satchell, 1991). The counter offensive has been sharp and swift. In February Environmental Protection Agency Administrator William Reilly released a "30-member racially representative" task-force study on the relationship between race and pollution. The report did not single out race as a deciding factor, rather it suggested that more often the issue may be one of poverty (Satchell, 1992; A.P., 1992). Newsweek reported that task-force chairman Robert Wolcott charged black environmental activists with "blaming racism" instead of class, poverty and political variables for the placement of LULUS -- locally undesirable land uses in minority communities. Citing such cases as Times Beach, Missouri, Love Canal, New York, and Staten Island where "the biggest landfill in the country" is located, critics contend that there are also a significant number of predominantly white communities which too have been victimized by toxic waste sites (Satchell, 1992).

The reality of environmental racism does not dismiss class or lack of political clout as contributing factors to the placement of such LULUS, however, studies which prove the existence of environmental racism have found that "race proved to be the most significant among variables tested in
association with the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities" (Lee, 1987). And further that this finding "represented a significant national pattern" (Lee, 1987, p. xiii). The Associated Press quoted Democratic Representative Henry Waxman of California as saying that the EPA task force report was "more concerned about appearance not substance" and showed "no appreciation for the serious environmental threats faced by minority communities" (A.P., 1992).

The chief precipitator of the environmental racism debate was a 1987 study on the location of toxic waste sites conducted by the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice. The report, entitled Toxic Waste And Race In The United States, used census data to analyze the relationship between toxic waste and race in twenty-five states and fifty metropolitan areas (Satchell, 1992). Among other findings the report concluded that:

-- Three out of the five largest commercial hazardous waste landfills in the United State were located in predominantly Black or Hispanic communities. These three landfills accounted for 40 percent of the total estimated commercial landfill capacity in the nation.

-- Three out every five Black and Hispanic Americans lived in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites.

-- More than 15 million blacks, and more than 8 million Hispanics, lived in communities with one or more uncontrolled toxic waste sites (p. xiv).
These are serious findings which, despite critics, substantiates the claim that environmental racism is a real phenomenon that is silently attacking scores of black communities nationwide.

**Researching Policy Implications of Environmental Racism**

Since the arrival of the first slave ships in 1619 black Americans have fought against a dual social status perpetuated through racism in the United States. In 1896 the legal justification for segregation, the separate-but-equal-doctrine, sanctioned the ruthless oppression of Jim Crow public policy which relegated black people to an unequal status in American society. Legalized inequalities created a system of social dualism which manifested in an array of dual public policies for black Americans. While dual segregationist policies professed equality, true equality remained a myth while indecent treatment for black Americans prevailed. "For the vast majority of white Americans, the past decade -- the first phase -- had been a struggle to treat the Negro with a degree of decency, not of equality" (King, 1967, p. 3).  

Equality remains a myth for victims of environmental racism as well. Bullard (1990) writes that when "black community residents compared their environmental quality with that of the larger society, a sense of deprivation or unequal treatment emerged" (p. 104). While Congressional mandates
aide the efforts of mainstream environmental organizations to keep conservation and pollution control issues at the forefront of the nation's environmental agenda, there is no such legislation which legitimizes or addresses environmental racism. "Mainstream environmental organizations ... have had a great deal of influence in shaping the nation's environmental policy" (Bullard, 1990, p. 14). The Clean Air Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, Superfund (Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act), the Clean Water Act, and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (Hopkins, 1991; Reich, 1991, p. 273) are just a few pieces of legislation which impact public opinion and concern for larger environmental issues.

Moves to combat social inequality culminated with the advent of the historic Civil Rights Movement which removed the most overt manifestations of racial discrimination. The movement was credited a success because it "launched massive attacks on public institutions and discriminatory practices that had limited the life opportunities of black Americans since the post-Reconstruction era" (Bailey, 1990, p. 5). While the pursuit of social justice and the elimination of overt forms of institutionalized discrimination were the major goals of the civil rights movement (Bullard, 1990, p. 3), numerous forms of covert discrimination, such as the practice of environmental racism, remained intact.\(^5\)
Civil Rights and the Environment: A Historical Review

Years before leaders in Washington decided to seek official ways to balance economic growth and environmental problems the out cry from black communities who have long lived with this tenuous relationship fell on deaf ears. By contrast the entire nation was made aware, through highly publicized battles in the media with chemical companies, of non-black communities in close proximity to hazardous waste sites (Bullard, 1990). The predominantly white community of Times Beach, Missouri is one example. In 1983 this tiny town located on the Meramec River gained national attention when exposure to dioxin, "one of the most toxic substances known to man" prompted the federal government to buy residents out for a total of $36.7 million (Beck, 1983, p. 20). A second example is the non-black community of Love Canal, New York where in 1977 "chemicals had bubbled into the homes of the town’s residents" (Lee, 1987, p. 5) forcing people to abandon their homes due to toxic waste exposure (Satchell 1992).

When considering toxic waste in black communities critics of environmental racism often ask, with skepticism, what makes black communities plagued with toxic waste sites more significant than others? The answer is simple and indicative of how within the context of a racist society, white privilege is directly tied to black exploitation and disadvantage. After non-black communities began to mobilize their resources against toxic waste sites in their
neighborhoods, public official and private industry responded
to their highly politicized cries of NIMBY (not
in-my-back-yard). The response to the NIMBY syndrome
precipitated what Bullard refers to as the PIBBY --
place-in-blacks’-backyard -- principal (1990, p. 5).

The civil rights cry of environmental racism was first
uttered after the public became aware of two significant
occurrences. In 1978 high levels of the dioxin DDT
(dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane), a toxic pesticide, and PCB
(polychlorinated biphenyl) contamination were recorded in the
Indian Creek river in Triana, Alabama. Located in the
northern section of the state, the town of Triana, a small,
unassuming, rural, black community of approximately 1000
people, became the site of one of the greatest American
environmental tragedies (Bass, 1990). The Center for Disease
Control tested the residents and found that some were
"contaminated with the highest levels of DDT ever recorded"
(Bullard, 1990, p. 20).

The Triana contamination resulted from DDT produced at
the nearby Redstone Arsenal Army missile base (Bullard,
1990). After the United States banned DDT in 1971, the
manufacturing plant was dismantled and more than 4,000 tons
of the pesticide residue, buried in the area, eventually
leaked into the Indian Creek River. In 1980, two years after
the discovery of contamination, then-Mayor Clyde Foster filed
a class-action lawsuit against the chemical-producing
company. The suit was settled out of court in 1983 for $25 million (Bass 1990; Bullard, 1990).

The second incident occurred in 1982 when then-North Carolina Governor James B. Hunt approved the dumping of 32,000 cubic yards of PCB contaminated soil into a landfill in Warren County, also a predominantly black community of more than 16,000 people. The irrationality of choosing Warren County, which has "the highest percentage of blacks in the state," (Bullard, 1990, p. 36) over more suitable locations or disposal measures, crystallized for black civil rights activists the racial implications of the decision. Not only was the decision ecologically unjustifiable it was also discriminatory.

EPA officials and other experts agreed that the Warren County site was "not even scientifically the most suitable" (Bullard, 1990, p. 38). Black civil rights activists along with community organizers protested the decision calling it "no less than attempted genocide" (Bullard, 1990, p. 38). The protests did not stop the siting; however, it resulted in the arrests of more than 500 demonstrators and sparked the first protest by black Americans nationwide on the hazardous waste issue (Beck, 1983; Lee, 1987; Bullard and Wright, 1989; Bullard, 1990). As Bullard notes, "the 1980s have seen the emergence of a small cadre of blacks who see environmental discrimination as a civil rights issue" (1990, p. 17). Because of the enormous racial implications of the Warren
County incident civil rights and the black environmental agenda converged, and the convergence was led by the rallying cry, "environmental racism."

The Research Method

This research will use the case study approach to describe and analyze how one black environmental group in Franklin County, Ohio is using its indigenous resources to combat environmental racism in their community. This approach is useful for this purpose because it "brings alive the experiences and perspectives of toxic victims" (Reich 1991, p. 13) through actual testimonies.

The case study site was chosen primarily because of its theoretical and empirical utility and insight, into the fight against environmental racism from the indigenous perspective. The site was also chosen because the participants have been involved in the toxic waste battle since 1984. They are now in the litigation stage with the chemical company.

The variables isolated for study are the institutions, organizations, leaders, communication networks, money, and organized masses within a dominated group. These are consistent with the indigenous resources previously identified that are necessary for a well-developed indigenous base.

Several participants involved in the organizing and protest efforts against the chemical company were interviewed
in an effort to get a complete picture and understanding of the group’s mobilizing activity. The participants were interviewed through the process of elite specialized interviewing. This interview method was chosen because it did not involve a predetermined list of respondents, or the distribution of formal questionnaires. Similar to snowball sampling or the reputational approach (Bullard, 1990, p. 21), elite specialized interviews are contingent upon referrals from the last person interviewed. The term elite in this sense refers to a small number of respondents, and not their perceived status in the community. This interview approach is also useful because it involves non rank-and-file respondents and it engenders open ended responses.

The remaining chapters of this thesis will introduce the case study, analyze and describe the indigenous perspective at work, and discuss the long-term political implications of locating toxic waste sites in black communities.

ENDNOTES

1. While the civil rights cry of environmental racism is denied legitimacy and remains a low priority on the domestic environmental agenda, Washington does not hesitate to use a like phrase, "toxic terrorism," when referring to international environmental disasters. Toxic terrorism was the phrase used by United States President George Bush when on January 24, 1991 Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, according to news reports, deliberately dumped eleven million barrels of oil into the Persian Gulf. See MacEachern, Diane, "Ecological Destruction Is Not A New War Tactic," The Columbus Dispatch, April 1991, 2E.
2. The emphasis on rationality in resource mobilization theory is a direct rebuttal to those collective behavior theorists who contend that the question of social movement insurgency is irrational, emotional, apolitical behavior. Doug McAdam’s *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982) critiques this assumption when he states: "social movements are not a form of irrational behavior but rather a tactical response to the harsh realities of a closed and coercive political system" (p. 20). Aldon Morris writes in *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The Free Press, 1984) that "resource mobilization theory emphasizes the resources necessary for the initiation of social movements ... grievances, psychic strain, and other psychological states are not central to the analysis" (p. 279).

3. Racism has many forms and can be defined in numerous ways. With regard to the hotly debated issue of environmental racism, Reverend Benjamin Chavis, Jr., Executive Director for the United Church of Christ, along with the National Council of Churches Racial Justice Working Group have chosen to define racism as follows:

Racism is racial prejudice plus power. Racism is the intentional or unintentional use of power to isolate, separate and exploit others. This use of power is based on a belief in superior racial origin, identity or supposed racial characteristics. Racism confers certain privileges on and defends the dominant group, which in turn sustains and perpetuates racism. Both consciously and unconsciously, racism is enforced and maintained by the legal, cultural, religious, educational, economic, political, environmental, and military institutions of societies. Racism is more than just a personal attitude; it is the institutionalized form of that attitude (p. ix-x).

This definition is used in the Commission for Racial Justice report *Toxic Waste and Race in the United States* (United Church of Christ, 1987), and will also be used in this study.

4. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the last book before his death *Where Do We Go From Here? Chaos or Community* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967) asked: "Why is equality so assiduously avoided?" His answer to the question underscores the essence of the convergence of black environmentalism and social justice. He wrote:
The majority of white Americans consider themselves sincerely committed to justice for the Negro. They believe that American society is essentially hospitable to fair play and steady growth toward a middle-class Utopia embodying racial harmony (p. 4-5).

As King noted the concepts of justice and equality are inextricably linked, however, both concepts remain elusive for African Americans in American society. One example is the fifteenth amendment to the Constitution which guaranteed, in theory, the right of black Americans to vote while in practice, the right was continually denied. It was not until the 1954 Brown versus the Board of education Supreme Court decision, that de jure segregation began to erode. While de jure segregation was successfully attacked, de facto segregation remained intact. De facto segregation, in essence, has continued a system of double consciousness and social duality. King wrote:

Ever since the birth of our nation, white America has had a schizophrenic personality on the question of race. She has been torn between two selves -- a self in which she proudly professed the great principals of democracy and a self in which she sadly practiced the antithesis of democracy. This tragic duality has produced a strange indecisiveness and ambivalence toward the Negro, causing America to take a step backward simultaneously with every step forward on the question of racial justice, to be at once attracted to the Negro and repelled by him, to love and to hate him. There has never been a solid, unified and determined thrust to make justice a reality for Afro-Americans (p. 68).


Racism is both overt and covert ... The second type is less overt, far more subtle, less identifiable in terms of specific individuals committing the acts. But it is no less destructive to human life. The second type originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society, and thus receives far less public condemnation than the first type (p. 4).
6. White Americans have always professed concern for the environment especially when the environmental problems are too close to their own backyard. During the 1970s environmental protection was of paramount importance facilitating the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency in 1972. See Harrigan, John J. Politics and Policy in States and Communities, (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1988). Robert D. Bullard writes in Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class and Environmental Quality (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990) that environmental awareness continued to escalate in the 1970s when acute energy shortages produced the widely publicized energy crisis. Since that time, Bullard continues, America’s increased environmental consciousness is in part due to a plethora of mainstream environmental organizations such as Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, the National Wildlife Federation, and a host of others which are primarily concerned with the preservation of rain forests, endangered species, pollution abatement, and pollution control issues. Also see Tarshis, Lauren, "Dumping on Minorities," Scholastic Update, April 1992, 16-17.
CHAPTER II

THE SOUTHFIELD COMMUNITY: BEFORE AND AFTER

The primary goal of this chapter is to introduce the Southfield community before and after the onslaught of environmental racism transformed the neighborhood.¹ This chapter will address one major question: what are the type of indigenous resources in Southfield that were available to be mobilized against environmental racism? The primary argument against the label "environmental racism" has been that class dictates where toxic waste sites are located, therefore, another focus of this chapter is to use demographic information on Southfield to examine that proposition and discuss the rejoinder that race rather than class influenced the decision to locate a chemical plant in the area.

Introduction

When studying the location of toxic waste sites in the Southern United States, Professor Robert D. Bullard (1990) asked, "what role does race play in sorting out land-uses?" Professor Bullard’s research indicated that racism greatly influenced land-use decisions. He states:
... unfortunately American society has not reached a color-blind state.... Race continues to be a potent variable in explaining the spatial layout of urban areas, including housing patterns, street and highway configurations, commercial development, and industrial facility siting (P. 6).

Covert acts of racism prevail across the United States. Regarding land-use decisions such acts as redlining, political gerrymandering, and environmental racism, while harder to prove, do in fact exist. Political elites who make land-use decisions aid and abet these racist acts by covertly using such tools as zoning ordinances to place locally undesirable land uses (LULUS) in or near minority and low-income areas (Bullard, 1990). The use of "zoning ordinances and land-use plans has a political, economic, and racial dimension," Bullard writes. Zoning, designed as a "protectionist device," has "effectively failed to protect minority communities, especially low-income minority communities from environmentally hazardous externalities" (Bullard, 1990, p. 9-10).

In the late 1950s, when the community of Southfield, located in Columbus, Ohio began, black Americans were in the wake of segregation and unequal housing opportunities. This fact no doubt attributed to the hunger for an equal housing area those initial Southfield residents had when they moved into the community. The fact that Southfield was touted as the first community in Columbus which was not a redlined district, represented the myth of equality for those initial
black residents who moved into the area. But as King (1967) noted, equality was assiduously avoided. Institutionalized racism replaced equality in the political decision of sorting out land uses for the proposed Southfield subdivision. In all likelihood it was no accident that a portion of the city destined to become an industrial corridor plagued with drainage problems, railroad traffic, noise pollution, and manufacturing activity was also selected as the first section of the city to be designated as an "equal" housing district for black people.²

The creation of the Southfield subdivision at first glance seems a positive effort to address one facet of institutionalized racism -- housing discrimination. But the "gift" of integration was dubious at best. Locating a chemical plant in a residential area is evidence of a "reform" which perpetuated a system of domination and inequality. Critics of environmental racism would counter the charge of inequality with the oft stated jobs-benefit argument. This argument presumes that most residents who live near a chemical plant are receiving economic benefits through employment opportunities. When applied to Southfield, however, this argument is null and void since the chemical company provided no economic incentive to the area. Out of almost 50 employees working for the chemical plant in Southfield only 10 people or so actually live in the Southfield community.³ Given that the community has close to
3,000 inhabitants this is an extremely small percentage. Also this information leads to the assumption that if the plant is generating economic benefits, the benefits are going elsewhere and not into Southfield. As one resident adamantly stated, locating the plant in Southfield was doing nothing more for the community "other than killing people."

Bullard (1990) writes that there are "a multidimensional web of factors which operate in sorting out stratification hierarchies" (p. 6). Occupation, education, value of dwelling structures, source and amount of income, and the racial and ethnic make-up of residents are just a few variables which determine who gets what regarding land-use decisions in American society.

Before Southfield was built the land designated for the subdivision was plagued with development obstacles. Although these obstacles persisted, in the late 1950s the City of Columbus annexed the area where the Southfield community is now located. This annexation marked the first housing development plan in the city where homes were sold to blacks and whites on an equal basis.

Using demographic data from the 1980 Bureau of the Census Report, the next section will provide the big picture of residents who have inhabited Southfield since that time, four years before the explosion transformed the community. This data will help substantiate the claim of environmental racism in Southfield in that it clearly shows for this
community that race was more prominent than socioeconomic status when the chemical plant siting decision was made.

**Demographics of the Southfield Community**

Those initial home buyers who flocked to the new Southfield subdivision were primarily black people who were no doubt lured by the city’s aggressive public relations campaign which described the integrated Southfield subdivision as "the most comprehensive attempt at planned residential development in the Marion-Franklin area." Located South of Watkins road, Southfield is comprised primarily of modest, three-bedroom single family structures.

Census tract 88.13 delineates the precise location of the Southfield community. While the Southfield community has been and remains a predominantly black neighborhood, the following census data illustrates the vast heterogeneity of its residents.

Heterogeneity in this context is important because there is a common belief among whites in society that all black people who live in a given area are basically alike in terms of educational attainment, income, occupation and so forth. The following demographic data for the Southfield community serves to negate this assumption. From the indigenous perspective heterogeneity in the Southfield community is important because the neighborhood’s diversity provided an important resource base of people from various social levels
who would contribute a variety of skills and expertise during the initial stages of mobilization.

Population: Using figures derived from the 1980 and 1990 census samples, the Columbus Bureau of the Census Neighborhood Statistics Program reported that 3,325 persons lived in the Southfield community on April 1, 1980. In 1990 the total population of Southfield was 2,851. This is a large number of people in one neighborhood, and such large numbers would provide a broad resource base during the initial stages of mobilization.

Race: The racial composition of Southfield is of paramount importance in this study because this information directly addresses the cry of environmental racism. Of the 3,325 residents in Southfield in 1980, eighty-six percent or 2,872 were black Americans; 398 white Americans; 13 American Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts; 17 Asians and Pacific Islanders; and 12 persons of Spanish origins. In 1990 the total black population was reported as 2,438; there were 362 white Americans; 21 Native Americans; 21 Asians; and 9 people designated as other.

The large number of black people in Southfield is significant since black people are the principal victims of racism. As perceived "victims" the Southfield community no doubt represented the "path of least resistance" (Bullard, 1990, p. 4) for city officials who decided to locate the chemical company in the community. Southfield's large black
population in this context directly addresses the cry of "environmental racism" because other areas of the city, which are not predominantly black, were not chosen as a site for the plant.

**Age:** In 1980, among the 3,325 persons in Southfield 26.3 percent, or 876 persons, were under 15 years old and 3.6 percent were 65 years and over. In 1990 of the 2,851 reported persons in the Southfield community, 21.2 percent were under 15 years old and 7.5 percent were 65 years and over. From the indigenous perspective the older persons in Southfield became an important resource contribution in terms of the amount of time they had to engage in mobilizing activities. Some of the things these residents did with their time included watching the plant at odd hours to see when fire trucks were dispatched to help extinguish another spill that the community was not informed of. Also the older residents contributed a sense of racial history to the movement because most of them could remember the struggle against overt racism during the Civil Rights Movement; a struggle which directly parallels the community's struggle against the covert practice of environmental racism. The number of younger residents in Southfield is also significant because they made an important resource contribution in that they were helpful with such things as passing out meeting flyers during the initial stages of mobilization.
Home-Ownership versus Rental Units: This data is important because it shows that the majority of Southfield residents owned their homes. Home ownership in this context is significant in that it identifies the deep vested interest Southfield residents have in their environment. Also the home itself became an important indigenous resource. Meetings were held and strategies were planned from the activists' homes during "closed board meetings." The people who participated in the protest against environmental racism in Southfield were predominantly long-time home-owners in the community. In an interview one resident revealed that she and her husband moved from a government owned housing project into the Southfield community, and worked several years to make their home into their version of the "American dream." From the indigenous perspective the home-owners in the community, who chose to stay and fight, provided the well-entrenched indigenous base necessary for mobilization. It is easy to understand why so few renters participated in the protest when one considers that renters have less at stake than home-owners because they can easily move to another location without losing home equity.

For the Southfield community, the 1980 census revealed that there were 971 year-round occupied housing units of which 90.0 percent were occupied by owners and 10.0 percent were occupied by renters. In 1990 the census data revealed 966 occupied housing units in the Southfield community. Of
that number 811 or 83.9 percent were owner-occupied housing units and 155 or 16.0 were renter-occupied housing units.

Length of Time in Unit: The length of time a person lives in their home indicates stability and commitment to their environment. Southfield people are long-time residents who have vested interests in their community. From the indigenous perspective this is important because longevity is necessary in order to establish a well-developed indigenous base. The 1980 Census reported that in Southfield 53.7 percent of all householders had lived in their housing units 10 or more years. The data also revealed that 6.3 percent of the owners and 9.5 percent of the renters moved into their units in the 15 months preceding the 1980 census.

Value, Mortgages, and Monthly Costs: Financial data for Southfield show that the median value for specified owner-occupied homes (i.e., one-family houses on less than 10 acres without a commercial establishment or medical office on the property) was $30,400 as compared to $41,400 for the neighborhood publication area a whole. The median contract rent paid for rental housing units in the neighborhood was $141 as compared to $171 for the NPA.

This information is highly significant to the charge of environmental racism. In its 1987 study the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice reported that the mean value of owner-occupied homes suggests important implications to the claim of environmental racism. The report stated:
The lower value of homes indicates the availability of cheaper land. Combined with institutionalized forms of racial discrimination which target "less desirable" residential areas for Blacks and other racial and ethnic persons, these findings may shed light on some of the dynamics behind the location of hazardous waste facilities (Lee 1987).

Income and Poverty Rate: This criteria is important when assessing the socioeconomic status of Southfield. Those who argue that class rather than race influences siting decisions of toxic facilities often use income and poverty thresholds to substantiate their argument. In Southfield the median income in 1979 of all families was $18,038. The median income for white families in Southfield was $15,911. The median income for black families was $17,507. On a per capita basis each man, woman and child in the Southfield community averaged $5,403 in 1979. In 1979 the poverty rate for white persons in Southfield was 13.1 percent while the poverty rate for black persons was 14.5 percent.

The above numbers indicate that Southfield is a lower middle class black community rather than a poor, black community. Black families earned roughly $1,600 more annually than white families. From the indigenous perspective the income level of residents provided an important financial resource when it became necessary, in the late stages of mobilization, for residents to use their own funds to help sustain the movement.
Educational Attainment: The relevance of education in this context is important to both the indigenous perspective and the class versus race argument. Education is an important resource contribution because knowledge is power. Southfield residents overcame their victim status and felt a sense of power when they learned for themselves the nature of the chemicals to which they were exposed. When asked how the community became so astute on environmental toxins one resident replied they went to the library. At first glance this statement may seem insignificant, however, the use of the library became an important resource in the fight against environmental racism for community leaders when they encountered a veil of silence and nonsupport from city and government officials who refused to impart information.

In Southfield, the 1980 census revealed that of the residents who were 25 years or older 11.4 percent had a grade school education or less, and 63.4 percent were high school graduates. These figures included 15.4 percent who had completed one or more years of college. About 3.3 percent of the population 25 years old and older in Southfield had completed four years or more of college. 32.9 percent of the white population 25 years old and older were high school graduates, while 1.2 percent had completed four years or more of college. Of the black population, 68.1 percent who were 25 years and older were high school graduates, while 3.8 percent had completed four years or more of college.
This information is important when determining what factors influenced the decision to locate the chemical company in the Southfield area, because Southfield's aggregate educational attainment addresses the community's social class. It is typically assumed that there is a positive relationship between class and education. Given that the above numbers clearly indicate the community is educated and not illiterate -- literacy is a presumed indicator of social class -- it only makes sense when one factors racism into the siting decision.

Labor Force Status; Occupation; and Family Characteristics: In the Southfield neighborhood, 65.4 percent of all working-age persons (16 years and older) and 58.7 percent of all working-age females were in the labor force. 67.3 percent of persons 16 years and over worked in 1979. The unemployment rate for Southfield was 8.3 percent for white persons. The unemployment rate for black persons was 9.3 percent.

The Columbus 1980 census reported that Southfield residents were employed in a variety of occupations. They included 394 in administrative support occupations including clerical. Another 236 persons reported they worked in service occupations, except protective household, and 180 persons were machine operators, assemblers and inspectors.

In 1980 there were 971 households in the Southfield community. Among persons 65 and older 69.2 percent lived in
family households and 30.8 percent in nonfamily households. Among persons in Southfield 15 years and older 52.9 percent of 1,142 men and 46.7 percent of the 1,307 women were married (excluding separated) in 1980.

This information is critical to the indigenous perspective because it illustrates the solid tradition of family and economic self-reliance in the Southfield community. Given the number of studies which report the poverty of black communities in general and the disintegration of the black family in particular (Moynihan, 1965), such information underscores the family as an indigenous resource in black communities, an important fact which such studies conveniently overlooked.

The data also reveal that more than half of the Southfield community was in the labor force and not dependent upon government support. This debunks the myth, for Southfield residents, that most black people are welfare recipients. Also the variety of jobs residents held contributed to the vast indigenous resource of knowledge and skills in the community which were available to be mobilized.

Voting Characteristics: Former Democratic ward committee chairwoman, Roberta Booth described the Southfield community as "a target ward for Democrats." According to Mrs. Booth there are so few Republicans in the Southfield area you could almost "count them on your fingers and toes." Official records obtained from the Franklin County Board of Elections
and the Franklin County Democratic Party confirm Mrs. Booth’s assessment of Southfield resident’s voting behavior.

According to information obtained from the Franklin County Board of elections, based on July 24, 1992 election abstracts, there were 2,612 registered voters in the Southfield community. Of that number 137 were registered Republicans; 1,515 were Democrats; and 960 were undeclared or independents. In the city of Columbus, for the same period, there were 65,371 registered Republicans; 96,106 Democrats; and 154,712 undeclared or independent voters.

In Franklin County there are eight Ohio House Districts numbered 28-35 and 74 neighborhood voting wards. The Southfield community, formerly part of the 32nd House District, after reapportionment, was included in what is now the newly created 22nd House District. This district includes 14 voting wards. Southfield is ward 50 and there are roughly 1600-1800 people who vote in a given primary.

Why is voting behavior significant in this context? The above voting statistics for Southfield indicate that more than half of the people who reside in the community are registered voters who vote regularly, therefore, the recurring official silence which residents encountered when asking elected officials for help in their fight against environmental racism cannot be explained away by poor voting patterns. Again, this silence only makes sense when racism is factored into the sequence of events. Also, as Mrs. Booth
pointed out in an interview, city council members in Columbus are elected on an at-large basis. At-large elections, where a candidate runs in the city as a whole rather from a specific district (Harrigan, 1988, p. 172), have been proven discriminatory against black people in several U.S. cities. In the case of Southfield the at-large elected city council representative who attended community meetings after the chemical spill occurred, did not represent a constituency in Southfield and subsequently was virtually insensitive to the residents’ concerns.

Other Indigenous Resources: A community’s greatest resources are its people. In Southfield the people, with their various skills and expertise, provided the well-developed indigenous base needed in the fight against environmental racism. The leaders who emerged were residents who were well-entrenched in the community’s civic association, PTA, and church groups. When it became necessary to mobilize the community, leaders called upon community members with their various employment backgrounds to do such things as library research, organize fund-raisers, attend city council meetings, make phone calls, plan strategies, and pass out flyers. All of these functions were crucial in the early stages of mobilization because they facilitated getting the word out about meetings, and disseminating information to other community members.
There are also non-human indigenous resources in black communities which can be drawn upon when it is necessary to mobilize protest activity geared toward effecting wanted change. Such indigenous resources as institutions, social organizations, communication networks, and money can provide the organized masses the ability to function through a well-developed indigenous base (Morris, 1984, p. xii).

In Southfield there are nine churches in the community. Of that number two were extremely active in the initial stages of mobilization. The two churches that were instrumental to the protest group would do such things as announce community meetings in the Sunday programs, and allow the protest group to use church facilities for community meetings without charge. There are four schools in the neighborhood, of which two were frequently used for community meetings. These institutions, the schools and the churches which functioned as meeting places, also became mechanisms to establish invaluable communication networks, and a source of generating finance for the neighborhood’s movement against environmental racism. The next chapter will explore more fully how these institutions were used from the indigenous perspective.

There was one neighborhood newspaper operational in Southfield at the time of the spill. The now defunct Southside This Week ran a series of stories after the spill occurred which were helpful toward politicizing Southfield’s
struggle to the larger Columbus community. In all probability the neighborhood newspaper's continued coverage of the spill precipitated coverage in the city's primary newspaper, the Columbus Dispatch. Concerning the black press, another indigenous resource for the national black community, of the two black newspapers in Columbus one covered the spill and the community's mobilization activities extensively. The next chapter will briefly examine how each paper reported the events in Southfield after the explosion occurred.

Section Two: The Southfield Community - After

While statistical indicators can provide the aggregate data or big picture of a community, it is the actual people who live and work in a given community who bring it to life. It is the story of their lives, hopes, and dreams along with their struggles to exist and overcome obstacles intended to inhibit their life chances which crystallizes the richness of the community rather than cold, aggregate totals.

The people of Southfield exemplify this richness. In their fight against environmental racism, they embody the true spirit of community empowerment in a racially oppressive society. Rather than accepting the perceived status of helpless supplicants typically thought of black people, the Southfield residents organized themselves, used their indigenous resources, and took an aggressive stance to rid their community of the silent killer in their midst.
The remaining section of this chapter will introduce a few of those Southfield residents who remember the day when the onslaught of environmental racism transformed their community.

The People and the Dispute

When in 1962 Dorothy Clark along with her husband and four children moved into the Southfield community, the modest home they purchased in the new subdivision represented the fulfillment of the family’s dreams. Little did they know that within the next 20 years their American dreams would fade into a nightmare.

Tired of past discriminatory housing practices, the Clarks were under the illusion that their home in the Southfield subdivision represented the long-awaited promise of equality for black people. While Mrs. Clark worked as a domestic worker and her husband an employee for the state, the two laboriously toiled to maintain and expand their three bedroom home while raising four children.

Although the work was hard, Mrs. Clark says she felt her life was good. But the happy scenario soon changed. One evening around 1969 one of Mrs. Clark’s daughters had car trouble on Watkins road, a street less than one mile from the Clark’s home. A man who was working in the area on a new building construction helped the two women with the car. Mrs. Clark recalls asking the man what were they breaking ground
to build. She said the workman told her it was "just a plant."

Mrs. Clark and others in the community had no idea at the time that what was described as "just a plant" was the Georgia-Pacific Corporation Resin Division Plant, one of the nation's "leading suppliers of resins, adhesives, and specialty chemicals."

A virtual giant, this multi-million dollar corporation which produces life-threatening and dangerously hazardous chemicals, was preparing to expand its operation almost in her back-yard. This chemical manufacturer, built so near her home and others, would produce daily cancer-causing substances such as formaldehyde and phenol in her family's environment.

Mrs. Clark and others were virtually oblivious to the chemical-producing off-spring of the mega giant parent company in their midst. Georgia-Pacific's 1992 annual report states that company sales the previous year were $11.5 billion. In addition to calling itself the "leading supplier of resins, adhesives and specialty chemicals to the forests products industry" the annual report stated that the company ships "more than 2 billion pounds of thermosetting resins annually" from 16 plants nationwide. The company also manufactures chemicals for industrial and agricultural uses. Its Watkins Road facility located in the Southfield community produces formaldehyde feedstock for agricultural uses (The Call and Post, 1985).
In the next few years the plant's "normal" operations silently victimized Mrs. Clark and other Southfield residents before the huge 1984 explosion fully alerted them to the potential killer in their community.

Before the major 1984 explosion a series of small disasters plagued plant operations. On October 12, 1975, three years after the plant officially opened, an explosion injured three plant workers. The Columbus Dispatch reported that a 1,000-gallon tank containing formaldehyde ruptured and exploded sending "chunks of the tank's insulating covering up to 400 feet away." The article stated that "for a while after the blast eye-watering formaldehyde fumes pervaded the area around the plant (Fennessy, 1975)." Even though the article reported a Columbus Fire Department spokesman as saying that formaldehyde from the explosion leaked into area sewers, for some reason Southfield residents were not notified. There are "few homes .. in the immediate vicinity," the article stated (Fennessy, 1975).

Mrs. Clark describes her home as only "a stone's throw away" from the plant site, yet no one from the City or Georgia-Pacific contacted her about the explosion. While no one officially notified her of the life-threatening danger the plant posed, in the early 1980s Mrs. Clark received an informal verbal warning from a plant employee. Long after the plant started operations in December 1970, she recalled taking a walk on Watkins Road with small children she would
periodically watch during the day. She remembered stopping to pick wild flowers near the plant when an employee surreptitiously called out to her. She recalled the conversation:

... one of the employees came out, and he called me to the gate, and he told me, he said, 'lady would you make those children throw those flowers down and go home and wash your hands.' And I said why? And he said it's poison in there.

Not only was the plant periodically releasing toxic fumes into the air, but newspaper articles report that it also "improperly" stored and buried plant wastes on the site until 1979 (Lore, 1985). A former plant employee was reported as saying that "the facility appears to be an open dump, a waste disposal practice which has been prohibited since July 29, 1976" (Lore, 1985). In November 1984 this practice precipitated the State Attorney General to impose a $75,000 fine on the company. The fine was threatened to increase up to $120,000 "unless the company installed specific pollution control systems" (Lore, 1985).

Also in 1984 "a breakdown in the plant's sewage treatment system flooded the plant site with phenol-contaminated water" which "ran into adjacent ditches and streams" (Lore, 1985). The Columbus Dispatch reported that:

According to the state inspector's report, the pollution flowed through suburban residential neighborhoods, through a children's playground,
past the village of Obetz’s water supply well field and then into Big Walnut Creek at a distance of approximately 28 stream miles below the subject resin plant.

While the Southfield community grew in size so did the plant and its operations. Community members, unaware of the plant’s activities, were busy working on their jobs during the day and in their spare time trying to get much needed public facilities into the area through their community group, the Marion-Franklin Civic Association. Organizations such as this are key to Morris’ indigenous perspective. This particular organization, as the next chapter will illustrate, provided an important resource link in the community’s early stages of mobilization.

Roberta Jones Booth, another long-term Southfield resident, was an active member of the neighborhood’s civic association. A native of Donalds, South Carolina and a college graduate, Mrs. Booth moved into the Southfield community in March 1965 with her second husband Carl and four children. After getting settled into the community Mrs. Booth immediately involved herself in a host of activities. She stated:

I was involved with getting street lights for our community, a swimming pool, recreation center, bus service, street cleaning services, and just overall working in the community to upgrade the quality of our education.

Mrs. Booth’s community activism is an excellent indicator that Southfield residents had a solid history of
fighting for the entire community’s quality of life. This history, from the indigenous perspective, is in itself an important resource because it provided residents with a tradition of community empowerment. Also active politically, in later years Mrs. Booth would become Democratic Ward Committee woman for the Southfield area. This position became extremely useful to community people in the early stages of mobilization in terms of the political knowledge and skills Mrs. Booth developed. As the key leader and spokesperson in the community’s fight against environmental racism, Mrs. Booth’s political skills would subsequently serve her as an environmental activist.

While leading a sometimes hectic life, Mrs. Booth recalls those early days in the Southfield community as peaceful. During leisure hours she and her husband Carl, like so many other residents, would spend time working in their vegetable garden or improving their home. "We had a nice community," she recalled in an interview. "It was a farm area before they built homes here. Most of the people are retired now or are retiring and the homes are paid for and the people can live real well."

Employed years ago as Regional Director with the State Auditor’s office, a wife, mother, homemaker, and an active community member Roberta Booth had a full life. But her life and the lives of others were drastically transformed when on
May 7, 1984 the time bomb which silently ticked away in their community finally exploded.

The Explosion

Virtually unknown to most Southfield residents, the Georgia-Pacific Corporation Resin plant began its deadly operation in December 1970. The plant’s size has ranged since that time between 40-50 employees. Today there are 46 employees. In 1969, while most Southfield residents were just beginning to enjoy their homes and the "gift" of integrated housing, Franklin County officials busily worked on an industrial development project which would bring the chemical manufacturer to its Watkins Road location near the Southfield community (Lore, 1985). In accordance with the array of zoning ordinances which dictated land-uses in the Marion-Franklin area, the county retained ownership of the plant site, while extensive open dump polluting was going on, until 1980 (Lore, 1985). The city’s gift of equal housing in an area plagued with development problems and destined to become an industrial corridor was in reality nothing more than an act of covert racism under the guise of equality.

Gertherine Cyiark was one of the Southfield residents unaware of the county’s industrial development plan which would eventually threaten her life, reduce the value of her home, and transform her community. Mrs. Cyiark, at that time the mother of two children and now the grandmother of three,
remembers the Southfield community before the plant's activities drastically altered the area as a "beautiful neighborhood" with lots of green trees, grass and everyone working hard to keep the neighborhood intact.

On May 7, 1984 all of that changed when approximately 2,000 pounds of an experimental batch of liquified resin was released from a tank at the Georgia-Pacific facility via a faulty safety release valve. The resin consisted of varying amounts of phenol and formaldehyde in an alkeline base. The resin was discharged through a 60-foot stack for about five minutes from 1:15 p.m. until 1:20 p.m. Interestingly, in the same year the Southfield explosion occurred, other Georgia-Pacific facilities reportedly released close to two million pounds of toxic pollutants nationwide, while the parent company was reported as being the 16th "biggest air polluter" in the nation (Domini and Kinder, 1984, p. 151).

The Ohio Department of Health investigated the Watkins Road incident. The investigation reported weather conditions at the time of the explosion and determined the presence of "a southwesterly wind (moving to the northeast) at the time of the incident." The report postulated, based on that information, that the area to the northeast of the plant within a half mile would have received the highest concentration of fall-out from the resin release. The homes in that area, which were not part of the Southfield subdivision, used private wells (Clark, 1988).
The Columbus Dispatch reported that 18 homes were "directly in the path" of the noxious fumes which spewed from the plant and "hundreds more" were located "in larger housing developments west of the plant" (Lore, 1985).

Mrs. Booth’s home is located less than a mile west of the plant site. On that day she recalls coming home from work with her husband Carl. They were both unaware during their trip home that an explosion had taken place. Mrs. Booth said she remembers sensing that something was wrong in the area because the police had blocked off portions of the road leading to their home. When she questioned police officers, she said not one of them would tell her what was happening. In an interview she stated:

I said to my husband STOP! The police had the bridge blocked off. And I asked what had happened. And the policeman didn’t say nothing. I asked ‘did the bridge fall in?’ And he still didn’t say a word! So my husband said come on and he just drove on. And I said well there is one more policeman who can’t talk.

This recurring official silence is indicative of the ensuing veil of silence and nonsupport the Southfield community would continue to encounter as they sought help from city officials. One cannot help but wonder if city officials would have been this unresponsive if the incident had occurred in an all-white community. It was after the Booths reached their home that the enormity of the situation became clear. Mrs. Booth recalls starting to work in her
vegetable garden when she noticed her arms began to itch terribly. In an interview she stated:

... I started to sting and itching all around my arms. It felt like something was on me ... I came inside and I started washing and it looked like I couldn't wash the itch off. I put alcohol on around my ankles. I took a shower and that didn't stop it. And then I heard on the news about the spill.

Mrs. Booth recalls a feeling of terror after she learned what was happening in their community. "I was quite alarmed," she said, "I didn't know what to make of it so I called the television station immediately." A news reporter gave Mrs. Booth the details of the explosion, calling it "very dangerous" and advised her to stay inside and not go out for anything until further notice through news reports. Mrs. Booth remembers mixed feelings of fear and anger. Most of all she says, she felt anger at the lack of concern for the community from the city and health department officials. She stated:

We should have been evacuated out of the area but we were not ... they didn't say anything. We heard the 6:00 news that we should stay inside. We didn't know the spill had taken place ... And that really scared me and it made me angry because you see the city should have been out here, the health department should have been in this neighborhood informing people ... but instead they were pushing and hiding it as if to say we don't care you just a bunch of black folks out there. We don't care what happens to you ... we wouldn't care if the plant blows up, it wouldn't make any difference.
Given the sequence of events, one expects silence and cover-up from a profit-oriented company but not from a "democratically" elected government. Once again, when one considers that more than half of Southfield residents are registered voters who vote regularly, it only makes sense when one factors in racism. Today when Mrs. Booth recalls the May 7th explosion in the Southfield community she refers to it as the day that "changed their lives."

Mrs. Clark also blames the plant for changing her life. Both her husband and her father died within the same year, less than one week apart, from cancer. She attributes their deaths to their constant exposure to the plant's noxious chemicals. A 1988 study conducted by the Columbus Health Department on cancer mortality in the Southside community revealed that "a significantly higher than expected number of deaths due to lung cancer was found in the Southside community" (Indian, 1988). The report did not definitively state that the causes of the cancer death rates observed were attributable to the presence of the chemical plant. Most residents, however, feel that the presence of the plant is the culprit of the illnesses which plague the neighborhood.

For Mrs. Clark and others the community that once represented the fulfillment of their hopes and dreams no longer exists. The hard work and toil that many residents put into their homes to make a better life for themselves and their families was wiped away in one fell swoop when the
chemical company started its operation in their community. As a consequence the long-awaited promise of equality once again remains elusive, replaced by the deprivation of environmental racism. King (1967) wrote:

It would be neither true nor honest to say that the Negro’s status is what it is because he is innately inferior or because he is basically lazy and listless or because he has not sought to lift himself up by the bootstraps (p. 67).

The residents of Southfield tried to lift themselves up by their bootstraps but were immediately knocked-down when racism reared its ugly head. Mrs. Clark stated:

You hear white people on T.V. all the time saying that black people are lazy, shiftless, and don’t want anything and this is what hurts me. Because when you try to accumulate something and they come in here and do something like they’ve done it really hurts, it really hurts.

The next chapter will analyze how Southfield residents picked themselves up and overcame the institutionalized obstacles intended to relegate them to helpless supplicants. Using their indigenous resources when the official governmental system failed them, the Southfield community took a stand and fought back against the onslaught of environmental racism.
ENDNOTES

1. In order to fully illustrate how the onslaught of environmental racism impacted the Southfield community, this chapter will use interview excerpts from three individuals, Mrs. Roberta Jones Booth, Mrs. Gertherine Cyiark and Mrs. Dorothy Clark. The interviews took place between March and July 1992. These three women were chosen because they were key players during the initial stages of mobilization against environmental racism in the Southfield community. Another person, Mrs. Bernice Davidson, was also one of the initial organizers in the community, however, she could not be reached during the course of the interviews.

2. During an interview with Mrs. Roberta Jones Booth on June 30, 1992, she mentioned that Southfield was the first housing subdivision in Columbus sold to blacks and whites on an equal basis.
   While no politically embarrassing official documents were uncovered, historical records prepared by the City of Columbus Department of Development Division of Planning about the Marion-Franklin area, where Southfield is located, indicated that the land set-aside for the Southfield sub-division had, among other things, a relatively flat typography which produced poor drainage problems. These two obstacles prohibited earlier residential development plans in the area.

3. Information regarding the number of Southfield employees who work for the Watkins Road plant was obtained from the Georgia-Pacific employee who receives and processes job applications at the plant. The information was obtained during a telephone interview on July 10, 1992.

4. This quote was taken from the City of Columbus Department of Development Division of Planning report, dated July 1977.

5. This information was taken from the 1992 Georgia-Pacific Annual Report.
CHAPTER III

AN ANALYSIS OF THE INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE AT WORK

The major goal of this chapter is to analyze the initial organizing efforts against environmental racism in the Southfield community, and the extent to which the indigenous perspective explains those efforts. The indigenous perspective posits that within dominated communities protest is, particularly in the early phases, dependent upon activists functioning through a well-developed indigenous base. As Morris (1984) outlined, the resources necessary for a well-developed indigenous base include institutions, organizations, leaders, communication networks, money, and organized masses functioning within a dominated group along with such cultural elements as music, oratory and prayer (1984, P. xii).

This chapter will identify the indigenous resources in the Southfield community’s fight against environmental racism, and the extent to which those resources were used to facilitate the community’s protest activity. The questions answered here are what leaders and organizations emerged
during the organizing efforts? To what extent did external resources help to sustain the movement? And what factors or events motivated the development of strategies and tactics which were used?\textsuperscript{1}

\textbf{Introduction}

Many forms of racism exist and continue to victimize black people in American society. Because racism of all forms is a disease which manifestly targets color rather than class, its existence cuts across class divisions and unites even the most diverse groups of black people. Just as black janitors and doctors worked together during the Civil Rights Movement to strike down overt forms of racism in society (Morris, 1984), so did diverse groups of Southfield residents work together to strike down the covert racism in their community.

The May 7th chemical explosion awakened Southfield residents to the covert form of racism in their midst. When the harsh reality of environmental racism became apparent to Southfield residents the collective spirit already present in the community was called upon and strengthened. Morris (1984) writes that prior to the Civil Rights Movement blacks in "compact segregated communities ... began to sense their collective predicament as well as their collective strength" (P. 4). While the Southfield subdivision was not legally a racially segregated community most of its inhabitants were black and had lived through the demoralizing effects of de
facto segregation. As a consequence of the national black community's fight against segregation, or "Jim Crowism" as one resident called it, Southfield residents were already psychologically imbued with the collective strength necessary to fight environmental racism.

The intangible collective spirit present in the Southfield community is an important aspect of the indigenous base which the residents called upon to fight environmental racism. The lesser the material resources of a group, the more that group is forced to rely upon intangible spiritual and cultural power to survive. In the context of the Southfield community's fight against environmental racism religious strength was an important intangible resource. For example, when an outside elite tried to discourage Mrs. Booth, a key leader in the movement, from mobilizing the community because, in his opinion, the chemical company was "too big" for them to handle she replied, "there isn't anything that my God and me can't handle. And in the sight of my God Georgia-Pacific is no bigger than a grain of salt."

The use of prayer was also an important resource for the community and a source of motivational strength. At a community meeting which took place long after the initial stages of mobilization were over, before the meeting began, group leaders called upon a member of the community to say a prayer. The person chosen was an older man who stood and led the group in reciting the Lord's prayer. This is significant
because this meeting was taking place eight years after the major explosion occurred. There were several people present who were frustrated and losing hope. Typically for black people, especially in times of crisis, prayer rejuvenates the spirit and restores a sense of hope.

There are other sources of collective identity and spirit in Southfield as well. Common southern roots, long-term community residence, having children who attended the same schools, participation in PTA activities, and shared civic association and church memberships are important because such things served to bond the community together in terms of concern for the overall quality of life in the neighborhood.

When the presence of environmental racism manifested itself and threatened the quality of life in the Southfield community leaders were galvanized into action. As leaders they organized community members and mobilized the community’s indigenous base by employing various skills, utilizing community institutions, raising money, and preparing themselves to fight. When the indigenous base did not provide enough muscle against the chemical company attention was turned to the supply of outside resources.

In order to analyze the explanatory power of the indigenous perspective in this context, first it is important to describe the leadership in Southfield which emerged in the initial stages of the protest, and explain how they organized,
mobilized, and financed their fight against environmental racism using the community’s indigenous resources.

**Leadership**

The chief person who initiated the Southfield movement was a woman who had a prior history of community involvement. Morris (1984) writes that the significance of leadership to the indigenous perspective is that leaders don’t tend to spontaneously appear with the birth of social movements, rather they have usually matured over the years resulting from work and commitment within a community (p. 285). This seems to be the case in Southfield as well. The principal person who led the community’s fight against environmental racism in Southfield was Roberta Jones Booth. Mrs. Booth was not a leader created by the movement, rather she had already established a history of prior leadership in the community before the movement began.

The previous chapter indicated Mrs. Booth’s history of community leadership in Southfield. Shortly after she and her family moved into the Southfield subdivision she became fully entrenched in community activities. One of the first things she did was become instrumental in forming the neighborhood improvement group, the Marion-Franklin Civic Association. In an interview she stated that she and other community members decided to form the association. "We ... got together and formed the civic association and informed everybody and most
of the people got involved." The association's thrust at that time was to accomplish a variety of community improvement projects related to zoning, recreation, public transportation and getting much needed public services into the Southfield area. Being a founder of this grassroots organization was an important accomplishment for two reasons: it would become one avenue by which Mrs. Booth would establish a history of community activism; and after the chemical disaster this association provided the resource link for the creation of a second organization that dealt specifically with the chemical explosion.

For the Southfield community's mobilization process the association became an invaluable resource. Since each resident was automatically a member of the civic association, the membership roster became a crucial resource after the explosion occurred because it provided names and addresses of all community residents. Mrs. Booth stated that she and another association member, Mrs. Bernice Davidson, used the roster to telephone community people for the first protest meeting. She stated, "we contacted someone in every area and asked them to call their neighbors ... we used word of mouth ... we got together and printed up flyers."

Asked how the group managed to print and pay for enough flyers to distribute to almost 3,000 people Mrs. Booth stated:

We typed them up and different people would zerox them for us ... different people had access to zerox machines so everybody would do a few ...
until we could take up a collection and get some money and then buy some paper and print them....

The fact that Mrs. Booth was an active member of the Bibleway Baptist Church helped the group to overcome some of those initial financial constraints. After those initial calls about the first meeting Mrs. Booth stated that community churches were called upon for assistance:

... then we notified the churches ... we asked the ministers from the churches to participate, to make the announcements in their services and put it in their church bulletins ...

Regarding her history of church participation Mrs. Booth stated that she has been active in a variety of roles: she had worked with the church tutorial program, the women's fellowship, and a church organization called Jets for Jesus. She is presently Vice President of the church trustee board (her husband currently serves as president).

In the context of the indigenous perspective the Civic Association and the church are key indigenous resources. In the latter stages of mobilization Mrs. Booth stated that the churches would sponsor fundraising events such as singing concerts and luncheons to help pay for printing and other costs. Also the church allowed the group to use its facilities for community meetings without charge, and make verbal announcements during Sunday services. She stated "they opened the door and let us speak whenever we wanted to." The fact that the church would not charge a fee for the use of its
facilities is worth noting since the community schools would charge the group for janitorial services. In order to pay such costs Mrs. Booth said the group would often "pass the hat."

It was not difficult for the group to obtain permission to use the community schools for meetings because Mrs. Booth's history of community activism made her well known by area school principals. She stated:

They had known me for a long time ... All of my children graduated from Marion-Franklin High School ... I was president of the PTA over there. In fact I was president of almost all of the PTA's out here ... I've served in every office just about.

For Southfield, a community of almost 3000 people, each organization -- the civic association, the church and area schools -- provided its own formal and informal setting for the development of communication networks. From the indigenous perspective such networks enabled residents get to know each other and develop organizational skills which would become essential to the ensuing mobilization process.

Morris (1984) writes that many local organizations provided communication networks which facilitated organizing and planning during the Civil Rights Movement (p. 277). In the context of the indigenous perspective communication networks are valuable to mobilization because they illustrate how dominated groups in society are able to exchange crucial information despite institutionalized efforts to keep information out of reach.
Another important aspect of Mrs. Booth’s leadership role in the environmental racism movement is her history of political activism. Not only was she well-entrenched in the Southfield community, Mrs. Booth was also well-entrenched politically in the Columbus community. After moving to Columbus she became a member of the Federated Democratic Women of Ohio. During the 1980s, when the Southfield explosion occurred, Mrs. Booth also served as Democratic Ward Committee woman for the Southfield area. For the movement against environmental racism her role as a political activist added another dimension to her role as community leader. In this capacity she represented a substantial political base in the community. This constituency afforded her the leverage to politicize the early stages of mobilization against Georgia-Pacific by unveiling, or making public, the political dimensions of the disaster.

The political dimensions of the chemical explosion included knowledge of what government agencies were involved in the decision-making process that enabled the plant to locate in the community. As a politico she could hold the policy-makers in these agencies accountable for the Southfield disaster. Mrs. Booth’s political role drew media attention to the movement, but more importantly the role enabled her to fully learn the political system. Political astuteness would later become crucial to sustaining the movement when other
elected officials refused to impart their knowledge of the system in ways which would help sustain protest activity.

In an interview Mrs. Booth candidly commented on the need for political awareness in black communities, and the adverse effects the lack of such awareness can have:

we ... black folks are not politically astute enough, only a handful, that's why they can get away with so much. That's why so much wool is pulled over our eyes because on the whole we don't understand the political system that we live in, that determines everything that we do. And we refuse to learn it. But if we ever do, then we are going to have equal access and equal representation under the law ....

When analyzing Mrs. Booth’s role as a leader, especially her political role, her connection to the national black political community becomes apparent. The political culture which informs Mrs. Booth’s political ideology -- in an interview she stated, "I am un-bought and un-bossed" -- derives from her association with and knowledge of black females who are known political activists. Asked who her role models were she mentioned such names as Shirley Chisholm. She stated, "she was un-bought and un-bossed ... I’ve used that quote an awful lot because I admire her very much."

In the context of the indigenous perspective this association shows how continuity and styles of leadership get established. Leaders who are indigenous to the national black community can and do influence local indigenous leaders who have strong ties to mass-based indigenous institutions. Such
local leaders are in a better position to galvanize people into action by imparting their knowledge and functioning through the community's indigenous base (Morris, 1984). After the Southfield explosion, because Mrs. Booth was well-established in the community, out of trust and proven leadership capabilities, residents responded to her call to organize.

The element of trust is especially important to black leadership when fighting against racism (Morris, 1984). If a leader is perceived as one who will succumb to pressure from the white establishment then that person's integrity is called into question and their ability to mobilize is limited. During the early stages of the Civil Rights Movement, Morris (1984) notes that the severity of oppression had a tendency to make black people distrustful of those who assumed leadership roles (p. 20). In the case of Southfield the question of who could be trusted became an issue when it was rumored that some people in the community knew of the plant's operations long before the explosion. Mrs. Booth, who was cognizant of the rumors, knew the importance of trust and stated in an interview that her history of community activism worked to circumvent any element of suspicion as to where her loyalties were:

... with my integrity and the other ladies that were helping ... people in the neighborhood have known for years that I'm a person who will take a stand ... I'm not afraid of anything or anyone. I
always pray and put Christ first in my life and just look like we just moved right along.

Particularly in cases involving environmental racism, Bullard (1990) writes that because mainstream environmental groups are perceived as outside elites in the black community, the question of trust in black environmental movements assumes paramount importance. Mrs. Booth saw herself as a trusted leader. Instead of immediately seeking the help of an established environmental group after the explosion she was aware that residents were more apt to respond to and trust someone who lived in the community. She was also aware that her history of community involvement and political activism dictated that she take the lead in the community’s fight against environmental racism. She stated:

I’m a very truthful and up front person. And there’s one thing that nobody in this neighborhood could say that Roberta has done anything to harm the neighborhood, everything that she has done for years since I’ve lived here, over 30 years, has been for the good of the community, for the good of the schools, for the good of the children. ... I stand up for the community where I live ... they know that working together we can do something.

On the flip side, however, 30 years of community activism and community leadership created enemies for Mrs. Booth inside the community as well as on the outside. In Southfield the rivalry resulted from the preponderance of female leadership in the environmental racism movement. With Mrs. Booth at the helm three more women emerged as leaders. In an interview, one
of those women Mrs. Gertherine Cyiark, stated that a male minister in the community resented the leadership role the ladies had assumed. She stated:

One minister who is no longer with us very much criticized the women for taking the role. He stated at the time that women should not take the lead. I had to say to this minister that you know I am not a politically active person and I am not running for an office of any type, but I am fighting for what is mine and what other people out here have struggled to get.

At one point the tension between the women leaders and the minister, who is now dead, became so acute that he advised his congregation not to participate in the protest activities. Mrs. Cyiark continued to state:

... he made the statement that there were many qualified men, those were his words, out there who were capable of doing this. I said well they are more than welcome to come forward and join with us we’ll be more than happy to have them.

Male ministers in the black community are an important aspect of the indigenous perspective. In his analysis of indigenous institutions instrumental to the organization of the Civil Rights Movement Morris (1984) writes that because churches are highly respected entities in the black community programs initiated and backed by them are more apt to gain mass support. The minister’s orders to his congregation could have been highly detrimental to the Southfield movement had it not been for Mrs. Booth’s insight and leadership. Asked if this conflict adversely affected her efforts to mobilize the
community she replied no, because while the minister’s actions precipitated gossip the community knew that her history had proven that she could lead them in this fight. Having an understanding of the community’s inhibitions, and the minister’s patriarchal views, allowed Mrs. Booth to proceed undaunted in the community’s mobilization process.² She stated:

I understand their insecurities and their inability to express themselves. And I understand their fears. Let’s face it a lot of people are not as well-traveled as I am. They don’t have the experience that I have. I have met the public for years ... I understand they’re good gossip-mongers ... if they need someone to speak at a city council they ask me to be the spokesperson ... People have tried to make me feel bad but they end up feeling bad themselves ....

From the indigenous perspective these home-grown jealousies and rivalries can be counter-productive to the organization of masses and mobilization of resources unless they are recognized early and understood. More importantly, however, Morris (1984) writes it is essential that those who are outside of the movement do not recognize and exploit such internal conflicts, because sometimes this knowledge can adversely affect indigenous mobilization and strengthen opposition to the movement.³

Organization and Mobilization

Immediately following the May 7th explosion Mrs. Booth, along with Mrs. Bernice Davidson quickly began to prepare the
community for organized action. Timing was crucial at this point because media attention was still focused on the Southfield community. With the help of Mrs. Davidson, Mrs. Booth decided to call an emergency community meeting to inform the residents of the dangers they faced. As mentioned earlier the group made a series of phone calls, using the civic association's membership roster, and passed out numerous flyers. Within one week after the explosion the first meeting was held at the Marion-Franklin High School in the school's cafeteria. The school was chosen because the cafeteria was large enough to hold the anticipated large crowd. In an interview Mrs. Booth recalled her uncertainty about how to proceed in the initial meeting:

We didn't know what to do. We were just trying to talk about it. So we had a community meeting and called the people together and began to talk about it.

The first meeting is important because the community recognized a need, from the first official responses to the explosion, to formulate strategies and tactics. This need became more apparent because an EPA representative and a city council person were among the official representatives in attendance. According to Mrs. Booth these two representatives tried to falsely assure the community that there was nothing to worry about. She stated:

The gentleman from the EPA said there's nothing dangerous in that cloud at all ... Arlene Shoemaker
[the city council representative] did a P.R. job for Georgia-Pacific talking about what good neighbors they were.

The impact of the official responses given at this first meeting on the group's tactics and strategies will be analyzed later in this chapter. Regarding organization and mobilization a key person who did not attend the first community meeting but later became an integral part of the organizing efforts was Mrs. Gertherine Cyiark. Unlike Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Cyiark was not a political activist. Her subsequent leadership role in the movement emerged as a result of the community's mobilization efforts. Although Mrs. Cyiark was not formerly a community leader, she was, however, an active member in the community's preexisting Civic Association. Of her membership in the Civic Association she stated:

I was a member but basically when I was involved with the Civic Association it was basically just community concerns ... with things during holidays ... whenever there was a need to have participation from people in the community ....

The importance of the Civic Association's existence, and Mrs. Cyiark's membership in the Association, to the early stages of mobilization can be explained from the indigenous perspective. The Civic Association was a mass-based community organization to which Mrs. Booth had strong ties and immediate access. Morris states that "activists who have strong ties to mass-based indigenous institutions are in an advantageous position to mobilize a community for protest" (1984, p. 283).
When the decision was made in Southfield to call the first community meeting the association provided the mass-base of people to attend that meeting. It was through the Association that Mrs. Booth could easily access Mrs. Cyiark's organizational skills. Such institutions are important toward providing leaders who are well-integrated in the community access to other people who have organizing skills. Morris (1984) states:

Mass-based institutions provide activists with groups of people who are accustomed to accomplishing goals in an organized manner and with much of the money and labor force capable of being harnessed for political goals (p. 283).

In the Southfield case, the Marion-Franklin Civic Association provided the human resource base needed to mobilize against environmental racism. There were, however, ambivalent feelings in the community about the effectiveness of the organization and the commitment of its leaders to the community at the time of the explosion. Mrs. Cyiark stated that she felt the Association's leadership was aware of the plant's existence long before the May 7th explosion occurred. In an interview she commented:

Well they were aware of the plant being there even when we discovered what was going on ... it was made known to the Civic Association about what was happening over there but no one came forward to say o.k we need to do something about this.
Mrs. Booth recalled while most of the community knew nothing about the plant’s operations, she too heard rumors that key leaders in the Civic Association were possibly aware of its existence. She stated:

Someone said, I don’t know how true it is, that some of the heads of the Civic Association were aware of it ... I noticed that they moved out of the neighborhood, I don’t know. I really couldn’t say ... and then you know when you look at it you see bought and paid for people all over ... people will do anything for a few dollars to gain something, to get a way for themselves.

This information is interesting from the indigenous perspective because it suggests that heads of preexisting organizations may not be the best or most likely leaders when a crisis develops, because preexisting leaders are so often compromised. In this sense skilled activists, less institutionalized leaders, may have the advantage under crisis conditions. Morris (1984) addresses re-selecting leaders when he discusses Dr. King’s role as a relative newcomer to the Civil Rights Movement, and also in his discussion of Reverend Jemison’s role in the Baton Rouge Movement.

It is also worth speculating how the gender issue in Southfield factors into the decision process to re-select leaders. The chair of the Southfield Civic Association at that time was a man. Male leaders are more likely to be entrenched, institutionalized and compromised politically, while female leaders are outsiders and thus less likely to have been bought off already. In one sense Mrs. Booth was an insider in the
community, however, in another sense her female status, especially given that she openly stated she was un-bought and un-bossed, made her an outsider in the Civic Association’s inner circle. In other words, if there existed a "good old boy" network among the Civic Association’s leadership, Mrs. Booth certainly was not included. In an interview Mrs. Booth commented that for Southfield’s movement and possibly the larger political environment "... it might take black women, it might take women period, to straighten things out."

Mrs. Clark, another long-time Southfield resident, attended the first community meeting. She remembers having misgivings about what to expect if preexisting Civic Association leaders were going to spearhead community action against the chemical company. She attributed her reservations to the incident, mentioned in the previous chapter, which occurred about two years before the 1984 explosion when a plant employee warned her of the plant’s activities. After that incident she recalls informing the Civic Association leaders of the plant’s existence during one of their door-to-door canvassing attempts to increase member participation:

I remember when they were going around trying to get people to come to the meetings and everything. After I found out what that plant was, when they came to my door one day because they said few people were attending, I told them, I said I don’t know why they would. I said, because since everybody now knows that this is a chemical plant seems like all of us would have gotten together and stopped it.
The rumors and suspicion which surrounded the Civic Association could have easily divided residents and thwarted all efforts to organize and mobilize the Southfield community. Such "schisms" as Morris called them, also existed in the black community during the early stages of the Civil Rights Movement (1984, p. 42). Mrs. Booth, like leaders during the Civil Rights Movement who sought to unify divided factions, knew the weaknesses of the Civic Association, and decided it would be more effective if a second organization was formed to deal specifically with the chemical explosion. In an interview regarding the formation of the new organization she stated:

"We put this together to deal with nothing but the chemical plant because the Civic Association at that time was not that strong ... So instead we would have a separate organization.... we organized and got the papers together for the Southside Community Action Association, Inc. to deal with nothing but the chemical plant.... had it gone through the Civic Association it would never have gotten off the ground because of all the other issues they have. But it is still for the community."

Mrs. Cyiark also recalled the decision to create a separate organization. "It was not that we were trying to replace the Civic Association," she said, "we formed as an organization to fight this chemical company." The formation of a second organization from a preexisting organization is consistent with the point of view of the indigenous perspective. Often white power structures will seek to exploit schisms within the black community during the early stages of
mobilization (Morris, 1984). The formation of a new organization, with different leadership, is an effective way to circumvent problems which plague preexisting organizations. In order to effectively mobilize it was necessary that the community perceive the Southside Community Action Association as a new organization that was a separate entity apart from the Civic Association, yet still connected to the community.

At an earlier point before the first community meeting the group formed the Southside Community Action Association and appointed Mrs. Booth as chairperson of the new organization and Mrs. Cyiark as health chairperson. Appointing Mrs. Cyiark as health chairperson utilized medical knowledge she gained while working as an operating room technician at a local hospital. The remaining officers included a secretary and a treasurer. Mrs. Booth recalls after the group decided to form a new organization, the second order of business was to determine what type of killer was in their midst. "Our first concern was what were we expose to," she said. "That was the first concern. Because if you don’t know what you’ve been exposed to you don’t know what the problem is, or what you’re dealing with."

**Tactics and Strategies**

Planning and implementing tactics and strategies are an important aspect of the indigenous perspective. In order to find out exactly what chemicals they were dealing with the
group's task at that point was to obtain much needed information. As Chairperson of the newly formed Southside Community Action Association and Democratic Ward Committee woman, Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Bernice Davidson, and Mrs. Cyiark had previously decided that the first strategy the group should employ was to invite Georgia-Pacific representatives along with city, EPA and Health Department officials to the first community meeting. This strategy is significant because it underscores the group's attempt to engage in legitimate negotiations with elite power holders.

The political skills Mrs. Booth's acquired as a political activist is a key element inherent in this strategy. When organizing neighborhoods against environmental threats political activism is one of three dominant approaches mainstream environmental groups have used (Bullard, 1990). This approach "views the organizing of communities as a means of empowering local residents to defend their space and develop a political power base to influence decision-making" (Bullard, 1990, p. 114). Residents have more potential to influence decision-making when their complaints originate from an organization rather than an individual (Bullard, 1990). In the case of Southfield Mrs. Booth's positions as Democratic Ward committee woman and chairperson of the Southside Community Action Association provided her with broad-based community support, knowledge of the political system, and knowledge of key local politicians and party members, all of
which translated into political clout. In all probability Georgia-Pacific along with city officials considered this fact when they agreed to send representatives to community meetings. The fact that they sent representatives indicates they took the challenge seriously.

Along with local plant representatives, Georgia-Pacific sent representatives from its home office in Atlanta, Georgia. Also present were Ohio Health Department officials and local Environmental Protection Agency representatives. Elected officials present included a city council representative and a State Senator. News reports of the meeting stated that Mrs. Booth "asked the management of the chemical company and public officials to explain and assure residents that a Love Canal-style explosion would not occur in the area" (Oshodi, 1984). According to news reports Georgia-Pacific representatives tried to arrest those fears by assuring residents that the company would increase precautionary measures against future spills in the area (Oshodi, 1984). The safety measures the company undertook would later prove futile as future spills continued to plague the community.

Health Department officials promised to take water and soil samples in the contaminated area for the next year or longer to ensure that there would be no future health hazards to the people. They did not mention, however, the health hazard already present in the community resulting from exposure to "nearly five million pounds of solidified
formaldehyde waste" illegally buried at the plant site between the years 1971 and 1982 (Lore, 1985).

EPA representatives at the meeting told the group that their agency was forwarding a report of the May 7th explosion to the State Attorney General’s Office (Oshodi, 1984). It was this report which later precipitated the very small $75,000 fine imposed on the company in November 1984, six months after the explosion occurred. At first glance it seems that the EPA acted responsibly in the wake of the explosion, however, follow-up news reports one year after the spill indicated that the EPA never fully investigated the company dump-site even though witnesses continued to state that formaldehyde and other chemicals were buried at the site (Lore, 1985).

Such official responses illustrate the necessity of self-reliance within dominated groups, and the crucial contributions of indigenous resources. Power-elites who have control in a system of domination are oblivious to human suffering. From the indigenous perspective the Southfield community is a dominated group in an oppressive and racist society. By McRiss’s (1984) definition "a dominated group is defined as one that is excluded from one or more of the decision-making processes that determine the quantity and quality of social, economic, and political rewards that groups receive from a society" (p. 282). In an interview Mrs. Booth stated that more than any place else her anger was directed toward city and county officials for locating a chemical
company in the Southfield community, and for excluding residents from that decision-making process. The exclusion was intended to perpetuate a system of domination, but just as the racist act of segregation ironically strengthened the black community’s indigenous resources (Morris 1984), Southfield’s exclusion from a process which drastically altered their lives, also strengthened and empowered the community when they turned to their indigenous resources.

The official responses given at the community meeting were supposed to eradicate fears, but residents knew that it was because of race and the dominant system of oppression that they were placed in their present situation. Mrs. Booth solidly replied, "yes" when asked if she felt the decision to locate Georgia-Pacific in the Southfield community was made on the basis of race. She stated:

> It was just some vacant land and it was near a black neighborhood, and it never made any difference to the people that was granting it ... They didn’t put it any place else, they put it out here ... We have found that you don’t have something in 98 percent of the African American communities quite by accident. I don’t think so.

Other residents present at that meeting with government and agency representatives knew they were hearing only part of the truth. Mrs. Clark remembers not being impressed with promises to increase safety and the barrage of official attempts to allay fears that she and other community members heard. She stated:
I went to several of the meetings when the man over there from Georgia-Pacific would come. He would say that they’re doing a lot for Southfield but I didn’t see what they were doing. ... He said it can’t be that the plant is hurting anyone because they have plants in other places.

To that statement, Mrs. Booth replied, "but we know better." "We know that phenol and formaldehyde are both killers." Such weak attempts from Georgia-Pacific and local government representatives to placate people illustrates how power elites pay only lip service and dole out symbolic reassurances to dominated groups (Parenti, 1973).

News reports stated there were people present at the meeting who reported since the explosion they continued to suffer from night choking and "coughing up blood" (Oshodi, 1984). Given such testimony, the company’s claim that the chemicals released were only "irritants" (The Call and Post, 1985) was an obvious insult to the community’s intelligence.

The insult to residents’ intelligence lies in the implication that their fears were irrational and unfounded. From the indigenous perspective the assumption of irrationality is dismissed because, as Morris states, "movements are deliberately organized and developed by activists who seize and create opportunities for protest" (1984, p. 283). Such activists are not responding from emotional stress and crisis, rather their actions are rationally planned and orchestrated through the community’s well-developed indigenous base (Morris, 1984).
In Southfield the residents were undaunted by the insulting attempts to placate their rational fears and proceeded to set forth a list of demands. Among other things the community asked for a siren to alert residents in the likely event of future spills; they asked for permission to go in and see the plant's operations; they asked the Health Department to conduct an epidemiological study of the area; they asked for a list of the chemicals the plant produced; and most of all they asked for victims compensation in terms of damages to their health and their homes.

After the demands were articulated, instead of concerned action, Southfield residents encountered a veil of silence and non-support from their "democratically" elected officials and state agencies subsidized through their tax dollars. When asked specifically how elected officials, both black and white, and state agencies responded to the community's requests, Mrs. Booth stated:

They started running ... I had one elected official to tell me that's too big for you to handle. You can't do anything with a company like Georgia-Pacific. That's too much for you. That's out of your league.

As for the local EPA agencies she stated, "they were more for Georgia-Pacific than for us. They were more in-tuned to protecting them and that's what made me so angry. And that's why we continued and pursued the fight." The overall dissatisfaction residents had with official governmental
responses is significant from the indigenous perspective because the governmental responses made Southfield residents angry, and anger can be an important indigenous resource. More importantly, however, the official responses precipitated the community’s next strategy in the fight against environmental racism -- the decision to protest.

Demonstration and Protest

Bullard (1990) analyzed the link between environmentalism and social justice. Traditional environmental groups have typically used expressive activities such as outdoor recreation, field trips, and social functions to express concern for the environment. For black environmental activists concern for the environment includes a civil rights dimension. Mrs. Booth succinctly articulated this added dimension when she stated in an interview that for the Southfield community:

Our health rights have been denied. Our civil rights too because these people should not have allowed something of this magnitude to be built in our community. We were a flourishing community before they came.

The added civil rights dimension results from the political decision to locate unwanted hazardous waste disproportionately in black communities. Such decisions are the result of racist practices which deny black people civil and human rights to live in a clean, healthy environment (Bullard, 1990).
Historically black people have had to consistently confront racist acts in American society. During the Civil Rights Movement such confrontations were made in the form of organized mass protests. In the context of black environmental movements mass protests are defined as instrumental or goal-oriented activities (Bullard, 1990). The goal of black environmental movements, as in the Civil Rights Movement, is to confront racism and produce social change.

Southfield residents decided that mass protest was necessary to confront the persistently racist treatment of their community and to salvage their environment. Before the protest took place, however, several key events occurred. Georgia-Pacific representatives, the EPA, and local officials did not voluntarily adhere to the community’s demands. First Mrs. Booth stated that the local Environmental Protection Agency refused to give the group a list of the chemicals they requested. After the EPA refused she asked local officials for assistance, and they too did not respond. In an interview she stated:

I called upon the elected officials to open up some of the files at the EPA so we could get in there and find out what we were exposed to ... I went to all of our city council people. We went to our elected legislatures here. I had to go to Washington. I called Ralph Nadar’s office ... I met with Senator Glenn and Senator Metzenbaum and they’re the ones who made them open up those EPA records under the right to know laws. You see local people wouldn’t do it.
The fact that Mrs. Booth was forced to seek outside help addresses the use of external resources along with the indigenous perspective. As stated previously, the indigenous perspective observes community power from the bottom up rather than the top down as in traditional resource mobilization theory. The use of external resources, however, is not ignored in the indigenous perspective. In his analysis of the convergence of external and indigenous resources, Morris (1984) explains the forces which propelled Mrs. Booth to seek outside resources:

The indigenous perspective takes into account that resources and activities of individuals and groups outside a dominated community can assist in sustaining and shaping the outcome of indigenous movements (p. 286).

The distinction is made between resources voluntarily supplied to the movement and those which are supplied by political actors such as "heads of state, courts, national guards, in response to political crises created by the movement" (Morris, 1984, p. 286). In this particular case, the help Mrs. Booth received from Ralph Nadar's office can be explained as "assistance supplied by individuals and groups who identify with the goals of the movement" (Morris, 1984, p. 286). On the other hand the help she received from the two Senators certainly fits the explanation of non-voluntary resources supplied in response to political crises created by the movement.
Another example of a non-voluntary resource which was an outcome of the Southfield movement is the Columbus Health Department's cancer death rate study of the Southside area. In 1986 the Southfield community was forced to conduct its own epidemiological study of the Southside area before the Columbus Health Department agreed to conduct a similar study (Johnson, 1986). Residents had repeatedly asked the Health Department for an epidemiological study after the explosion occurred but their requests fell on deaf ears. Frustrated and angry, Mrs. Booth said the Southside Community Action Association decided to conduct its own five month survey which found, among other things, that "more than 1000 residents reported cases of emphysema, congestion, bronchial asthma, heart attacks and upper respiratory problems" (Oshodi, 1986).

Mrs. Booth said it took the group three to four years to get the list of chemicals they requested from the EPA. In the interim Georgia-Pacific was forced, through the State Attorney General's office, to install additional safety equipment at the plant. News reports state that the "improvements" cost the company $950,000 in repairs (Lore, 1985). A series of community meetings took place during this time. At one meeting, held on September 4, 1985 at the Marion-Franklin High School in the community, a Georgia-Pacific representative stated: "These people don't realize it, but they've got a gold-plated chemical plant here" (Lore, 1985). Referring to Southfield, a predominantly black community, as "these people"
and to the chemical plant as if it were a gift, illuminates the covert racism the community was forced to uncover and confront. Mrs. Booth, however, did not hesitate to say that she knew the company was not doing the community any favors with its highly publicized "improvements." The article reported her as saying, "I'm glad to see all these improvements, but I'd like to point out that if we had not been persistent, these improvements would not have been made" (Lore, 1985).

Company officials, in an obvious attempt to manipulate public opinion, allowed media representatives to tour the newly renovated facility. Ironically, in the midst of company efforts to tout its probable cure, another spill occurred. Less than two weeks after the company boasted its "gold-plated" repairs, The Columbus Dispatch reported that a tank containing 20,000 gallons of phenol ruptured. The article stated that several homes northeast of the plant were evacuated (Beres and Lore, 1985). For the Southfield community, however, this was the spill that sparked their demonstration.

On September 28, 1985 community residents demonstrated outside of the Georgia-Pacific site. Carrying placards which stated "we want a non-toxic community," close to 100 residents insisted that officials respond to the hazard in their community (Oshodi, 1985). The demonstrators were forced to disperse shortly after they gathered due to noxious fumes in
the air emitted from the plant. A news article reported that one resident shouted: "We had a meeting with Georgia-Pacific and they assured us that it wouldn't happen again (Oshodi, 1985).

From the indigenous perspective this sequence of events is important. Initially the Southfield community tried to engage in, through a series of community meetings, legitimate discussions with elite power holders. Rather than respond to the community's rational and warranted fears of ensuing health hazards power elites erected a veil of racism, silence, and non-support. As a dominated group the Southfield community was forced to confront and expose the veil through nonlegitimized protest activity. When dominated groups "attempt to change their situation of powerlessness by engaging in nontraditional and usually nonlegitimized struggles with power holders" (Morris, 1984, p. 282) the entrenched system of domination begins to crumble.

The power holders in this case were local EPA representatives, Georgia-Pacific, and elected officials. Through use of the community's indigenous resources, such as leaders, institutions, organizations, and communication networks, residents were empowered with skills and resources necessary to engage in an overt power struggle with power holders. While the battle against environmental racism in Southfield at this point was far from over the community was now poised to fight.
The residents of Southfield only wanted what all human beings deserve, true equality. In the words of W.E.B. DuBois, spoken in 1903, their "spiritual strivings" would not allow them to accept the status of "outcast and stranger" shut out from the world by a "vast veil" (DuBois, 1969) of institutionalized racism. There are many remaining vestiges of the veil to which DuBois referred in American society tucked away in communities such as Southfield. But Southfield residents were determined to expose and rent the veil in their community and fight for their right to live in a clean, healthy, environment.

The concluding chapter will discuss where Southfield residents are today in their fight against the veil of environmental racism, and the political implications of their fight, and others like theirs, for the national black community.

ENDNOTES

1. Interview excerpts are used in this chapter from three Southfield residents. The interviews took place between March and July 1992. The persons interviewed were: Mrs. Roberta Jones Booth, Mrs. Gertherine Cyiark, and Mrs. Dorothy Clark.

2. In a telephone conversation on July 22, 1992 with Professor Aldon Morris, author of The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement (New York: The Free Press, 1984) he commented on female leadership and patriarchal views. He stated that in some movements there is gender bias resulting from some indigenous institutions which are male-dominated. Gender bias can often make it harder for female leaders to generate resources.
3. Also in the interview with Professor Morris on July 22, he stated that conflict is endemic to social movements. In the case of movements involving female leadership, such conflict resulting from male-female rivalries can often inhibit female leaders from engaging in movement building and resource development. The indigenous perspective, however, is genderless and allows for leadership flexibility. Such flexibility allows female leaders the freedom to create new ways to generate resources within the indigenous base. New ways can often mean that women will use female-oriented indigenous resources such as the home, and women’s groups to generate resources and circumvent institutions which are male-dominated.

4. Mrs. Bernice Davidson is an important person in the Southfield movement. Mrs. Booth stated that Mrs. Davidson helped her extensively during the early stages of mobilization. She was not interviewed here because she was unavailable for interviews during the course of this research.

5. Professor Morris also explained during the July 22 phone conversation how his concept of local movement centers, the place where strategies and tactics are formulated in indigenous movements, can be applied to Southfield which is a female-led indigenous movement. He stated that the local movement center concept is not mechanistic, it is broad and flexible. By definition a local movement center is a nerve center for an indigenous movement. It is the space from which strategies and tactics emanate and movement consciousness is raised. A local movement center, he explained, is a place where people go to learn how to mobilize folk around the issues. Because a movement center is a constellation of things -- rather than only one thing -- when women are leading a movement the movement center can actually be a cluster of homes where strategies, tactics, and organization takes place.

6. The newspaper which reported this vivid testimony was the Call and Post, a black newspaper in Columbus, Ohio. This raises the issue of how the black press in Columbus covered the Southfield explosion as compared with the white press in the city. Without the benefit of a detailed content analysis it is difficult to make any definitive assertions. It does appear, based on the placement of the Southfield explosion news stories, and the amount of space given, that the black press gave the explosion more quantitative coverage. Qualitatively, it seems that the black press used much more emotive language to describe the explosion and its impact on the community. It should also be mentioned that there are two black newspapers in Columbus, however, only one black newspaper, the Call and Post, was used in this research.
CHAPTER IV

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Summary

Racism in any form is a disease. The subject of this thesis, environmental racism, is a covert, insidious form of the disease which hides itself in black communities nationwide. Because this covert killer is often obscured by policies and decisions that are touted as being probable cures, it strikes sporadically and takes its victims by surprise. Once its victims are alerted to its existence through recognizable symptoms, their awareness facilitates arriving at strategies and tactics to combat its manifestations. Such tactics and strategies often rely upon a well-developed indigenous base of institutions, organizations, leaders, communication networks, money and organized masses. This base also includes less tangible cultural elements such as music, oratory and prayer.

What is environmental racism and who are its victims? Environmental racism is the disproportionate location of toxic waste sites in minority communities. The victims of environmental racism are disproportionately black Americans
who reside in black communities that are perceived as constituting the path of least resistance when toxic waste siting decisions are made. This perception comes from elites outside of the communities who wield political power and influence, and systematically exclude black community leaders from this critical decision-making process.

In order to investigate this phenomenon of environmental racism in one black community the case study approach was used in this study. The community chosen, located in Franklin County, Ohio, is a predominantly black community called Southfield. The approach used to explain how the Southfield community fought against environmental racism was the indigenous perspective, first used by Aldon Morris in 1984 to study the Civil Rights Movement.

The indigenous perspective was chosen for this thesis because of its unique presentation and analysis of history and social change involving dominated groups from the vantage point of the empowered rather than the oppressed. This is an important perspective for black social movements because all too often black participants in social change have been depicted as helpless supplicants who are powerless and unable to fight back unless assistance is received from outside elites. The explanatory power of the indigenous perspective for black social movements illustrates how this is not the case. From this perspective the initial stages of mobilization provide the foundation for larger protest
activity. It is only after the larger protest activity begins to take place that the attention of outside elites and the supply of outside resources become essential to the movement. This distinction is crucial because the initial stages of mobilization determine whether or not a social movement will in fact develop and thereby force the political establishment and social elites to take action.

The two major questions this research sought to answer were: during the initial stages of mobilization how did the Southfield community transform its indigenous resources into power resources and marshal them in a conflict situation to accomplish political ends? Accomplishing political ends for the Southfield community meant eliciting appropriate policy responses to the cry of environmental racism. Also, once indigenous resources were mobilized, how did the community use those resources to overcome institutionalized obstacles and constraints intended to thwart their mobilization efforts?

When the insidious form of racism reared its ugly head in Southfield and transformed the community, pre-existing leaders -- an important indigenous resource -- immediately began to mobilize and transform other tangible indigenous resources within the community into fighting power. Tangible community resources included institutions and preexisting organizations which provided access to community people with various skills; churches and schools to use as meeting
places, sources of finance, and communication networks; and homes which functioned as places to plan strategies and tactics. Intangible cultural resources such as religious beliefs and prayer served as motivation and inspiration for the long fight ahead.

After the community's indigenous resources made possible the initial stages of mobilization, then community leaders tried to engage in legitimate negotiations with power elites by asking for much needed outside help to fight the giant chemical producer in their community. Rather than receiving help from democratically elected officials and state agencies subsidized through their tax dollars, leaders encountered a veil of silence and nonsupport. They also encountered the symbolic reassurance that the toxic threat in their community was abated and prior injury was cured only to find out later that the reassurances were nothing more than lip service intended to thwart their mobilization activity. When the racist environmental assault manifested itself in yet another chemical spill then the community decided to demonstrate.

During the early stages of mobilization the community transformed its indigenous resources into power resources by adapting existing networks, organizations, institutions, and leadership skills to meet the new challenge in hopes of eliciting appropriate responses to their cry of environmental racism. Obtaining appropriate responses in this sense did not necessarily mean that the actions of the Southfield community
resulted in some observable public policy outcome or altered the structure of decision-making. Rather the community’s actions changed their consciousness, which was a state of powerlessness in the face of racist activities, and created a new sense of community spirit and power. For example, community power was gained through obtaining information about the chemicals to which the community was exposed, which in turn exposed the "good" corporate citizen rhetoric of the chemical company. Community power for Southfield was also gained when the group reclaimed their sense of personal health by taking matters into their own hands after the Health Department initially refused to conduct an epidemiological study of the neighborhood. The group subsequently conducted their own study. After publicizing the results of their study then the Health Department, to avoid negative public opinion, responded appropriately with a similar study.

Indigenous groups, such as Southfield, can wield power even though indigenous players are often restrained and their movement is denied legitimacy. As Michael Parenti (1973) observed, even though people are theoretically a part of the democratic system doesn’t mean that they actually play a part in the crucial decision-making process. There are institutionalized obstacles, constraints, and difficulties which exclude communities such as Southfield and predetermine who gets what and who does not get what in the American
political process. But the scope and capacity of the protest movement’s indigenous base can provide the leverage needed to overcome institutionalized obstacles intended to perpetuate a system of racism and domination.

Conclusions

Where does the Southfield community go from here? At this point the immediate answer is new resources. At this juncture the community is past the initial mobilization stages where preexisting, internal resources so crucial to the indigenous perspective were used, and are well into the phase of protest which involves the use of more institutionalized outside resources. These new outside resources -- courts, the legal system, and attorneys -- will supplant those prior indigenous resources as the community goes into the next stage of its fight against environmental racism.

The movement’s goal at this point is no longer to gain empowerment through mobilizing indigenous resources, they have already done that, but to remain empowered and find new ways to sustain the movement. One important way the people can do this is to establish a link with the national black environmental movement. An important outside resource for the Southfield community which will facilitate this link and their continued empowerment will be The United Church of Christ Commission For Racial Justice. Connecting with the
movement against environmental racism launched by this institution, a predominantly white church with a long history of anti-racist struggles, will establish for Southfield an invaluable link and communication network to the larger black environmental movement.

The Implications For Future Research

The continued existence of environmental racism is a major threat facing the national black community. The long term political implications of this threat involve the existence of political elites who systematically exclude black people from the toxic waste siting decision-making process. In a lot of instances these elites are in public offices which afford them the ability to systematically exclude black people because of discriminatory electoral systems. For example, as the Southfield case study illustrated, at-large versus district representation of city council members can have regressive impacts for victims of environmental racism. A thorough investigation of the relationship between the existence of environmental racism and local electoral systems is an area worthy of future research.

Another area worthy of future research which emerged from this study are the gender effects within the indigenous perspective. Indigenous institutions are crucial in the early stages of mobilization, but these institutions are typically
male-dominated and permeated with patriarchal views. Given this fact an interesting research question would be, is it more difficult for female leaders in indigenous movements to generate resources within male-dominated institutions?

A third area of future research involving the indigenous perspective is to determine whether its scope is broad enough to explain global movements against "toxic terrorism" in African countries. Professor Robert D. Bullard (1990) an environmental sociologist, is presently researching strategies for diversifying the global environmental movement.

Because the social world is changing, changing rapidly as the structure of society, the face of racism is also changing. No longer is its face an easily recognizable "whites only sign" or a person covered in a white sheet reeking terror in the dead of night. Today racism is shrouded in policies and programs which are touted as probable cures. If we, as black people, continue to look for its old manifestations and miss where the new racism is heading we will sound as if we are whining about an old disease which, critics say, has long since been cured. As an oppressed people we know that racism, in its changing forms, is alive and well. Black people have suffered long from the disease of racism and know its symptoms. And it has only been through our endurance and ability to fight back that we have surmounted this insidious disease and truly overcome its
brutalizing effects. Edet Okon (1971) quoted Ralph Ellison who eloquently summed up the indigenous power black people have against the pervasive disease of racism. Ellison stated:

Any people who could endure all of that brutalization and keep together, who could undergo such dismemberment and resuscitate itself, and endure until it could take the initiative in achieving its own freedom is obviously more than the sum total of its brutalization.
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