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Land, Belonging, and Relationality

Black & Indigenous Environmental Justice Activism in the Twin Cities

Angelina (AJ) Papakee

Statement of Purpose

This essay is a culmination of my personal experience as an Afro-Indigenous person while living in the Twin Cities for the past few years. As a descendant of the Meskwaki Nation of Iowa and of African-American/Black ancestry, the formation of my identity has shaped the way I approach my research in views on culture, relationality, and past/present histories. I was often taught in my youth to attempt to separate these identities and communities, to not draw many parallels between the two. But, in my development in this new space, I have found the communities in the Twin Cities to be a perfect example of how Black and Indigenous peoples cannot be separated and we must work together in order to liberate ourselves and our people. Between being at Macalester during the George Floyd protests in 2020 and other subsequent protests, activism, and community action, I have found a passion for these connections and honed in on these real-life issues. The Twin Cities is filled with an immense amount of knowledge and history that has brought me to where I am now. I want to acknowledge and thank those that have been a guide during my time here and have welcomed me into their communities, knowledges, and stories: thank you to Kiri Sailiata in American Studies at Macalester who has been my advisor during my time here and has been such a solid figure; and thank you to Lisa, Prof Velez, and those at LPCP.

Keywords: Environmental Justice, activism, Land-based pedagogy, kinship, Indigenous knowledges, decolonization, abolition.

I: Introduction

While living in the Twin Cities for the past three years, the knowledge I have accumulated about inter-community relations and activism has immensely reconditioned my perspective and direction. Between my involvement in this activist work, academic research, and personal knowledge, I found my internship at Lower Phalen Creek Project in Saint Paul, a useful site for my passion directed toward cultural sites and Indigenous education. In this essay, I implement the theory and praxis on knowledge production to apply to my case studies of the Community Members for Environmental Justice (CMEJ), a Black-led environmental justice organization based in Minneapolis, and Lower Phalen Creek Project (LPCP), a Dakota-led environmental justice non-profit organization. I employ this combination in my methodology for asking the questions: *what does land revitalization and resurgence look like for Indigenous communities and how does this provide a vision for the future of our communities? Where do Black and Indigenous perspectives converge, and how does this convergence transform and lead community activism?* I focus in on Waziyatawin's *What Does Justice Look Like?*, Jim Rock's *Wakan Tipi and Indian Burial Mounds*, Leanne Simpson's *As We Have Always Done*, alongside the works of Robert Bullard, David N. Pellow, and Hōkūlani K. Aikau and Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez to delve further into how we relate to one another through space, place, and time. I also question how we can employ terminology such as belonging, community, and relationality through understanding our histories and how they contextualize our present-day realities. I advocate for the co-created future we want for our communities and envision the necessary steps toward this. I find that these larger movements to rename and restore/re-story sacred sites exist not only within the historical context but are also embedded within the people's relationship to land and the land's relationship to the people.

I first began uncovering this through my Mellon Mays Fellowship research, initially examining excerpts on tribal sovereignty in Meskwaki Tribal history, culture, and kinship, including critically analyzing matrilineality as a function of blood quantum. Here, I found mirroring discussions between larger colonial projects and how settler ideology has embedded itself into tribal governments and relationality. I then took this analysis to a broader context of Black and Native histories, specifically researching and examining

land removal in relation to boarding schools. I found that, although settler colonialism is a long and never-ending project/process, there are lights in our resiliency between both communities, and as an academic within American and Indigenous studies, my goal is to uncover how we can work outside of these forces.¹

In between this time of self-discovery and academic research, I found myself reckoning with the larger Twin Cities context and the ongoing protests nearby. I participated in protest in response to the murders of George Floyd (May 2020), Daunte Wright (April 2021), and Winston Smith (June 2021).² I also was looped into other Indigenous community work in the Twin Cities, particularly the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center where I participated in a year-and-a-half project called the *Mindimooyenh Project for Young Native Women for Resistance* between March 2021 to May 2022. This project encompassed my activism work through the ways in which we discussed and created a storyboard of Indigenous women's resistance stories as I once again took my positionality between Black and Native activism and applied this to resistance. Here is where I found myself welcomed into the Twin Cities Indigenous community and sought to better understand the land I am occupying by being in better relation to the people and acknowledging its history. I also began an internship with MN350, a climate justice organization based in Minneapolis in Spring 2021, forming my focus on environmental justice. Although grateful for the opportunity to intern there, I found myself in a majority white space of activists who advocated for Indigenous rights and sovereignty in relation to the Stop Line 3 Movement but had different views than I

¹ Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism & the Elimination of the Native* (Kurrajong NSW: Subversion Press, 2006), 1-2.

² George Perry Floyd Jr. was a 46-year old Black man arrested outside a convenience store in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020 from allegedly using a counterfeit \$20 bill. Police Officer Derek Chauvin held him down on his neck using his knee for 9 minutes 29 seconds until he was unconscious and not breathing, a video widely circulated online. Protests in Minneapolis immediately ensued, with phrases heard across the country as part of the Black Lives Matter Movement.

Daunte Wright was a 20-year old Black man fatally shot in Brooklyn Center, MN on April 11, 2021 during a traffic stop. Officer Kimberly Potter said she thought she used her taser on him, but drew her handgun and fired. Protests also instantly ensued outside of the Brooklyn Center precinct, connected to George Floyd's murder and trial of Derek Chauvin.

Winston Smith was fatally shot by sheriff deputies on a U.S. Marshal Service task force in June 3, 2021 in Uptown Minneapolis during apparent arrest. There was no body camera released, but conspiracies formed based on the excessive use of force and sheriffs during his arrest. During protests after his murder, on June 13, Deona Erickson died after a man drove his SUV at a high speed into a crowd of protestors outside the original murder site.

did on how to highlight Indigenous activism and work alongside these pre-existing movements. I felt isolated in this experience and sought to do similar environmental justice work, but alongside Indigenous leaders who I could find better mutuality with. This has brought me to the forefront of this capstone, which will include historical context in both Indigenous and Black history, Environmental Justice history, and my two case studies, concluding in a reflective stance on positionality and Indigenous/Black futurisms.

II: Parallels in Indigenous Sovereignty & Black History

The struggle for sovereignty and self-determination in Indigenous communities dates back centuries and can be defined as the general struggle for land. As Indigenous peoples, we value our spiritual connections to the lands we originate from and desire to connect back to these histories, despite past removal and ongoing colonial forces keeping us away. Movements for self-determination have been described in the ways in which we must have a say in determining decisions that affect us and our people.³ Indigenous communities withhold the fact that our ancestral knowledges are always within us, we simply have to reach back. We never forget our original instructions or past generations' knowledges, we just must make the personal journey to remember. The land itself is seen as a source of learning: culturally, spiritually, and physically. These land-based pedagogies and epistemologies are tools seen to decolonize education and recreate knowledge as stewardship for the land as per our original instructions. Since a facet of settler colonialism is to move and displace Indigenous peoples, our reconnection and reconstruction of history means reconnection for every aspect of Native life. One key strategy in reversing this is through Indigenous placenames to gain back control over the erasure of sites or places. Indigenous activism has a great portion of focusing on including Indigenous toponyms, often not found in signage, maps, or such, but renaming is a critical aspect of including Indigenous presence as a form of reclamation. This embraces and strengthens these connections through these land-based pedagogies as based upon traditional knowledges. As Leanne Simpson describes, "individuals...existence is ultimately

³ Professor Lowitja O'Donoghue, "Self-Determination," The Australian Human Rights Commission, n.d., <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/self-determination>.

dependent upon intimate relationships of reciprocity, humility, honesty and respect with all elements of creation, including plants and animals.”⁴

Relationality can also be defined through relation(ship)s with others, specifically the long histories between Black and Indigenous communities. The connections in our histories are too often concluded through the ways in which we have placed violence on each other in formation and projection from settler colonialism. For example, it is often referenced that the Five Civilized Tribes of the Southern US (Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminoles) had slaves.⁵ Or, on the flip side, the Buffalo Soldiers—who were Black Civil War veterans—worked alongside settlers during westward expansion to remove Indigenous peoples from their ancestral homelands onto reservations.⁶ These narratives do not substantiate the solidarity between both parties, such as in Maroon communities, where escaped slaves hid among Indigenous communities, but instead, continue to perpetuate settler narrative of divide and conquer where we are left fighting over crumbs and arguments for which community had it worse.⁷ We see that the settler concept of manifest destiny has quite literally manifested itself into the ways we view ourselves and conceptualize our communities. Since we only view the facts that the enslavement of Black people and genocide of Indigenous peoples are the foundations of the United States, we have to instead question this effect in our minds and interactions in the ways we play into oppression Olympics.⁸ I argue that both sides have been deeply dispossessed by the United States, but both have deeply embedded connections to the land. Although U.S. Black people no longer have a direct connection to our ancestral homelands, we have found home, and community, and formed our own culture in the U.S. In collaboration with Indigenous peoples, we can align ourselves through sympathizing with each others’ struggles and work together in how we find ourselves in this space we all reside in together.

⁴ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Brantford, Ontario: W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library, 2019), 10.

⁵ Kyle T. Mays, *Afro-Indigenous History of the United States* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2021), xv.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Mays, *Afro-Indigenous History of the United States*, xviii.

⁸ Andrea Smith, “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy,” *Feminist Theory Reader*, 2020, pp. 141-147, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003001201-18>, 66.

Black scholar Tiffany Lethabo King's work supports this narrative in her book, *Otherwise Worlds* through discussing this relationship with our pasts pre- and post-settler colonialism. In this series of essays, she ties Black and Indigenous scholars' work to question the complexities of this relationship instead of presuming an answer for how to co-relate between communities. She describes this in terms of incommensurability, which asserts these conversations often come with a presumed commonality or relationship between the two parties. King instead suggests: "Therefore, organizing requires us to address our full realities where we have uniqueness, along with commonality, in order to live against the constant disasters of settler colonialism and anti-Blackness."⁹ This provides insight into this large intricacy and complex mapping of the connections and disconnections between these two communities and fields of scholarship/discernment. Her work and Afro-Indigenous History itself can be directly drawn through understanding environmental justice itself as creating a limit on both communities in terms of mobilization and application. Environmental injustice is a force that has been applied to both communities through oppression and is only one part of the larger picture of struggles we equally face.

I find that the first step in the process for environmental justice is the continual persistence to realign with history in the ways we are physically, mentally, and spiritually disconnected from places, as "[the] links between land and body create a powerful intersection—one that, when overlooked or discounted, can threaten their very existence."¹⁰ The *Violence on the Land, Violence on Our Bodies* toolkit, which documents the ways Indigenous women and young generations' safety are impacted by extractive industries and promotes leadership in environmental justice, describes the importance of this concept, which can be translated into Black communities as well¹¹:

⁹ Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith, *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 10.

¹⁰ Women's Earth Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network, "Violence on the Land, Violence on Our Bodies: Report and Toolkit for Indigenous Response to Environmental Violence," Land Body Defense, November 29, 2017, http://landbodydefense.org/uploads/files/VLVBRReportToolkit_2017.pdf, 2.

¹¹ *Violence on the Land, Violence on Our Bodies* is a toolkit created in alliance between the Women's Earth Alliance and the Native Youth Sexual Health Network as a source of direct action and community-based report. They include several voices in forms of interviews about violence to the land and its impacts on health and safety for Indigenous women in the US and Canada. They explain why gender and sexuality are central to understanding land-based learning and interventions.

“A critical step for Indigenous land/body defense is to develop a language that describes the impacts of environmental degradation on both the social and physical aspects of human life. Once people can conceptualize and articulate these impacts, then communities can discuss, build strategies, and implement change.”¹²

Our education of the sites we sit upon and the land we currently inhabit is important first in its historical development and further in its broader education, specifically of environmental justice. It firstly acknowledges our bodily autonomy and sovereignty and our right to these spaces and secondly how we must reenact or redefine these spaces.

III: Early Environmental Justice Organizing Histories

Environmental Justice (EJ) has a significant contextual history as a broader social movement and can be framed in terms of leadership amongst Black and Indigenous peoples. This key term and framework emerged through Southern protest in the 1980s in the predominantly rural, Black, and low-income neighborhood in Warren County, NC.¹³ Over 500 locals and supporters were arrested in a six-week nonviolent protest against a PCB (polychlorinated biphenyls) landfill planned to be built in the county.¹⁴ This ushered in support from Civil Rights leaders outside of the city, bringing in not only the same tactics used in Civil Rights struggles, including marches, petitions, coalition building, community empowerment through education, etc. but also national attention to the issue in Afton, forming the first major milestone in the national movement for EJ.¹⁵

These early struggles for Environmental Justice brought ample research and studies into the patterns of pollution facilities and their proximity to poor communities of color. One particular activist in the Warren County protests, Walter Fauntroy, who at the time was a DC Congressional Delegate and Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus,

¹² “Violence on the Land, Violence on Our Bodies,” 11.

¹³ This environmental justice history can be traced even further to MLK’s work within the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis in 1968. Here, he was working on an environmental and economic justice mission for the striking Black garbage workers demanding equal pay and better working conditions. MLK was assassinated before being able to complete his mission in Memphis. Warren County is important specifically in its sole focus on environmental justice and this widespread change that came about after the events. (Bullard, *Environmental Justice in the 21st Century*, 151)

¹⁴ “Environmental Justice,” Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, n.d., <https://www.mncenter.org/environmental-justice>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

requested the Congress's General Accounting Office (GAO) to determine if communities of color were disproportionately affected by hazardous waste landfills in their communities. The GAO formulated a study published in 1983 which revealed $\frac{3}{4}$ of hazardous waste landfill sites in eight Southeastern US states were located in predominantly Black and Latinx communities.¹⁶

Hereafter "Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States" was published as a prominent tool for supporting EJ as the first national study to correlate waste facility sites and demographics.¹⁷ This report was assembled by Reverend Ben Chavis of the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice, who was also previously involved in the Warren County protests, further clearly deciphered that race itself is the single most important factor in determining where toxic waste facilities were sited in the US.¹⁸ It highlighted the correlation between race and location of waste sites as the "intentional result of local, state, and federal land-use policies," and accurately described the relationship between race and the environment.¹⁹

Furthermore, the 1991 First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit broadened the EJ movement from Southern Black Civil Rights mobilization to a transnational and coalitional movement. Leaders shifted their focus from fighting against toxic pollutants towards broader issues of public health, worker safety, land use, transportation, housing, resource allocation, and community empowerment.²⁰ This summit developed the 17 "Principles of Environmental Justice," which is a guide for organizing, networking, and relations with government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) for environmental justice leaders.²¹ People came from across the North American, Latin American continent, and islands to share action strategies, redefine the environmental movement and develop common plans for people of color across the world. They centered Indigenous leaders such as Tom Goldtooth and Mililani

¹⁶ "Environmental Justice," Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, n.d., <https://www.mncenter.org/environmental-justice>.

¹⁷ Robert D. Bullard, "Environmental Justice in the 21st Century: Race Still Matters," *Phylon* (1960-) 49, no. 3/4 (2001): pp. 151-171, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3132626>, 151.

¹⁸ "Environmental Justice," Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, n.d., <https://www.mncenter.org/environmental-justice>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Bullard, "Environmental Justice in the 21st Century: Race Still Matters," 152.

²¹ Ibid.

Trask in the drafting of these principles, which preceded the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted in 2007.²²

These early ideologies still support many of the environmental justice frameworks of combating injustice in the discussion and advocacy we still see today. Race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status are all factors that affect and promote environmental injustice. This correlation has been discovered through several studies as there are parallels between increased risk for health issues alongside environmental factors. In the state of Minnesota, there is a higher risk for pollutions and exposure to toxins, among other environmental dangers.²³ These consequences are clearly shown as the asthma death rate for Black Minnesotans is 6 times higher than white Minnesotans as well as 2.25 times the cancer risk than average residents. As for Native communities, Indigenous Minnesotans have a 3 times higher infant mortality rate than white residents.²⁴

In David N. Pellow's *Toward Critical Environmental Justice Studies*, he describes the flaw in perspectives within EJ that doesn't have a "multiscalar approach," identifying an intersectional approach in methodology and theory.²⁵ Too frequently EJ movements engage with an over-reliance on state power for justice as environmental racism itself is a form of state violence. State power and governance are one of the largest obstacles to combat racial and environmental justice as it gains its power through controlling bodies, space, and knowledge systems.²⁶ The state views people of color and poor communities as indispensable and expendable resources, and instead, we must assemble a formulation for environmental justice outside of settler ideology. These movements that are founded upon environmental racism are part of what Pellow

²² This UN Declaration "establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world and it elaborates on existing human rights standards and fundamental freedoms as they apply to the specific situation of indigenous peoples." (un.org)

²³ "Environmental Justice," Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, n.d., <https://www.mncenter.org/environmental-justice>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ David N. Pellow, "Toward a Critical Environmental Justice Studies," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 13, no. 2 (2016): pp. 221-236, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1742058x1600014x>, 4.

²⁶ Maryam Amiri, "David Pellow. What Is Critical Environmental Justice?," *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences* 10, no. 2 (July 2020): pp. 210-211, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13412-019-00575-8>, 18.

describes as “Critical Environmental Justice,” focusing on our scale in the use of critically examining EJ frameworks. Although some EJ frameworks details institutions and structures as places needing reform, their sole purpose cannot only be to reform but to seek outside of the confines and reckon with “the need for transformative (rather than primarily reformist) approaches to realize environmental justice.”²⁷

Black Lives Matter activism in the Twin Cities connects police brutality and abolition to environmental justice. Pellow’s work has brought me to several conclusions on how to work outside of the confines of settler colonialism through activism and the underlining necessity for abolition.²⁸ Abolitionist frameworks underline the work done within the Twin Cities and the centrality of BLM and Abolitionist movements aids in understanding EJ, as described by Pellow, “state violence produces intersecting oppressions.”²⁹ EJ is simply put only one facet of state violence reproduced in many forms and faces by the state, and to only view, this oppression as through one singular means or only placed onto one community “frequently augments and compounds the mistreatment of others.”³⁰ These ideologies of abolition are important to keep in mind in application to the following case studies in reference to state violence/oppression and racial stratification in cross-analysis.

IV: Sacred Sites & Tourism: CMEJ

In the present context, the primary tactic of public education in the EJ movement is implementing the use of education of the land we are on. The Community Members for Environmental Justice (CMEJ) is a coalition of community members based in North Minneapolis working to fight for EJ for its residents by use of educational “tours” or “toxic tours”. This area is a majority low-income Black neighborhood that is unequally impacted by pollution due to nearby waste facilities and dumps. North Minneapolis is

²⁷ Pellow, “Toward a Critical Environmental Justice Studies,” 4.

²⁸ It is important to note the differences between abolition and reform. Within the BLM Movement there is a lot of discussion circulating the differences. Reform refers to changing the existing practices/enactments/system, while abolishing means completely dismantling and creating a new system outside of the confines of the original system. In reference to the system of capitalism, we all exist in some format of having to still participate within the system, even if we dislike and want to have a new system. This simply explains the complexities of also not working with/alongside state governments in the fight for EJ and going outside of or working within the confines of the system.

²⁹ Pellow, “Toward a Critical Environmental Justice Studies,” 6.

³⁰ Pellow, “Toward a Critical Environmental Justice Studies,” 5.

filled with a concentration of polluting industries.³¹ CMEJ was founded in 2012 by Roxxane O'Brien to push for government policies and decisions that reduce toxin levels and other issues that affect the health of local residents. This coalition is comprised of over a hundred active members working across the community, between residents, government, and private sector workers, working where they can to make a difference.

CMEJ provides several different strategies in its work to combat environmental injustice and racism. Their work includes building the Terrell Mayes Jr. Memorial Garden, a community garden in his name and other kids lost due to gun violence. A recent project has been pushing for the eviction and closure of Northern Metals, a multinational corporation located by the Mississippi River area in Minneapolis and residential areas. This recycling incinerator caught on fire on April 21, 2021, and moved its operation to Becker, MN, but they continue to have other combustible materials in their site in Minneapolis.³² CMEJ advocates for accountability through filing charges and calling for the city to evict them as a repeat offender for the site caught fire multiple times and additionally a health department effects analysis.³³ They also provide multiple sources of information on community safety, policing, and healing for those who have been directly affected by police violence.³⁴ CMEJ administers an emergency preparedness initiative and discussions on police use of tear gas due to the airborne chemicals that can affect vulnerable peoples in the community.

The most important initiative of CMEJ that I would like to feature is their EJ Tours or Toxic Tours. Toxic Tours or Toxic Tourism is not only exclusive to CMEJ, but emerged as a general political EJ tactic used to bring awareness, either to public or government officials, educators, or other locals. They vary in their locations across the US, but all provide visits to toxic sites, such as oil refineries, metal recycling facilities, and other polluting sites in low-income neighborhoods led by those passionate and

³¹ "Environmental Justice," Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, n.d., <https://www.mncenter.org/environmental-justice>.

³² Joe Nelson, "Firefighters Battling Large Blaze at Northern Metal Site in Minneapolis," Bring Me The News (Bring Me The News, April 21, 2021), <https://bringmethenews.com/minnesota-news/firefighters-battling-large-blaze-at-northern-metal-in-minneapolis>.

³³ Kirsti Marohn, "Northern Metal Recycling Fire Ruled an Accident," MPR News (MPR News, March 11, 2020), <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2020/03/11/northern-metal-recycling-fire-ruled-an-accident>.

³⁴ CMEJ, "Police + Healing," CMEJ, n.d., <https://www.cmejustice.org/copy-of-climate-emergency-preparedness>.

often affected by such realities.³⁵ With CMEJ, they provide a direct site tour of North Minneapolis and spot key issues for low-income and communities of color. CMEJ's tours are available to students, organizational leaders, community members, and others to learn about these environmental injustices directly led by residents affected by these issues. They highlight the historic green-light zoning practice that allows industrial plants to sit within or near communities of color and a general context to the systematic inequalities within Minnesota.³⁶ This practice connects further back to the 1987 Report coining environmental racism as it has continually allowed contamination sites and a "slow form of toxic poisoning" to occur for residents in North Minneapolis.³⁷

CMEJ's Toxic Tours shows the strong power of stories through storytelling.³⁸ These tours offer an alternative to decolonization, as it is a practice of resistance, refusal, and dismantling settler structures.³⁹ As described in *Detours: A Decolonial Guide to Hawai'i*, Aikau, and Gonzales describe decolonial tours for community transformation by taking people through specific places and narrating them in ways that transform participants' understanding of and relationships with those places.⁴⁰ They write this in the context of Hawai'i, where settler colonialism becomes masked by tourism of the islands with a metanarrative about the islands and hospitality and militarism, the biggest environmental polluter. They say, "community-led tours became a key strategy for exposing how conservation and environmental protection actually worked against people who were preserving traditional practices in these places.", which entails how everyone is a participant in the land, not as either an observer or tourist and these tours can provide insight on certain locations.⁴¹ Aikau and Gonzales's words can be applied to Indigenous sovereignty and revitalization in the Twin Cities

³⁵ Francine Orr, "Brownfields, Not Greenbelts, on L.A. 'Toxic Tour'," Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles Times, n.d.), <https://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-toxic-tour-pictures-photogallery.html>.

³⁶ Al Brown, "Communities of Color Bear the Brunt of Toxic Waste," MSR News Online, August 24, 2022, <https://spokesman-recorder.com/2022/08/24/communities-of-color-bear-the-brunt-of-toxic-waste/>.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Jothsna Harris and Dr. Michelle Garvey, "Environmental Justice Narratives: Personal Stories from the Field," Climate Generation, September 30, 2022, <https://climategen.org/blog/environmental-justice-narratives-personal-stories-from-the-field/>.

³⁹ Hokulani K. Aikau and Vernadetta Vicuña Gonzalez. *Detours: A Decolonial Guide to Hawai'i*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019. muse.jhu.edu/book/71401, 247.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

context in the expansion and similar formations circulating tourism and the tourist industry.

As mentioned previously, environmental justice is one sliver into the multifaceted issue of systemic racism that plagues this community and other Black residential neighborhoods. The larger picture includes continual racial segregation through racist urban planning in redlining, housing projects, and legacies of displacement in Black history.⁴² Minneapolis is one of several major Black cities in the Midwest that movement after the Great Migration altered the course of Black histories within these cities and Southern activism (such as the Warren County protests) as approximately 6 million Black families moved to the Northern states.⁴³ This caused the displacement of people from the South and coastal areas, but also these longer legacies of racism being built through the environment. Redlining policies followed those that migrated to Midwest states and still have clear impacts on these predominantly Black communities in efforts to continue oppression by segregating them and continuing systematic oppression. Redlining of Black neighborhoods is also an important part of intergenerational wealth and intergenerational health because of the proximity to waste incinerators, pollutants, etc. Because of this, in 1994, President Clinton established Executive Order 12898 which enlists “federal actions to address environmental justice in minority populations and low-income populations,” attempting to address environmental injustice existing within federal laws and regulations.⁴⁴ This also reinforced the Civil Rights Act of 1964, specifically Title VI, which prohibits discriminatory practices in programs receiving federal funds. Clinton’s EO sent the order back to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the, at the time, 25-year-old law that originally set policy goals for the

⁴² GAIA US Canada, “Pollution, Police, Pandemic: How the Fight for Black Lives in Minneapolis Connects Anti-Incineration and Police Abolition,” Medium (Medium, July 30, 2020), <https://medium.com/@gaiauscanada/pollution-police-pandemic-how-the-fight-for-black-lives-in-minneapolis-connects-c4eff319d08a>.

⁴³ National Archives, “The Great Migration (1910-1970),” National Archives and Records Administration (National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/migrations/great-migration#:~:text=Black%20people%20who%20migrated%20during,in%20wealth%20in%20the%20United>.

⁴⁴ Robert D. Bullard, “Environmental Justice in the 21st Century: Race Still Matters,” *Phylon* (1960-) 49, no. 3/4 (2001): pp. 151-171, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3132626>, 152.

protection, maintenance, and enhancement of the environment.⁴⁵ In Minnesota, these enactments were officiated and formalized in the mid-2010s through the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA). They approach EJ by developing strategies to reduce pollution by focusing on low-income and communities of color where the health disparities are more widespread and measurable in their disproportionate inequality.⁴⁶

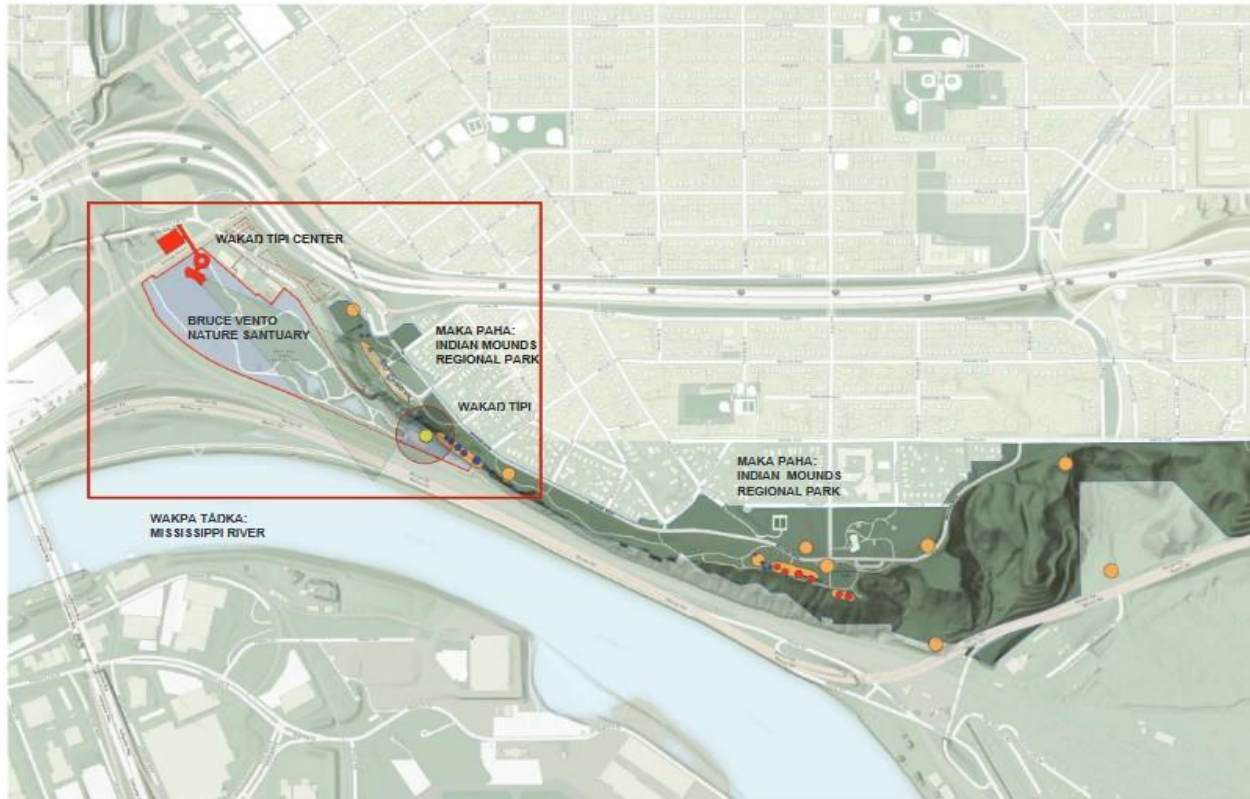
⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ "Environmental Justice," Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, n.d., <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/about-mpca/environmental-justice>.

V: Sacred Sites & Tourism: LPCP



Fig. 1 Marlena Myles, *Dakota Landmap of the Twin Cities*, 2019 print.



Adapted from a map by Cuningham/Full Circle Planning, 2020

Wakáŋ Tipi Center Final Visitor Interpretive Experience Plan

Fig. 2 Saint Paul map and location of Wakáŋ Tipi Center/Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary and Indian Mounds Park, Cuningham/Full Circle Planning, 2020.

Lower Phalen Creek Project is a Dakota-led environmental justice non-profit organization based in East Saint Paul founded in 1997.⁴⁷ Their work comprises the area between Lake Phalen to the Mississippi River and is led by a board, staff, and volunteers. It was originally brought together between Karin DuPaul of the Friends of Swede Hollow, Amy Middleton, and Sarah Clark of Citizens for A Better Environment, Wiming Lu of Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation, and Dan Ray of the McKnight Foundation. Their first project was to purchase the 27-acre site to reclaim and create a

⁴⁷ Their original history was not Dakota-led, as highlighted in the following description. They began their full commitment to being Dakota-led and focused by hiring Maggie Lorenz (Turtle Mountain Ojibwe, Spirit Lake Dakota), the Executive Director of the Wakáŋ Tipi center, whose focus is on place to reconnect to ancestors and history here. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ub-XgQT1jWY&t=72s>)

public nature sanctuary, which is where the alternative name of the site, Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary, comes from. In 2003, they organized over 150 volunteers to remove 50 tons of trash from the site, and since then have had regular site cleanings with the help of local volunteers. This is when they began their work to combine a nature sanctuary with a cultural and environmental interpretive center and building relationships with Dakota communities (Prairie Island, Shakopee, Upper Sioux, and Lower Sioux, the four federally recognized Dakota tribes in Minnesota) to highlight the site's significance and finding ways to go about recreating the ponds, wetlands, walking paths, and restoring the Wakáŋ Tipi cave. In 2011, they were formalized as a non-profit organization and in 2018 were awarded \$3 million for the design and construction of the Wakáŋ Tipi Center and began fundraising for this ceremonial and educational building on the grounds to be opened later in 2023.⁴⁸

LPCP has three main focus points in its 5-year restoration plan, spanning from 2021-2025. The first is Urban Conservation and Restoration, which includes the direct care for the land, plant, and animal life at the Wakáŋ Tipi/Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary.⁴⁹ Second, Cultural Connections and Healing work directly with Dakota perspectives, language, and culture as the primary focus of relationality to the land. Programming for Cultural Connections includes naming of the land, plants, and animals, Dakota storytelling, and plant medicine workshops. Third, Environmental Education is where LPCP connects to the greater community of elders and other local members' knowledges at the Wakáŋ Tipi site.

I have been an intern with LPCP since February 2022, working primarily to help create a written tour guide based on the oral history tour they provide to site visitors. The intention of creating this tour guide is for further information for volunteer site tour

⁴⁸ Frederick Melo, "Funding Falls into Place for \$8.6 Million Wakan Tipi Center at Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary in St. Paul," Twin Cities (Twin Cities, June 24, 2021), <https://www.twincities.com/2021/06/24/funding-falls-into-place-for-5-8-million-wakan-tipi-center-at-bruce-vento-nature-sanctuary-in-st-paul/>.

⁴⁹ Wakáŋ Tipi, translated to "sacred dwelling place" or "they live sacredly," is the Dakota sacred site LPCP stewards. Dakota scholar Jim Rock uses his scholarship to describe the site in combination with the above sacred site, Indian Mounds Park, as *one* sacred site, not as separated as many view it as. In addition, Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary and Wakáŋ Tipi are used interchangeably by many, but is important to note their distinction in the original plan for the site and how LPCP has transitioned the site into being Dakota-led and culturally focused, hence the use for Wakáŋ Tipi. (Gould and Rock, *Wakan Tipi and Indian Mounds Park*, 225)

guides, but also with the mindset of further access for Dakota community members to have historical knowledge. The guide is broken down into several different sections and continues to be a work in progress. Restorying the history of Wakáŋ Tipi is vital to this work as part of an intervention between traditional knowledges and access to reconnection. In bringing forth the place names and history of this site, the focus of restorying the land reconstructs new meaning from past narratives to bring the “old” stories to the forefront.⁵⁰ In this, it will be useful to provide a roadmap and outline of the important sections within the tour guide and their significance to LPCP’s mission for honoring and caring for the land and cultural value.

a. Dakota Cultural History

Mni Sota Makoce, or Minnesota, is the traditional homelands of the Dakota, Ho-Chunk, and Ioway tribes, and also now the Anishinaabe and other Indigenous peoples. The Dakota peoples are the largest tribe with four bands: The Bdewakantunwan (Mdewakanton), Wahpetunwan (Wahpeton), Wahpekute, and Sissitunwan (Sisseton) peoples that form the Santee or Eastern Dakota.⁵¹ They are also the sister tribes of the Yankton (Dakota and Nakota) and Teton/Lakota, all three Dakota tribes comprising the Oceti Šakowiŋ. The Twin Cities are Indigenous lands and must be discussed as so, both in the past and present. *Imnizaska*, which is the Dakota name referring to the white bluffs surrounding the *Haha Wakpa* (Mississippi River). Within Saint Paul itself there are several Dakota sacred sites, an important one to note is the Bdóte, which is where the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers converge. The land itself has a deep history and connections, among several other recognizable sacred sites.

⁵⁰ “Restorying: The Process of Reconstructing New Meaning From Old Narratives,” Beyond Human Stories, April 24, 2020, <https://beyondhumanstories.com/home/re-storying/#:~:text=RE%2DSTORYING,NEW%20MEANING%20FROM%20OLD%20NARRATIVES>.

⁵¹ “The Dakota People,” Minnesota Historical Society, n.d., <https://www.mnhs.org/fortsnelling/learn/native-americans/dakota-people>.



Fig.3 Lower Phalen Creek Project, Photo of Wakáŋ Tipi cave, 2022.

Wakáŋ Tipi is one of the several caves in this area between the Mississippi and Lake Phalen, but this is where numerous Dakota petroglyphs, including creation stories, were found. These were described as “representations of the constellations the Dakotas saw in the night sky, revealing their deep sky-earth relationship in the form of mirroring or, kapemni.”⁵² Jonathan Carver was the first white man in this area to document these depictions within the cave walls, and the Wakáŋ Tipi cave is sometimes erroneously referred to as Carver’s Cave. A portion of the knowledge base of this area comes from settlers to the area and their research and “discovery” of the caves and bluff above, but it is worthwhile to highlight the Dakota, scholars, and other community members’ knowledges of the site and Twin Cities in general.

Dakota peoples amongst other tribes held these as meeting grounds to travel to and host ceremony, hold council in the summers, and keep it as a significant site to

⁵² Roxanne Gould and James Rock, “Once upon a Toxic Sanctuary: Partnering to Restore and Reclaim a Dakota Sacred Site,” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies* 4, no. 3 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.24926/ijps.v4i3.177>, 227.

seek spiritual and political guidance.⁵³ It was also the site of the village Kaposia, also known as Little Crow's (*Thaóyate Dúta's*) Village. Little Crow was a Mdewakanton chief who led revolutionaries in the US-Dakota War of 1862. This site holds great ancestral value to Dakota peoples and ancestors who visited the site.

b. Land Destruction

Upon colonization of Minnesota and westward expansion, the site was destroyed to make room for the incoming settlers. Dakota peoples were forcibly exiled from the area and Minnesota in its entirety after the US-Dakota War of 1862. This war was declared by Dakota warriors, such as Little Crow, as a last desperate attempt to save Dakota homelands from white invasion.⁵⁴ Following this uproar, there was a violent removal of Dakota people from Minnesota along with Dakota 38+2, the largest mass execution in the US. Originally, over 300 Dakota men were sentenced to death by hanging and 16 to prison sentences, but it was lowered to 38 by the president at the time, Abraham Lincoln.⁵⁵ The Treaty of 1805 alongside two 1851 treaties, the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux and Treaty of Mendota, were unfulfilled and unjust treaties that confined Dakota peoples alongside the Minnesota river and removed them from land claims outside of this area.⁵⁶ This intense form of ethnic cleansing is a difficult but important history in the larger context of Dakota removal, land uprooting, and reconnection.

Following removal, the centuries of industrialization completely demolished the area and ignored the significance of Wakáŋ Tipi, the Indian Burial Mounds, and other sacred sites in the Twin Cities. The wetlands between the Mississippi River and the bluffs were filled in, along with most of the trees and plant life removed. Industrialization heavily polluted the air and water surrounding the site and the sacred bluffs were blown

⁵³ Roxanne Gould and James Rock, "Once upon a Toxic Sanctuary: Partnering to Restore and Reclaim a Dakota Sacred Site," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies* 4, no. 3 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.24926/ijps.v4i3.177>, 226.

⁵⁴ Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look like?: The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland* (St. Paul, MN: Living Justice Press, 2008), 10.

⁵⁵ The "+2" comes from two other leaders who white soldiers illegally followed, arrested, drugged, and hung after their escape to Canada back to Minnesota. The Dakota 38 +2 are honored annually on their anniversary from December 26, 1862, through different community commemorations.

⁵⁶ Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look like?: The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland* (St. Paul, MN: Living Justice Press, 2008), 10.

to make room for the railroad in the late 1800s, which still currently runs alongside the site and disrupts the landscape to an extent. The petroglyphs inside the entrance of the cave were destroyed to make this room, and many Dakota artifacts of creation stories and other artifacts were lost. In addition, there was extensive “research” carried out on the burial mounds, which consisted of looting and excavation by both Edward Neill and D.A. Robertson, the first of which was the founder of Macalester College and reported his findings and kept artifacts from the mounds at Macalester and Minnesota Historical Society.⁵⁷ This history is important to Macalester’s larger history in its contribution to settler colonialism in the area. In 2020, students at Macalester, specifically PIPE (Proud Indigenous Students for Education) brought this history to the forefront in the renaming of the humanities building, named after Edward Neill, in an effort to remove Neill and other colonizers’ names from Macalester’s buildings, signage, and other celebrations of past history.⁵⁸ Later on in the early 1900s, a brewery was built and stored inside the cave and eventually abandoned and destroyed by fire. The caves were further re-opened for cultural tourism, but were consistently vandalized and became an informal dumping ground for the city. Tons of trash was left at the site and it was ultimately abandoned.

Although this is a difficult history, the land acknowledgment is necessary with how this removal still has present-day effects. Dakota peoples currently only hold approximately 3,2000 acres of what used to be millions with the four Dakota communities on the map.⁵⁹ As Waziyatawin describes it, “the ethnic cleansing of Dakota and Ho-Chunk Peoples out of Minnesota was extraordinarily successful...the land base for Dakota people today can only be considered outrageously small, given the breadth of their boundaries of our ancestral homeland.”⁶⁰ This underlines the necessity of the

⁵⁷ MnDigLib, “T.H. Lewis Collection of Artifacts, Macalester College, St. Paul, Minnesota,” MN Digital Collection, n.d., <https://collection.mndigital.org/catalog/macal:141>.

⁵⁸ The Mac Weekly, “Colonial Macalester: A Mac Weekly Special Issue,” Macalester DeWitt Library, 2020, <https://dwlibrary.macalester.edu/counterbalance/student-projects/colonial-macalester-a-mac-weekly-special-issue/>.

⁵⁹ Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look like?: The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland* (St. Paul, MN: Living Justice Press, 2008), 10.

⁶⁰ Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look like?: The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland* (St. Paul, MN: Living Justice Press, 2008), 10-11.

work of places such as LPCP to reconnect Dakota peoples to their original homelands and make space for this.

c. Revitalization

The site tour guide also includes several facets of cultural teachings for the Dakota community which I will not fully include here. It is important to highlight the use of cultural knowledges in relation to the significance of the site, but not to give way for those outside of the community further information in respect for the fact that many Dakota peoples do not have this knowledge themselves. My intention is to instead highlight the complexity of tourism and counter-tourism of such a site, and how the framework of LPCP instead can bring a model for tourism of sacred sites relating to EJ. As discussed previously, land-based pedagogies are the way Indigenous communities have always learned from the land and how we continue to do this. Their models of land-based educational tours are brought by the combination of traditional history and technology, highlighting the adaptability of Indigenous communities and their willingness to share histories and to have written material.

Another way that the site takes advantage of its use of technology is through the work of artist Marlena Myles (Spirit Lake Dakota/Mohegan/Muscogee). In 2021, she created the Dakota Spirit Walk, an augmented reality (AR) installation at Wakáŋ Tipi, which gives a cultural tour of the site through virtual reality technology on your phone.⁶¹ Both the augmented reality tour and the written historical tour present opportunities for adaptability as technology is not a threat but a way to further the competency of our oral histories and traditions through environmental justice. This intricacy can be best explained through *Contemporary Studies in Environmental and Indigenous Pedagogies*:

“Environmental education must now adapt a broader understanding that represents the environment as encompassing the global cultural forces that are contributing to a sustainable future, as well as those that are accelerating the destruction of the natural systems leading to the collapse and disappearance of cultures... Environmental education carried on within Indigenous cultures has always been centered on learning the culture’s knowledge of how to live in ecologically sustainable ways. The new concepts that should now become part of environmental education within Indigenous communities should lead to understanding the role of recent technological and ideological developments in

⁶¹ Marlena Myles, “Dakota Spirit Walk,” *The Art of Marlena Myles*, July 12, 2022, <https://marlenamyl.es/dakota-spirit-walk/>.

the age-old process of cultural colonization that goes back to the first encounters with western values and patterns of thinking.”⁶²

VI: Conclusions and Futures

In the larger context of Environmental Justice work, LPCP’s education has a clear focus on the future of the community. They set an example of social justice movement-led work and immersive resurgence educational design through working with community elders, existing scholarship, and connections to other sacred site tours such as the Bdote Tour, Pilot Knob tour, and CMEJ tour. These larger movements to rekindle relationality to land and space are presented through these different modes of battling against environmental racism and the need for environmental justice. Among these, one must consider how we tour places with the respect to land; and engage Black and Indigenous histories and practices, within a larger public history framework, to understand what environmental justice truly means.

Within the cross-examination of Black and Indigenous histories, there is a need for reparative and restorative justice in the forms of community care and healing. I inscribe to the fact that there is a necessity, not only a desire, for Indigenous knowledges and Black voices to be at the forefront of these movements. These intergenerational movements of healing can be drawn from BLM frameworks and pushed forward with Indigenous traditions, such as ceremony, language, and traditional healing through medicines. Decolonization includes decolonizing the mind and to do this we must reach back to our traditions and bring them forward to the present. We must accept the hybridity between traditional knowledges and present-day realities, such as technology, outside forces, etc., and our shared resiliency and survivance have shown that we can do exactly that.

⁶² Andrejs Kulnieks, Dan Roronhiakewen Longboat, and Kelly Young, *Contemporary Studies in Environmental and Indigenous Pedagogies: A Curricula of Stories and Place* (Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2013), 225.

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