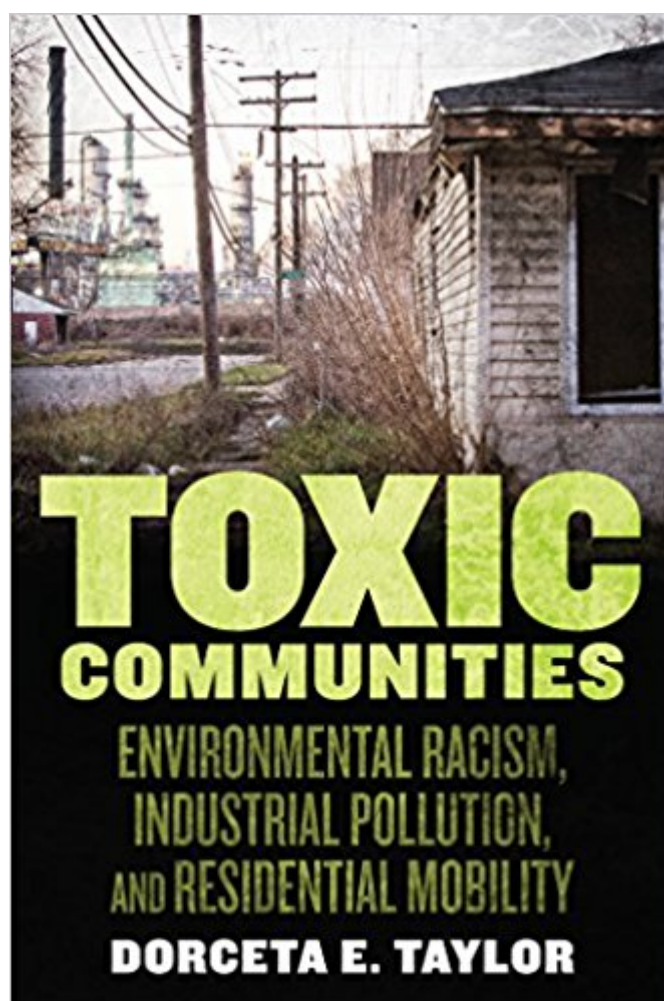


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# Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, And Residential Mobility



## Synopsis

From St. Louis to New Orleans, from Baltimore to Oklahoma City, there are poor and minority neighborhoods so beset by pollution that just living in them can be hazardous to your health. Due to entrenched segregation, zoning ordinances that privilege wealthier communities, or because businesses have found the "paths of least resistance," there are many hazardous waste and toxic facilities in these communities, leading residents to experience health and wellness problems on top of the race and class discrimination most already experience. Taking stock of the recent environmental justice scholarship, *Toxic Communities* examines the connections among residential segregation, zoning, and exposure to environmental hazards. Renowned environmental sociologist Dorceta Taylor focuses on the locations of hazardous facilities in low-income and minority communities and shows how they have been dumped on, contaminated and exposed. Drawing on an array of historical and contemporary case studies from across the country, Taylor explores controversies over racially-motivated decisions in zoning laws, eminent domain, government regulation (or lack thereof), and urban renewal. She provides a comprehensive overview of the debate over whether or not there is a link between environmental transgressions and discrimination, drawing a clear picture of the state of the environmental justice field today and where it is going. In doing so, she introduces new concepts and theories for understanding environmental racism that will be essential for environmental justice scholars. A fascinating landmark study, *Toxic Communities* greatly contributes to the study of race, the environment, and space in the contemporary United States.

## Book Information

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: NYU Press (June 20, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1479861782

ISBN-13: 978-1479861781

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.9 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #75,465 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #16 in Books > Law >

Environmental & Natural Resources Law #108 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social

Sciences > Poverty #128 in Books > Engineering & Transportation > Engineering > Civil &

## Customer Reviews

"It offers a valuable review of the diverse mechanisms of structural racism that has produced and maintained patterns of residential segregation, spatial exclusion, and environmental injustices in the United States."-PsycCritiques

"Dorceta Taylor's book, *Toxic Communities* is an intellectually weighty book that elevates the discussion of environmental justice."-Human Ecology

"Dorceta Taylor, a distinguished scholar in the field of environmental sociology, has just published a book that contributes to research on environmental racism in the USA. In *Toxic Communities*, Taylor surveys long-standing debates in the field of environmental justice and identifies new theoretical and methodological directions for environmental justice researchers."-Urban Studies

"In this excellent assessment of multimethod research, Taylor brings a refreshing emphasis on nuance and accountability to the environmental justice discussion . . . provides a comprehensive, objective, and balanced portrait of environmental justice to date."-Choice

"Well-written and researched."-Olive Branch United

"a survey of the environmental justice movement which has so crucially challenged white traditions of conservation and the pastoral images of land and ecology that are their hallmarks."-Art Journal

"Clearly and accessibly written, the book is well suited for a course on environmental justice, environmental sociology, urban studies, or race and ethnicity. It is an essential addition to conversations between environmental justice researchers on how best to move toward theorizing environmental injustices."-Social Forces

"In *Toxic Communities*, Dorceta Taylor tackles a vexing question: why don't people in contaminated communities just move? This highly original book reframes the entire field of environmental justice studies by urging us to focus on the social mechanisms behind the scourge of environmental racism, which relegate people to those spaces and make it nearly impossible for them to move out. Only when we can target those underlying mechanisms will there be any hope of securing a meaningful and lasting environmental justice. Rather than simply demonstrating the fact that people of color are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards and accepting simple explanations for this phenomenon, Taylor goes to the heart of the matter and explores why and how environmental racism remains an enduring wound on the American social landscape. This is the first book to delve so deeply and broadly into the debates concerning environmental racism. *Toxic Communities* will become the gold standard for the field of environmental justice studies."-David Naguib Pellow, co-author of *The Slums of Aspen: Immigrants vs. the Environment in America's Eden*

"*Toxic Communities* is the

most comprehensive account to date of why certain communities host toxic facilities and why certain populations are more likely to live in close proximity to those facilities. Taylor not only forthrightly confronts the complex causal processes that shape the uneven distribution of environmental hazards, but she does so with a keen sensitivity to the vast differences among communities, their geographies and their histories. This book deepens our understanding of the phenomenon of environmental (in)justice and promises to be a standard-bearer in the field for a long time to come."-Sheila R. Foster, co-author of From the Ground Up

Dorceta E. Taylor is Professor in the School of Natural Resources and Environment at the University of Michigan, where she also serves as Field of Studies Coordinator for the Environmental Justice program. She graduated from Yale University with doctorates in Sociology and Forestry & Environmental Studies. Her previous books include *The Environment and the People in American Cities: 1600s-1900s. Disorder, Inequality and Social Change*, which won the 2010 Allan Schnaiberg Outstanding Publication Award from the Environment and Technology Section of the American Sociological Association.

Excellent read

Just as described.

It won't take a book like this to convince me of the points here. Throughout the world, it's been common practice to dump garbage in poorer communities, and if not, the lower income resident usually live in the most polluted areas, near the dumps, coal bins, canals, and slaughterhouses. Take Vancouver's "Low Track" as an example; it was a low-lying area that flooded easily, so you'd get sewage pollution whenever it rained, and who would want to live there? London's Camden Lock is another example of low-income housing built near a polluted waterway. It may be stylish now, but in 1992, it was a mess. Tourists and locals came to the Camden Lock market to shop, browse, and take pictures, but you couldn't be there at night. The smell from the canal made it the least desirable place to live. *Toxic Communities* turns things up a notch by studying how racism as well as poverty drives the "dump in the poor town" practice. Triana, Alabama, for instance, was polluted with DDT from the Tennessee River, and the locals were eating toxic fish, not out of a desire to

“eat local,” but because they were hungry. Warren County, North Carolina, was the scene of a 1979 lawsuit to stop a PCB landfill. Love Canal is barely cited in this book, because it had nothing to do with racism or poverty. On the contrary, the dump was there before the houses were built, and the owners warned the town not to build there. The problem was that the town thought the canal was leak-proof, and it wasn’t. The residents were all white, so you can’t blame racism, but what if the town built low-income housing on the site? Could the town have forced section-8 tenants to move in, so they could sell valuable land where existing housing projects were? Native American land in the USA is also in danger of pollution. The Skull Valley reservation in Utah is one example; a massive number of sheep died there in 1968 when gases escaped from a chemical site, and nowadays the US Army stores its waste there. The reason for Reservation pollution is simple; the Tribal Councils need money badly, and there’s so little oversight against corruption, so there’s little to stop someone from allowing tanker trucks full of sewage to dump things on the land. If there are mines on the Reservation, that’s also a problem. The Pine Ridge Reservation has radioactive tailings from the mines, and the local healthcare system is ill-equipped to deal with it. Mobility is probably half the problem. If Native American leaders let in the toxic waste, the residents can’t move away. Same thing in NYC, where NYCHA apartments often have black mold from leaking pipes (not to mention crime) and the residents can’t afford to live elsewhere. The book is well-written and researched, but it would’ve been better if there had been interviews with the residents of the communities that suffered from waste-dumping. Photos and maps would be welcome as well, because a lot of the places mentioned here are unfamiliar to the readers.

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