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Author(s): Stella M. Čapek

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The “Environmental Justice” Frame: A Conceptual Discussion and an Application*

STELLA M. ČAPEK, *Hendrix College*

Drawing on a social constructionist perspective, this paper: (1) identifies some of the most salient dimensions of the “environmental justice” frame as it has emerged from local community struggles over toxic contamination in the United States; and (2) provides an empirical illustration of the emergence and application of this concept in a particular contaminated community, the Carver Terrace neighborhood of Texarkana, Texas. Carver Terrace, an African-American community consisting mostly of homeowners, recently organized to win a federal buyout and relocation after being declared a Superfund site in 1984. Using case study evidence, the paper argues that the residents’ ability to mobilize for social change was intimately linked to their adoption of an “environmental justice” frame. The intent of the conceptual discussion of environmental justice and the case study is to clarify the meaning of a term used with increasing frequency and some ambiguity in both popular and academic discourses. This paper documents the process by which the environmental justice frame is constructed in an interplay between the local community and national levels of the antitoxics movement.

When local grass-roots environmental groups have participated in national networks mobilized around toxic contamination issues in the 1980s and 1990s, they have altered not only the political economy of the U.S. environmental movement, but also its strategies and conceptual language. Representing more economically marginal actors than do traditional “mainstream” environmental organizations, these grass-roots groups are more likely to frame their demands in terms of social justice and to challenge stratification based on race, class, gender, and the distribution of power. Accordingly, the concept of “environmental justice” has emerged as a prominent part of the national dialogue over citizen empowerment and the environment. Although national organizations such as Citizen’s Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes (CCHW)—which adopted the slogan “People United for Environmental Justice”—have helped to popularize the term, its source is in a nationwide pattern of local responses to perceived social injustices. In the prototypical situation, social groups in a community (including the victims themselves) are polarized over questions relating to chemical contamination and its consequences, and “expert” agencies are unable to resolve ambiguity. While surrounding circumstances may vary, the call for environmental justice crystallizes the analogous experiences of many communities into a term with significance and mobilizing power at both the local and national levels (Bullard 1990; Cable and Walsh 1991; Clarke 1991; Edelstein 1988; Freudenberg 1984; Gibbs 1982; Krauss 1989; Levine 1982; Masterson-Allen and Brown 1990; Pardo 1990).

“Environmental justice” can be understood as a conceptual construction, or interpretive “frame” (Snow et al. 1986), fashioned simultaneously from the bottom up (local grass-roots groups discovering a pattern to their grievances) and from the top down (national organizations conveying the term to local groups). A social constructionist perspective (Gusfield 1981; Snow and Benford 1988; Snow et al. 1986; Spector and Kitsuse 1987) is particularly useful for understanding the emergence of an environmental justice frame and its mobilizing power in

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the environmental movement. While resource mobilization theory (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977) has made significant and lasting contributions to the understanding of organizational resource-building, the emerging constructionist tradition pays closer attention to symbolic processes, nonmaterial resources, and the micromobilization processes through which organization and symbolic frame come together (Ferree and Miller 1985; Gamson 1988). Since symbols themselves become resources to movements, the intersection between resource mobilization and social constructionist theory is particularly promising for generating insights into the process of frame construction and modification. In addition, attentiveness to stratification yields insights into grass-roots strategies linked to hierarchical relationships with other social groups (Feagin and Capek 1991).¹

The two-way process by which interpretive frames are constructed and validated in an interplay between local and national groups in the environmental movement is an important and relatively undeveloped field of sociological inquiry. Constructionists point out that the viable symbolic presentation of a social problem (both to participants themselves and to the general public) is an essential task for any successful social movement (Snow et al. 1986; Turner 1983). Much of the literature on technological hazards emphasizes the inherent ambiguity of chemical contamination and the consequent need for cognitive framing procedures by social groups (Erikson 1991; Kroll-Smith and Couch 1991). Spector and Kitsuse (1987) note that the appearance of a new terminology signals a transformation in public understandings of a social problem. The significance of “naming” has also been underlined by a host of other scholars (Collins 1990; Donati 1992; Melucci 1985; Smith 1990). Finally, Gamson and Modigliani (1989) point to the crucial role of social “sponsors” in media construction and dissemination of competing frames or “packages” surrounding policy issues (see also Gitlin 1980; Hansen 1991; Mazur 1991). These theoretical insights from a constructionist perspective are particularly fruitful for analyzing the emergence of an environmental justice frame.

The specific goals in this paper are twofold. First, the content of the environmental justice frame itself needs conceptual clarification. The term “environmental justice” is often used loosely and with a broad range of connotations. Increasingly, it is applied in a global and cross-cultural context, and some groups use it in a broader or narrower sense than this paper reflects.² Given its emerging prominence in both popular and academic discourses, it is important to clarify its meaning. Drawing on a range of literature concerning grass-roots mobilization against toxic contamination (Brown and Mikkelsen 1990, Bullard 1990; Cable and Walsh 1991; Capek 1987, 1991, 1992; CCHW 1986; Clarke 1991; Couch and Kroll-Smith 1991; Edelstein 1988; Gibbs 1982; Krauss 1989; Masterson-Allen and Brown 1990; Pardo 1990; Zeff et al. 1989), I will first propose a number of dimensions that constitute an environmental justice frame.³ Second, I will relate these dimensions to my case study of the Carver Terrace neighborhood in Texarkana, Texas, where an extraordinary mobilization by its African-American residents resulted in a highly unusual federal decision in 1990 to buy out and relocate residents, over the objections of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Carver Terrace residents’ ability to mobilize effectively for social change was intimately linked to their gradual adoption of an “environmental justice” frame. I examine this process,

1. I am aware of the debates between “strict” and “contextual” constructionists (Best 1987; Rafter 1992; Troyer 1992) and in this paper I assume the latter standpoint. As I will demonstrate, the environmental justice frame is socially constructed, but grounded in an objectively verifiable set of social patterns.

2. For an example, see the “Principles of Environmental Justice” drafted by the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, sponsored by the United Church of Christ’s Commission for Racial Justice in October 1991. The principles incorporate, among other things, a consciousness of the interdependence of all species; the right to be free from ecological destruction; the right to political, economic, cultural, and environmental self-determination for all peoples; ethical and responsible land use; and appropriate lifestyle choices.

3. This distillation is the gradual result of reading about, directly participating in, and observing grass-roots antitoxics mobilizations; it builds on suggestions made in an earlier paper (Capek 1992). I do not offer my interpretation as definitive, but as a necessary first step in clarifying an ambiguous concept.

as well as the reasons why this particular frame was powerful and “culturally resonant” (Gamson and Modigliani 1989) for Carver Terrace residents and for certain audiences. Finally, I examine the significance of the “environmental racism” claim as an increasingly visible component of environmental justice debates.

The Environmental Justice Frame and Its Dimensions

If the environmental justice frame is to be analyzed as a claims-making activity (Best 1987), then it is important to lay out its major assumptions. As Spector and Kitsuse observe, “Claims-making is always a form of interaction: a demand made by one party to another that something be done about some putative condition” (1987:78).

There is much in the sociological literature on environmental movements to suggest that residents of contaminated communities face a range of structural obstacles to full participation in decisions that affect their lives. Disproportionately likely to be of lower socioeconomic status (Masterson-Allen and Brown 1990), they also have a high probability of being racial minorities (Bullard 1990; Bullard and Wright 1990). At the social-psychological level, studies of contaminated communities reveal the devastating impact of real or suspected contamination on residents (Edelstein 1988; Kroll-Smith and Couch 1990, 1991; Vyner 1988), which adds to power inequalities strongly related to class and race, and is reflected in residential patterns and access to the political process (Mohai 1990).

Environmentally-related social movements and countermovements sharply reflect these stratification dimensions (Albrecht 1973; Gale 1986). Grass-roots groups mobilized against toxic contamination generally have less access to political, legal, and scientific resources than do their opponents. Influence exercised by private industry on public agencies is well documented (Buttel 1985; Freudenberg 1984; Levine 1982; Szasz 1990; Yeager 1987), and occurs both directly through political appointments and indirectly through the economic, bureaucratic, and legal resources accumulated by “repeat players” in the public policy arena (Čapek 1992; Galanter 1974). In addition to class-based and bureaucratic obstacles, racial and ethnic barriers are also significant; the gulf between neighborhood residents and city hall is typically greater for racial minorities (Mohai 1990). Grass-roots activists who contact city officials to exercise their democratic rights often find themselves stigmatized for raising issues that may give their city or town an unattractive image (Cable 1992; Krauss 1989). Their opponents, usually organized around groups such as the chamber of commerce, fear that damage may be done to “a good business climate” conducive to growth. Such groups accuse antitoxics activists of selfish NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) sentiments. Moreover, residents of contaminated neighborhoods are often characterized as hysterical and irrational (Edelstein 1988) or as greedy publicity-seekers. According to their own accounts (Čapek 1987; Gibbs 1982; Krauss 1989), antitoxics activists gradually discover that there is no “polite” way to get their problems addressed. Feeling violated at one level by the contamination itself, their sense of social justice is violated at a second level by the social reaction to their problems (Kroll-Smith and Couch 1991; Vyner 1988).

Defining a situation as unjust is more than an act of categorization; it implies a strategy for action. Residents in contaminated communities are generally pushed by their experiences toward a particular set of mobilizing strategies. A typical (although not inevitable) path is to opt for direct action tactics upheld by an “environmental justice” frame. This choice implies rejection of other possible frames. For example, it has been amply documented that many activists begin with assumptions of fairness about the political and regulatory process in the United States, as well as a naive faith in science as unbiased and “above” politics (Gibbs 1982; Levine 1982). As a result of their experiences, this frame’s validity is shattered. In constructing their claims and seeking redress, therefore, grass-roots antitoxics activists are far less likely

than traditional established environmental groups (such as the Sierra Club) to appeal to the supposedly neutral arbitration of scientific studies conducted by private or public sector experts. Instead, environmental justice is premised on the notion that the rights of toxic contamination victims have been systematically usurped by more powerful social actors, and that "justice" resides in the return of these rights.

The environmental justice frame is built around a concept of rights constructed in part by the actions and rhetoric of previous social justice movements. Most notable among these is the civil rights movement. Snow and Benford (1992; also see Tarrow 1983) suggest that the civil rights movement provided a "master frame" which validates the struggle for rights by other disenfranchised groups. While the civil rights movement was itself shaped by prior social movements and traditions, its rhetoric of dignity and full citizenship has been preeminent in a range of "rights" movements in the twentieth century. The movement for environmental justice is no exception; perceiving themselves as stigmatized "second-class" citizens to whom other social groups do not feel accountable (Scott and Lyman 1968), antitoxics activists claim full rights in the community, from respectful public treatment to legal protection and compensation.

The environmental justice frame also contains specific claims related to the distinct character of environmental grievances. These claims include the right to: (1) accurate information about the situation; (2) a prompt, respectful, and unbiased hearing when contamination claims are made; (3) democratic participation in deciding the future of the contaminated community; and (4) compensation from parties who have inflicted injuries on the victims. A fifth component, not stated in the language of rights but often functioning as an informal expectation, is the commitment to solidarity with victims of toxic contamination in other communities (Čapek 1992). Finally, a call to abolish "environmental racism" (Alston 1990) is an increasingly significant element of the environmental justice frame.

The dimensions of environmental justice are unified by a strong emphasis on citizenship rights, democratic process, and respect for "grass-roots" knowledge (i.e., the experiential reality of those most directly affected by problems). They are firmly grounded in existing beliefs about fairness in the United States. For example, just compensation is an important moral dimension of environmental justice. Unlike natural disasters, chemicals are manufactured and distributed by human beings who (theoretically) can be identified and whose responsibility can be established (Erikson 1991). In constructing their claims, therefore, some antitoxics activists have drawn an analogy between the crime of poisoning a person's cattle in the nineteenth century, for which a well-established punishment existed, and poisoning by chemical companies in the twentieth century. This extends the domain of beliefs about justice to fit a new situation, a type of "frame alignment" (Snow et al. 1986) crucial to many social movements.

The theme of solidarity, although not present in all contaminated communities (Kroll-Smith and Couch 1990, 1991), implies a nationwide movement "community" transcending racial, geographic, and economic barriers and resting on the claim that no community's solution should become another community's problem. The national dimension of the antitoxics movement calls attention to the "sponsor" role of various organizations in the dissemination of frames (Gamson and Modigliani 1989), as well as the two-way process of frame construction at the local and national levels. National organizations such as CCHW, the National Toxics Campaign (NTC), Greenpeace, and others have facilitated the creation of national networks, even as their presence as "big players" in local communities has sometimes stimulated infighting among victim groups. Organizations like the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP) and The United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice, which sponsored the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991 (see footnote 2), have fostered solidarity against environmental racism for people of color. Indeed, in minority communities, environmental justice is often strongly linked to civil rights issues (Bullard

1990; Mohai 1990), and the growing visibility of national organizations that challenge environmental racism is once again changing the face of the U.S. environmental movement.

Finally, framing demands around environmental justice is not in any way automatic or inevitable. Students of social movements have shown how problematic a unified, enabling collective interpretation of a stressful situation may be (Fantasia 1988; Gaventa 1980). Contaminated communities frequently include homeowners who feel they have a vested interest in the status quo. In situations of alleged contamination, recent and/or economically marginal homeowners may feel torn about acknowledging a problem, since denying it enables them to cling to their tenuous but hard-won status. The individualism inherent in the "American dream" of homeownership may also undermine collective action. Traditional gender roles can be a further obstacle; men may feel compelled to deny that they have failed as breadwinners or have exposed their wives and children to dangers (Blocker and Eckberg 1989). In addition, they may work for the private industries or agencies against which their wives are protesting. Protestors also generally know that corporations can respond by taking away the jobs of people in their social network (Cable and Walsh 1991). These subtle and overt social pressures and stigmas may decisively defuse potential protest.

On the other hand, a perception of "second-class citizenship" frequently acts as a powerful motivator for social change action (Čapek and Gilderbloom 1992). Betrayal of the dream of homeownership, given its cultural place as a marker of success in the United States, makes it a double blow to dignity and aspirations, and violates "folk" understandings of justice. In effect, residents in contaminated communities experience a shocking inversion of the American dream, where all that is assumed to represent safety and economic and existential security—and, one might add, creativity and self-realization—is turned into its opposite (Edelstein 1988). Indeed, many accounts of contaminated communities use the evocative imagery of transformation from "dream" to "nightmare." While the environmental justice frame does not reject the American dream, its mobilizing power stems from this deep sense of betrayal. It is thus both "resonant" with mainstream U.S. culture and radically challenging in its recognition of "second-class" citizenship.

Case Study Data

The data for my qualitative case study are primarily from in-depth interviews with Carver Terrace residents as well as with members of other local and national organizations or agencies involved with Carver Terrace. Carver Terrace contains 78 homes, and represents an economic spectrum that includes middle- as well as working-class residents, most of whom are homeowners (Čapek 1991). I conducted interviews there in 1991 and 1992, although I began collecting background materials in 1989.⁴ The sample includes 21 open-ended interviews of Carver Terrace residents, 6 interviews of nonresidents, and numerous follow-up interviews. The goal was to reach people active in the movement for change rather than the entire community. The sample was constructed using a roster of Carver Terrace residents compiled by Friends United for a Safe Environment (FUSE), a group affiliated with the Carver Terrace Community Action Group (CTCAG). I also used a snowball sample to reach other elements of the community (for example, nonparticipants, opponents, city officials, and members of national environmental groups). In addition to interviews, I collected background information from newspapers, EPA documents, press releases, personal correspondence,

4. My first visit to the community took place in 1989 during a three-day Grass-roots Conference on Environmental Justice that brought local and national environmental groups together in Carver Terrace. In 1991, I was invited into the community—along with my husband, Hans Baer, an anthropologist—by a member of FUSE and subsequently by the president of CTCAG to sociologically document the case. Interviews were tape-recorded by permission, and vary from one to four hours in length. All attributed quotes appearing in this paper are by verbal permission.

scrapbooks of movement participants, transcripts of meetings, photographs, videotapes, and coverage in national environmental publications. I also relied on field notes and attendance as a participant observer at a number of community meetings involving CTCAG, FUSE, the EPA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the relocation agency) and an environmental rally. Although this is presently an ongoing project, my data collection has been shaped by the imminent scattering of the community.

Carver Terrace, Texarkana

Texarkana, split by the Arkansas and Texas state line, has three Superfund sites on the Texas side (the Superfund is a federal program established in 1980 to clean up the most contaminated sites in the United States), a controversial landfill on the Arkansas side, and various other environmental problems stemming from the nearby paper companies. The Texas Carver Terrace residential subdivision, consists of approximately 33 acres and includes 78 homes. It was declared a Superfund site in 1984, and was unusual in that people lived directly on top of the site rather than near it. As in many other communities, the contamination problem was many decades in the making, and involved both corporate actors and the local government. Production at the Carver Terrace site dates back to 1910, when the National Lumber and Creosote Company began to operate (Preston 1991). By 1940, the site became part of the Koppers Company, headquartered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Koppers produced treated wood products and used the site for both production and disposal of toxic chemicals. The company stopped production there in 1961 and the buildings were removed. The property was subsequently sold for residential and industrial development.⁵ The Koppers Corporation was bought by Beazer East, Inc., a multinational corporation headquartered in New York City, in 1988.

City zoning permitted a Shreveport-based developer to build houses on part of the site, and the first lots were sold in 1967. In a time when most neighborhoods in Texarkana still had racially-based deed restrictions, Carver Terrace offered a place where middle-class, upwardly mobile African-Americans could buy homes with amenities such as paved streets, playgrounds, fire insurance, and other desirable features at an affordable price. As homeowners moved in, they viewed their community with pride and saw it as an excellent place to settle and raise children. Although some of the residents knew that creosote had been manufactured there, they were unaware of its toxicity and the extent of its presence at the site.

The EPA first became aware of the problem in 1979, after Congress asked the 50 largest chemical companies to report hazardous waste sites (Preston 1991). Koppers reported finding pentachlorophenol (PCP), arsenic, and creosote on its former plant site. In 1980, the Texas Department of Water Resources recommended that the land be included on the EPA's national Superfund list for emergency cleanup. In 1984, the EPA declared the Koppers Texarkana site a Superfund site and placed it on the National Priority List (NPL). The EPA and Koppers conducted a remedial investigation and feasibility study in 1985, and as an interim measure Koppers engaged in some soil removal and sod replacement at various residences to create a barrier against contamination.⁶ In 1987, some residents who had long experienced health problems joined together to sue the Koppers company. This was the first public "justice" claim, and it took a legal form. Although the claimants were unsuccessful, Koppers reached some out-of-court settlements with individual residents. In September 1988, the EPA in its Record of Decision (ROD) proposed a technique called soil washing/filtering to clean up

5. Twenty-eight acres on the southern half of the original site adjacent to the future Carver Terrace residential community were sold to the Bruce Kennedy Sand and Gravel Company, which was in operation from 1970 to 1984.

6. Many residents privately questioned the integrity of this process, including the degree to which old contaminated soil was removed and good quality sodding was installed.

Carver Terrace, a process which did not require relocating residents. This was consistent with the EPA's claim—then and now⁷—that levels of contamination were not sufficiently high to warrant a relocation.

This brief history reveals the important role of outside groups and agencies in determining the fate of Carver Terrace. Many residents were unaware of the seriousness of the contamination until they read about it in the newspaper or were informed by a local environmental organization, Friends United for a Safe Environment. Residents soon encountered conflicting interpretations from various agencies. While the EPA insisted that the contamination posed no serious danger to residents, a 1988 Texas Fish and Wildlife Service survey report noted that Carver Terrace also faced the problem of toxins migrating from contaminated gravel pits adjacent to their neighborhood. In that same year, portions of Carver Terrace began to flood badly, carrying chemically contaminated water into some residences. This was a probable result of the EPA's instructions to city officials to refrain from digging on the site (another interagency conflict). Moreover, a health assessment carried out by the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and published in 1989 underlined the site's dangers. A 1991 study funded by the ATSDR but carried out by the Texas Department of Health found that Carver Terrace residents reported skin rashes, chronic bronchitis, liver disease, premature births, and low birth weights more often than residents in a nearby comparison group (Busby 1992).

Feeling trapped in a dangerous situation, and unable to trust conflicting reports by outside agencies, residents gradually became more actively involved in protesting and demanding relocation, and with the help of local and national environmental groups, mobilized themselves sufficiently to prompt a Congressional override in 1990 of the EPA's recommendations. A federal buyout and relocation was in progress in 1992. The 1988 formation of the Carver Terrace Community Action Group, in coalition with FUSE of Texarkana, had a major impact on this decision. A successful repertoire of direct action strategies supported by an environmental justice frame were indispensable for accomplishing this task.

The Emergence of an Environmental Justice Frame

An "environmental justice" frame appeared with increasing frequency both in the residents' interpretations and public presentations of their situation. Initially, factors typical of contaminated communities posed obstacles to such an interpretation (Edelstein 1988; Levine 1982). Residents knew at some level about bad-smelling air, mysterious illness or deaths among people with no prior history of medical problems, plants that would not grow or grew strangely, animals becoming ill or born deformed, and a variety of other experiences that lacked explanation. The amorphous and invisible nature of chemical exposure, however, and the difficulty of diagnosing its consequences either at a popular or professional level worked against the integration of this knowledge (Brown and Mikkelsen 1990; Vyner 1988). Second, residents were reassured by the authority of the city government, which had zoned the Koppers site residential. The developer of the housing tract likewise played down any dangers. Third, the pride of homeownership sometimes encouraged residents to deny dangers, and traditional gender roles sometimes reinforced this denial.⁷ Carver Terrace was an attractive and well-kept community, and its very desirability for upwardly mobile African-Americans may have helped residents to discount or overlook the dangers. Fourth, many people did not initially talk to their neighbors about their experiences, a significant fact which can be linked to the individualistic interpretation of the "dreams" of homeownership, as well as to busy schedules. As one resident observed:

7. For example, men landscaping and digging in their yards were much more likely to run across odd substances, but tended to minimize their significance and did not always share this information with women.

I think we were just so busy with the art of living, and making a living and raising kids—you know, my children were involved in everything. And we were so busy with that, and they didn't get seriously ill, so we didn't talk to the other one about things, we just thought it was part of kids growing up . . . we just didn't have time to look at other things, unless it happened to be a big problem, and it wasn't, as far as we *knew* (interview 19 July 1991, Texarkana, Texas).⁸

Thus many factors systemically worked against attributing problems to chemicals, and experiences remained at the level of relatively insignificant personal puzzles or at most "private griefs."

Over time, a radically different definition of the situation cast a new light on residents' experiences and linked them to a sense of social injustice. The environmental justice frame not only facilitated the attribution of blame, but also laid out a remedy in the form of "claims" for rights.

The Right to Information

An important claim within the environmental justice frame is the right to get information about one's situation. As individual residents of Carver Terrace became concerned and asked questions about the potential presence of chemicals, they were often misled about the dangers. Without the social or financial resources to employ experts of their own, and not yet experienced in organizing themselves, community residents initially had to rely on information supplied to them on an individual basis by experts in the employ of private business or city and federal officials. This gave them little opportunity to interact or react as a community. The Carver Terrace Community Action Group later consciously strove to counteract this problem.⁹

Many instances could be cited of false assurances given to residents. For example, one resident—who had grown up in the area and had been warned as a child by his grandmother not to walk through the creosote plant grounds—consulted the building contractor about the possible presence of dangerous chemicals before building a house. "He assured me about the state and the city, they had given him the O.K. to do it, there was no toxic elements out here, and so I took his word for it" (interview 20 July 1991). After digging up strange black substances in the process of landscaping his backyard, the same individual told him, "Well, you're gonna dig up some black stuff, but all of that stuff has been treated." Other residents had experiences that suggested that something was wrong. As one remarked:

One guy tried to raise a garden out there, and stuff just didn't grow. And I had fruit trees planted out there and they didn't grow. I guess they'd stay maybe a couple of years and then they'd just die. And the worst off about me was I planted the yard and I always wondered why my mouth and hands would swell up, my lips would swell up double, just like somebody would hit me, but they weren't bruised, they'd just swell up (interview 19 July 1991).

This woman's doctor was at a loss to explain the cause, but told her she was "probably getting into something" that she shouldn't. The antibiotics he prescribed seemed to ease her problem, and it was not until later that this incident made sense in a broader context. In retrospect, it is evident that although disturbing individual events were taking place, they did not generate social alarm.

8. All interviews cited in this paper were conducted in the Carver Terrace neighborhood of Texarkana, Texas between 10 July 1991 and 11 July 1992. Although I received verbal permission for direct quotes, in most cases I cite interviews with the following individuals by date only: Camille Brown, Talmadge Cheatham, Bettye Davis, J.E. "Sonny" Fields, Clida James, Linda James, Patsy Oliver, Raymond Parker, James Shavers, Mary Frances Shears, Billy Shears, Patricia Smith, and Jeter Steger.

9. On a well-remembered occasion, J.E. "Sonny" Fields, president of the CTCAG, refused to allow the group to be broken up to confer separately with experts at an EPA workshop; suspecting a "divide and conquer" strategy, he asked the group to remain together. They did so, symbolically affirming their unity and their desire to be addressed as a group.

Significant changes took place in 1984, when Carver Terrace was declared a Superfund site by the EPA. Despite the fact that studies of their area had been carried out for years, homeowners were not aware of them. As one resident remarked, the earlier studies “lay and got dust on them in the offices” (interview 13 July 1991). However, FUSE of Texarkana—a local citywide environmental group already enlisted in a number of battles with polluters—was “plugged into” a range of local and national information networks. FUSE members Don Preston and James Presley learned of the dangers in Carver Terrace and called a meeting with Carver Terrace residents to share information with them. FUSE eventually participated in an extremely effective interracial coalition with the CTCAG.

The public attention drawn to their situation initiated a process of cognitive “reframing.” Shocked by the implications of chemical contamination in their “dream” homes, residents pondered the factors that had produced their situation. In the process, they experienced a range of emotions common to contaminated communities (Edelstein 1988; Vyner 1988), including anger and feelings of betrayal. At the same time, a sense of injustice emerged out of their interactions with the EPA as the agency began to bring in speakers and to organize workshops and public hearings. In a 1991 interview, the president of the CTCAG observed: “About the second or third meeting, nobody had no trust in the EPA. As a matter of fact, the ATSDR, we didn’t trust any of them, because we found too many discrepancies in what they were saying and doing” (interview 13 July 1991). Numerous residents provided parallel accounts, noting that information “wasn’t ringing true” or was “full of holes.” As one homeowner put it, “the more we would question it, the less answers we were getting” (interview 10 July 1991). Another remarked that “they always send us different faces each time” (interview 19 July 1991). Since the cast of experts changed constantly, it was difficult for the citizens to establish continuity and to perceive accountability. Moreover, the EPA’s bureaucratic rhetoric and reliance on statistical information created a sense of alienation.

In response to dissatisfaction with the agency’s response, the Carver Terrace Community Action Group was formed in March 1988 by three residents—Jeter Steger, Talmadge Cheatham, and J.E. “Sonny” Fields. Formed as an affiliate of FUSE, it benefited from the existing organizational resources and experience of that group, but also had an independent board of directors consisting of Carver Terrace residents. The CTCAG made use of the existing social networks of churches and various professional organizations, as well as informal contacts in the Carver Terrace neighborhood. It relied, like most social movement organizations, on a core group of activists, but gradually developed the power to mobilize almost the entire community for particular events such as public hearings. Unlike many contaminated communities in which leadership roles belong predominantly to women, the CTCAG mobilized both men and women and in some cases, entire families. Although some strong tensions exist to this day between male and female leadership styles and networks, the organization usually presented an effective united front to those outside the community. The CTCAG thus became a formidable opponent of any agencies or individuals who treated residents as second-class citizens.

With the formation of the CTCAG, the community asserted its right to information. For example, according to federal regulations, a health study of Carver Terrace completed by the ATSDR on 10 April 1989 was supposed to be made available to the community immediately. Instead, residents did not discover its existence until almost a year later. This generated a strong sense of betrayal:

They withheld a study that they made, they kept the documents from us for over a year. . . . It was hid, and they were supposed to have it on record at the public library [and] . . . over here at the church . . . but nobody had a copy of it. . . . So that really made people lose a bigger trust in the EPA (interview 13 July 1991).

The CTCAG learned to respond to such instances with public “attention calling” tactics (Marx 1979) such as press conferences and other joint actions. In this particular case, CTCAG/FUSE

solicited a statement from civil rights leader the Reverend Jesse Jackson that linked Carver Terrace's plight with racism and with a national struggle for environmental justice. The resulting publicity successfully pressured agencies to become more responsive.

The Right to a Hearing

A related aspect of environmental justice is the right to a serious hearing when contamination claims are raised. This means not only getting information, but presenting claims in a climate of respect for personal knowledge of a situation. In Carver Terrace, a variety of means for getting a hearing were used. The initial legal strategy was indicative of trust in the justice system. In 1987, 58 families came together to sue the Koppers Company for damages. The first test case was that of Jeter Steger, head deacon of the Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Carver Terrace and a retired school administrator. Mr. Steger was in extremely poor health and his case was taken first because it appeared strongest in terms of health problems related directly to the site and the willingness of medical experts to support his claims. However, pursuing a strategy used elsewhere by corporations against minority plaintiffs, the Koppers corporation's lawyers brought in a doctor from Atlanta to testify that Steger's problems were typical of "hereditary" health problems among blacks and therefore not caused by chemicals. Class dynamics also surfaced in the case; a white male working-class member of the jury stated after the case was over that he simply didn't believe Steger "deserved that kind of money" (interview 13 July 1991). The impact on Carver Terrace was to raise awareness about corporate manipulation of technical, scientific data in the regulatory and legal systems. Disillusionment about getting a fair hearing through the legal system—and over time, through the EPA—laid the groundwork for acceptance of direct action strategies.

In interactions with the EPA, citizens noticed firsthand the discrepancy between the *formal opportunity* to participate presented by the EPA, and the *discounting of their testimony*. Elsewhere I have discussed the political-economic and bureaucratic dynamics that foster this process, as well as the highly ambiguous nature of scientific data regarding chemical contamination (Čapek 1992). A chronically underfunded agency such as the EPA has a stake in "framing" the dangers of contamination as minimal; EPA spokespersons were careful to assert that Carver Terrace was "no Love Canal." Moreover, rules about the practice of science frequently do not permit the kind of "yes" or "no" answers that residents in contaminated communities need to hear. In interviews and in transcripts from public hearings, Carver Terrace residents clearly reacted negatively to a communication process they perceived as not credible or respectful. Their own evidence about their illnesses and firsthand experiences were treated as "anecdotal" (Gillman 1991) or "statistically insignificant," while the EPA's position was upheld by highly technical data which residents were not in a position to dispute. As one resident noted:

They come in here and use all these big numbers, parts per million, and all of that, and like I got up at the meeting and I said show me a group of people that have any idea as to what you are talking about, I say, I want a show of hands in this group tonight that know exactly what he's [the EPA official] talking about. Hey, nobody can hold their hand up, 'cause they don't know (interview 19 July 1991).

Through the efforts of FUSE and CTCAG, some residents educated themselves on a "lay" basis to interpret such numbers and to debunk the agency's arguments. However, they generally felt they were being talked down to by people who had many statistics but no answers and little common sense.

In particular, Carver Terrace residents could not cognitively reconcile their "Superfund" status with the fact that the EPA did not see fit to move them. Although the agency implied that the area around their houses could be cleaned up while residents were still in them, residents logically wondered about what was under their houses, particularly since a portion

of the neighborhood began to flood with chemically contaminated water (interview 10 July 1991; see also EPA Public Hearing on Koppers Texarkana site, 20 July 1988). They also wondered about the dust raised during soil removal. "Soil washing" did not seem a very believable option; as one woman recalled stating to the EPA:

I asked them how long it had been out here, how long had this poison been here. I said, "That many years. If they Lord didn't wash it away, you tell me how *you're* gonna wash it away" (interview 19 July 1991).

Another fact that made no cognitive sense was that although the EPA maintained that contamination levels were low enough for families to continue to live there, residents knew that sampling was being done by contractors in "moon suits." One resident recounted that when the EPA came in to do a house-to-house survey

Boy, that's when some of these people grabbed them and said, "Would you want your wife and kids and mother and father to live out here?" They had to say no. Well then, why are you saying that it's alright for *us* to stay out here? (interview 20 July 1991)

Feeling that they were being "managed" rather than getting a true hearing, residents responded by trying to cut through the technical rhetoric; they attempted to radically simplify and "humanize" the discourse by asking "yes" or "no" questions. Would the officials who declared their neighborhood safe be willing to live there? Would they accept a glass of water to drink? Would Carver Terrace land be as safe as any other land in the city? Officials refused to venture onto this linguistic terrain, and public hearing transcripts are full of their efforts to return the questions to a more quantitative, abstract plane. In turn, this discursive strategy was perceived as evasive and disrespectful, and sent a deeply negative message to Carver Terrace residents.

Residents were even more disturbed when they discovered that an all white community in Conroe, Texas was to receive a federal buyout.

They [EPA] kept telling us, they stood flat-footed and told us "We don't do any relocations." But at the same time they had one at Conroe Texas. O.K., Conroe had the same problem that we had here, and I related it to them that the only difference between the two problems was, one, that it was an all white neighborhood, and this was an all black neighborhood. And the other factor was that the man found the creosote in his *front* yard, and I found it in my *back* yard (interview 13 July 1991).

While Carver Terrace residents are far from unanimously agreed on the extent to which racial discrimination explains their situation, many feel strongly that it has had a major impact. Ironically, the climate for public hearings was inflamed when the EPA appointed an African-American woman to be site supervisor for Carver Terrace. Since she was the main communication link with the community, many residents felt this was a ploy to control them by "one of our own." The situation constituted a double offense since the woman was perceived as having very little independent power or significant information. Instead of convincing people that they were "getting a hearing," it had the reverse effect.

As a consequence of their experiences, residents lost faith in the process of communication with agencies such as the EPA. As the CTCAG organized and pressed for environmental justice, it adopted press conferences, marches, direct encounters with public officials, and letter-writing campaigns as strategies. Each encounter was a lesson in empowerment as well as in structural resistance. In one incident, for example, CTCAG members took a bus trip to Dallas in order to confer with Robert Layton, an official at EPA's Region VI headquarters. Although they announced their intentions in advance, EPA officials were apparently threatened not only by Carver Terrace residents, but by the presence of Greenpeace. As one participant recalled:

At the time that we were supposed to have been there we went up in the building and tried to go upstairs to the EPA office. And every time someone would go through the door they would lock it.

And we got up to about the sixteenth floor, they shut the elevator down, they locked all the doors, they had people lock them upstairs, they had people lock them downstairs . . . and nobody was radical—I mean it was just a peaceful demonstration. All we wanted to do was to just get in to see the people, to try to find some answers (interview 13 July 1991).

Although respondents often laughed about this episode, its message was serious. Participants realized in yet another way that officials appointed to serve them would not be available without a fight. The media, on the other hand, recognizing a “good story” (Gitlin 1980), became an increasingly valuable resource as they reported on the situation, making it possible for Carver Terrace residents to publicize their environmental justice claims and to derive a stronger sense of collective identity as a community.

Democratic Participation and Social Solidarity

Although democratic participation in deciding the future of a community may be a separate issue from social solidarity, most grass-roots groups fighting toxics find that the two are integrally related. After their expectations of “getting justice” from traditional sources such as the city council or the Environmental Protection Agency fail, residents in contaminated communities such as Carver Terrace are often forced to rebuild their networks in order to reclaim the right to take part democratically in public decisions about their lives (Edelstein 1988; Gibbs 1982). This process might include developing “lay networks” to gather information to counterbalance what they believe to be biased science (Brown 1991, 1992; Brown and Mikkelsen 1990) or exchanging protest strategies and experiences with other groups facing similar issues. As a number of theorists have pointed out, protest is a learned activity that depends, in part, on mobilizing or constructing social networks and “cultures of solidarity” (Fantasia 1988; McAdam 1988; Morris 1984; Snow, Zurcher, Eklund-Olson 1980). This is particularly important given the high degree of social conflict that often arises in and around contaminated communities; new forms of solidarity may be necessary to counterbalance the loss of old ones.

In Carver Terrace, social networks had to be constructed both within the community and between communities that shared similar problems. Stimulated by information from FUSE, the Carver Terrace Community Action Group immediately after its formation began to push for a federal buyout and relocation. In the process, CTCAG/FUSE made contact with other groups with similar environmental problems. As a result, in February 1989, a “National Grass-roots Conference on Environmental Justice” took place in Carver Terrace. This was a key episode in constructing an “environmental justice” frame, since the term itself was brought in by national organizers. While it would be a mistake to assume that the national movement “constructed” the local movement, it offered significant expertise and resources and most importantly, perhaps, “named” the problem in a way that made sense to both residents and the national environmental network. Indeed, according to participants, the conference was a success because the accounts offered by national activists—unlike those from the EPA—were consistent with local experiences and efforts by Carver Terrace residents to understand their situation.

The conference brought in prominent activists including Lois Gibbs of Love Canal, New York; Cathy Garula of Centralia, Pennsylvania; Pat Bryant of the Gulf Coast Tenants Association in Louisiana; members of the Highlander Center in Tennessee; Greenpeace; and others (Presley 1989). Held in the Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church adjacent to the Carver Terrace neighborhood (constructed in 1985, the church was a chemical “hot spot” with symbolic value as a meeting place), the meeting proved to be a major catalyst for collective action. The presence of national activists who had struggled with similar problems served to validate the firsthand experiences of Carver Terrace residents. Validation is often one of the most important resources provided by national social movement organizations when they bring their expertise to local settings (Masterson-Allen and Brown 1990). In effect, contamination victims

finally “got a hearing” from others who respected their experiences. Carver Terrace residents were also moved by the willingness of others to support their cause; they learned at the same time that they were part of a larger pattern and faced typical obstacles to democratic participation.

At the conference, Lois Gibbs shared “state of the art” knowledge about protest used by groups all over the country. She observed that of three approaches to social change—scientific, legal, and political—the last proved most effective, particularly when allied with direct action tactics (Presley 1989). Since the “experts” associated with the first two approaches could be bought off, or in any case tended to move very slowly, collective action guaranteed better results. Other seasoned activists presented the same conclusions. The consensus—arrived at through a variety of local encounters—was that reasserting democratic control and achieving “environmental justice” could only be accomplished by adopting a politically conscious, direct action strategy. This was not a new thought for organizers of the CTCAG; as one of them recalled about the group’s founding: “We knew we had to get ourselves an action group. You gotta be noticed. . . . We knew we were gonna have to do some marching. We knew that we would have to adapt probably some of the civil rights movement’s tactics” (interview 20 July 1991). However, prior to the conference no direct action tactics had been used.

The conference resulted in the first collective protest action in Carver Terrace. As a culmination of the gathering, a number of Carver Terrace residents, as well as representatives from FUSE and statewide and national groups, marched through the neighborhood in the rain carrying signs. This action gained broad media coverage. It was an easier action for some to take than for others, and a number of residents remained at home, peering out from behind the curtains.¹⁰ As one participant recalled:

Well, we just didn’t go out and march. We had other people from other states marching with us. And it was quite uncomfortable because I’d never done anything like that . . . but if you get sent someone that’s willing to come in here and spend his time and money to try and help you, and then he comes up with an idea like that, you’re gonna have to accept it. We said—well, we kind of smiled, but we said, yessir, we’re gonna do it (interview 20 July 1991)!

For those who participated, the march was a powerful personal experience which generated solidarity for future action.

As a symbolic action, the march dramatized the environmental justice theme, and presented the national media audience with a morally disquieting image of a group of people trapped in a poisoned setting through no fault of their own. This image was powerful for many reasons. It called up strong associations of the civil rights movement, which, despite some recent “backlash,” has provided a certain baseline for moral expectations. The marchers, too, perceived their struggle as a civil rights issue, a theme highlighted by the grass-roots conference (Presley 1989) and evident in their unusually high degree of social unity compared to other contaminated communities. The “story” presented by Carver Terrace residents was full of injustices, including the poisoning of the land, the neglectful behavior of city and federal authorities, the illnesses and deaths, and the years of hard work lost when property values dropped. In short, it represented the betrayal of a post-civil rights movement dream of building a good community. Moreover, the group looked deserving, respectable, nonviolent, and driven to protest as a last resort, moved by their own grief. As Turner (1969) pointed out, these kinds of qualities are likely to help bystanders construct radical actions as “just protest” that deserves sympathy. The environmental justice frame spoke both to those who felt guilty

10. Some residents viewed direct action as not polite, respectable, or likely to accomplish anything; some working-class activists in particular accused “people with degrees” of having this attitude. Some residents had taken payments from the Koppers Corporation and were afraid to get involved. Many of these individuals joined later, but a few only began to attend CTCAG meetings once the buyout was assured.

that a civil rights action was still taking place in 1989 and those who were preoccupied with extending minority rights only to the “deserving.”

Local reactions were not all sympathetic. Texarkana’s “city fathers” condemned the marchers for spreading negative publicity harmful to the entire city. Residents found these criticisms hypocritical, since the city itself had zoned Carver Terrace residential. The protesters’ belief that they were right to challenge their treatment as second-class citizens was strengthened. As the president of CTCAG remarked, “we’ve had mud thrown back in our faces, and we being tax paying citizens, it’s not asking for too much, *only the things that’s right*” (interview 13 July 1991). The CTCAG subsequently organized a second march, this time on city hall, with even greater participation than the first march. As the CTCAG’s direct action repertoire expanded, it included joint actions with such groups as Texans United, Greenpeace, and the Environmental Congress of Arkansas.

Several other factors linked Carver Terrace to the national environmental movement. In 1990, a Highlander Center Stop Toxic Pollution (STP) school was held in Texarkana. The Highlander Center’s approach over the course of its involvement in the labor, civil rights, and environmental movements has been to link activists directly (Morris 1984). At the STP school, a number of Carver Terrace residents learned to be more outspoken as they heard firsthand about citizen actions in other states, including, for example, Lauri Maddy chaining herself to the Kansas governor’s chair until he gave her a hearing. After sharing some of these stories, one resident said of her protest involvement: “No, I had never did it before but if it took that I was willing to. Sometimes you have to do those things” (interview 10 July 1991). Prominent individuals like Jesse Jackson also forged a link to the the broader environmental movement. His statement of support for the CTCAG’s protest over the withheld ATSDR health study jointly critiqued discrimination based on race and class.

Carver Terrace is an African-American community at risk. . . . It is time that communities such as Carver Terrace stopped paying for pollution that they did not create, time that everyone, regardless of their race or class, be guaranteed the right to breathe free (National Rainbow Coalition 1990).

Insisting on first-class citizenship for residents of contaminated communities, Jackson’s statement embodied the national movement’s emerging environmental justice rhetoric and helped place Carver Terrace on its agenda.

I noted at the outset of this paper that social construction of an environmental justice frame was a two-way process. Through an environmentalist network, the story of Carver Terrace was carried to the national and even international level, where it became a dramatic symbol of the struggle for environmental justice. At one level, this process spread a success story which inspired local grass-roots activism elsewhere. At another level—well documented by resource mobilization theorists—it fulfilled the goals of particular organizations (such as Greenpeace, NTC, and others) to generate powerful images helpful in mobilizing funds and sustaining social activism. Just as Rosa Parks was judiciously selected as the symbol of a budding civil rights movement, Carver Terrace has received selective attention from national organizations due to the level of moral indignation that it generates. At yet another level, local activists have also been recruited into national and international organizational networks. For example, resident Patsy Oliver became vice president of the National Toxics Campaign Fund and travelled to Brazil for the Earth Summit in 1992. She has not, however, been “appropriated”; as an outspoken activist, she and others like her have helped to “construct” the national movement through their participation. Thus, resources and symbols have flowed in both directions, sustaining environmental activism but at the same time generating new frictions.

As Carver Terrace became highly visible due to regional and national publicity, local and federal political officials became markedly more responsive. EPA documents reflect the growing volume of correspondence arriving from prominent political figures concerning Carver Terrace (EPA Administrative Record Index). The Texarkana, Texas city council eventually

passed a resolution supporting a federal buyout for Carver Terrace. A major coup for the residents occurred when Texas Congressman Jim Chapman publicly espoused their cause after a massive letter-writing campaign. Among other things, residents convinced Chapman that a buyout would be less expensive and more effective than the cleanup remedy proposed by the EPA. Chapman spearheaded the successful effort to win a Congressional override of the EPA's decision not to relocate residents. In November 1990, President Bush signed the appropriations bill, allocating five million dollars for the buyout. Since the EPA numbers, criteria, and scientific data had not changed, this action can only be attributed to the citizens' ability to organize around the "environmental justice" frame in a pragmatic and morally convincing way.

The Right to Compensation

A final environmental justice claim is the right to compensation from those who have polluted a particular neighborhood. In many contaminated communities, getting satisfactory compensation is the most difficult struggle of all. The major social actors involved in compensation are the polluting corporations themselves and the federal government. Corporations generally do not acknowledge fault, and if pressed, prefer to engage in out-of-court settlements. As a chronically underfunded agency, the EPA under Presidents Reagan and Bush was unable to back up its authority to conduct Superfund site cleanups and to effectively regulate industry. Indeed, in the past several years the U.S. government has played down the severity of contamination in places like Love Canal, New York and Times Beach, Missouri, stating that the buyouts there were the result of an "overreaction."

In this climate of structural resistance to compensation, winning a federal buyout and relocation was a major victory. Clearly, the social and moral pressure generated by CTCAG/FUSE and the national movement for environmental justice produced a dramatic reversal in Carver Terrace residents' fate. At the same time, the EPA, mandated to work through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, has been a reluctant party to the relocation, as has Beazer East, the corporation which bought out Koppers in 1988 (Environmental Protection Agency 1992). Although funds were designated in November 1990, the process has moved slowly. In the meantime, the psychological cost of staying in Carver Terrace—as is common in contaminated communities (Edelstein 1988)—was very high. The wait was aggravated by yet another flood in March 1992. The first handful of residents moved out of Carver Terrace in the early summer of 1992. By the end of 1992, approximately 25 families remained.

The buyout has been ambiguous in other ways as well. Residents lost some of the solidarity built up in the community when they had to negotiate their buyouts individually with limited information. By law, they were entitled to information about particular houses and neighborhoods used as a basis for establishing their appraisals (although they were not allowed to see the actual appraisals), their property was to be evaluated without taking contamination into account, room for negotiation was required, and the process was not to be threatening or coercive. However, dismay at the low prices offered was matched by a strongly negative reaction to perceived coercion (communicated both in writing and in interpersonal negotiations) and to breaches of some of the law's other requirements.

The dissatisfaction in the community led to a partial split in the CTCAG. The president of the organization, J.E. "Sonny" Fields, led the way in accepting the buyout process. He was joined by others who felt that under the circumstances the monetary offers were the best they would get. Some also felt that outside organizations were exploiting the situation to promote their own agendas. However, resident and CTCAG member Patsy Oliver—affiliated with the NTCF and with a variety of organizations formed around the issue of environmental racism—publicly challenged the buyout process and helped arrange a community forum, mediated by the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, in Dallas on 26 June 1992.

The forum brought together the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the EPA, Carver Terrace residents, representatives of the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice (whose study in 1987 was the first to document "environmental racism" in the United States [Lee 1987]), the NAACP, the Panos Institute, and the Texas Network. These organizations' contribution to monitoring the federal buyout of a minority community revealed the growing visibility of the movement against environmental racism. The forum belied the EPA's claim that since 70 people had signed buyout agreements, they were satisfied. Residents offered detailed testimony about perceived intimidation, an inability to receive information, and a sense of loss aggravated by the low bids for their homes which made them fearful about finding comparable housing. The public record reflects this testimony as well as claims that due to racial discrimination the buyout was conducted differently than it would have been in a white community. The forum slightly raised residents' economic bargaining power, and a number of the groups involved are monitoring the "paper trail" marking the expenditure of the five million dollars appropriated for the relocation.

While the Carver Terrace buyout allowed residents to gradually escape their "toxic trap," it also brought the disheartening loss of an actual community of neighbors and social networks rooted in a particular location and built up over decades. Although a small number of Carver Terrace residents hoped to relocate together, the obstacles (including availability of land, cost, and agreement on location) have proved insurmountable. In the end, there is no adequate compensation for the loss of a functioning community. Even as residents approved the EPA's decision to raze the houses of Carver Terrace and to close it forever to residential usage, they also assented to the literal razing of their history. While at one level environmental justice is achieved, at another level community is destroyed.

Conclusions

This paper's purpose was to conceptually clarify the emergent environmental justice frame as a claims-making activity, and to explore the connection between this frame and the process of mobilizing for change in a particular community situated within the field of a broader social movement. Drawing on theoretical tools offered by a social constructionist perspective, supplemented by insights from resource mobilization theory and an awareness of power and conflict dynamics, I have traced links between local and national groups in constructing and diffusing the environmental justice frame. I have also explored this frame's grounding in the everyday experiences of residents in contaminated communities as well as in a broader, legitimizing "civil rights" culture. The evidence supports the conclusion that the outcome in Carver Terrace was determined not by objective scientific evidence (which is at best ambiguous), but by a social movement repertoire that rested on effective symbolic framing.

The value of this case resides both in its typicality and its uniqueness. Many of the social circumstances surrounding Carver Terrace are representative of other contaminated communities: the joint culpability of corporations and local governments in producing contaminated sites; the experience of residents in contaminated neighborhoods of being ignored and stigmatized until they form social movements; and residents' need to convince not only themselves, but also crucial outsiders of the injustice of their situations in order to achieve remedies. An in-depth look at this case, therefore, provides insights into a more general social process of frame construction in the antitoxics movement.

Carver Terrace is also exceptional, not only in getting its claims addressed through economic compensation and relocation, but in doing so as a minority community. As Bullard and Wright (1986) point out, black "Love Canals" have tended to be overlooked, not the least by the mainstream environmental movement. It is precisely for this reason that many such

communities—a large proportion of which are in the South—are taking part in an emerging movement for environmental justice that strongly accentuates the “environmental racism” claim. This new strand of grass-roots activism is altering the terrain of environmental movements in the United States and globally. Indeed, it is possible that in mobilizing grass-roots support around the claim of environmental racism, an independent frame will be generated that not only elaborates on, but challenges the existing environmental justice frame. Situated in this new terrain, Carver Terrace is significant not only as a federal buyout and relocation of a minority community, but also as a marker of the emergence of environmental racism as a major new component of environmental social movements in the United States.

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