

Who's to Blame: An Examination of Environmental Inequality

Environmental inequality is exacerbated by multiple systems of oppression. Environmental crises aren't only created by systems of nature they are also affected by systems interacting with the crisis. These systems interact in complex ways that disproportionately affect marginalized communities which creates environmental inequality. Those systems of oppression are the medical and science system, the legal system, and the government. We can see these systems interact by examining the Michigan PBB crisis and the Flint Water Crisis. The PBB crisis happened in 1973 when a chemical plant mixed polybrominated biphenyl into livestock feed and contaminated cows throughout the state. This contamination began to affect the humans that ate the livestock affected by the contamination. The Flint water crisis happened in 2013 when a government-appointed official switched the water source for the city of Flint to the Flint River without treating the pipes. This caused the residents of Flint to have lead in their homes and eventually in their bodies. While these two crises differed on their timeline, scope, and populations what is similar is the lack of or slow structural response, lack of accountability taken from the systems, and a disproportionate impact on class or race. In each of these crises the medical and science systems, the legal system and the government interacted to oppress those affected by the crises. Looking at the history of Michigan allows us to see what we can do to hold these systems accountable, examine environmental inequality through a new lens, and hopefully find solutions to stop the further oppression of communities.