

# BOOKS OF NOTE

## CHRONICLES FROM THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FRONTLINE

by J. Timmons Roberts and Melissa M. Toffolon-Weiss; Cambridge University Press, New York, 2001; 279 pp., \$59.95 cloth (ISBN 0-521-66062-9), \$19.95 paper (ISBN 0-521-66900-6)

**G**rassroots struggles against exposure to hazardous waste in African American communities characterize the environmental justice movement. These struggles communicate important lessons for the future of environmental organizations regarding coalition-building, the importance of a commitment to equality, the ability to accept the leadership of low-income women of color in strategic alliances, and the fundamental definition of "environment"—where we live, work, play, and learn. *Chronicles from the Environmental Justice Frontline* tells the story of four struggles in Louisiana, detailing the complex combinations of players in each drama as well as their motivations and goals, and using contemporary and historical documentation and first-person accounts.

Chapter one introduces environmental justice as a national and international issue. Chapter two describes, in vivid detail, the roots of environmental injustice in Louisiana. The next four chapters outline case studies in environmental justice, including the politics of siting a uranium enrichment facility, which the authors claim to be the first environmental justice judgment; the Shintech PVC factory case, which served as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's environmental justice test case; the Cajuns' and Houma Indians' fight against an oil-field waste

dump in Grand Bois, Louisiana; and the stress and politics of living on a Superfund site in the context of New Orleans's Agricultural Street housing development. Chapter seven discusses the backlash against the environmental justice movement and the implications of environmental justice for the future.

Overall, this book is an excellent chronicle of the maelstrom of environmental injustices and racism in Louisiana. The authors consciously construct their work to ensure maximum authenticity of voice through the generous use of interesting quotes, attention to detail, and historical research. In addition, they broach sensitive topics, including the exclusion that some European Americans feel from participation in the strategies and leadership of the movement.

These topics are essential, although potentially combustible, for the formation of deliberative dialogs between different stakeholder groups.

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## BETTER ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY STUDIES: HOW TO DESIGN AND CONDUCT MORE EFFECTIVE ANALYSES

by Lawrence E. Susskind, Ravi K. Jain, and Andrew O. Martyniuk; Island Press, Washington, D.C., 2001; 187 pp., \$50.00 cloth (ISBN 1-55963-870-2), \$25.00 paper (ISBN 1-55963-871-0)

**T**his short book asserts that the conventional approach to environmental policy analyses "virtually guarantees controversy." According to the authors, the conventional approach typically entails defining an issue, finding an analyst or consultant, and producing or locating information (often complex

and scientific) to support previously held positions. As such, the conventional approach serves to reinforce existing cleavages in political debate rather than open up new avenues for decision makers. "Such studies," the authors conclude, "are usually doomed to having a minimal impact on policy making."

The authors recommend five policy studies that they believe to be particularly successful in (re)defining policy problems so they are useful to decision makers. The authors present a full range of decision alternatives, motivate institutional change, enable stakeholder participation, legitimize a particular course of action, and ensure adequate resources for policy implementation. A brief review of the five cases is followed by a discussion of six "tasks" argued to be important to successful environmental policy studies: selecting and using experts, shaping the relationship of study sponsors and experts, choosing the right "institutional auspices," reviewing results, learning from policy studies, and setting the ongoing policy research agenda. The volume concludes with two short chapters on methods of policy research and one on international perspectives.

Although the book identifies a critically important subject, it is long on description and short on analysis and consequently is unlikely to convince a skeptic that environmental policy analyses can in fact be better. It is even less likely to convey how to design and conduct better analyses. The book falls well short of its own high standards for producing policy analyses that make a difference.

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