

To the Rutgers Law Community:

In 2016, the same year that 195 countries signed the landmark Paris Climate Agreement, the residents of Uniontown, Alabama were left asking their leaders why 4 million cubic yards of hazardous coal ash had been dumped into their home. For a decade, the Federal government has advertised this community as a storage site for other communities attempting to rid themselves of the toxic arsenic, mercury, and lead found in coal ash. As of 2018, the residents' complaints have been dismissed by the state and Federal government. 90% of Uniontown's residents are African-American and live below the poverty line.

The society that declared toxic waste is no longer toxic by virtue of its disposal into a predominantly African-American community is the same society that deprived George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, David McAtee, and countless others of their right to life. As environmentalists, we can often be so focused on the broad, sweeping fixes to the climate crisis that we often forget to ask whether all our fellow human beings are even able to attain the same, basic quality of life in the present that is necessary to pursue a brighter future. The reality is that there is no point to clean air if a police officer can deprive you of your breath based on the color of your skin. There is no point to mass electric vehicle ownership if every police traffic stop could be your last. There is no point to protecting endangered bird species if the act of bird-watching-while-black warrants a 9-1-1 call. There is no point to transit-oriented development if centuries of economic and social policy ensure you can only afford to live in a city with lead pipes.

The Rutgers Environmental Law Society stands in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, the Association of Black Law Students, and all the members of our community who are facing this injustice together. Environmental justice, though without a uniform definition, requires us to call upon all of the levers of power and law to address endemic racism, which has been quietly injected into society through environmental policies and regulations. At its core is the pursuit of justice. The justice we seek for George and Ahmaud and Breonna and David is the same justice we seek for Uniontown, Alabama. If we care about the planet - if we care about leaving behind a brighter future for the next generation - then we must seek to ensure all human beings are equally heard in this society that would rather move a problem out-of-sight than address its roots.

By now, you have seen countless avenues to donate and participate in this national crisis. Even more simply, we will make space for our friends and community-members to grieve during this time. For those of us at the levers of power, now is the time to lift up the voices of the marginalized and provide our platforms to them.

The task before us is as monumental as the climate crisis, but we know we are all up to it.

Standing in Solidarity,

Rutgers Environmental Law Society