

**Sociological Imagination: Divergent Milieus**

C&E SOC. 140: Introduction to Community & Environmental Sociology

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There is a pattern of victimization for women or minority groups due to a lack in access to resources, for instance “during Hurricane Katrina, women were less likely to have a car or a driver’s license,” resulting in the inability to flee from the hurricane (Pellow & Brehm, 2013, p. 239). The inability to participate in a public process will be discussed later. In this essay, I will demonstrate key terms and concepts used in sociology to better understand the social and environmental problems within a community. I will concentrate on women and people of color, two commonly marginalized groups. The general topic considers environmental policy.

“[T]he sociological imagination works is between ‘the personal troubles of milieu<sup>1</sup>’ and ‘the public issues of social structure,’” (Mills, 1959, p. 4).

Sociologist should imagine a variety of concerns within a community, express those divergent views, thus encouraging decisionmakers to use authority in a fair and just way. Since C. Wright Mills introduced the concept known as the “Sociological Imagination,” in his 1959 piece *The Promise*, sociologists increasingly stipulate specific solutions to complex problems, addressing a wide variety of concerns. Intersectionality aside, women and Blacks represent two distinct milieus; yet both groups have been adversely impacted due to a social structure. According to a 2013 report from the *Annual Review of Sociology*, “the material impact of social inequality is reflected in the highly uneven distribution of environmental harm and privileges in

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<sup>1</sup> \ mēl- 'yü (noun) the physical or social setting in which something occurs or develops: Environment. (Webster’s)

societies around the globe,” this is the focus of environmental justice (EJ) (Pellow & Brehm, 2013, p. 235).

“Relegating people of different races to different places artificially skews exposure to toxic hazards,” (Lipsitz, 2011, p. 7).

In the Fall issue of the 2018 *Michigan Sociological Review*, a brief recap of environmental studies precedes a case study of the 2016 water crisis in Flint, Michigan. This event led many residents, majority Black, to utilize poisonous tap water. Sociology has concentrated effort in the use of precise language, and thorough fact-finding. Because of dedicated environmentalists like Dr. Paul Mohai, a Professor at the University of Michigan, the 42<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States “Bill Clinton signed the Environmental Justice Executive Order 12898 calling on all the agencies of the federal government, not just the EPA, to consider environmental justice consequences in their rulemaking,” in February 1994 (Mohai, 2018, p. 15). During an environmental summit in 1991 Co-Convened by Mohai, the seventeen principals of EJ was first publicly introduced. Mohai and others wrote letters to and facilitated meetings with decisionmakers regarding their work. Their work exposed a nationwide trend, environmental policy’s disproportionate and negative impact on Black communities.

“In 2000, Professor Robert Kuehn, former Director of the Environmental Law Clinic at Tulane University, conducted a comprehensive review of ... the various aspects of environmental justice,” (Mohai, 2018, p. 22).

Professor Kuehn’s framework for discussing EJ encompasses four key areas: distributive justice, procedural justice, corrective justice, and social justice. This language continues to manifest in dialogs between the public and decisionmakers. In the case of Flint, the largest

injustice was procedural after an emergency manager was appointed. The manager decided to change water pipelines for fiscal purposes disregarding health and safety needs. This subverted the public's right to participate in a public process as the manager had sole authority to act, causing long term health consequences for the mostly Black community.

### References

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