



THE RULE OF LAW: Equitable Environmental Policy in the U.S.

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Background

- The U.S. has historically not handled social and environmental problems in an equitable manner (Eg: the Flint Water Crisis, the Love Canal incident, BLM, even the COVID-19 pandemic)
- As the planet continues to suffer from climate change, those in underserved communities will bear the brunt of the burden
- It is the government's responsibility to take care of all of its constituents and enact laws to protect them
- For future environmental policy, the U.S. should look to past successful legal events to guide them

Research Question

How can the government better support its underserved communities that have previously been affected by environmental issues?

Internship & Methods

- Historical research intern with NOAA AFSC
- Virtually researched Miller Freeman (Fig. 1) through a historical equity lens for the development of a new exhibit
- Freeman was a prominent early advocate of fisheries conservation policy, and was also deeply xenophobic and racist
- Decided to conduct a case study analysis to examine past reparations events and see how they could be applied to present-day



Figure 1: Miller Freeman in his official naval militia uniform, 1919. Freeman was a prominent early adopter of fisheries conservation policy in the Seattle area. However, his legacy of xenophobia and racism has left a difficult legacy for the fisheries industry to address.

Case Study Analysis

Japanese Redress - 1970-80's

- Redress Movement gained traction with the Civil Rights Movement
- Japanese Americans were demanding acknowledgement and reparations for their treatment during WWII
- Redress Movement resulted in 1988 Civil Liberty Act
 - Issued an official apology for Japanese incarceration during WWII and offered monetary compensation



Image via Densho

Flint, Michigan Water Crisis - Ongoing

- Began in 2014 when an Emergency Manager of Flint opted to change where the city sourced their water from
- Water was treated improperly, leading to the lead leaking into Flint residents' water
- The Flint, Michigan water crisis was settled in 2021 with a \$626 million payout
 - A very small percentage of this actually is going to residents



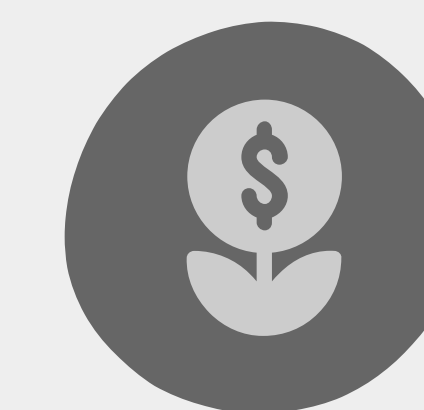
Image via Detroit News

Findings

- Needs to actively seek out the opinions of underserved communities and areas
- Needs to act proactively when communities ask for aid - Flint communities brought up issues with water quality to their officials but were brushed off
- Needs to formally apologize to communities that have been mistreated - like with the Civil Liberties Act

Implications

The government should establish a new environmental aid office that...



Aid

Has control of an environmental aid fund that they are able to distribute quickly to communities in need



Claims

Accepts claims for aid from any community that is not in emergency need - prioritizes underserved communities



Truth Commissions

Establishes truth commissions if enough claims are filed from one community (individuals willing) - this would hopefully also help rebuild trust

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