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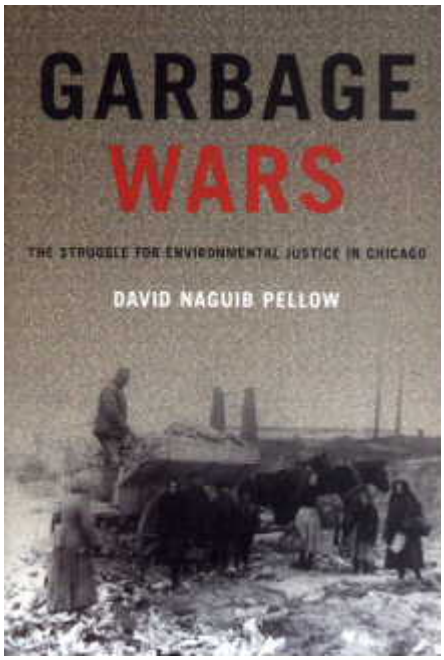
Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago

THE BOOK

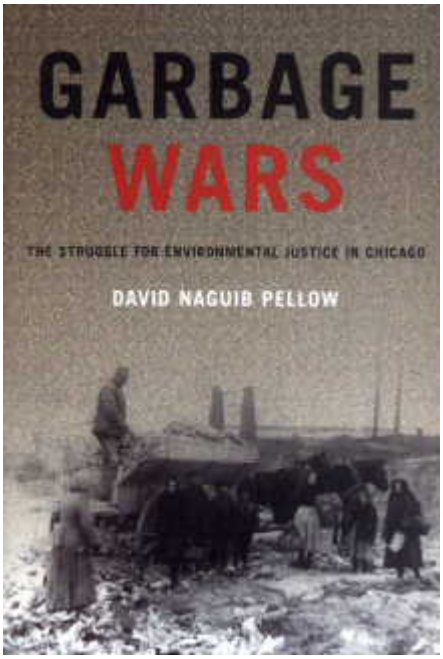
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> *...STRUGGLE AGAINST ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM ...Almost 10,000 residents live in Altgeld Gardens, 97% of them African Americans, 62% of whom live below the poverty line. The area is surrounded by 53 toxic facilities. 36 of them are regulated as hazardous waste facilities. Residents in the area breathe in an environment, where almost 126,000 pounds of toxic pollutants are emitted each day! No wonder this community shows one of the highest rates of infant mortality, cancer mortality, low birth weight infants, and lead poisoned people. This is a textbook case of environmental inequality. It has been called the worst case of environmental racism in the US...*

Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago *by* David Naguib Pellow, hard cover
The MIT Press, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142: xii + 234 Pages: Publication Date: 2002: ISBN 0-262-16212-1: Price $24.95



Publisher's Blurb



In this book, the sociologist David Pellow describes the politics of garbage in Chicago. He shows how garbage affects residents in vulnerable communities and poses health risks to those who dispose of it. He follows the trash, the pollution, the hazards, and the people who encountered them from 1880 to 2000. What unfolds is a tug of war among social movements, government, and industry over how we manage our waste, who benefits, and who pays the costs.

Studies demonstrate that minority and low-income communities bear a disproportionate burden of environmental hazards. Pellow analyzes how and why environmental inequalities are created. He also explains how class and racial politics have influenced the waste industry throughout the history of Chicago and the United States. After examining the roles of social movements and workers in defining, resisting, and shaping garbage disposal in the United

States, he concludes that some environmental groups and people of color have actually contributed to environmental inequality.

By highlighting conflicts over waste dumping, incineration, landfills, and recycling, Pellow provides a historical view of the garbage industry throughout the life cycle of waste. Although his focus is on Chicago, he places the trends and conflicts in a broader context, describing how communities throughout the United States have resisted the waste industry's efforts to locate hazardous facilities in their backyards. The book closes with suggestions for how communities can work more effectively for environmental justice and safe, sustainable waste management.

When I read the title of the book, I thought it was yet another of the routine environment books, with the author lamenting on modern society spreading garbage beyond their ability to mop it up, and causing untold environmental damage. A quick glance at some of the pages told me it was much different from that. It touches on a relatively new topic. I was certainly not aware of it. The author calls it *environmental racism* or *environmental inequality*. These terms stress that the people who generate the most wastes (the affluent ones), don't necessarily have to pay the price of being affected by it. That price is paid by those who don't produce so much waste (the less affluent ones). These are the ones, who have to live near these wastes (perhaps because the cost of living is less in these areas). They are the ones who inhale toxic fumes emanating from these wastes. They are the ones who get poisoned from these wastes, while the more affluent ones - the ones responsible for producing these wastes - go on producing more and more waste quite nonchalantly, unaware of the untold havoc they are causing all around. The author also stresses, that these less fortunate ones are mostly colored people and the Latinos, working as laborers in the US, while the producers of the wastes are mostly the white people.

Although these "garbage wars" are supposed to be going on everywhere in the US, the author has chosen Chicago for his study for a number of reasons. For one thing, Chicago is one of the first great industrial cities in the United States, and therefore is one of the most polluted. At one time known as the "slaughterhouse to the world", it was also the undisputed capital of the meat packing industry during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This industry was a major source of pollution during that era, making the "Windy City" one of the filthiest places in the world. Chicago, as the author informs us, "has more landfills per square mile than any other city in the United States".

> *...Environmental racism is the unequal exposure to pollution, toxics, and other hazards that the poor and people of color confront every day. This includes solid waste facilities (garbage dumps, transfer stations, sewage treatment plants, incinerators), other polluting industries (chemical plants, steel plants), highways, dangerous jobs, and a range of "locally unwanted land uses" (LULUs)...*

The author describes several movements against this environmental depredation. In chapter 4, for instance, we are told about the indefatigable Hazel Johnson (a colored woman incidentally), who along with her daughter Cheryl Johnson has made an organization called *People for Community Recovery* (PCR). They live in an area known as Altgeld Gardens, an area on the South Side of Chicago, infested with crime, poverty and unemployment. Tons of waste surround the city. So much so that Cheryl prefers to call it the "Toxic Doughnut"!

Almost 10,000 residents live in Altgeld Gardens, 97% of them African Americans, 62% of whom live below the poverty line. The area is surrounded by 53 toxic facilities. 36 of them are regulated as hazardous waste facilities. Residents in the area breathe in an environment, where almost 126,000 pounds of toxic pollutants are emitted each day! No wonder this community shows one of the highest rates of infant mortality, cancer mortality, low birth weight infants, and lead poisoned people. This is a textbook case of environmental inequality. It has been called the worst case of environmental racism in the US.

What are the solutions to problems like this? Readers may want to find out by reading this book. Fully recommended to every one, especially those who feel passionately about and want to read about environmental issues. This book gives it all, with an entirely new twist.

Order this Book by clicking here

-Editor-in-Chief

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