

ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIOLOGY NEWS

 Newsletter of the American Sociological Association's
 Section on Environmental Sociology

Winter 2025

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SECTION CHAIR'S MESSAGE



Hello colleagues and friends,

I hope you all are as well as can be right now and finding support to help you through what has been and continues to be a seemingly endless assault from

the new Federal Administration on our work, communities, and environments. As we navigate the challenges of everyday life and uncertainties and manufactured crises from the Administration's various executive orders, including its fight against

DEI and environmental justice initiatives (and those who participate in them), I am finding some relief to know I – and we – are not alone.

We have compassionate, brilliant, and motivated members in our Section and broader association who share many of our same values around supporting each other and working to restore, maintain, and improve equal protection of our communities and environments through our research, teaching, and service. For example, during the fall, Margaret Walkover (Section Nominations Committee Chair), Andy Szasz (Section member), Mike Lengefeld (Section Webmaster), and Debra Davidson (Past Section Chair) built out our Section's [Climate Change Teaching Resources](#) webpage – a resource that is being used within and beyond our Section.

This winter 2025 edition of the Section newsletter contains evidence of the great and important work from other Section members in the form of critical and rigorous environmental-sociological scholarship, public sociology, and community engagement efforts. The essays by Drs. Lacey Satcher and Angela Frederick remind us, respectively, of their excellent scholarship on the intersections of race/racism and disability/ableism with health and the environment. Further, Dr. Satcher's call for us to "go to work" (ala Toni Morrison) and advance antiracist and theoretically and practically relevant environmental sociology in this challenging time is inspiring, as is Dr. Frederick's documentation of how vulnerable "disability communities have a wealth of expertise to share about how to thrive in a world out of sync with our bodies, about creating communities of care on the unwavering principle that no one should be left behind."

ASA leadership is showing support by closely monitoring the Federal Administration's blizzard of orders and their implications for our work while providing us some resources to articulate the value of sociology to others and on how to navigate an attack on you or your colleagues. One avenue I am looking into collaboration with the ASA leadership and our Section's Council is around the development of a reporting mechanism that you all can use to share any concerns you have and requests for assistance from the Section and the ASA, given the particular animosity the Federal Administration holds for the work that many of us do in this section. There are sensitive privacy and legal considerations at play here, so we will have to see what results of this effort.

In the meantime, I will share the recommendation that I received from colleagues at my university. They recommend that I report the concerns I have to my university's Office of the Provost and Division of Equity and Inclusion. I anticipate that graduate students would also be able to report their concerns to their faculty mentors, Department Heads/Chairs, and/or Dean of Students. If you have a union that represents you, that may also be another resource to consult. I am aware that your home institutions

may not have such institutional supports, so I will work expeditiously to see what our Section and the broader ASA can do to support you as needed during this difficult time.

I have more clarity on the type of research supports that are available for those of us who use federal data in our work. As you may have already seen in other announcements, there are several groups who have already archived federal environmental, population, housing, and other data that may be of interest to you. One group is the Environmental Data & Governance Initiative (EDGI), who restored public access to the U.S. Council on Environmental Quality's Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST). Another group is the Public Environmental Data Partners, which includes EDGI and others (see: <https://screening-tools.com/>). They recently restored public access to the CDC's Social Vulnerability Index and Environmental Justice Index and other CDC resources, the Council on Environmental Quality EJScorecard, and version 2.0 of the CEJST.

In addition, Rachel McKane (Section Member) recommends visiting <https://archive.org/details/20250128-cdc-datasets> to regain access to additional CDC data that was recently taken down. They also note that deleted web pages can be accessed through the Wayback Machine at <https://web.archive.org>. Further, even when the Census pages were taken down/scrubbed, the actual data was still accessible through the API the entire time and the data is back up now.

Rachel and I recommend consulting IPUMS, of the Institute for Social Research and Data Innovation at the University of Minnesota, which has a "Core Trust Seal" for meeting the Core Trustworthy Data Repositories Requirements. At <https://www.ipums.org/>, you can find the data repositories linked to IPUMS from around the world, including historical and contemporary U.S. Census data. Many of us within and beyond environmental sociology regularly use the IPUMS/National Historical GIS repository for our work.

Also, as I understand it, many of us within our Section have been compiling our own repositories of federal data that is relevant for our various research projects. I am planning to consult with the Section Council and others to explore ways we can collaborate on making that federal data publicly available for those within and beyond our Section. I will keep you all updated on the status of such work and the other ongoing support work I outlined above and in my prior communications through our Section's listserv and fall 2024 newsletter. In the meantime, I wish you all well and good health.

In solidarity,

Raoul Liévanos

ASA Section on Environmental Sociology Chair
Associate Professor & Director of Undergraduate
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FEATURE ESSAYS

Race[ism], Health, and the Environment: On “Going to Work” and *Doing* Sociology in a Time of Crisis

Lacee Satcher

Assistant Professor of Sociology and Environmental Studies
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As we mark the 42nd celebration of MLK Day, a time to commemorate the purpose-filled life and tragic death of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, we’re reminded of Dr. King’s *radical* commitment to a more just society where racial equality, economic opportunity, and basic human dignity are afforded to all. King’s fight for justice resonates today in the context of environmental justice, as communities of color continue to face disproportionately high environmental and health risks. With the United States grappling with the increasingly evident effects of climate change, the challenges of environmental degradation are compounded by racial inequalities in health and access to resources. Environmental sociology, in its commitment to producing knowledge on the “social, economic, and political relationships that drive society in destructive directions,” must stand firmer and go forward in this regard, recognizing that both our socio-political histories and the present are inextricably tied to the ongoing health and environmental crises.

“Socio-political histories and present” is a circuitous way of saying that racism, in all of its forms, and the systems of oppression of which it is interdependent (including capitalism, sexism, ableism, and colonialism) have long shaped and continue to dictate the haves and have-nots, the profiteers and exploited, and the valuable and dispensable. Environmental degradation, climate change, and racial health disparities are inextricably linked, and it is incumbent upon us to address these issues.

In cities across America, communities of color live in areas with fewer resources and environmental amenities and greater exposure to environmental hazards. Whether it’s the smog-choked air or contaminated drinking water in many major cities, or the continued threat of more chemical plant siting in Southern Louisiana, communities of color are bearing the brunt of environmental degradation and institutional neglect. These environmental disparities are well-documented and directly linked to racial disparities in health outcomes. On a global scale, these patterns of disparity persist, as nations in the Global South disproportionately bear the brunt of extreme weather, natural disasters, and environmental degradation—issues exacerbated by the rising production, consumption, and development of nations in the Global North, whose decades of colonization and resource extraction have further entrenched economic and environmental vulnerabilities across the Global South. This is environmental racism—where public policy and corporate practices systematically place Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color in harm’s way.

The wildfires that have ravaged California in recent years and most recently in the last month are another stark reminder of the urgent need for a reckoning in addressing these issues in both academic scholarship and government policy. The fires themselves are worsened by climate change, and their effects ripple through communities in ways that are not felt equally, displacing families, destroying homes, and disrupting lives. Often the most vulnerable—those without wealth or political power—suffer the greatest. The wealthy can protect themselves by hiring private fire departments or fleeing to other cities with the solace that they can rebuild. But low-income families, especially in communities of color, are left behind to cope with the devastation and are the least likely to receive the resources needed to rebuild.

In my ongoing work, I explore this nexus of inequality, the environment, and health, asking *how are systems of oppression reflected in the built and natural environment, and how do these environmental inequalities impact individual health and well-being?* Taking a cue from W.E.B. DuBois and St. Clair Drake, my research prioritizes examining the ways that structural and institutional racism produce spatial and environmental inequality in urban cities. This involves examinations of how racist historical and political processes are reflected across space in ways that allow for the prediction of neighborhood- and county-level resource inequality using the racial/ethnic and socioeconomic makeup of these geographic units. More recently, it has involved highlighting the lived experiences of Black American seniors across the southeastern US and Boston in the contexts of the climate crisis. I seek to amplify how this generation, many of whom came of age during the Civil Rights Movement, come to recognize changes in weather across their lifetime, how extreme weather has impacted their health and health of their communities, and how their knowledge of the causes and consequences of climate change impacts their engagement in climate discourse and voting behaviors. I also work outside the bounds of academia, engaging our oldest and youngest in public talks on environmental racism in K-12 and senior centers in my local community, fostering intergenerational dialogues that emphasize the importance of collective action, shared wisdom, and community-based solutions to address our present challenges.

Unfortunately, while many of us in the U.S. and around the globe looked to serve our communities on January 20, 2025, building solidarity around a common goal towards true justice and equity, others gleefully commemorated the inauguration of an administration that, in many ways, represents the antithesis of what Dr. King fought and died for. As climate change denial remains an active part of American political discourse, the incoming presidential administration's approach to climate change may be the most crucial factor in shaping the next decade of environmental and public health policy—a dangerous truth. Ignoring climate change means continuing the cycle of environmental harm for marginalized communities. It means perpetuating a system where low-income, mostly Black, Latinx, and Indigenous families bear the weight of environmental disasters, while wealthier Americans are buffered from the worst impacts. The government has a responsibility to correct these inequities by investing in climate resilience, healthcare infrastructure, and environmental justice initiatives. We, as knowledge producers, have a responsibility to both document and amplify the voices of those affected as well as develop theoretical and practical applications of this knowledge towards informing policy, anti-intellectualism be damned.

Rather than being consumed with angst or objectiveless anger, a recommitment to antiracism in both our words *and* deeds is necessary. Just as Toni Morrison encouraged artists to “go to work” in times of dread, we too, must go to work.

Every Disaster Is a Disability Disaster

Angela Frederick
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What does an order to “Get out of your car and run for your life” mean for someone with a mobility impairment? What hardships do evacuations demand from those whose home provides the carefully-curated access they need to live independently? And what do power outages and public water emergencies mean for those who depend upon electric-powered medical equipment, refrigerated medicine, or clean water for their very survival? I’ve been consumed with these questions as I, like so many, have watched media coverage of the devastating Los Angeles wildfires. These questions are not hypothetical. They are born out of a reality I have come to recognize – that every disaster is a disability disaster.

As a scholar of disability, and as a member of the disability community myself, I have long argued that all roads in sociology intersect with disability. From education and the workplace, to healthcare and informal caregiving, to the criminal justice system, disability is a central organizing principle and a key dimension of inequality. I sheepishly admit, however, that I have not always recognized that there is a prominent disability story in disaster contexts or in environmental sociology more broadly.

Then, in 2021, during a massive winter storm, millions in my own state of Texas endured one of the most significant power failures in U.S. history. I saw a common thread connecting the news reports of those who perished during this preventable disaster. It was disability. And as I also heard the stories of hardship and grit from disabled Texans in my social networks, I knew this was the next story I was called to tell using the tools of qualitative sociology.

In my book, *Disabled Power*, forthcoming by NYU Press, I illuminate the experiences of people with disabilities who endured the 2021 Texas power crisis during Winter Storm Uri. Drawing from 57 interviews I conducted with Texas residents with disabilities, as well as a few parental caregivers, I demonstrate how people with disabilities and chronic health conditions bear unique forms of harm when basic infrastructure, such as power and water systems, are “disabled.” I argue the vulnerability people with disabilities experienced during Winter Storm Uri was not an inevitable consequence of individual disabled bodies. Rather, disability vulnerability was “produced” through a policy process that “disabled” vital infrastructure, including power, water, and emergency services, precisely when residents needed it the most. These preventable infrastructure failures required disabled Texans to endure unique forms of embodied harm.

People with disabilities bear disproportionate loss of life and suffering in disaster contexts. According to the United Nations, disabled people around the world are two to four times more likely to die in disasters compared to their nondisabled neighbors. In the United States, disabled people are the demographic group least likely to have returned home one year after an extreme weather event. What’s more, disabled advocates have long warned that disaster-related displacement has created a pipeline into institutionalization for those in our community.

As I demonstrate in my book, the long-duration power outages that often accompany extreme weather events are particularly dangerous for disabled community members. Many disabled people rely on electric-powered durable medical equipment for life-giving function, resilience against pain, and mobility. Power outages pose grave dangers for people with health conditions that impede the body’s thermoregulatory

systems. Many people with spinal cord injuries, for example, are unable to regulate their own body temperatures and are at risk of serious health complications in extreme heat or cold conditions. Blind and Deaf community members can face unique barriers when we lose access to the technologies we increasingly rely upon for access in daily living, including using rideshare platforms for transportation and reading food and medicine labels.

Social services can also deepen disability-related inequities in disaster contexts. Too often, emergency response systems are still built upon the model of the able-bodied community member, presuming that everyone can see, hear, stand for long periods of time, and tolerate loud crowded environments. Vital information can be denied to Deaf and Blind community members when information is shared in inaccessible formats. Often, emergency shelters do not meet the minimum standards for accessibility, and personnel have at times refused to admit disabled residents. Finally, services such as food and water distribution systems are still designed around the faulty assumption that all community members have vehicles or are able to stand in line for hours in inclement weather to apply for post-disaster services.

Yet, in my book, I also emphasize another meaning of the term “disabled power,” that is, the individual and collective resilience Texans with disabilities exercised to survive the disaster. Contrary to dominant tropes that portray disabled people as passive victims or as objects of rescue in disaster contexts, I demonstrate how Texans with a wide range of disabilities employed remarkably creative strategies to survive the disaster, while simultaneously providing and receiving care within their social webs of loved ones, neighbors, and the networks of disabled people to which they belong. This combination of resilience and care, however, often required physical and emotional sacrifices from disabled individuals that are not always legible to nondisabled people.

Long-time members of the Environmental Sociology section will likely be asked with increasing frequency to welcome newcomers like me as climate-driven disasters impact our communities and those we study with accelerated speed. Disabled people, too, are an integral part of each of these communities. I hope that my book might provide a blueprint for how we can better incorporate disability into our work. People with disabilities are among the groups who will face the greatest harm in the climate crisis. Simultaneously, disability communities have a wealth of expertise to share about how to thrive in a world out of sync with our bodies, about creating communities of care on the unwavering principle that no one should be left behind. Now marks a critical time to place disability at the center of sociological research on the environment and to uplift disabled people as valuable and knowledgeable agents in our research.

PUBLICATIONS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Journal Articles and Book Chapters

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Austin, Jessica, Candace Evans, Jocelyn West, Heather Champeau, Lori Peek, and Rachel Adams. 2024. "Defining and Practicing Reciprocity in Disaster Research." *International Journal of Qualitative Research* 23.

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Public Sociology and Community Engagement

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Calls for Books and Articles

Call for Papers, Pictures, Stories, and Participation in a Special Issue on the theme of "Land and Life: Ecosocialist-Ecofeminist Responses to Capitalist Extractivism" Special Issue Editors: Selina Gallo-Cruz and Ana Isla, due April 15, 2025. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10455752.2024.2448674?src=exp-la>

Calls for books with series Environmental Justice and Power: Studies in Knowledge, Health, Sustainability, and Inequality. Lexington Books. Editors Christina Jackson and Martiza Jauregui. https://rowman.com/Action/SERIES/_/LEXEJP

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