Environmental Injustice

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Course

Date

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Research that Boedeker and colleagues published on *BioMed Central Journal* last year revealed that about 740,000 unintentional acute pesticide poisoning (UAPP) occur annually, and 7446 of the cases result in fatality in 141 countries that they covered (2020). The researchers estimate that UAPP results in 385 million cases globally and 11,000 ends in fatalities. The statistics imply that 860 million people from low-income households (primarily farmers) get poisoned by pesticides. These findings suggested a significant increase in poisoning from the observation that Jennings and colleagues made in 2003 that 50,000 people die annually from pesticide poisoning, and a majority of them are from developing nations. Disproportional environmental-health impacts affect the minority, and lower-income communities in the world is a concept identified as environmental injustice. The following is a case study of environmental injustice in a proposal to build Claiborne facility, a highly polluting uranium plant in Homer, Louisiana.

**Question 1: Motivation for Selecting Homer**

Many parties might have selected Homer as a site for locating the uranium-enrichment facility for various reasons. According to the city policies, the city and local officials had declared the area as an Enterprise Zone, meaning it required economic affirmative action programs (Payne, 2021). The declaration was a means for attracting investors into the zone to revive its economic growth. The officials had declared Homer an Enterprise Zone because they wanted investors to locate their industries near black communities. The assumption was that the blacks, as a minority and a poor community, would not offer substantial opposition to the industrialization plans. The community would also not be powerful enough and lacked adequate access to resources for countering the industrialization plan.

Some of the residents perceived the situation of the uranium enrichment plan as an icebreaker. They believed that the investment would awaken Homer's economy by providing jobs to the local community. Many people would work in their neighborhoods and end the tedious and expensive journeys they make to work in the affluent cities. Other residents considered the location of the industry in Homer a perpetuation of environmental racism. The direction would expose the blacks to radioactive waste that would deteriorate their health gradually.

The school system personnel were optimistic that the new investment would bring innumerable gains to the community. According to the existing local government policies, the Louisiana Energy Service would part with millions of dollars to the county school board as a one-time parish use tax on equipment. The public service preferred Homer as a suitable location for the Claiborne plant due to tax incentives. The local government policies exempted industries in Enterprise Zone for ten years and later required an annual flat rate of $8 million in taxes (Payne, 2021). The revenue would almost double the city's tax bracket.

**Question 2: Reasons for Outsiders’ Interests**

The enormous waste channeled towards the black communities in Homer attracted outsiders like the environmental activists to the investment proposal. The Claiborne plant was championed as a job creation opportunity, but the proposers did not specify the plant's magnitude of waste generation. Its operations would result in the emission of toxic radioactive wastes to blacks' already impoverished and neglected communities. This implies the Homer communities would be exposed to radioactive waste for the rest of their lives, risking their health outcomes, reducing their life qualities and life expectancy. Further research on the proposal reveals that the resources like a road connecting African-American communities of Forest Grove and Center Springs had already been closed to pave the way for the plant's construction (Payne, 2021). The motivation for job creation that renders support for the plant from some residents was only a bait. The entire plant would engage a few tens or hundreds of the local population, leaving thousands of others jobless as before. Despite the plant would require sophisticated skills, most of which could not be sourced locally due to systemic marginalization of the black communities leading to relatively low education competencies compared to dominant communities. Based on these facts, the environmentalists sought to create awareness to the local communities on the health and environmental hazards that the plant possessed. They aimed at gathering support and lobbying the local authority to prevent the Claiborne plant from establishing in Homer.

The proposed plant location in Homer attracted interest from many stakeholders due to the city's demographics. The dominant population is the minority black that the government greatly underserves. The racial segregation of this city makes it ideal for the perpetuation of environmental racism and injustice. For example, Jennings et al. observed that despite black neighborhoods being the minority, they have the most landfills accounting for about 15 out of 17 and 6 out of 8 incinerators (2003). Homer was facing increasing environmental health risks due to environmental racism.

**Question3: Impacts of the Facility**

The Claiborne facility would not benefit the minority group of blacks but single out the group to carry an environmental burden of pollution. The parent company, Louisiana Energy Service (LES), establishing the Claiborne facility, is owned by a European firm Urenco (Nuclear Information and Resource Services, 2003). The company's operational strategy involves identifying poor rural communities to invest in and carry the blunt end of expansionist nuclear plans. The predominant race of the residents of Homer would perpetuate environmental injustice in siting the facility near the blacks and poor communities of Homer.

The assumption that the Claiborne facility would create employment for the black communities in Homer is negligible, as Payne held that it would create 400 jobs in the construction phase and only 180 long-term job positions (2021). Little evidence exists on the facility's impact on Homer's economic growth because, like many companies, the facility would repatriate the profits to the parent company owned outside the state. Tax benefits after the tax break of ten years would not contribute significantly to the community growth, as evidenced in the lack of commitment by city officials to improve the black neighborhoods (Payne, 2021). The voluminous impacts of the Claiborne facility would be in exacerbating health hazards and social injustice caused by toxic and discriminative waste disposal. These challenges will add to the existing marginalization of the community by exposing the community to health risks, increasing their expenditure on health, and reducing productivity and life expectancy.

**Question 4: Informed Consent**

A community at large cannot give informed consent since an entity (a person) is not the community but a representative of a community and its individual. Therefore, the Homer community could not give informed consent for the project's initiation. The actual individual rather than a community would take the project's risks, which requires individual consent. Community consent would differ from individual consent because varied opinions would be collected (Molyneux & Bull, 2016). Individual consent is a form of voting, and people can either give or reject to give their consent based on their interpretation of an issue. For example, if a majority of the people in the Homer community declined to give their consent on the project, it would lack prerequisite support leading to its lack of implementation.

Full disclosure is relevant information to the public to enable full participation in decision-making. It is a form of transparency where stakeholders get full information on the benefits and risks of a decision (Jennings et al., 2003). The disclosure of the positives and negatives of the Claiborne facility would enable the Homer residents to make an informed decision on the facility and its investment plan. The most probable direction would be a decline from the community from supporting the establishment proposal due to the foreseeable health risks like exposure to radioactive wastes.

**Question 5: Industrial Growth/ Environmental Racism**

The situation was environmental racism rather than industrial growth. Industrial growth is uniformly distributed and does not violate critical ethical considerations. The proposal for locating the Claiborne plant in Homer violated the ethical rights of the black communities, qualifying it as environmental racism. Firstly, the communities did not have informed consent because they were provided with half-truths about the plant's impact (Jennings et al., 2003). The investors violated the community’s autonomy of deciding if or not they would want the plant established in their community. The situation violated the ethical principle of equality and equal protection of all people against environmental-health threats (Jennings et al., 2003). The city policymakers designated Homer neighborhoods as enterprise zones while leaving out the white neighborhoods, an outright environmental injustice. The policy was not in line with the ethical principle of distributive justice, which would have presented other cities, including the affluent ones, as potential locations for the plant.

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