DYNAMICS OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

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Baltimore is a segregated and primarily African-American city with a declining population, high residential vacancy rates, and an old industrial economy. It has all the ingredients for a classic environmental justice story, where racial minority groups are most likely to live closest to toxic industries. Yet the data show that most toxic facilities are located in white neighborhoods. From a present-day point of view, black Baltimoreans appear to be on the winning side of environmental justice. The irony of the present pattern is it is based on a long history of racism, segregation, and institutional factors that disadvantaged African-Americans in Baltimore. This paper begins with an analysis of environmental inequality patterns using demographic data and the EPA’s Toxics Release Inventory. I then explore key historical dynamics – with particular reference to zoning, segregation, and disinvestment – that help to explain the perplexing present-day pattern of environmental inequality. I conclude with comments on promising pathways for future research in environmental justice and urban studies in general.

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