

Environmental Justice and Resiliency in an Age of Uncertainty

Edited by Celeste Murphy-Greene

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Seemingly endless tragedies including extreme drought, record freezing, the spread of COVID-19, and skyrocketing living costs populate news headlines daily. The timeline of disasters, especially as the Earth's climate warms, leaves individuals, communities, and countries with less and less time to recover from one event to the next. Though attempts are made to improve and relieve some of the wicked problems we face today, no sudden intermission offers a break from these ongoing challenges. In her book *Environmental Justice and Resiliency in an Age of Uncertainty*, Celeste Murphy-Greene tackles environmental equity, energy justice, democratic practices, and the importance of creating resilient communities better prepared to face disasters.

With her academic career and previous roles with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Energy, Celeste Murphy-Greene's experience has granted us a volume of insights and understanding about the intersection of equity and the environment. Acknowledging the timeliness of the book, authors in this collection write not only to inform readers of the dynamics of justice, but to also describe realistic actions public administrators can take. The book is not aimed at throwing theory at readers with no topical application. Rather, it is written and edited with a refreshingly straightforward approach that easily breaks down the layers of social and physical forces impacting historically exploited communities of color. *Environmental Justice and Resiliency in an Age of Uncertainty* serves as a necessary new resource. It models the direction resources and theory must go if collective efforts are to realize a more sustainable future. Change that improves the environment and creates more equitable distribution and infrastructure cannot be left to elected officials and academics. This book targets public administration as the impetus for solutions.

The book accentuates the notion that equitable solutions to persistent injustices affecting Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities require multiple targets. Throughout history, these populations were subjected to conditions involving polluted resources, segregated housing, and reduced access to essential public service. Fueling the injustices, public managers, elected officials, and contracted private companies have remained largely unresponsive, allowing for decades of mistreatment to compound. As issues accumulate without any type of policy learning, injustices become more difficult to repair. At its apex, these circumstances result in disasters that are impossible to escape. Consider how already struggling communities respond to disasters. How does a community in poverty rebuild their water infrastructure after disaster? How do migrant workers with limited resources adapt to unbearably warm temperatures, and what happens to agricultural products when people cannot work in the heat? No issues of equity and the environment exist in a vacuum, a point this book reiterates throughout. The main idea of this collection, as told through interwoven themes, is that inequitable practices do, in fact, exist and they are heightened during times of climate change and related disasters. The book clearly describes these issues by defining terms and deleting jargon, offering case studies and historical events, and providing realistic suggestions for actions public administrators can take.

Book Contents

Each chapter of the book contributes to the same thesis without becoming redundant. The contents cover issues that will remain topical for years to come alongside brand-new topics such as the COVID-19 pandemic. What shines, in addition to the ideas, is how the materials are covered in a way that feels new. The book is not a mashup

of chapters that read as stand-alone articles, but rather a thoughtful mapping of environmental equity and modern problems. This style offers a welcoming tone to practitioners and students looking for digestible literature that is informative and thought-provoking. The book contains chapter-ending discussion questions, offering guideposts to readers as they think through the book's overarching themes, which accentuates the applicability of the content. Readers of *Environmental Equity and Resiliency in an Age of Uncertainty* will be left feeling more empowered by what they have learned about the complicated arena of social equity and the environment.

The introduction and opening chapters provide a survey of the history and development of the environmental justice movement. In an early chapter, authors Celeste Murphy-Greene and Michael A. Brown discuss focusing events and policy development in the United States, the scientific markers of a warming climate, and areas in the world most vulnerable to climate change. Though advances to protect our environment have been made since mid-century, BIPOC communities were not offered access to the same advancements, laying the foundation for the persistent inequities that stem from practices like redlining and segregation. These introductory chapters pave the way for the remaining chapters. They leave the reader with a sufficient understanding of key elements to environmental injustice without feeling overwhelmed by climate science and political narratives.

Chapter 3 stands out as an acknowledgment that the book is being published at a time when we are still working to understand the COVID-19 pandemic. Though the virus is not an issue of energy or the environment, this chapter plays an important role by illustrating the entwined nature of health, racism, and the environment. It describes how tragedies in the past impact willingness to trust government authority. For example, the generational trauma of the Tuskegee Study is cited as an example of learned distrust among communities. How can we expect citizens to trust a system that has continuously wronged them before? As poor environmental quality and climate change have deleterious effects on health, understanding community buy-in and risk perception can increase community resilience. Trust in information and in leaders is an essential lever. Combatting climate change requires understanding and action at the community level. For this to happen, citizens must understand and believe that improving the environment will, in turn, improve quality of life.

Another emergent theme is the importance of emergency and disaster management in mitigating damage and preventing compounding trauma. *Environmental Justice and Resiliency in an Age of Uncertainty* tackles emergency response, describing the resulting consequence of poor preparedness and silenced voices. In their chapters, Chris R. Surfus and Cara Sanner discuss the Flint Water Crisis and together with Jim Redick, they describe the power of disaster in determining community resilience through discussion of emergency appointments, accountability, and community demographics. Informative for managers and those interested in the chain of command leading to and responding to disaster, these chapters reiterate that administrators bear a true responsibility to citizens. During Flint's crisis, citizens were ignored and complaints went unheard, leaving the city to continue its strategy of slashing the budget while chemicals and bacteria leached into the water. In the end, the failure to invest upfront left the city investing more dollars afterward to solve the crisis inflicted by the city's hired emergency manager. Disasters are not only unexpected events. They can also be the direct result of conscious decision-making. The strategies employed to overcome a given disaster or to create new decision-making tiers are how learning and resilience are built. Addressing this main takeaway from the book, Redick's chapter outlines existing tools and effective strategies for emergency managers to reflect on equity and choices when responding to disaster. For a community to become more resilient, administrators must acknowledge that preparedness and stability after disaster are not personal choices. They are, instead, subject to already existing inequities.

Public works, though not the most attractive headline grabber in equity and the environment, are explained as a direct way to mitigate unequal treatment. Historically, only wealthier and whiter communities have benefitted from public-offered benefits such as maintained parks, greenspace replacing concrete, and safe sidewalks. This has translated to a higher general quality of life for the beneficiaries and measurable detriments like urban heat islands and higher rates of illness for deprived communities. Angela Orebaugh's chapter exploring smart cities describes how the ability to monitor area quality and infrastructure performance can help officials and urban planners respond more readily to problem areas. If cities can easily react to timely information on air quality, energy outages, and high-

speed internet access, then citizen needs can be met swiftly. This prevents compounding stressors in problem areas of a community. Intentional infrastructure is also described in Seth Mullendore's chapter discussing renewable energy at the local level. Just as BIPOC communities are often grounds for waste sites and emitters of noise pollution, these communities also do not see the benefits of renewable or efficient energy infrastructure. In advancing renewables, local level decision-making must offer a seat at the table for all who will be affected by energy transmissions. Commitments must be made to ensure BIPOC communities do not once again shoulder the burden of waste or expensive energy costs when communities shift to greener solutions.

Thinking about this alongside James W. Patteson's chapter discussing public works highlights the importance of sustainable and equitable service delivery as a right to all citizens, regardless of demographics. This echoes the ideas presented in chapters discussing pollution and disaster. Conditions which give rise to community devastation are preventable and manageable by informed, equitable planning. With infrastructure and attention to clean water, the Flint Water Crisis could have been prevented. With widespread planning around renewable energy, frontline communities may not be subjected to dirty fossil fuels or runoff. Reevaluating existing services in the face of BIPOC neighborhoods can offer insight into how planning for these communities can increase equity across regions. The authors argue that administrators benefit from grasping how equity is a component of every level of decision-making in public service. Even the tasks that some regard as menial or straightforward require assessment to identify gaps in equitable practices, a skill that should be taught to all administrators and planners. Advancing toward renewable energy, mitigating the effects of a warming climate, and serving the communities most affected will be the primary global challenge for the foreseeable future. Only when considering equity and a fair weight of burden in these circumstances can we ensure resilient communities.

Conclusion

For practitioners, diving into academic literature is often a luxury with the time to do so being an even greater luxury. This book fills a need in the field by offering insight on issues that are not often tied together in a straightforward fashion by news media or practitioner-aimed reports. Here, through-lines are explicit and the reader does not move between the chapters unsure of common themes or topic relevance. No other volumes offer this approach to explaining the dynamics of environmental inequality while offering this much breadth in a book of this size. Free from overly technical explanations, these chapters speak directly to students and administrators. The material is accessible, informative, and prescriptive. It fills a gap by providing administration-related energy and environmental guidance. *Environmental Justice and Resiliency in an Age of Uncertainty* would be a great addition to any classroom and an excellent resource for those already working in public service fields.

Communities across the globe must prepare for the effects of a changing climate and identify new sustainable solutions for society. The path to doing so, though, must not repeat historical patterns of shedding the burden onto communities of color and lower incomes. The role of public administrators in managing infrastructure, urban planning, disaster response, and public services places them at the helm of critical interventions to improve equity across the United States and the globe. Training professionals to understand how access and just practices are important for every aspect of public administration is a crucial step in ensuring that equity becomes a second nature thought process for future generations. Murphy-Greene's edited volume and its contributors have offered a new type of literature that is both informative and useful for anyone in administration, planning, and policy. Its readership ranges from students to practitioners to academics and it informs across a wide survey of concepts.

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