



## The Lit Review Podcast

## English Transcript

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**Guest/Topic:** Juliana Pino Alcaraz on *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*

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**00:00 Monica Trinidad:** We're here for the last episode of the season. Yes, we made it. There have been many moments this year where it felt like everything was going to fall apart. But thankfully they didn't completely, and I am very thankful for community, for always providing hope and fuel to just continue moving forward.

This year has just really offered me space to slow down, literally pushed me to slow down, and that's felt important for me as someone who was always just moving really fast and making quick decisions. It just helped me to pay more attention to the -- to the importance of the process versus always thinking about putting stuff out there, putting out content and putting out information into the world. So it's just -- it's felt important to slow down. So that's a quick reflection for me. And I'm curious, Page, if you have any also quick reflections on this year.

**01:06 Page May:** Yeah, I mean, I... I think a lot about this word "Praxis" and this idea of sometimes that feeling like you might be spinning in circles, but you're growing out sort of your spiraling, right? Maybe sometimes you're spiraling down. But I think this was a year where I started to see the patterns and what happens when you organize for the long term and the ways that their cycles and the incredible whirlwind that we saw this year was overwhelming and exhausting in so many ways. But also, I'm, you know, I'm going into this period of my praxis of reflection. And yes, some rest where I'm thinking about all the new containers that have been built and all of the relationships, that we had so many more folks get plugged in and so many more projects get started and skills get developed in our end. And you know, we can't always sustain whirlwinds like this summer all the time, and I don't know what next year is going to bring, but I'm really confident in the foundation that's been built. I think it's a lot stronger and a lot wider. So, yeah, I am -- and there's a lot to digest this year. I think all of us are going to -- it's

going to be a long time. I'm excited for the textbooks, um, that'll come out one day, about 2020. But um yeah, definitely taking time to kind of slow down and reflect and think about what was learned and what to do better next time. And also books! Yeah.

**02:37 Monica:** Yeah, I was going to say, do you have any books that are on your list of 'To Read For Winter Break'?

**02:43 Page:** Yeah. So I always have a big stack. I saw a funny tweet today that was like "buying books and reading books are very different hobbies" and that really resonates with me, so --

**02:51 Monica:** [*laughs*] Damn. I feel called out.

**02:54 Page:** Oof, exactly, yes. So I have many, many, many books to read, but definitely so. *Freedom Farmers* is on my list, which I haven't bought, but I will get a copy that Vivi did, did an interview or an episode about. And then I also really want to read Dean Spade's new book on mutual aid. I can't think of a better time to read that and have that exist, so I'm excited to read that along with a few folks.

**03:18 Monica:** Nice.

**03:18 Page:** Yeah. What about you?

**03:19 Monica:** Yeah, I think, Oh, I was going to try to start reading *Capital* by Marx, but I decided to read, uh, it's called like '*A Reader's Guide to Capital*'. I bought it on Haymarket books, and so I'm -- and even that is like dense in trying to, like, break down. But he's -- but the author is really trying to break down like the uh... everything that Marx is trying to explain, but just like even more broken down. And I also didn't know that Marx didn't fit the -- you know, there's three volumes of *Capital*, right? He only finished the first volume, and Engels had to finish the last two volumes for him because he kept writing about capitalism and capitalism kept evolving so quickly. And so like he cut it, he had to keep adding, Anyways, I'm going to stop there. That's what's on my winter To-Do list. But let's get to this episode. It's our last episode. Juliana knows her shit, which makes sense because she's a Virgo, so she was ready for this conversation. And for folks who don't know who Juliana, she is a long term comrade, abolitionist, environmental justice organizer in Chicago. She's the policy director to the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization and just an all around badass. Juliana was really good at breaking down the core ways that folks can confront and challenge environmental racism in our own communities, and even describing the ways that environmental racism can look in our communities that we might not recognize on a surface level. And then the various tactics that folks have taken to disrupt it. It's a very full episode in the sense of length and amount of information, so definitely have a notebook next to you or a Google Doc open that you can take

notes in, or just take it all in and go for a walk and listen to this episode. And yeah, what did you appreciate about this episode?

**05:17 Page:** So Juliana, absolutely. She's brilliant, definitely knows her shit. And I... yeah, I mean, I learned so much in terms of history and also in analysis. I mean, she's talking about a book that is pretty dense in and of itself, but it's like sort of a primer and it is somewhat short and straightforward. And I think she does a phenomenal job of adding her critiques of it and also really talking about it in the context of her experiences. And so there were a couple of things that stood out to me. I mean, number one, just -- I don't know why it was so significant for me to hear her say this, but just her naming how consistent the government procedure of how decisions get made that affect our environment as the main primary site of disruption and protests for our movements. And you know, I just -- maybe it's because I never want to go back to City Hall, but the important reminder that we will be back there and that that is a place that we have to watch what they're doing and use that as a stage and as a place to disrupt. So I'm thinking more about that and then how you apply that to the climate crisis, where consumption behaviors as much as policy and land use policies are affecting. So anyways, that's something I'm thinking about, but also, you know, part of the season, I think there was this common theme of talking about -- and this year, this common theme of talking about our work as neighbors and our work in local places. And I'm really glad that we dug into that and talked more about what that has looked like and what that -- how we need to apply that to movements today. And this episode, I think, made a really explicit reminder of how a lot of the people, the people with power that we are resisting are a part of these multinational conglomerate corporations and institutions and that that creates an opportunity for us to build relationships and solidarity across these local geographies. And so I think that was really cool. And then lastly, she does a beautiful job of really breaking down and reframing environmental justice and as deeply tied to police and prisons, just the existence of police and prisons as an environmental justice issue. So I think that was really great and something we haven't talked about as much. But I think we mentioned at one point is that every episode we've been talking to our guests after the episode is over and asking them to define racial capitalism, and that has just been this wonderful thought exercise to each week hear a different person's take on it. And yeah, you talking about Capital, my brother is also reading that book so we were talking a bit about it over this last week, but anyways, yeah, so that's something that I really enjoyed and I'm going to be sitting with and thinking about. And if you become a patron, you can actually get those sent to your inbox on a weekly basis. So we're going to do something cool with it over the next year or so.

**08:14 Monica:** Yeah, thanks for bringing that up. I love those little snippets of our guests just, yeah, interpreting racial capitalism, and everybody has been interpreting it and describing it in different ways. And that's also been really cool to just hear the different ways that racial capitalism manifests in our daily lives. Another quick thing, what something you brought up in your, in the last thing that you said around the emphasis this year on paying attention to our

neighbors and understanding the importance of our connection to our neighbors, I really appreciated Juliana's emphasis on movements being led by directly impacted community members, right? And also her stress on the fact that environmental justice work is anti-violence work because what's happening to our communities, air and water and land is all violence on behalf of the state and corporations who work hand-in-hand in the interest of capitalism. So yes. Anyways, let's tune in to this episode. Thank you, everybody for tuning in this season and for hyping us up on social media, becoming monthly sustainers on Patreon. It really helps us keep going. And then before this last episode begins with Juliana, we have a few quick words to share from our friends at AirGo radio, so check it out.

**09:35 Damon Williams of AirGo Radio:** Hey, thanks for having us, y'all. It's such an honor to be here in the Lit Review. I feel like I'm in my natural zone of like being a really attentive but unprepared student in the back of the class. I'm really happy to be here. [*background laughter*] I feel like I'm back at my zone, but we are proud to be here from AirGo. We consider ourselves movement documentarians. So we have been archiving and building a living narrative of the people, places, spaces and emergent themes of our progressive and radical movements, not only here in the city, but throughout the country.

**10:07 Daniel Kisslinger of AirGo Radio:** So each week we have a longform conversation with an artist, organizer, culture worker, someone reshaping the culture of Chicago and beyond for the more equitable and creative. We've been doing it since 2015. You're on episodes 59 and 60, and we're now in episode 270, so we've been going for a minute and it's been really fun to also watch you all do the work that you do and feel like we're not, you know, alone in these podcast streets anymore, so.

**10:35 Damon:** We're really excited because I think similar to your space, in addition to covering and archiving some of these stories, we do view Airgo as an educational tool and a space for learning and consciousness raising. So after folks come here and check out these books, we can get a little bit more deep dive on some adjacent or connected themes over here at Airgo. We would love y'all. Check us out.

**10:57 Page:** Yeah, I can say being a guest on your show, the conversations I've had have been some of my favorite over the years. I think they've happened every year, like, there's an annual one, and it's been this really cool sort of like marker of things that I'm thinking about and I have really appreciated the questions that you asked in the conversations that you're holding. But also just, I mean, it's almost at this point 300 conversations with so many incredible artists and you know, organizers, and they're organized into like tracks, which is phenomenal, like y'all are really goals. And I really love what you all do and how you do it, and I highly encourage our listeners to go over. There's a lot of people I'd love to have one day on the Lit Review, but they're probably already on AirGo.

**11:39 Daniel:** Well you can double up, it's fine. We don't have, like exclusive NDAs with our guests, you know? *[laughter]*

**11:47 Monica:** Can you let our listeners know where we can hear AirGo radio?

**11:51 Daniel:** Absolutely. You can find us on all the places you find your podcast at A I R G O. It's also at AirGoRadio on everything, and airgoradio.com.

*[Sound of book pages turning, soft instrumental music]*

**12:08 Monica:** You're listening to the Lit Review Podcast.

**12:12 Page:** We're your hosts, Page May and Monica Trinidad.

*[Musical hip hop beat playing in background from "Chicago" by David Ellis]*

**12:16 Mariame Kaba voiceover:** "I think it's essential for people to learn together in order to be able to understand what we're up against."

**12:23 Protest Chanting:** "CPD, shut it down! New Jim Crow, shut it down!" *[Inaudible chanting]* "I said No Cop Academy, 95 mil for community!"

**12:32 Page voiceover:** "We must disrupt, we must disobey, we must agitate, we must escalate, we must break, we must create, we must abolish, we must transform -"

**12:40 Young person voiceover:** "I remember, she was shot by my house -"

**12:44 Mariame voiceover:** "In sharing our ideas, we're stronger."

12:47 *[Music Lyrics]* *Welcome to Chicago, this is home for most. This is the home of the wealthy, making cameos. This is the house of the heartless, the home of the cold. Man, my dog gets more acknowledgement than homeless folks. This is a house, a generation filled in Audy homes -*  
*[Music Fades]*

**13:01 Page:** Welcome back, everyone. Our guest today is amazing. The last time that I think I saw you was this summer. It was a friend's birthday and we were like, it was like a stoop six foot distance circle, and we spent a lot of time talking about bugs, and I was very charmed and I am so excited to have another chance to just nerd out with you. And so welcome to the show, Juliana. Can you tell us a little bit about who you are, what you do and why?

**13:29 Juliana Pino Alcaraz:** Yes. Thanks, y'all. So I am the daughter of an entomologist, which is why I nerd out about bugs so hard. My mom studies insects. Love bugs. Bugs are cool. Yeah, I am a rabble rouser of many hats. I have a hard time thinking through like one part of myself because I think a defining part of myself is I do a million things and I've always been that way since I was little. I'm a professional intervenor into fucked up shit. I'm an organizer. I'm a movement strategist, negotiator in my movement home of the EJ -- the Environmental Justice and climate justice movements. I am a friend, a sibling of Marcella, a daughter of Carlos and Sandra. I'm a Colombian Afro-indígena here in Chicago, the ancestral land of the Council of Three Fires: the Ojibwe, Odawa and Potawatomi Nations. You know, my home away from my own ancestral lands as a displaced person. Also shout out to Chi-Nations Youth Council. I wanted to give them some love. Really incredible local crew of inter-tribal native young people here. If you have some coin to send them, listeners, please do. And in Chicago, a lot of folks know me for directing policy at the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization workgroup, building self-determination, fighting for justice for little village residents and alongside other frontline organizations across the city in a number of places struggling hard against industrial siting, pollution, racism from the city and the government in order to establish goodness and well-being in their lives.

**15:07 Monica:** Oh, thank you for being with us today, Juliana. I'm so excited to talk about the book *From The Ground Up: Environmental Racism and The Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement* by Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster. I wish that folks could see you right now because you look amazing. You always have the best earrings on, the best t-shirts, looking so great on this zoom right now. And I'm also excited because we -- I think we have identical birth charts too? Basically identical birth charts. Yeah, some Virgo love here. So can you tell us a little bit about what led you to read this book? I know that you are... you are a major environmental justice organizer, so obviously we know why you wrote this book. But can you tell us a little bit more about why you chose to talk about this book today?

**16:00 Juliana:** Yes, this is about to be such a Virgo birth chart answer because mainly it's efficient and it sure it delivers a lot of detail in a slim text. It uncommonly covers a few things that are important primers to understand environmental justice work all in one place. That's not normal for works about this kind of work or books in general. It gets into a bunch of different case studies of different communities. We're talking Kettleman City, California, Buttonwillow, Cancer Alley in Louisiana, Chester and Pennsylvania, Dilkon in Arizona, and alternates them with different contextual analysis of different aspects of environmental justice, organizing and strategies to intervene. So just to understand the issues, but also for organizers, it's really helpful because you can really see in these hyper specific examples; what are the ways that different strategies were successful or not? And how did that work to build movement power? And I think, you know, my favorite EJ books are deep dives in communities' own voice and in their

own struggle. This is not that. This book, however, is a good entry point for people who are less familiar with the movement and its history. It's got a heavily annotated citation section, which are fruitful seeds if you're the kind of person who's like, I need to read more about that. Well, there's a ton of stuff here for you to read more about, which is really great. And you know, the authors are a movement activist lawyer and a legal scholar. And so that kind of shows right there. They're like moving between the organizing strategy out into this meta analysis. I also think the book doesn't try to be everything, and it can't be. It's almost 20 years old so, so, so much has evolved in the movement and the world. It really focuses on the part of our work that are just transition frameworks. The way that we approach shifting from old extractive economies to regenerative economies. It focuses on the fighting, the bad part, right? And less on the part that's equally important to EJ work, which is the imagining, the building, the new part. But I think it's a -- it's really an invaluable work and a great entry point for folks to take a look.

**18:01 Page:** So my understanding is that it seems like this book, in part, was written to not push back, but expand on the moment where Bill Clinton signs the environmental racism, some executive order against environmental racism and that was, I believe in 1994, which is the same here as NATO. NATO, which is wild. That's like environmental racism to the tenth degree -- anyways. And that all these realities of pollution were being talked about and seen on much more of a mainstream scale. But again, Bill Clinton had sort of like narrowly defined it and made it look like "and now it's done". And so this book was seeking to help, as you were saying, create a bit more of a primer and look into all of the history of what led to that and what is still happening. And so I know that it's a rich book, even though it's short. And so this is the space for the summary, you know, can you tell us a little bit more about what does this book go into? What are the main messages and points it's trying to emphasize?

**19:05 Juliana:** Yeah, absolutely. And thank you for raising that about environmental justice as a term. I think, you know, when Clinton signed the executive order, it defined the government's approach to what environmental justice means. Their focus is on a few key pieces around its influence in policy, about the reality that everyone should be treated equally in all of these different things. But what their definition doesn't get it, is environmental racism, which is the cause for why environmental justice is even a thing, right? We wouldn't be talking about it if it wasn't about environmental racism and how that operates. And in study after study, you know, a lot of environmental justice analysis from the federal government. It's talking about income and race. But study after study shows that race is actually a primary driver of inequitable sighting outcomes where you have black and brown communities specifically being targeted, not just poor communities. It's like poor black and brown communities specifically. So that's important to know. It's not that every community is a black or brown community, but largely that's who we're talking about, and it's important to name that, right? The government does not name that when they say environmental justice. So this book really gets at environmental racism. And so it's drawing on these key pieces of how the environmental justice movement came together. It's

drawing on these different threads. They use this great framing about tributaries to a river and these different tributaries over time that came together to make a broader movement. And they cite that accurately, right? They're talking about the civil rights movement. People putting their bodies on the line to block trucks full of PCBs come -- to come into their community all the way to industrial workers and folks fighting against toxic working conditions actually being another threat. They also base indigenous land struggles. A huge part of the EJ movement is from indigenous land struggles. And you'll note -- and a few other examples -- and you'll note that they're very small. That is environmental movements, which actually were like they showed up in the 11th hour and were like, *"Oh, we should care about this also, instead of just conserving land and evicting native folks from that land so we can take pretty pictures that then go to museums later? Cool. But let us actually pretend like all environmentalism is what we think and not environmental racism struggles or environmental justice, when actually the vast majority of people impacted by environmental issues are not doing that kind of work. They're doing this kind of work."* And so it's important to ground that. And I think that the book does that well, and that's like a main overarching goal. Another goal is that the book I think tracks strategies that EJ communities have used to fight major corporations, right? These are long odds organizing struggles. And I think that's something that's important to think through from an organizing perspective, but also just to understand, like what's at stake, right? Companies are showing up in communities. People are getting dumped on and straight up killed, right? And there's an assumption that communities will just take it and time and time again. You have like small, scrappy groups of 10 people, 12 people to hundreds of people, you know, as they build movement, fighting back and in many cases, winning against multinational global corporations. It's really important to understand how that happens, because that's a long odd. And folks are transforming their conditions. So I think that's another thing that the book does effectively is that it shows how you do organizing is actually around, you know, addressing the violent disposal of black and black and brown bodies directly. Really seeing that for what it is, the force that seeks to exert on communities, and that community organizers are actually just regular people who are confronting a reality that they don't get to leave, right? Every day, all day, they're like seeing the consequences in their body and their families bodies, on their land, in their food and their air and their soil. And they're being creative and outwitting people with millions of dollars and the power structure on their side. And that there's something really beautiful about that and in thinking about transforming material conditions so directly and that the people who are the most impacted are the ones who have the most at stake, and they're the ones who are actually driving really creative interventions and getting resistance done. It also, hopefully, I think, also doesn't paint EJ communities as a monolith. A lot of texts and other perspectives sort of show, well, every, you know, these communities have shared struggle and it's like, that's true. But as you both know, as organizers, there's -- not everybody shares the same perspective on what should be done. And it's important to recognize that reconciling that and really moving with folks' differences is a huge part of what organizing looks like, what relational work looks like and how to ground movement building moving forward. So I think that that is also good. There's some



other stuff that I think are valuable, that are takeaways from the book, but I can speak more to that later. Those are, I think, some of them, some key things.

**23:54 Monica:** Yeah. And I would like to go even a little bit earlier than 1994. Like where -- what -- I know that the book begins -- has a first chapter around what happened in Kettleman City. I don't know if you could speak a little bit towards that. Or even just like where did the Movement for Environmental Justice begin?

**24:12 Juliana:** Yeah. So there are a few different origin points, right? If we're talking -- if we're going chronologically, I would cite the movement for environmental justice beginning with land based resistance to colonization. Shortly thereafter, movements for environmental justice also originated with slaves who were resisting essentially the employment of their bodies as tools to work the land, instead of folks who had -- who were in their native lands, having agency over land use agency over the use of their time and the use of natural resources. Fundamentally, slavery is a deep act of environmental racism and the way that bodies and communities were used and and disposed of for the purposes of industry is a core characteristic of what environmental racism is. So I would site actually on this land, the origins of the movement in the resistance of native communities and the resistance of enslaved people to those conditions that they were facing. That has changed over time, right? Those struggles continue in different forms in the civil rights tributary into the movement. You had people identifying, right? This isn't just about we don't get to eat at the same lunch counters. We don't -- we're not enabled to go to the same schools, but also we are living next to toxic waste dumps. And when they're trying to get rid of their trash, they're throwing it at us. Right? And essentially that the material wealth of the entire United States was conditioned on production and extraction that sees black and brown people as like, sides to the main dish of capital. That that dynamic right was something that I think civil rights organizers started to see, especially in communities in the south where you just had -- I mean, you had blatant examples of like building public housing complexes on toxic waste dumps. You had trucks full of extremely toxic material, just cruising down into communities and dumping stuff in people's backyards. Just explicit dumping on people and organizing against that was part of how people were trying to say, this is not respecting our rights, right? Using a rights based framework. You also through the labor movement, as you know, as the federal government starts to become aware of, oh, some of these things are toxic. Workers knew that years prior because they were in close contact with these wastes and you had facilities struggles inside canning factories. You had the United Farm Workers movement, you know, chemicals applied to agriculture. You had people in the textile industry seeing their working conditions, like getting exposed to stuff on the job and organizing against that. That's also a threat important in the EJ movement that was starting to happen fifties, sixties, seventies. You have the anti-toxics movement specifically like chemicals specifically and what it means to deal with chemical, chemical waste, chemical waste incineration, right? This idea that to get rid of these waste products, you just burn it and it goes nowhere. But the nowhere is actually into the

lungs that the people that live next door to the burning facility. Even last year, right, these threads still continue. Last year, the Chemical Council was in Springfield in Illinois, saying This is plastic recycling, right? The city calls metal shredders recyclers, so the recycling rules are actually about large metal shredders and all of these different misnomers about what's actually happening, which is we're producing a huge amount of toxic waste and byproducts in our capital accumulation as a nation state and these corporations. And what happens to those byproducts? They go to the people who are also seen as waste, as unnecessary as superfluous in a system where they're not the ones accumulating wealth where we don't get to participate as people with our own agency and the different threads in the environmental justice movement come from different locations in that experience. Again, I think there are some parts to be recognized, too, about the role of academics, some of whom had marginalized identities who were starting to see in their academic work. Whoa. This is not. This is a pattern, right? And doing larger scale analysis of different sitting situations. Well, this is happening in all these different regions. This is happening in all these different ways by the thousands, right? And sort of using that to get at the scale question. And then again, lastly, this much from the traditional environmental movement. Let's take a lot of credit and parachute in and think that they do good things, but have a lot of work to do around moving in solidarity with communities and understanding their own role in focusing government intervention on broad scale equality for everyone. And enforcement of laws that are actually enforced best in white communities. Affluent communities and are. Not enforced equally, even when they exist, right? So, so, yeah, it all through those decades started to come together. The first sort of joint summits of different parts of those groups happened in the early 90s before 1984, and you start to see real clashes between the large environmental organizations and EJ groups. One really good example is the negotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, where folks tried for the first time to sort of work in coalition with each other. The large environmental groups ended up going with the state supported strategy and abandon all of these small frontline communities in the U.S. and Mexico to essentially rot when they passed NAFTA. So frontline groups then joined together in Hamish in New Mexico and came up with a document called the Hamish Principles for Democratic Organizing, where they lay out. These are the things you have to be held to and you're going to move in coalition, work with each other. And those documents are still used today because the dynamic is still continuing, right, of who gets the focus of what the movement looks like and who gets the dollars and who gets the resources or the attention, even from government or regulatory bodies. But that movement, that original core of that movement and understanding where it comes from is super important to get how emerging EJ struggles happened today. It's about regular people recognizing their conditions and rising up and then starting to see that other communities are experiencing the same thing and linking together mutually across geographies. It's not about the top down, you know, conservationist approach at all.

**30:45 Page:** What is someone who's interested in organizing their community against environmental injustices that are happening? What are some of the common practices or

structures that are lifted up in this book that folks might be able to immediately apply or try to incorporate into their work? I know there's a whole chapter about -- I think it's called like environmental justice practices. And so if you could summarize that as well.

**31:12 Juliana:** Yes, absolutely. So there are, I think, the book outlines as processes of struggle, which I really appreciate the framing because it's totally processes. Also, in my organization, they call me the purveyor of process because I'm super process oriented and I think that everything is dictated by processes of decision making. I think that's how you distribute power. And so that's why process matters so much. So I appreciated this. I was like nerding out when I saw this title the first time I read this book. But yeah, essentially, the book makes the point that the processes of struggle, at least in the United States, are shaped by the reality that environmental laws and laws that actually create the possibility for industries to act this way are the things that are shaping reality. So the struggles are in relationship with these laws. And so you start seeing things like, you know, addressing, for example, the reality that OK, so now the government thinks that environmental regulation is the thing that will protect people. Let's just make sure we check in with the public and we're good. So there is a whole subset in environmental struggle around how do we force the government to make sure that it's listening to the community's input? So actually, even though this is relevant to all kinds of organizing, EJ movements have honed this approach of how do we demand and extract public participation processes that actually exert decision making power into regulation, into situations? And almost by intuition, community after community folks who have realized, oh, there is a whole decision making process that caused this, we got to go there. We have to intervene there. And so that procedural approach of going straight to understanding how a decision got made to produce the reality that folks are living with is a core strategy in EJ movements. We call that procedural justice, which is to say that processes can be extremely designed to intentionally exclude the ability of the public to actually exert influence over an outcome. But you can disrupt that. You can deliberately disrupt that. You can organize around that. So things like organizing around hearings, showing up at public meetings, some of those strategies that has been endemic to EJ strategies even in the tiniest communities, because it's so fundamental, because these kinds of struggles have to do with often massive facilities, single site struggles. Nowadays, we also organize around what we call multi-point sources, which is like cars, trucks, right? Things that don't have that a result of many, many different decisions instead of sort of a handful of small ones. But even then, that public process intervention, that procedural intervention is really important.

You know, I think another thing that they talk about is around this idea that communities often get pitted against regulatory bodies and pitted against owners of companies, and one of the ways that that happens is you end up getting sort of a bifurcated organizing approach where often communities are both working through the system to understand like the technical aspects of what's happening, like looking at permits, calling the regulatory agencies, trying to understand

like this chemical name is like this long. What the fuck is that, right? Am I allowed to curse? I don't know. And essentially really digging into that scientific, legal, technical part of the work and then also doing nonviolent direct action, working outside the system. And you know, you'll sometimes you'll even have groups that are both at the same meeting. Some people are inside and some people are outside and they're using -- they're working together strategically to produce an outcome. And because of the nature of environmental racism being legal, technical language, even that obscures what's actually happening. I gave the example of recyclers, right?

Communities have had to scale way up to debunk and dismantle all of this obscurity, to get out what the truth is of what's going on, which in that cases, they're burning toxic waste. They're trying to burn medical waste in my front yard, so that sort of bifurcated two-systems strategy is also really, really common among EJ groups.

I think a last thing that I'll note here, that is part in that chapter and part in another chapter called Transformational Politics, is that EJ organizations, again, we operate in networks. So, often these institutions think they're dealing with one community and one organization. But actually, we're in constant, perpetually growing formation with peers locally and with peers across the country. So I'll give an example about how that operated here.

Hilco, the company that acquired the coal plant and is wreaking major havoc and destruction in Little Village, where the community shut that plant down, along with Pilsen Environmental Rights and Reform Organization, shutting down FISK in Pilsen. That company just is trying to buy another facility in Philly. So at LVEJO, we're working with Philly Thrive and we're jointly organizing against the same multinational company in two different places. And that's just a tiny little microcosm, but that's sort of standard practice in EJ organizing, we don't just start here and think here, the folks who are locally impacted should be driving decision making, but we strategize and build across geography as like a core part of how we get things done against big multinational companies, often because the things that hurt the most, right, shocks to their stock price influence, to their reputations, messing with their donations, the the head of Hilco sitting on the Police Foundation board, for example, is one of the directors is a good example, right? The way that they try and embed themselves into power structures. You have to organize across geography to be effective against institutions like that. So those are sort of two three core ways that they pull those strategies out in the book. But I think they do a good job of sort of identifying. This is a pattern of how this work happens in different communities.

**37:27 Monica:** Yeah. And I want to get into everything you're describing, but in very concrete examples right of current environmental justice struggles, like you mentioned, Hilco. And then there's also the struggle against General Iron right now in the south-east side. But before we go deeper there, can you just say -- give us one main takeaway that you have from this book.

**37:47 Juliana:** Totally. I think one takeaway here that I think the book does a good job of highlighting and is something that's really key to the movement in general is... is this idea of we speak for ourselves, and I would even drive just the people who are most impacted themselves, or the source of the brilliance that we need for organizing against environmental racism to be successful, or organizing in general, to be successful. EJ movement position is that folks who are most impacted should be prioritized, should be supported to be in positions of leadership, people for whom lifelong fenceline struggles are defining everything in their lives, for whom their outcomes are at stake. The outcomes of their kids, their grandparents, their relatives and people who, because of that, are willing to push and innovate and use tactics and strategies that folks who have less at stake are not willing to use or take risks to use. Those are the people who should be driving our movement strategy overall and who should be driving campaigns locally. I think that takeaway is super important, especially in an era of social media where we're building across larger geographies. In an era where folks are able to get followings as organizers, in an era where people are able to move just at all, right? It's still important to like... at the end of the day, is this holding to the principle of the person who is the most impacted has a say and that we're focusing on like deliberating and supporting people to, like, exert that influence over the process versus we're doing what we want as people further and further removed from a situation. And that's governing what's happening, right? As soon as that starts to happen, we've got to check ourselves and get go back to that source principle of self-determination. Are the people determining themselves what the future of a campaign or outcome is going to be?

**39:36 Page:** Can you speak more to how this book has influenced the ways that you organize today?

**39:41 Juliana:** Yes. So much has been really helpful in this book, and I think that there are some things that I had learned bits and pieces of, but this book really did a good job of pulling the threads together in a way that just like was like, Yes, I get that. You know, there are a couple of chapters with some meta analysis that I find really helpful and useful. One is about environmental racism and how land use planning specifically has isolated and economically suppressed Black and Brown communities. I see that happening in Chicago as an active, ongoing process and that government and corporate entities together have specifically targeted these communities. Again, an active ongoing process and especially here in Chicago.

In my experience, a lot more of us know about forces like redlining than we do about industrial siting. If we think about social justice movements and our popular education at large, I think that's a fair generalization. I don't tend to generalize, but I think that's a fair one. But both have really accelerated mass death in Black and Brown communities, and I think it's important for organizers to understand the basics of those histories and how they operate because it actually does drive outcomes across a bunch of different issues. And so I think about that a lot in my own

work when I'm thinking about how is this producing different realities and what does that manifest like in folks' lives?

A good example is the book runs through this example of how white planning boards have rezoned Black and Brown communities into industrial area designations without folks knowing in a lot of cases. So you have these white boards just being like, "We think this part should be industrial. Cool. Let's do it." And like often, neighbors don't even know that that's happening. A version of that happened here, right, when Chicago designated plan manufacturing districts, you know these white boards, the technical term for that process is called explosive zoning, where you're like getting rid of residential classifications and in theory, residential homes. But people aren't actually leaving because you didn't tell them that you are doing that. You know, in Chicago, with the creation of the plan manufacturing districts, many of whom folks would recognize as being the geographies where you had PETCOKE struggles, where you had the struggles against the coal plants, where you have incinerators in West Garfield Park that shut down in the 90s, you know, some of these lifelong health consequential struggles happen in these plant manufacturing districts, which were created purportedly to preserve manufacturing, but did so by citing the consequences of that manufacturing in Black and Brown communities in the city.

So I think about that, that zoning dynamic a lot because they use that to do all sorts of things, not just industrial siting. Now think about this. This morning I was reflecting on when we were all waiting together, the No Cop Academy struggle that we came through and made a presentation on the Northwest Plan Manufacturing District to the crew, and that the city had created this industrial zone in West Garfield Park, Right, folks didn't know that that was there, but they created this zone and they drew it when they drew the map. They specifically cut out the corner where our high school is located. So it's like a perfect square, except this little notch, because they wanted to pretend that this area was not up against books as homes and it was not up against a vast majority black high school. And then that they, in the code for that zone, put in loopholes for polluters to put whatever they want in that part of the neighborhood and gave themselves the same loopholes for policing facilities. And then they use that loophole to fast track the cop academy. So the city's same practices are on zoning, right? The same root causes of devaluing Black and Brown lives. They use that to drive outcomes environmentally or otherwise.

And I think, you know, folks had no idea about that [industrial citing], and the city counted on that when they fast tracked their plan, right? We came in after it had already moved through some of the planning process to be like, "This is what they're doing!" you know? But they counted on us not having that, that connectivity, that understanding of these technical parts of the siting that normally relay over here. And they're using that, right, to do some of the things that they want to do because they understand that control of land, controlling where things happen, ultimately drives outcomes that they want and we don't want as a movement.

So that's one way that the book has really supported my thinking about how the governance of land and industry violently messes with our people and that they deliberately work together with these siting strategies to do that, you know.

Another strategy that they call out that I think about a lot in the book is the academics call this "the path of least resistance citing strategy", which is that literally, companies and the government, will look for neighborhoods where they think people are so disempowered that they can drop something there and folks won't fight back. Like, they're banking on people not fighting back, people not knowing what's going on and not fighting back and literally banking. They use that to exert even more profit. And so that they can literally kill people and folks won't fight back and won't know that the companies are responsible or that the government is responsible. They've attempted that in a number of situations in different Chicago neighborhoods where there are these assumptions that because the community is not organized around environmental issues, they're not going to know, right? They may experience some differences in their health, but they're not going to be able to pinpoint it to any given source. Companies also rely on that strategy to cite a bunch of things in one place, right? Then they can be like, "Oh, you're coughing because of that person, not cause of us." Like, "sure, we produce some pollution but they produce more." And it leads to this inability for communities to pinpoint what the sources of their misery and that's something that they do on purpose.

This is particularly on my mind right now because we're seeing a spate of warehouse facilities coming through the south and southwest side, from small to large being cited and potentially cited in communities that don't have a history of organizing around environmental issues that might not even have civic or social organizations or formations generally. And they're taking advantage of that, right? They're going to drop Amazon warehouses on neighborhoods that don't even know what environmental justice is because they haven't had facility struggles historically. And I'm like seeing before my eyes, right. The use of these practices to create future frontline communities, dozens more EJ communities in Chicago. And that's my waking nightmare, right?

But they're banking on organizers not knowing the way that they go about this so that they won't know when to resist, right? At what point they start to fight back until it's already happened, right, until they're already after the end of the process, they've already gotten all the permits. Then the people start to see the walls go up over the building and they're like, What's this? You know, they're counting on that. And so really, keeping that central in my mind helps me stay sharp on what we need to be looking for the --- what patterns. Also, we need to be seeing. You know, one last thing that I find that paired with in the real world often is a like deliberate strategy to, I mean, this is like a form of gaslighting to essentially like culturally invest or otherwise throw resources at the same region that they're deliberately targeting. So with one hand, there's the Invest Southwest strategy from the mayor's office and with the other, you know, and let's name like cultural resources into these communities. And with the other hand, we also cite future

warehousing facilities in those same neighborhoods, same administration. But it's a distraction, right? It's like, let's put a nice name on this thing over here and then simultaneously buy folks off and distract people from noticing what else is happening in their community. That's also a city initiative and that that's deliberately coordinated in ways that I think we all have growth to do around understanding, especially because they're getting savvier and savvier on how they employ those strategies and like the modern evolution of these sort of historical historical tactics.

**47:46 Page:** I really appreciate that answer for so many reasons. Number one. Correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems like the book really focuses on very important stories of communities resisting toxic pollution from corporations. And that is a somewhat narrow -- I would I think that that's a narrow way of thinking about what environmental justice movements look like when we only focus on rather obvious examples of like, you put this chemical into the environment and it makes people sick. And so I really like how you're bringing up. It's also about maps and who creates the maps and who creates the map, who has control to land and access. And I think that when we do that, it helps us understand -- we had a guest earlier VB was on talking about black farmers, and we see that that is an environmental justice struggle as well of our fight of access to land and ability and -- the means of self-determination, right? We see the 40 acres and a mule claimed reparations as an environmental justice fight. And so I think I sort of have a two part question of, you know what, maybe I'm misinterpreting the book, but it seems like that's absent, sort of that expansive definition of environmental justice and scope of what environmental racism looks like. And so I'm wondering if you could speak to your definition of those terms. And what do you see them as including? And what are you -- And then also, are there other things that you feel are maybe missing from the book; recognizing it's 20 years old and nothing can do everything. So maybe it's not a critique, but just what are -- What are other stories and scopes of work that are not included?

**49:27 Juliana:** Definitely. I had like 15 paragraphs of notes on this, probably because it's my biggest critique of the book. I think that the book starts to get at like the seeds of some important threads to other parts of the movement, but doesn't really dig into them. Because the case studies that they chose are really around toxic waste. Even the case study in Dilkon, Arizona, they're focused on a waste incinerator, right? They're not focused on broader issues of land sovereignty struggles, which are very much about environmental racism, displacement and genocide, related to control of land and preventing people from exerting their rights to control land.

There's also this international aspect that's missing from the book that really centers on that, right? You see environmental justice struggles in other countries. Again, lots of facility struggles, but also fundamentally, right? If I think about struggles in my native territory, it is about open, open coal strip mining that's preventing people from doing their ancestral fishing practices. That's preventing people from not getting toxic dust into their homes while the government is naming things U.N. heritage sites with the other hand, so just again, another example of the



parent strategy. But it's also that hundreds of human rights defenders are being killed because they're standing on their land and they're fighting to protect the ability to care for themselves and their communities on their land, right? That's what's at stake. It's like, I'm from here. We've been from here for hundreds of years, now you're trying to forcibly remove us to grow sugarcane. We're trying to forcibly remove us to put in a dam or to put in a massive prison. That land defense is critical to an understanding of what environmental justice looks like in an actualized way and how environmental racism operates to forcibly remove people from land, and to make decisions about land that fuel neoliberal trade policies and fuel capital accumulation while literally running Black and Brown people over right, literally running indigenous people over. I think the other thing that's super missing for me is I think about environmental justice work is anti-violence work. It's about violence. The thing that's happening is violence, and we have to name it that way. We can't just like, avoid that in engaging with the movement work right? There's the slow violence of poison and toxins, right? Where like, literally, you're just saving years off people's lives, not just through the exposure, but the stress of the mental health of being poisoned and then policed in the same community, right? It's also around working to end state violence against Black and Brown people, period, right? Generally. What does that mean? Tearing down prisons and jails, liberating people from conditions that are choking them, literally depriving people of the ability to breathe, literally, right. Work to end white supremacy. Work inside of and outside of our organizations to dismantle anti-Black racism. Work to abolish policing and the end of the carceral in military state. Those are all under environmental justice struggles, and many frontline groups work on both, right, LVEJO does, and people sometimes think we're the anomaly, though we're not, like folks who are working in response to material conditions and communities find themselves working on the sites of violence. And that's important for us to understand. That could be a whole separate book, but I think, like for me, that's key. It's also key to why I do this work specifically, you know, and to really understand like how the hell these forces of violence function jointly is important to environmental racism, especially in the United States, but also everywhere.

Everything from how prisons are built on toxic brownfields, right? The Cook County Jail was built right next to a site that ended up producing polluted toxic roof tiles that one of the biggest Superfund sites in Chicago, extremely toxic land that the community won and transformed into a park where young people now run restorative justice alternatives to policing program. The Cook County Jail people wanted it to be a parking lot. They did it win that fight. But you know, all the way to how climate disasters happen, all the way from like Hurricane Sandy to Hurricane Maria, for example. And the nation states use that to then abruptly militarize right and abruptly take resources back. When folks are literally struggling to get clean water, they're coming in and taking people's homes, taking people's land, cracking down violently. These forces work together to ensure that the means of control always lay with government and always lay with industry. And it's really important to think through how the protection of private property around policing the private property we're talking about wasn't just homes, it's like moneymaking facilities. You

know, I think about this history specifically in Chicago, specifically on the southeast side, how the steel industry was crucial to the building of the cops. They were some of the first suppliers of weapons to police, right, clubs and other weapons in cracking down on Mexican immigrants who were laboring inside of steel shops, inside of steel factories. You've got that really violent, horrible crackdown confrontations that are part of that history. That is environmental justice work, the work to resist that sort of suppression, to establish better working conditions and to connect the issues of they're making a sick at work. And it's not just because of the pollution, and then they're following us home and the police, they're policing our bodies. That's a continuum. And all of that is under the umbrella of what we should be considering environmental racism. Because literally, the environments where you work, where you play, where you, where you live, where you're trying to have a life are being constrained and suppressed and violently controlled for the purposes of other people's capital accumulation. They're working in tandem. That's why those systems exist. And so it's really, really important when folks think about environmental justice, justice looks like the end to those systems. Justice doesn't just look like canceling polluters one at a time. Justice doesn't look like transforming into a cleaner type of manufacturing. It's also about why it is that manufacturing company have a security force that's policing the young people who live next door. It's both questions that once

**55:59 Monica:** You brought up chemical weapons in terms of -- in connection to Chicago policing, and it makes me think about the Memorial Day massacre that happened in 1937 on the southeast side, a few blocks away from where I grew up. And at this time, I mean, this was like, you know, laborers that were striking against unfair conditions at Republic Steel, and they were retaliated against by Republic Steel and by Chicago Police. And they had the police had tear gas, they threw tear gas at them. And at this time, police were not issued tear gas. This was issued by Republic Steel to protect their factories and their, and their production, right. So absolutely, what, you know, what you're saying, it just is horrible. It's absolutely horrible. But I want to say you brought up also the Cook County Jail, which is located in South Lawndale, which is right next to the neighborhood of Little Village. And earlier this year, a few artists, including myself with For The People Artists Collective, we worked with LVEJO to create posters that brought attention to this extremely harmful demolition of the old Crawford coal plant that Hilco presided over with Lori Lightfoot's greenlight. And this happened during the pandemic and in June of 2020, when folks were already vulnerable, particularly folks in Little Village. And I live about a mile from where this happened and our air purifiers run constantly, especially when we open our doors, our windows. The air purifiers just are on full blast because they're like, What is this shit in the air? And in all of the neighborhoods I've lived in, this is some of the worst air quality I've ever experienced. So can you talk a little bit more about what happened in this incident of extreme environmental racism, of violence and how LVEJO is fighting against Hilco?

**57:53 Juliana:** Yes, absolutely. So the sort of very concise history of this site is that there is a coal plant that ran at the Crawford site for decades. This coal plant was causing death in the

community. Forty three people prematurely dying every year, hundreds of asthma attacks, thousands of missed days of work and school. Extreme consequences for the community. The community waged a battle for 12 years and ultimately won that battle through very, very intense organizing to get the facility shut down. I mentioned Fiske earlier. That's less than two miles away in Pilsen, so these facilities were operating at the same time. So you could say that there's a little bit at stake with the future of this particular land, given how much loss and devastation the operations of the former plant had for the community and the work that was put in to shut it down. And folks had a whole process to determine what the future of that site could be. The city was even involved in that process, right? It turns out that that was all for naught, because when it came down to it, the city wanted to use the site to get tax revenue in and cut a deal. You know, overnight folks weren't notified until after the literal commissioner of Planning, who was a former industry representative industry lawyer, cut a deal and got Hilco the site with the stamp of the local alderman at the time, Ricardo the worst Munoz. And yeah, so then folks found out that this site was now in the hands of a global industrial transition company who purportedly cleans up sites and then turns them over to a different kind of industry. Now their plan is they want to build a massive warehousing facility. And they wanted to fast track demolition. So they were going left and right, trying to make the demolition happen as fast as possible, including on April 11th. They utilized a tactic that hadn't been used in 10 years in Chicago because it's so dangerous, called an implosion where they put explosives on the inside of something in order to collapse it. They were able to get special permitting for this because again, this is not a practice that's used anymore. They stopped actually using it after they were using it to demolish public housing complexes, and folks were getting major lifelong consequences due to inhaling massive amounts of asbestos. Right.

There's a whole other legacy here around implosions in Chicago and why it is that it's not a practice anymore. So they did that and they got special permission from the Lightfoot administration to do it. We found out about it a day in advance and fought like absolute hell to try and stop it. We weren't able to do that. I mean, they hid it from the community on purpose turned out that the local alderman knew a week in advance. I'll never forget that, no matter what he does anything else ever and didn't try and stop it. And so they went ahead. So this implosion covered the community. It shook the ground in the community, and it covered the community and adjacent neighborhoods for many, many blocks with a fine layer of polluted, toxic dust. We still don't know the entire composition of that dust because the city did not take appropriate samples. They waited too long. They waited until after it rained, and they didn't gather enough material so that they could conduct tests to really know. So they were like, Oh, it's safe, it's clean. They don't actually know. They didn't test it for a bunch of the things that they should have tested it for, given that it came from a coal plant. like period. They can say that as many times as they want, they don't know. The community will never know what was in that dust. We also had a community member who was out in his yard in close proximity to the event and had been living with lifelong respiratory issues from living a few blocks from the coal plant his whole life. He

was out in his garden and he died later that day. And you know, his death coming so close on the heels of the event, as well as many community members suffering extreme health consequences.

You know, over by where you live, Monica and even further away, people reporting like their asthma were way worse than usual, really struggling to breathe. I'm struggling to sleep, all sorts of stuff. You know, there are going to be lifelong consequences here. On top of that, to do this during a pandemic, when we know that the risk of transmission of COVID goes up eight times over in the presence of particulate matter to then flood a community with particulate matter that already had some of the highest COVID rates in the state and has consistently been in the top one, two or three spot of the highest rates in the state is an act of extreme violence, extreme belligerence and violence. They also didn't consider. And we also in our communications with them to try and stop. This made it really clear that people incarcerated at Cook County, much like the rest of the residents of the community, are trapped with this event and trapped with this air. And in their mitigation after the fact, they handed out some shoddy masks to a few people, like two masks a household, when you have multiple households in one home, it's not even remotely enough, and a few like car cleaning gift certificates to a local car wash. They refuse to help the people at Cook County Jail. They refuse to include in their outreach about how dangerous this was. We had to figure out ways to try and communicate with folks so that they would understand the conditions that they might be experiencing, right? Like the increase in breathing problems like getting justice in health care inside a facility that's contingent on devaluing people's bodies is hard enough. And then the city just clobbers people already who are trapped in the path of COVID with additional risks to their life. It's unconscionable. It's a horrible tragedy and we've been fighting back against the company, you know, before and after the event. But they continued into the city, paused demolitions for a little while.

Then we find out that they're demolishing pieces of the building again and then over and over again. This dynamic continued where the company has an extreme investment of demolishing this building and getting profit back out of it as fast as possible, and the city is very happy to help facilitate that. And recently, it's become really clear that it's not just that they think warehousing is an economic driver for the city's future. They're kind of hanging their future on this driver. And indeed, when the city tried to push an air quality ordinance that got adjusted some zoning measures, a hallmark of that was that they included a carve out for warehouses. So where they did some minor zoning process improvements for some kinds of facilities, but not warehouses, though that's a whole different thing. It's because they have huge dollars coming in from companies who are looking at Chicago, which has very nearby, another major site of EJ Struggle, the third largest intermodal facility in the world, the largest one in China. They're counting on Chicago to move their goods. You know, the good, they're thinking about this is a good movement territory. And so companies like Hilco have a lot at stake in getting more distributor renters into the city and getting more profits into the city's coffers. Right? The city was also very glad to help Cook County give them a massive public incentive, right? That wasn't even city that

city resident tax dollars, but through Cook County. So the city gets the property taxes and Cook County gives away the incentive. I mean, it was like, it's some like really evil genius, terrible stuff. So, you know, that's and that's just Hilco. And now we're seeing right, there's a new Amazon facility in Bridgeport. There's a warehouse coming to McKinley Park. We're looking at some in Inglewood. We're looking at more on the southeast side. We're hearing about some in Austin. Like it's happening. They're turning the volume way up. So I think the things that we're thinking about now are support continuing to support and fight the local struggle, but also building with our EJ family in other parts of the city to support all around us. Everyone else who's about to get clobbered with the same tradeoff around health and this false choice between work and, you know, and a paycheck and people's health and their ability to actually even just stay alive.

**1:06:31 Page:** It's really remarkable, I think, how much of a strong EJ tradition Chicago has and how many environmental crises are happening in this moment. I'm pretty sure Chicago has one of its many taglines is that it's a very green city. It claims that as something remarkable about itself, that I'm just like whenever I see it, I'm like, Wait, what? Like, what is the benchmark for that? And because, yeah, there's so many horrible things that are happening I'm thinking about, you know, they just cleared 20 acres of wood, a forest for the Cop Academy, which was one of the only green spaces in that area because it is this industrial corridor. And it was an informal park for people, and it's just gone now. And this is happening at the same time as we are very much in a climate crisis and we need every carbon sink that we can that we have. We need to be keeping ever. But if you go back, there is the strong legacy, right? And if I'm not mistaken, actually, Hazel Johnson was at the 1994 signing that bill. The thing that Bill Clinton passed around environmental justice and that's a Black woman from the south side of Chicago who was organizing in the 70s and Altgeld Gardens after she saw, I believe, her husband, but also many of her neighbors dying very young of cancer and making connection. To the fact that she lived in a toxic donut and that this is a housing project that black people, when they tore down the towers over here where I live, that Ida B. Wells Towers, Altgeld was a main place that folks were sent -- that folks had to go to, and it's surrounded by toxic industries where people are dying. And she fought back and she did community surveys, right? She was doing all kinds of organizing, especially with young people, and was at that -- in the photos with Bill Clinton. You know, that's in Chicago. And I think that's really beautiful and speaks to how rich this history is, especially if we start to think about what environmental work looks like beyond just white people in north face fleece talking about polar bears who I also love and respect and believe should have the things they need to survive. Like no disrespect to polar bears, but also like it's happening not just to polar bears, so anyways. We're in it. It's happening. People are fighting back and the world is fucked up. What does environmental justice look like under Lori Lightfoot administration? What are your visions?

**1:08:56 Juliana:** Yeah. Yes. Thank you. Environmental racism under Lori Lightfoot looks like again using doublespeak to obscure what's happening as they literally as a matter of policy, move the remaining industry from the north side into Southside corridors. So what's happening in the General Iron situation is they've got this metal shredder that's been a bane of existence for Lincoln Park residents in that part of the neighborhood because they are trash recyclers. They are shredding cars with everything in them, and they're emitting ridiculous amounts of chemicals as well as just fly ash and other waste into the neighborhood. So existing a terrible polluter.

Now it was started under the Emanuel administration. They wanted to start redeveloping the north branch of the river into luxury housing and away from industrial uses. So they created a policy to get some money in when companies moved from north side corridors into south side corridors. In this case, the site where it's located is going to be part of the sterling, you know, the Sterling Bay Lincoln Yards development, right? So this is also about the city positioning itself as a global location and all of this right as a sustainable like hallmark. It's about image also and they want to use the land for that and to get money from that complex. And so they're moving. They literally made a secret agreement. I'm not even making this up a secret agreement that got discovered with the company to facilitate their move through a merger with a company that's already existing and have been a recycling facility on the southeast side called RMG and Lori's line during the campaign, and an afterword was that's not General Iron, that's RMG. They're not moving their operations, that's RMG, like if RMG buys General Iron's equipment and then puts it somewhere else, that's the same thing, right? But this -- they really think the people are dumb, but the people are not dumb. The people are wise to what they're doing, you know, and they've been fighting back and in this case, incredible resistance.

I would just really want to shout out people that I organize with and who I am in deep relationship with and have so much love for -- Cheryl Johnson, Peggy Salazar, Olga Bautista, and other leaders at the Southeast Side Coalition of End Petcoke, the Southeast Environmental Task Force and People for Community Recovery. And Page, you shouted out Cheryl's mom. So much love for all of them. They filed a complaint with housing and urban development based on the idea that the city actually is facilitating this explicitly. They're not even trying to hide that they're doing this racist stuff, right? They're literally saying, take it out of these white neighborhoods. Let's put it over here, that'll solve our problem and we'll get the revenue, right?

So they are in an unprecedented way because there was that evidence that the city actually had an active hand, were able to say, you're violating -- you're violating the law like your own law, you're violating it. The other thing, too, is that we had commissioned an analysis through the Natural Resources Defense Council of the cumulative impacts of pollution, as well as folks as population vulnerability in one map. So I don't know if y'all have seen, it's like a map, it's got these red areas to green and it shows like where in the city environmental racism is the worst because it's not just about the pollution, it's about... Do folks have the ability to mitigate the

pollution? Can folks go to the doctor? Do they speak English? Are they able to have the money, right? All these other factors. Are they old? Are they young? And the city, we worked to get the city to replicate that study. The city did through their own public health department, they came up with this thing called the air quality report this year, while boom, the city knew that these are the parts of town that already are disproportionately impacted, that already have huge Black and Brown communities who suffer health consequences because of the city's own decision making. And they still are choosing to move General Iron, so then they're extra violating the law. Makes sense.

**1:12:57 Juliana:** So I just wanted to shout that out because I think that was the result of a lot of long term strategizing and planning and really using everything from nonviolent direct action to extreme level legal maneuvering. Much like the very many strategies that are in this book to jointly top down pressure on the city in a way that they didn't anticipate having to deal with. Now they're going to have to potentially face HUD coming in and reregulating things that the city has control over itself right now in very -- it's a very similar tactic to -- and again, an imperfect tactic, but a similar tactic on policing, right? When the federal government comes in and is like, "Yo, your policing is not just average policing, you're doing stuff that's clearly racially motivated. We might need to have a consent decree. Right?" It's sort of a similar tactic. So yeah, I just wanted to shout that out because I just, I love them and they out here making some brilliant moves. And we organize together under the Chicago Environmental Justice Network, where we mutually support and strategize and often are dealing with the same city agencies, same even individuals who are telling us different things. And they just, you know, we stay, we stay several moves ahead of them in that way.

**1:14:10 Juliana:** And I really appreciate that long legacy of EJ work here because we're able to be in these deep, long term relationships with each other, and that leads to just different kinds of organizing, I think, than the kind of organizing where you're like dropping into places and you're there for a short amount of time, is like this real anchor in the city. This legacy of struggle here means that it's -- we see things for what they are. We see them more clearly and we're able to really throw down for each other when it counts. I would also flag, um, we have emerging EJ organizations here. It's really amazing, not the conditions that have created the need for them, but just folks rising up, right? I want to shout out under that lens Neighbors for environmental justice in McKinley Park. They're out here doing incredible things, fighting the expansion of a massive asphalt facility right across from their park, right? Like feet from schools. It's horrible. The smell is horrible and like full of carcinogenic toxins. That smell means something. And the city just let that, let that polluter expand. And you know who makes a ton of money from the city contracts to that company? Right? The city doesn't just like, put it there. It makes asphalt for the city! So as you can see, you know, the city is playing an active hand. The Lightfoot administration plays an active hand in environmental racism, and communities are playing extreme and active roles in fighting back. And again, you know, with the influx of warehousing facilities in the city,

bankrolling their future on warehousing income to the city, I anticipate, fortunately, we'll be able to support that. Unfortunately, communities are going to start needing to organize around EJ issues in places that they haven't historically. And that will be there to back folks up and to support as much as we can as that starts to happen, we're trying to give folks a heads up where we start to see sites coming and you know, and connecting the dots were one of our incredible organizers and our crew, Jose Costa Cordova, He's our environmental planning and research organizer. He's working with some folks to put together a warehousing town hall sometime in the new year, where we're really going to break down with the warehouse workers for justice and some other folks like what is coming and to try and support folks to understand what their community might be facing. And to, you know, to continue to grow out that longer legacy of EJ into these communities and spaces for folks to recognize when they are faced with these realities, like they're not alone. We have a crew here and we roll hard in Chicago. And so whatever is going to go down like, we'll go down fighting, you know, and fighting for justice together. So I'm excited about that, about the potential for movement building and continuing to really show up for each other's communities.

But the reality of environmental justice, environmental racism under the Lightfoot administration is that, like justice in name only, right, they're not doing anything that's substantively moving or improving people's material conditions as of right now. You know, and we find that pattern to be true in every other area where they're claiming to invest, claiming to move toward reforms, but actually aren't actually interested in disrupting their cash cows, right? The things that are enabling them to get the juice that they want to maintain. Ultimately, what it's about is power and money. And so that's how things are going down. You know, and I think I'll just name that under COVID, we knew that COVID was going to be worse in environmental justice communities because folks live with breathing disabilities, folks are out here with health problems that are what they call common comorbidities. One thing that I said earlier was like, Where do they think these places are where people with co-morbidities live, places where folks haven't had access to health care, places where black around folks will have money, like where are these places? They're all the places where all the pollution is already compromising people's health. We tried to get them to put in testing sites early. We tried to get them to put together documents for families where you have multiple families in one home, right? We were like, Can you talk about what social isolation looks like when your abuela and your kid live in the same building? Like, what can we be doing to prevent death? They were not interested and they didn't do any of those things, and it was only until, like very recently that there was a testing site put into a little village, let alone other communities that are facing pollution. So I also hold the Lightfoot administration, who was at the same time violently beating down people in the streets for resisting and rising up around liberation for Black communities personally responsible for accelerating mass death in black and brown communities in Chicago on several fronts through violent neglect and violent physical tactics as the same continuum of how how racism is operating under this administration. And I think it's really important to link those two things because they're happening at the same



time and they were warned and could have done something about it, but they were not interested in doing that.

**1:19:15 Page:** I know we're nearing the end. Is there anything else that you wanted to say or add in addition to the gifts you've already given us this hour?

**1:19:23 Juliana:** Yes, I think that the last thing that I would say is that despite the fuckery, despite the long odds, despite the incredible top-down pressure that is straight up trying to undermine discount, render invisible Black and Brown communities and the things we're trying to do, I continually -- my fire is continually kindled and rekindled by just the straight boss-ery of communities rising up and taking care of each other. It's like, Oh, the state's not going to get our -- we have our backs. We will feed each other. We will make sure each other have access to what we need. We'll find innovative ways around this. And yeah, just that work is a very important part of the resistance I, in my understanding, right? I squarely say Assada's daughter's work in that frame, also, right, in building ways of caring and mutuality and liberation that's cited and grounded in the land. And that is in opposition to the structures around us.

I want to shout out farm food familias. You've had Vivi on here, Vivi and Taryn Randall have been doing incredible organizing with amazing chefs like Roberto Pettis, Chef Fresh, Fresh Rogosin to create food and to feed three hundred and fifty meals. A fresh chef prepared food every week to families in Little Village and Englewood and South Shore. That project came together out of necessity under these conditions, but has created incredible opportunities for folks to build deep connections to check in on each other. And some of these operations around mutuality around taking care of ourselves, I think, are just like to be humbly and incredibly honored and respected by all organizers doing any kind of oppositional work that the work of building alternatives is key and is actually the seed that will create the future that we need and it's already happening. This isn't about we wait until we win to wait until we dismantle stuff. This is we're building things while we're dismantling things and those things are being built. And I think, I think really doubling down on support for those, for those things that are being built is really, really key. You know, and it really gives me a lot of strength and energy, and that's the stuff that keeps me going is like, how do I create more space for folks to build more about what we need instead of being subject to what other people's visions for our death looks like?

**1:22:00 Monica:** Well, thank you so much for being with us today, Juliana. I learned a lot in this conversation and I wish we could talk to you every week. You're truly an inspiration of mine. I'm honored to share that birth chart with you, and I hope that I could -- I hope that your birth chart sort of like moves towards my birth chart to be more like you and like conversation and like, you're just, I'm just, yeah, I'll stop there. *[laughs]* Can you -- Can you leave us with your favorite passage from this book again for folks listening? The book is called *From the Ground Up*:

*Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement.* Take it away, Juliana.

**1:22:39 Juliana:** Thank you. It turns out that is my selection and my cat's also selection. I had a hard time picking a passage, but here's one of them that I enjoy, it's on page 152. It's called individual transformations, power and agency in grassroots struggles. *"On a personal level. Thousands of people across the United States have experienced the transformation that takes place when one moves from being a bystander to being a participant in a struggle. This transformation has occurred through the creation of spaces for people to come together and take power over their lives. Environmental justice activism has what Carrie Boity and Sara Evans call free spaces, settings which create new opportunities for self-definition for the development of public and leadership skills, for a new confidence in the possibilities of participation and for wider mappings of the connections between movement members and other groups and institutions. Part of what sustains these free spaces in which ordinary people move from victims to participants in the processes that govern their lives, is the realization that power relationships within a decision-making structure are fluid, contestable and mutually transformative."*

**1:24:05 Page:** Thanks so much for listening to another episode of the Lit review podcast, where we interview people we love and respect about books to help grow our movement. We are your co-host, Monica Trinidad and Page May, two Chicago based abolitionist organizers. We'll be back next week with another episode next Sunday. Same time. Same place. Want to learn about a specific book? Email us your suggestions at [theLitReviewChicago@gmail.com](mailto:theLitReviewChicago@gmail.com) or find us on Facebook. And if you like this episode, give it a shout out on Twitter or Instagram. Our handle is @Lit ReviewChi. Financial support for the production of this podcast is thanks to our amazing Patreon subscribers. Learn more about becoming a Patreon at [Patreon.com/The LitReview](https://Patreon.com/TheLitReview). Keep reading!