



Sustainability & Social Justice Intersections & Imperatives in 2019

Mike Bryson

Professor & Director of Sustainability Studies, Roosevelt University

Research Associate in Science & Education, Field Museum of Natural History

Dine & Dialog Presentation for SPEED | 20 Feb 2019

Why Is Sustainability Important?

Environmental resources are being consumed, degraded, and despoiled; biodiversity is decreasing; climate is warming; human health is compromised.

Economic development is pursued as an end-to-itself without regard to its ecological impacts or sufficient acknowledgment of its social costs.

Ethics are short in supply and are viewed, if at all, as irrelevant to governance and economic processes. Profound disconnection between nature and humanity.



Leanne Walters holds up bottles of her tap water in Flint, MI (2015)



Climate justice activism in London (Reuters, 2018)

Ethics & the Sustainable Future



Michael Howard at Eden Place Nature Center, in the Fuller Park neighborhood on Chicago's South Side (photo: EPNC)

Environmental resources are conserved for both future human generations as well as non-human biota.

Economic development occurs not at the expense of the natural environment, but in a way to mitigate ecological costs and impacts.

Equity – social, economic, and environmental justice – governs the process of sustainable development. Ethics inform everything we do.

Sustainable Development as Holistic Framework



A model for integrating ecology, economy, and ethics that is espoused by the United Nations in their [Sustainable Development Goals](#) for 2030

Sustainable Development Goals



The UN has established these laudable SD Goals for its [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). Note the centrality of social justice in this list. This is about people as well as the environment.

The Environmental Justice Movement



People of Color Summit, Washington DC, 1991. Delegates created the Principles of Environmental Justice (EJ for short) at this historic gathering (photo: [Robert Bullard](#)).

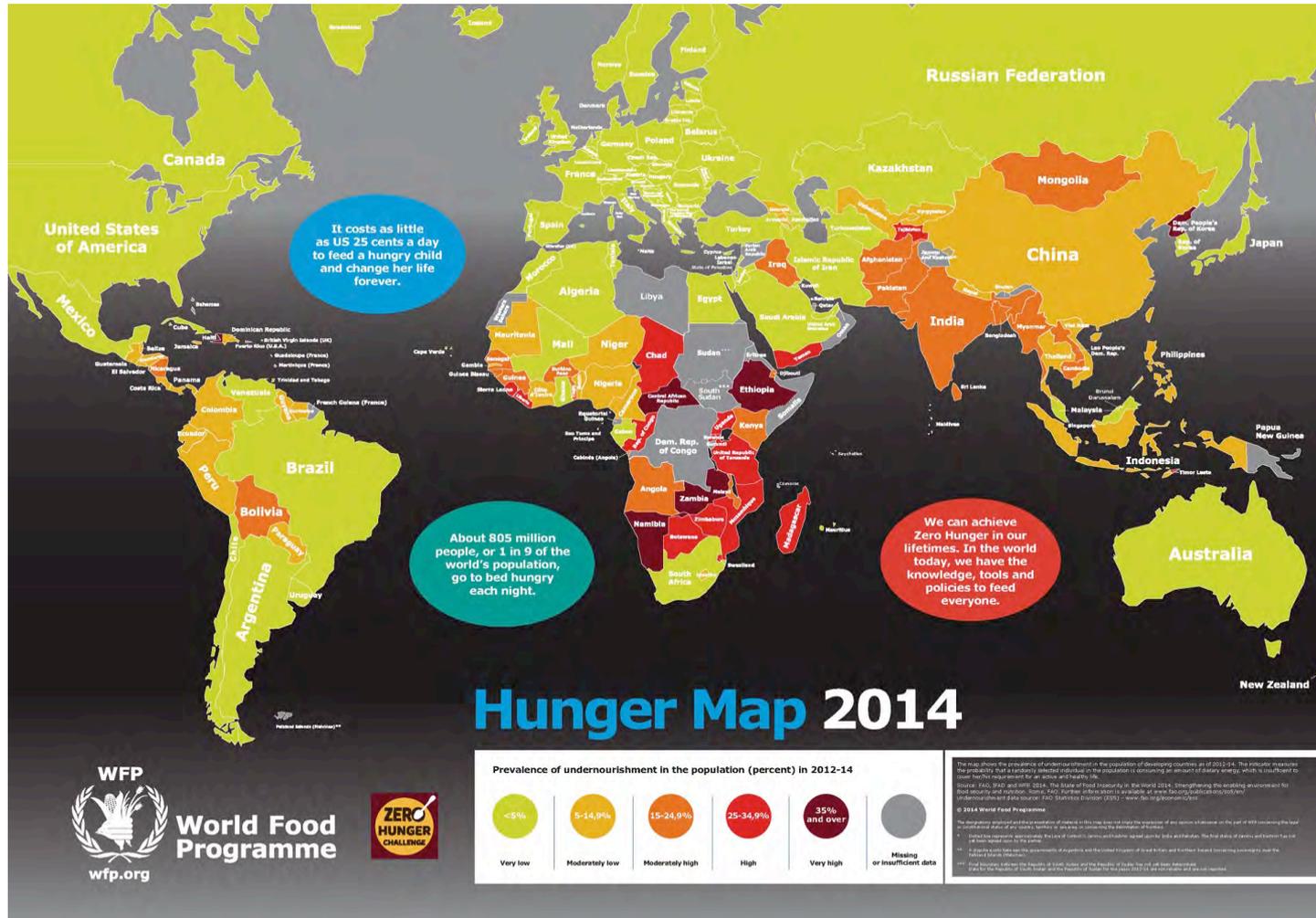
For more information on EJ, [see this website](#).

Environmental Justice Principles

- 1) **Environmental Justice** affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
- 2) **Environmental Justice** demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.
- 3) **Environmental Justice** mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.

People of Color Summit, Washington DC, 1991. The first three of the 17 Principles of Environmental Justice (EJ for short). For more information on EJ, [see this website](#).

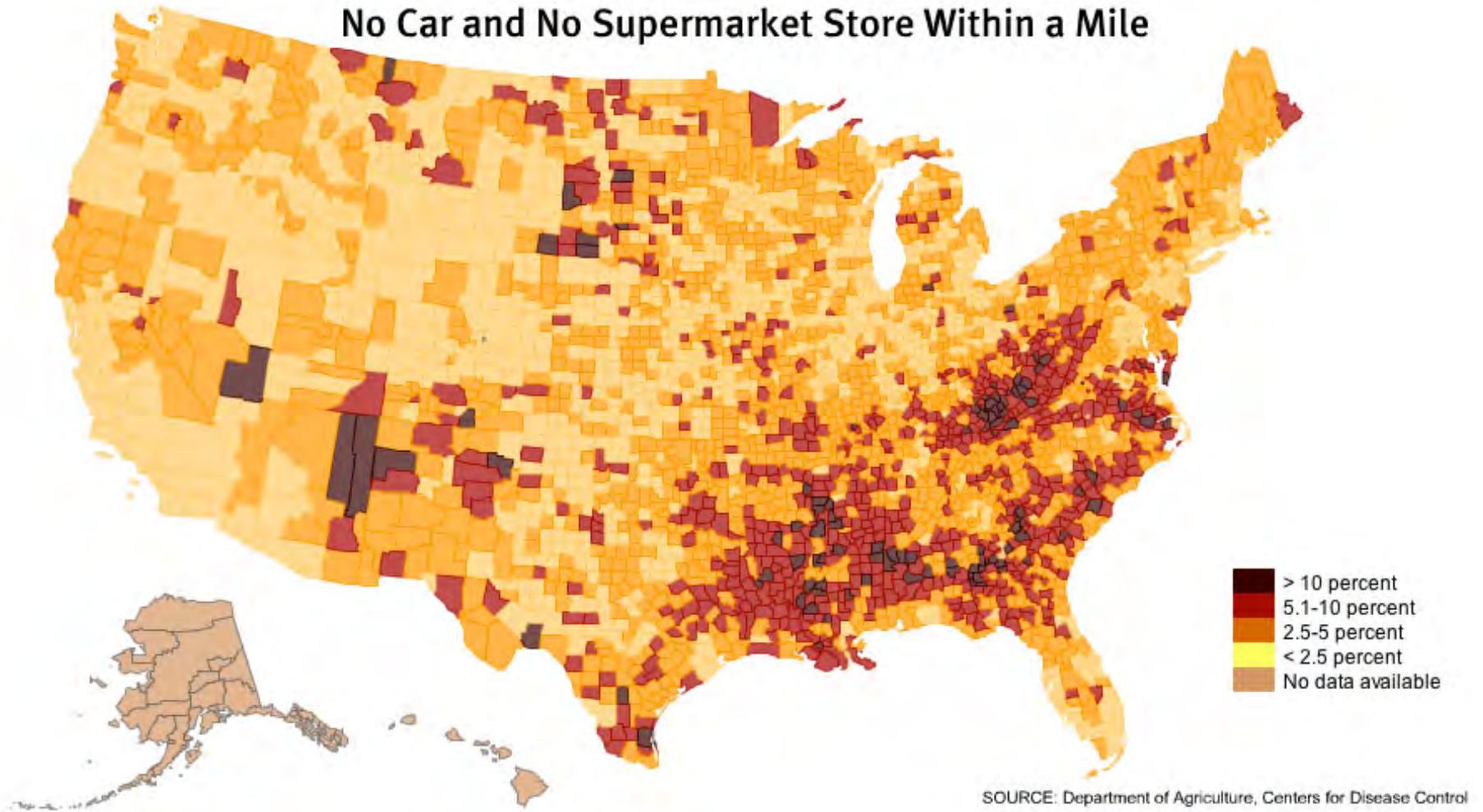
Global Hunger



This map from the [World Food Programme](http://www.fao.org/wfp) illustrates one aspect of environmental injustice: the pervasive hunger throughout much of the world.

Food Access

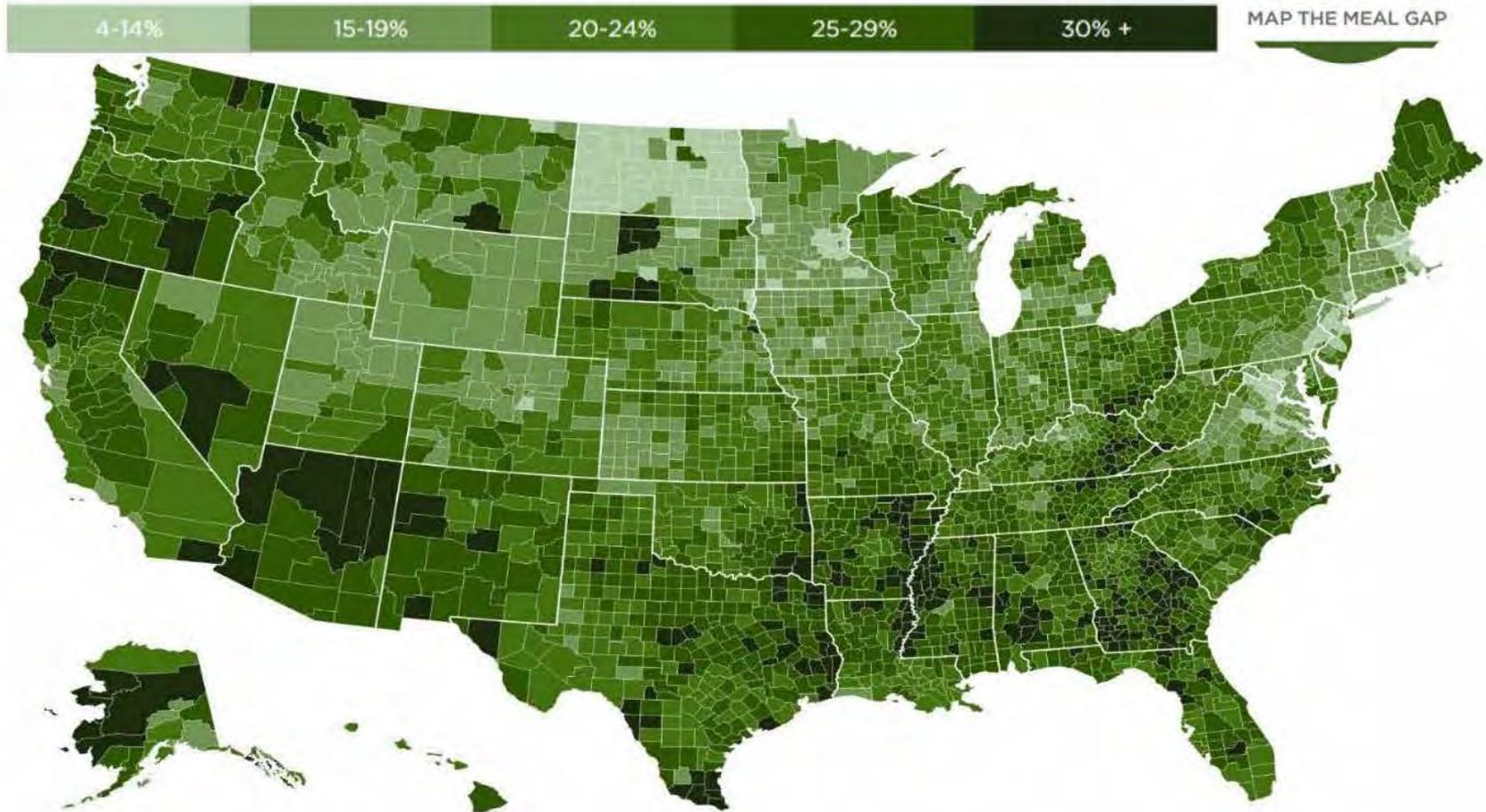
No Car and No Supermarket Store Within a Mile



What about the US? This map from the USDA and CDC shows how access to food sources is hampered by lack of transportation and/or proximity from grocery stores.

Food Insecurity on a National Scale

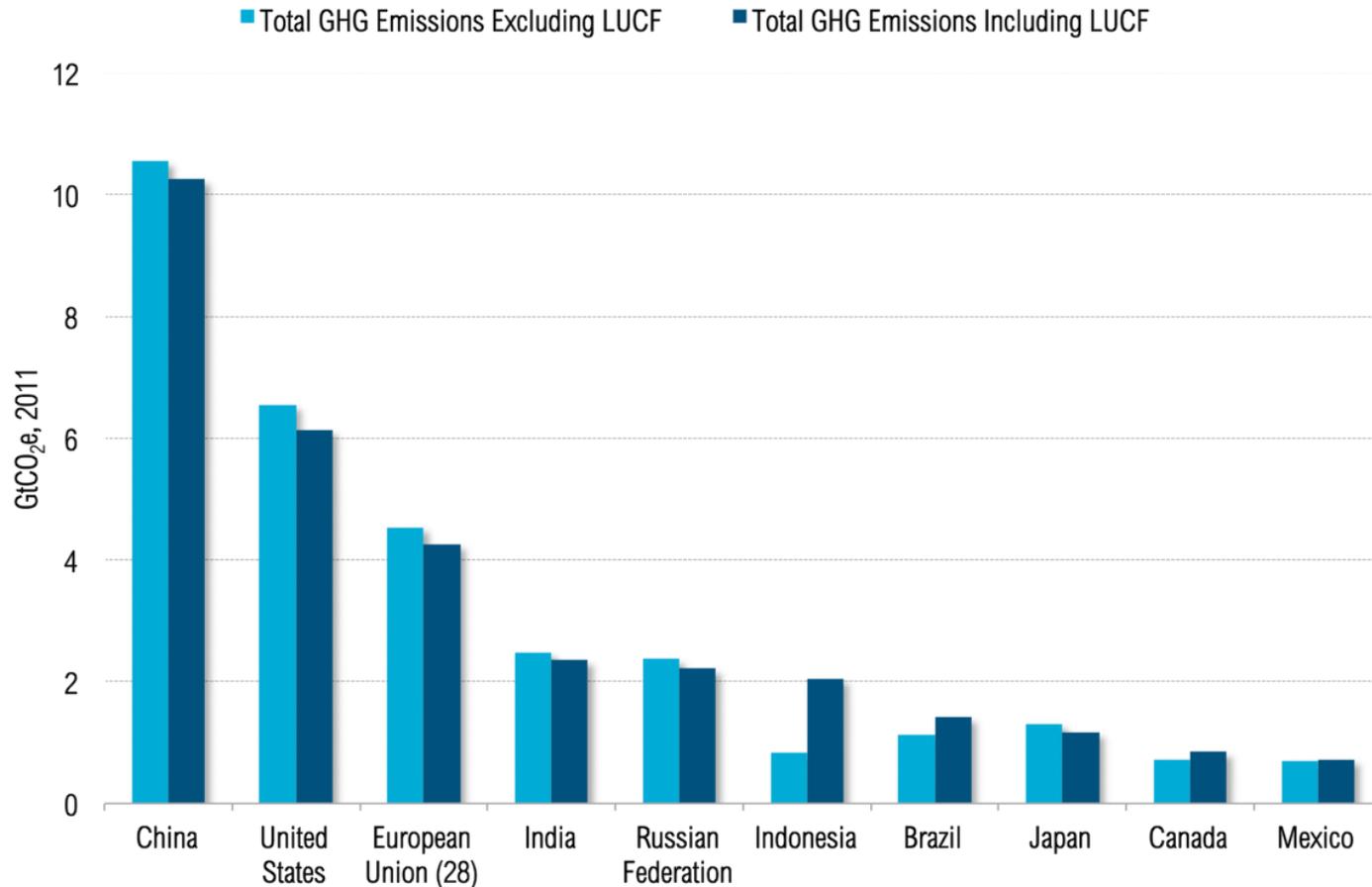
CHILD FOOD-INSECURITY RATES



Food insecurity map of US (source: C. Gunderson, 2017)

Climate Change: GHG Emissions

Top 10 Emitters



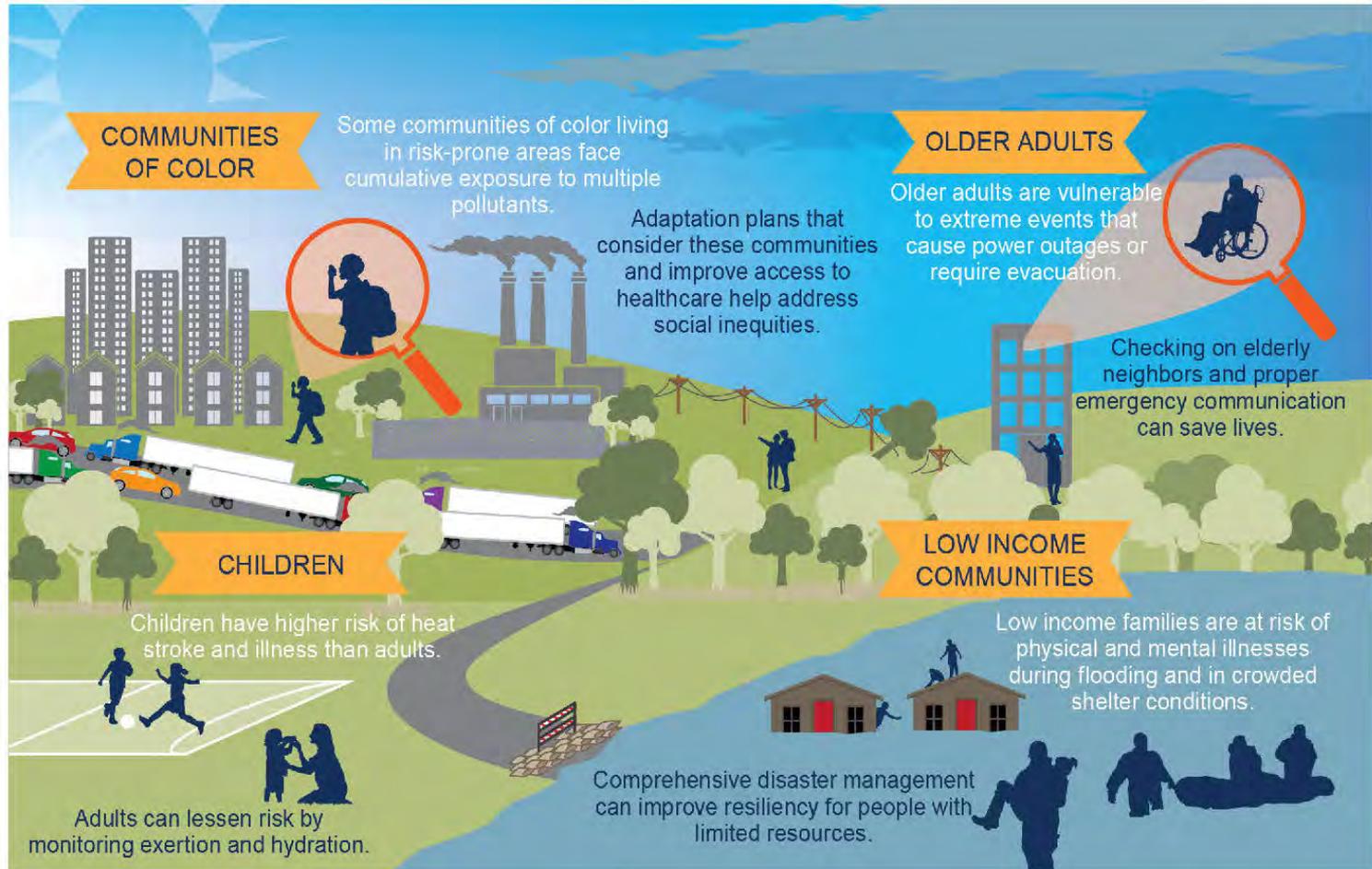
<http://bit.ly/11SMpjA>

 WORLD RESOURCES INSTITUTE

What strikes you about this list of top GHG polluters? (LUCF = Land Use Change & Forestry)

Source: M. Ge, et al., "[6 Graphs Explain the World's Top Ten Emitters](#)." WRI, 25 Nov 2014

Climate Change: Health Impacts



Examples of populations at higher risk of exposure to adverse climate-related health threats are shown along with adaptation measures that can help address disproportionate impacts. When considering the full range of threats from climate change as well as other environmental exposures, these groups are among the most exposed, most sensitive, and have the least individual and community resources to prepare for and respond to health threats. White text indicates the risks faced by those communities, while dark text indicates actions that can be taken to reduce those risks. *From Figure 14.2 (Source: EPA).*

Source: US Global Change Research Program, *Fourth National Climate Assessment, Vol. II: Impacts, Risks, and Adaptation in the US* (2018), p. 111

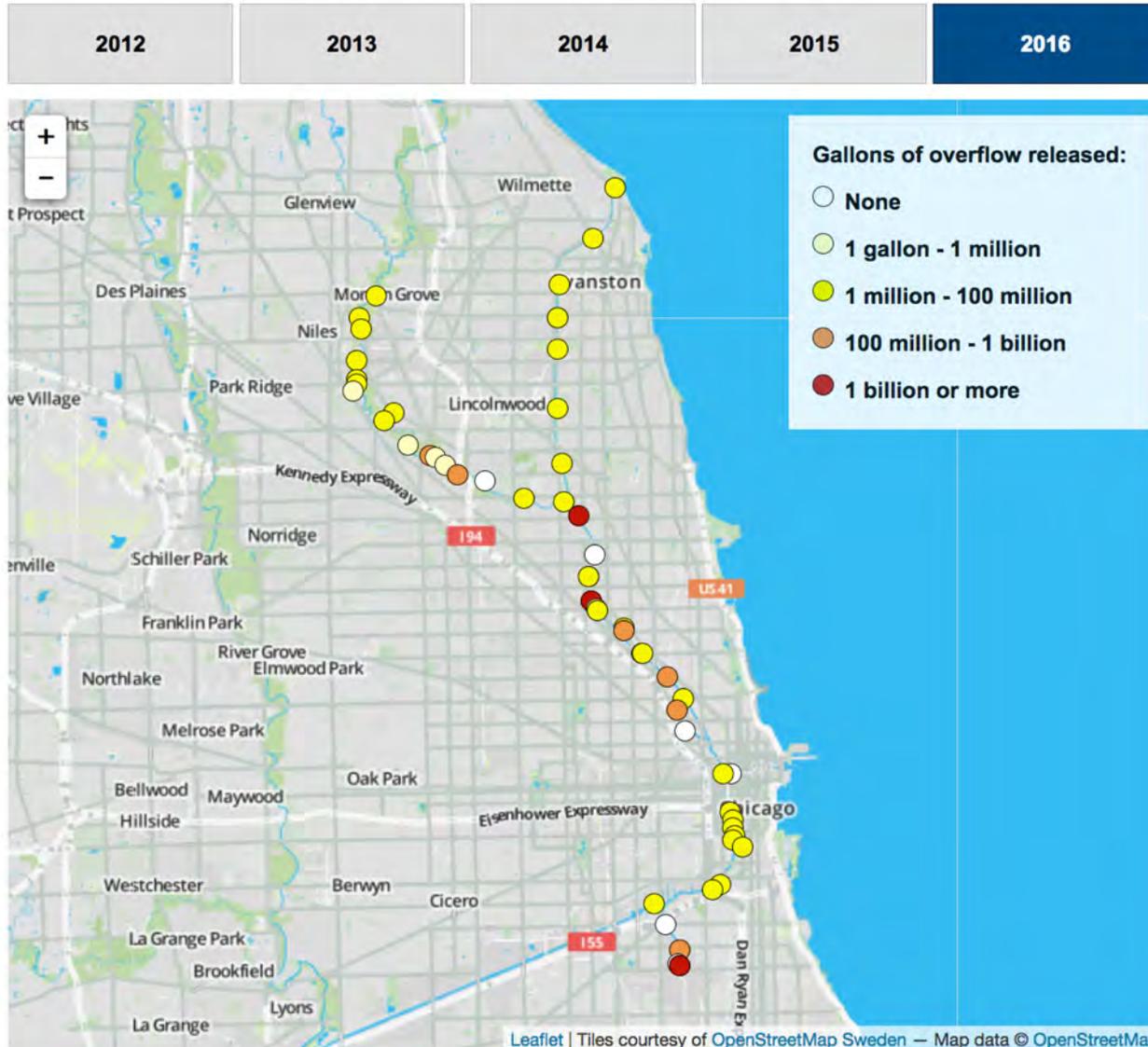
Consumption & Waste



Chris Jordan, *Cigarette Butts*, 60x72" (2013). The provocative artwork inspires us to consider the impact of our consumption and waste (click image to go to website).

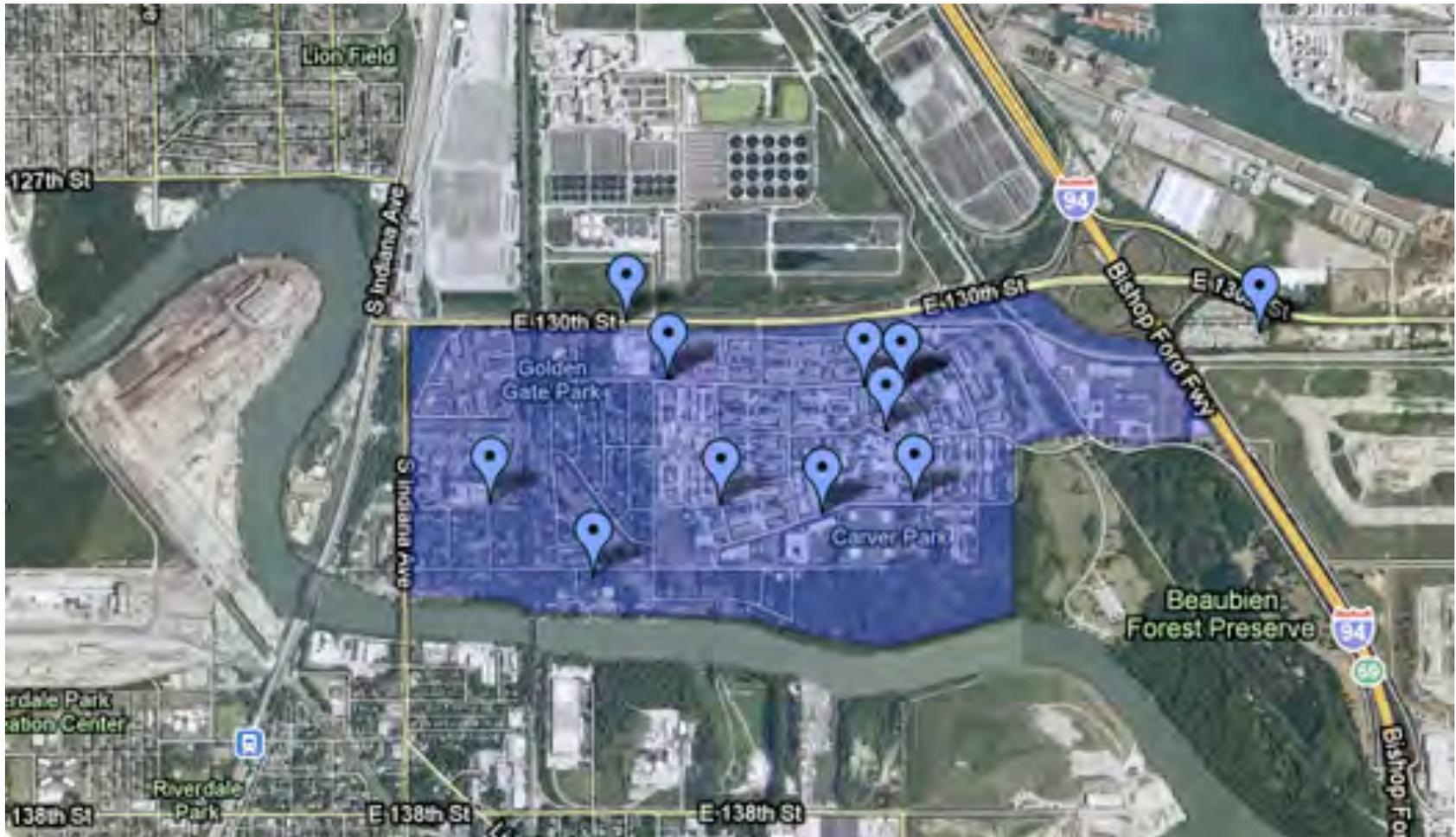
Water Quality Impairments

Sewage overflows into the Chicago River, by year



Source: Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Frontline Communities



Map of the Altgeld Gardens community in Chicago (click image to view interactive map). This area was described by EJ activist Hazel Johnson as the "toxic donut" because it is literally surrounded by polluted/hazardous land and water. The map illustrates how few economic, social, and transportation resources are available to AG residents.

What We Have Here Is a Failure of Leadership



Any idea who these bozos are?

A Crisis in Governance & Environmental Ethics



Trump-appointed EPA chief **Scott Pruitt** (left) [resigned in July 2018](#) after a scandal-ridden tenure of incompetence and wholesale deregulation/demoralization within the EPA. Another scandal-plagued and ethics-challenged administrator is **Ryan Zinke**, [who left the Dept of the Interior](#) in December of 2018 after months of promoting fossil fuel extraction in national parklands and shrinking the size of national monuments/wilderness areas. Note: both agencies are now run by skilled and inoffensive bureaucrats who share the same anti-environment/pro-industry values as their corrupt and craven predecessors. In other words, we still have a problem.

Hope: Environmental Ethics & Justice Orgs

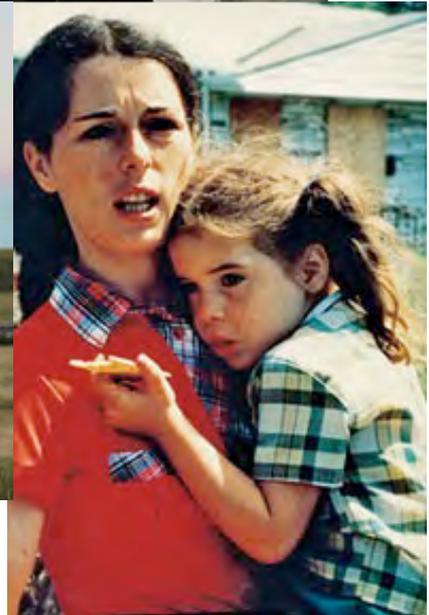


**Union of
Concerned
Scientists**

Citizens and Scientists for Environmental Solutions

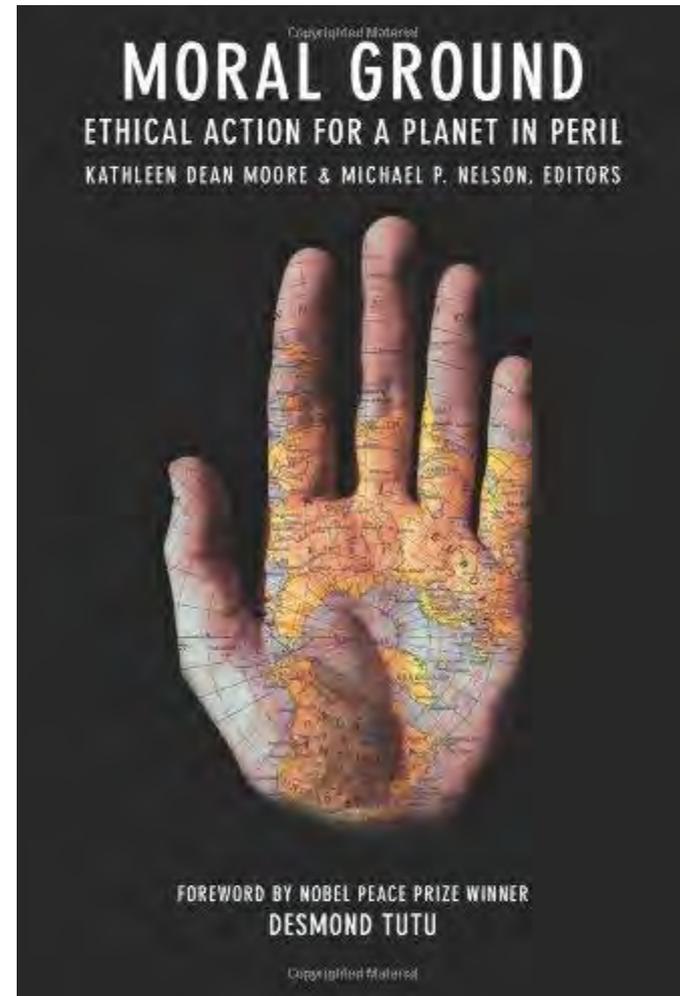
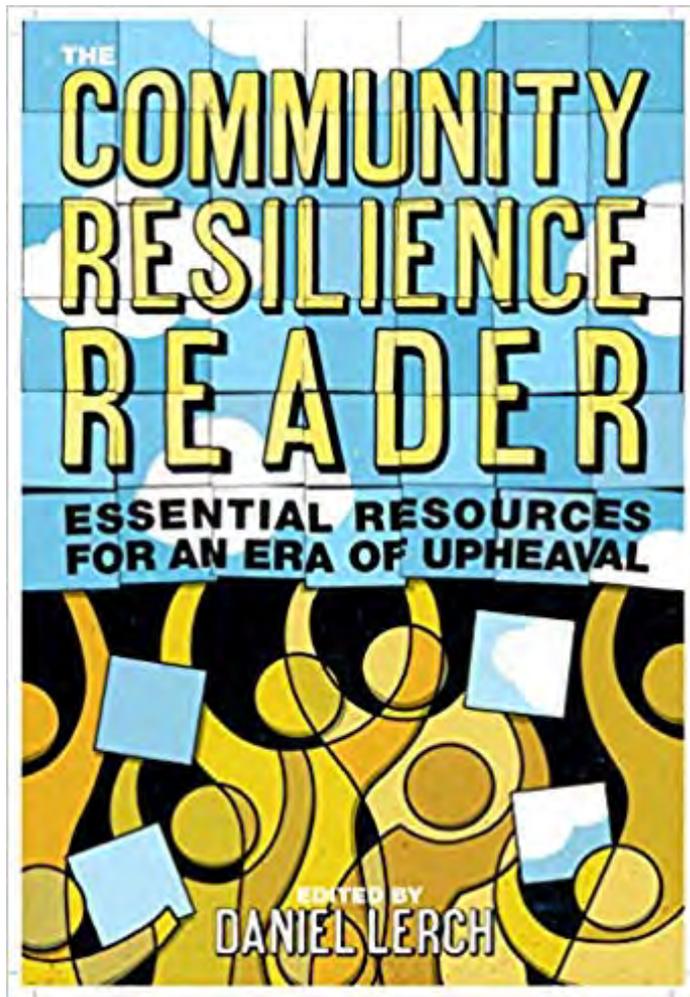
Spend a little time checking out these orgs that address matters of policy, social justice, & environmental ethics; in terms of their scope, they range from the local to national to global: [Center for Humans & Nature](#), [Little Village Environmental Justice Organization](#), [Union of Concerned Scientists](#), [United Nations](#)

Inspiration: People Fighting for Change



Clockwise from top left: SUST 240 Waste students @RU clean up Bubbly Creek; Will Allen, urban farmer; Hazel Johnson & young community organizer; Lois Gibbs, environmental activist; Dallas Goldtooth, Native American climate activist; Kim Wasserman, community organizer/activist

Knowledge: Books I Recommend



Both of these texts are available free:
click each cover for book website (CSR) or RU Library (MG)

Questions for Discussion

- How can we move from despair to **action**? Any ideas?
- What environmental and/or social justice issues are most important to **your home community**?
- **Political engagement:** how can we get more involved at the local, state, national, global levels?
- What are some of the ways **you can get involved here at RU** on behalf of sustainability and social justice?
- What **people** inspire you? Who should we know about and learn from?
- What are your **questions**? Your **passions**? Your **values**?