Sustainability at the Intersection of Environment and Equity
Sustainability

What’s your definition?

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Equity vs. Equality

- In 2014 Berkeley, CA was the most unequal city in the Bay Area
  - Gap between rich and poor was the widest according to the Gini Coefficient, which measures income inequality
- Why might this be?
Equity

- How many of you are first generation college students?
- **Social mobility** - an indicator of equity
Cascading Impacts of Climate Change

- **Rising temperatures**
  - Rising sea levels
    - Submergence of habitated coastal areas
  - Increased severity of storms and hurricanes
    - Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico
  - Increased drought
    - CA fires of 2017
    - Crop failure
      - Farmer suicide
  - Increased rainfall
    - Increased flooding
      - Damage to property
      - Disease
  - Increased heat waves
    - Death of heat stroke

- **Refugees**
Two Case Studies in Environmental Justice:

1. Hurricane Katrina (New Orleans, Louisiana)
2. Lead Poisoning of Water (Flint, Michigan)
Hurricane Katrina (New Orleans, Louisiana)

- Bush Administration
- August, 2005: Katrina formed over the Bahamas
- New Orleans at particular risk - avg. elevation 6 feet under sea level and completely surrounded by water
- Day before hurricane hit: 80% population evacuated, 10% sheltered in Superdome, 10% remained in homes
- Many levees along the Mississippi River/Lake Pontchartrain, Lake Borgne collapsed below design height
- By the time Katrina struck it had already been raining heavily for several hours
- Eventually 80% of the city was under some quantity of water
Response to Katrina

- Coast Guard rescued some 34,000 people
- Ordinary citizens commandeered sailboats and delivered food to their neighbors
- Federal government unprepared; Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) took days to establish operations and even then did not have a sound plan
- Federal officials including President George W. Bush unaware of the extent of damage and emergency
- Poor desperate people trapped in the city without a car, had nowhere to go
- Some tried to cross a pedestrian bridge into the suburb of Gretna, but were forced to turn back by police officers with shotguns
- ~2000 deaths
Reflection

- New Orleans was NOT built for climate resiliency
- Evacuation was NOT an option for all residents of the city, namely poor African Americans
- The federal/local government FAILED to support those left behind when in dire need of assistance
Lead Poisoning of Water (Flint, Michigan)

- Flint: a majority Black city, where 40% of the people live in poverty
“[Dept. of Environmental Quality] and [Dept. of Community Health] feel that some in Flint are taking the very sensitive issue of children’s exposure to lead and trying to turn it into a political football claiming the departments are underestimating the impacts on the populations and particularly trying to shift responsibility to the state.”

-Governor Chief of Staff, Dennis Muchmore in an email
Telltale Signs of Environmental Injustice

- Communities involved are poor and/or majority communities of color
- Communities are often not consulted by local governments/corporations before environmentally detrimental infrastructure is built
- Community environmental and health concerns/grievances are disregarded or downplayed by local governments/corporations
- Communities have low resilience to climate change-related natural disasters, and receive low-prioritization by government on relief efforts/aid
- Communities impacted by climate change are not represented among policy-makers, resulting a lack of commitment to aggressive climate policy
- Capitalist approach used by government/corporations towards human lives
Twenty Minutes to Research:

1. Chevron Refinery (Richmond, California)
2. Dakota Access Pipeline
3. Hurricane Maria (Puerto Rico)
4. Louisiana’s Cancer Alley (St. Gabriel, Louisiana)

Report back with:
- Demographics of location
- Summary
  - What happened?
  - What was the government response?
  - What resiliency efforts (if any) from the community?
- Winners
- Losers
What can you do? [see resources on handout]

● Make conversations about climate/environmental justice a part of the culture
  ○ Art
  ○ Music

● Learn how to communicate climate/environmental justice
  ○ Tell it like a story
  ○ Make it relatable and applicable

● Make your government work for you
  ○ Use your vote (not just nationally, but locally)
  ○ Write to your local congressman/representative regarding the issue/policy you care about
  ○ Attend local rallies and public forums

● Learn what you can do to help in the revitalization of vulnerable communities
“So much of the motivation for even whether or not you believe in climate change, let alone decide you should do something about it comes down to your ability to identify with others and the suffering that they’re going through...How to communicate the impacts of climate change when it’s not being felt by everyone everywhere equally? **Whether people say I don’t believe in it, or it’s there but it’s not bad...it won’t hurt us, we can’t wait for climate change to be a rich white person’s problem before we do something about it...**”

-Warm Regards Podcast
Earth Day Showcase Themes/Topics

- How to depict the suffering of these people? How to tell their story through your art?
  - New Orleans, Flint, Richmond, Dakotas, Puerto Rico, and Louisiana

- How to depict a dystopian society?

- How to critique the government on its failure to protect its most vulnerable people?

- Important concepts: sustainability, privilege, equity, social mobility, environmental justice, vulnerable communities
Sources:

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- Warm Regards Podcast: People Power