

Environmental Justice and STS in Louisiana

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Issues relating to environmental justice in New Orleans have been a mainstay in public discourse for years now. From pollution from the petroleum industry to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, environmental justice organizations and STS scholars have understood New Orleans as an important site of discussions regarding the intersections of race, class, coloniality, late capitalism, and disasters among other factors.

In this article, we will showcase some initiatives and people that are involved in environmental justice organizing, scholarship and STS-related work based in New Orleans.

Louisiana Bucket Brigade

Louisiana Bucket Brigade (LABB), founded in 2000, has a program of community-supported air quality monitoring that uses gas chromatography and mass spectrometry to measure air pollutions at various sites. The LABB uses scientific data garnered from its citizen science projects to further the aims of environmental justice in communities throughout Louisiana and empower communities to affect policy change at a systemic level.

LABB also offers a “toxic tour” experience through important New Orleans sites for environmental justice and African American history called “Down by the River.” On their website, LABB describes the tour as an “antidote to the plantation tours that dominate [the] region.” These tours are open to the public.

Wesley Shrum

Prof. Wesley Shrum, a sociologist and STS scholar at Louisiana State University, developed a method of video ethnography in Asia and Africa along with his students. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, he was in a large-scale project to document the process of disaster and recovery efforts, using video ethnography. He is a key contributor to disaster STS and has [written about the causes of the floods in Louisiana in the aftermath of Katrina](#).

Gwen Ottinger

Prof. Gwen Ottinger of Drexel University won 4S's Rachel Carson Prize in 2015 for her book [Refining Expertise: How Responsible Engineers Subvert Environmental Justice Challenges](#) where she studied how residents of a small Louisiana town organized to fight a local oil refinery based on notions that their health was being adversely affected by the operations. The book traces the shifting nature of scientific expertise enacted within communities.

Nick Shapiro

Prof. Nick Shapiro, an anthropologist and assistant professor at UCLA, studied pollution and shifting socioeconomic conditions in Louisiana, including New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. He explored [formaldehyde contamination in FEMA trailers](#) in the area, as well as reflected on the nature of [gentrification and the state of racial justice](#) in New Orleans during his Ph.D. research in the area.

What can you do?

At the 2019 conference, we can all do something to promote environmental justice. This includes decreasing our environmental impacts, as well as being mindful of who we are impacting and how. Here some tips to keep in mind:

1. [Housing injustice is an extension of environmental injustice](#). Instead of using services like Airbnb, check out what Prof. Nick Shapiro has written up on [Alternative Accommodations](#) in New Orleans if you're not staying at the conference hotel.
2. Reduce your use of single-use plastics and non-recyclable goods. For example, when traveling by plane, you may pack an empty reusable water bottle or thermos.
3. Research and support local environmental justice organizations that correspond with your values.
4. For business and leisure travel while you are in town, try public transportation, walking, bike rentals, or carpooling with your conference mates. But always choose safety first.