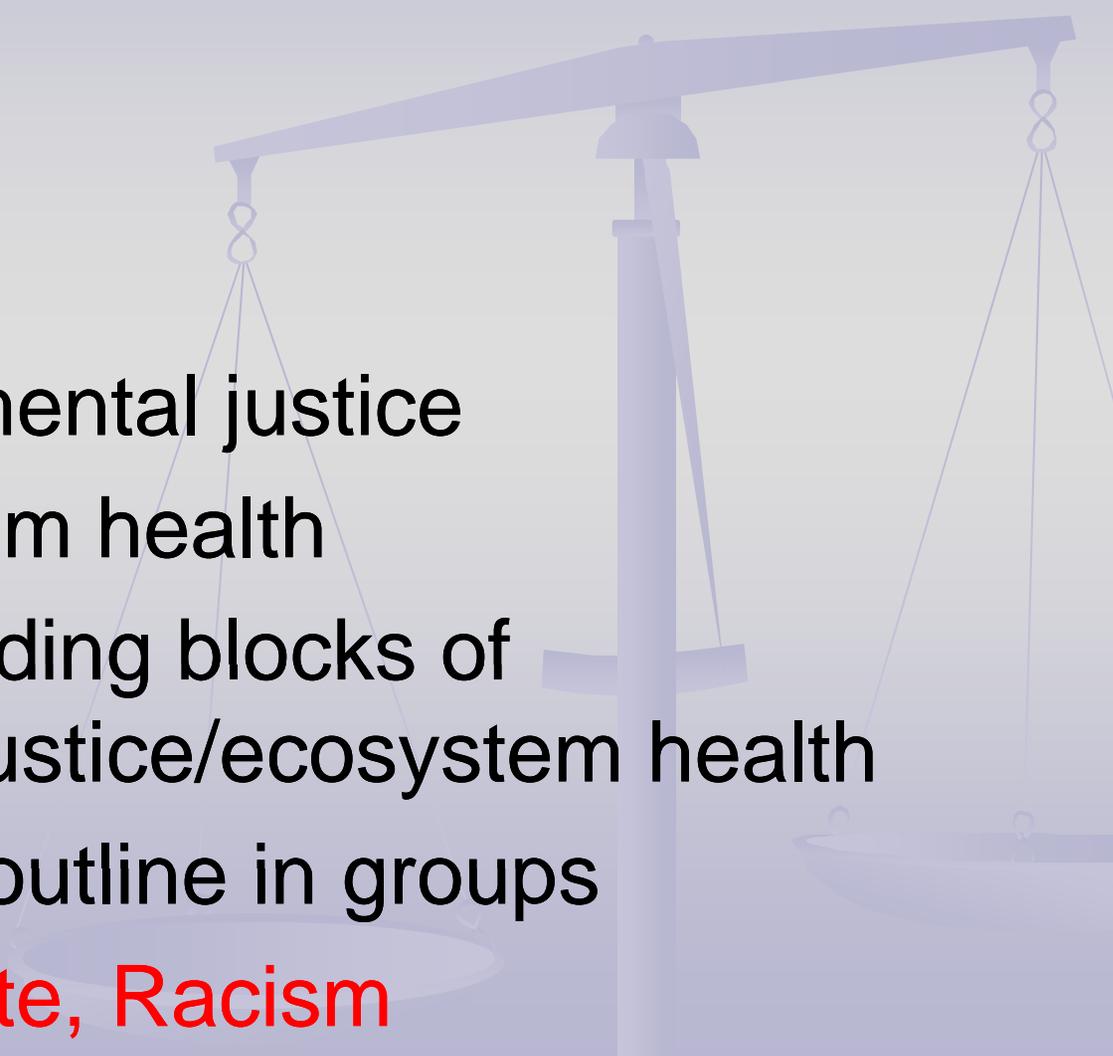


# Environmental Justice: Exploring the dimensions

**Shirley Thompson, PhD**  
**[s\\_thompson@umanitoba.ca](mailto:s_thompson@umanitoba.ca)**  
**Natural Resources Institute**  
**University of Manitoba 2009**



# Itinerary



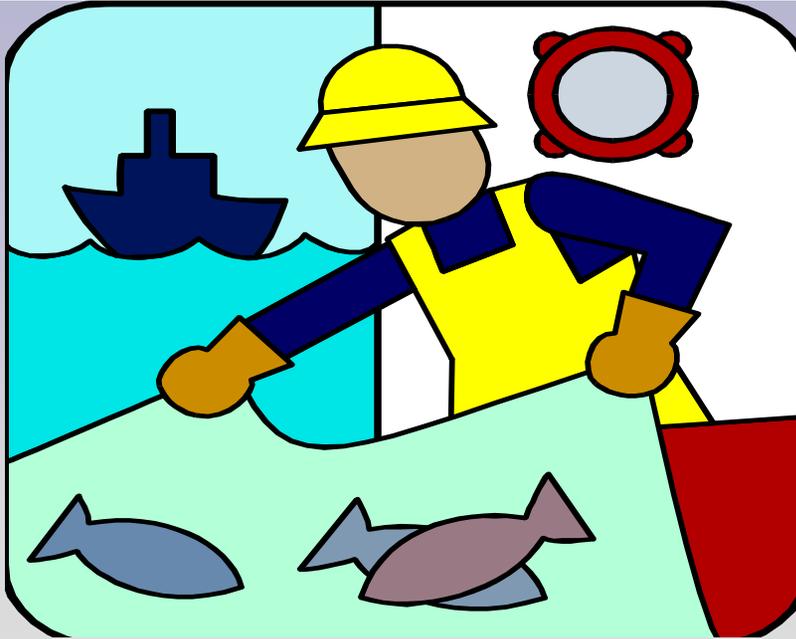
## Today

- Introductions
- Course outline
- Define environmental justice
- Define ecosystem health
- Discuss the building blocks of environmental justice/ecosystem health
- Review course outline in groups

**Next Week: Debate, Racism**

# Learning Objectives

- Understand the concepts of environmental justice and ecosystem health.
- Assess health and environmental impacts considering ecosystem health and environmental justice (use databases, analyze risk, etc).
- Understanding and develop some tools to undertake advocacy, apply media and educate for environmental justice and ecosystem health.



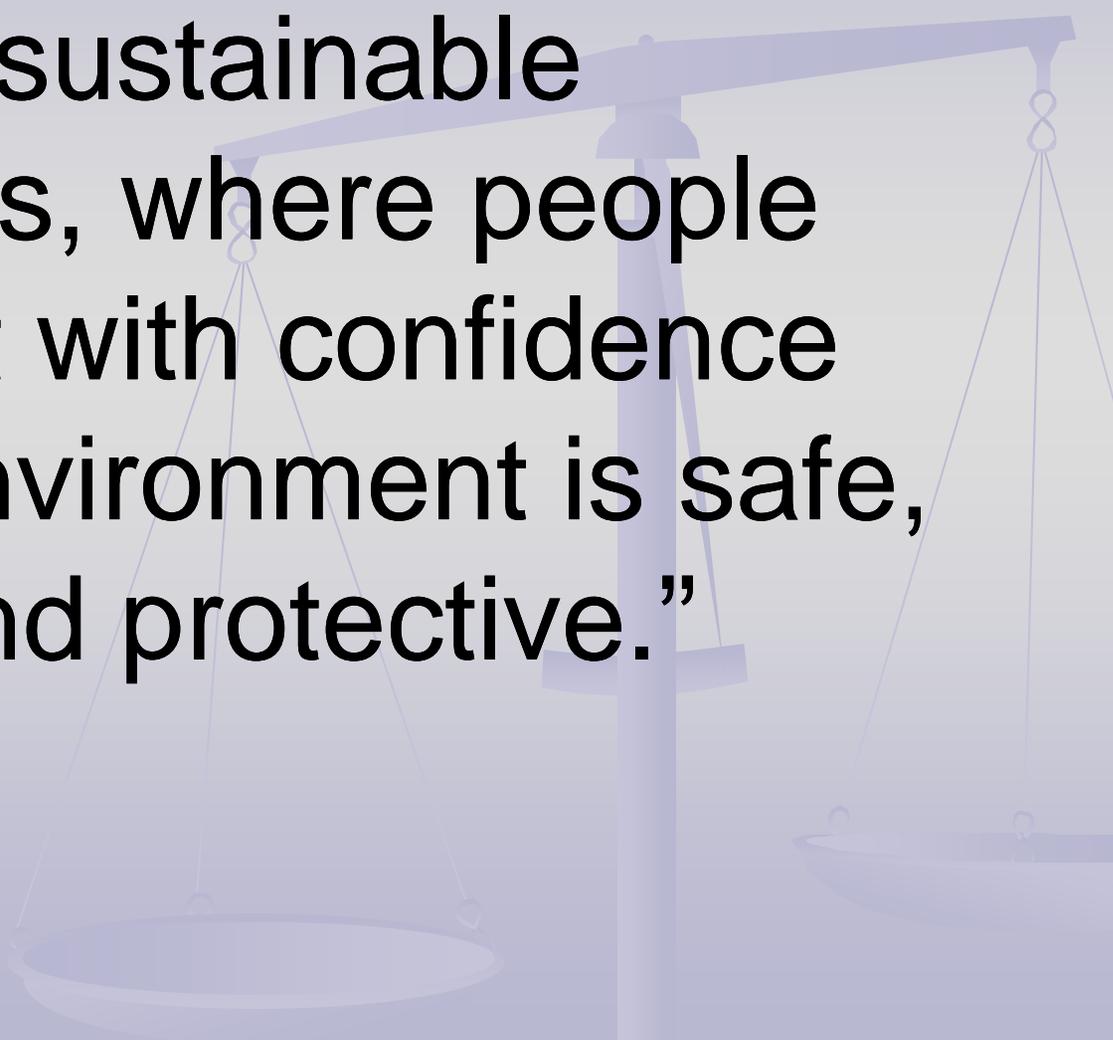
“If you’re talking about lead and where people live, it used to be a housing struggle;

If you’re talking about poisoning on the job, it used to be a labour struggle;...

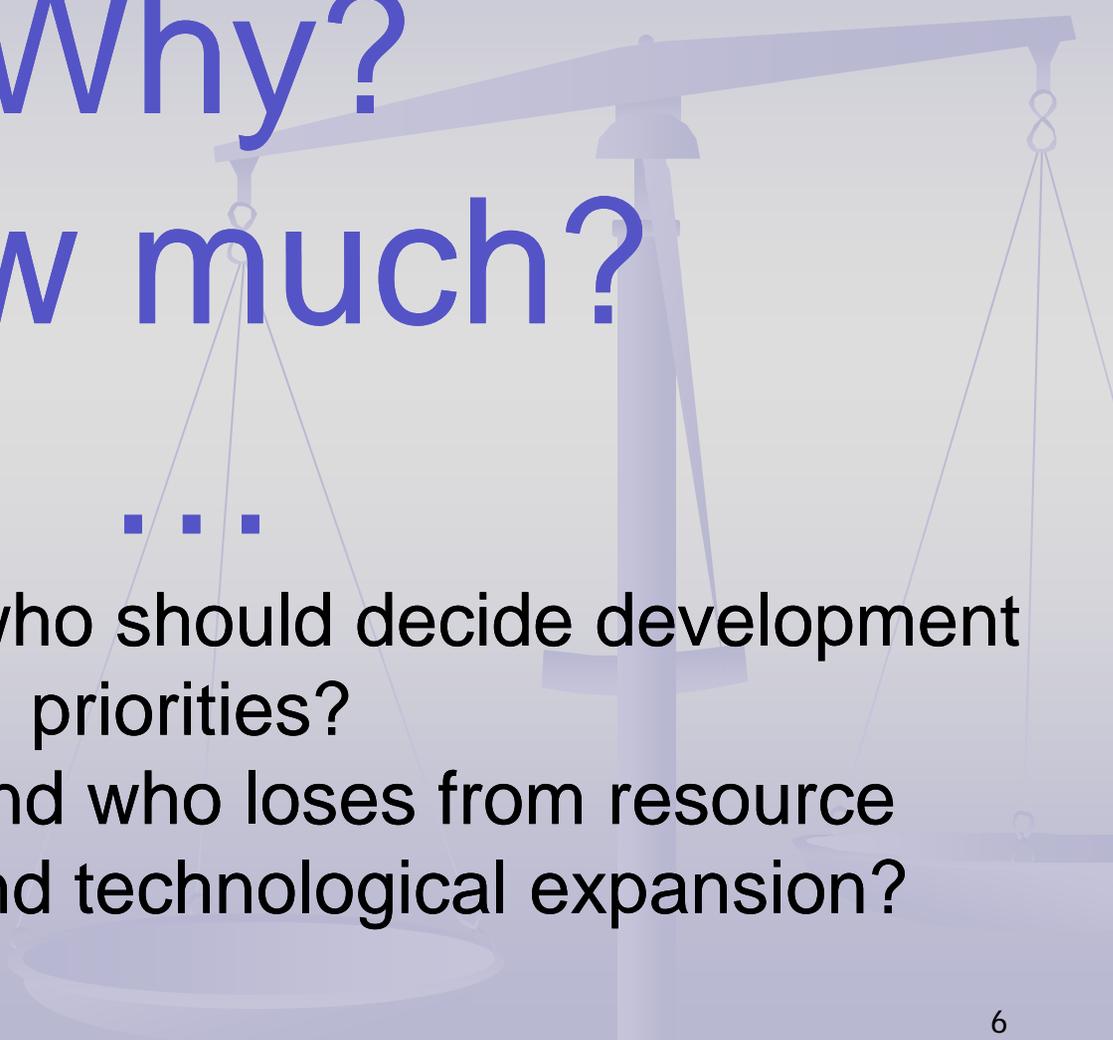
So, environmental justice is able to bring together all of these different issues...to get at the root of the problem”

*(Lee, National Toxics Campaign interviewed in Stephens, 1998: 63).*

# Environmental Justice



- “Support[s] sustainable communities, where people can interact with confidence that their environment is safe, nurturing and protective.”
- Bryant (1994)



Who gets what?  
Why?  
How much?

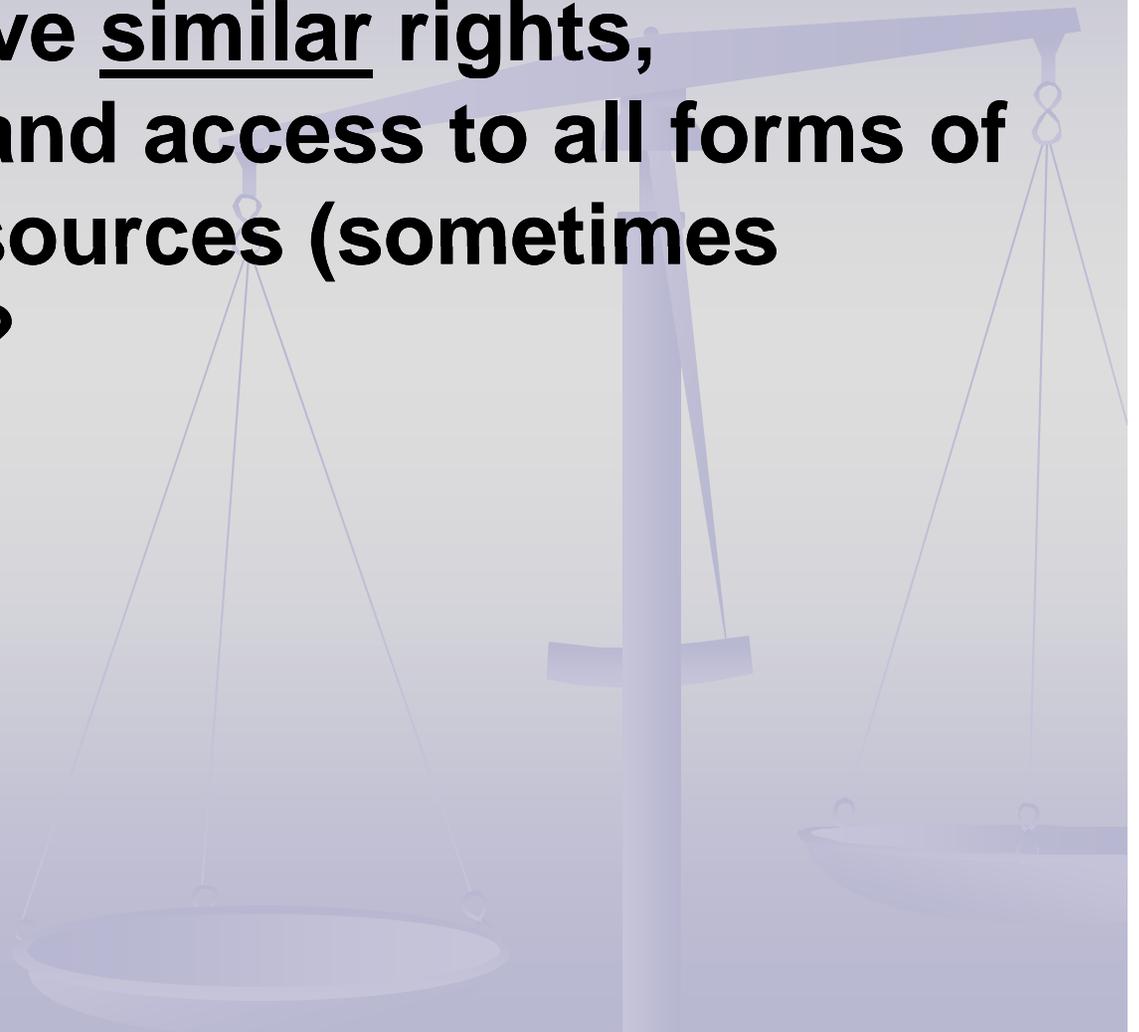
...

Who decides and who should decide development priorities?

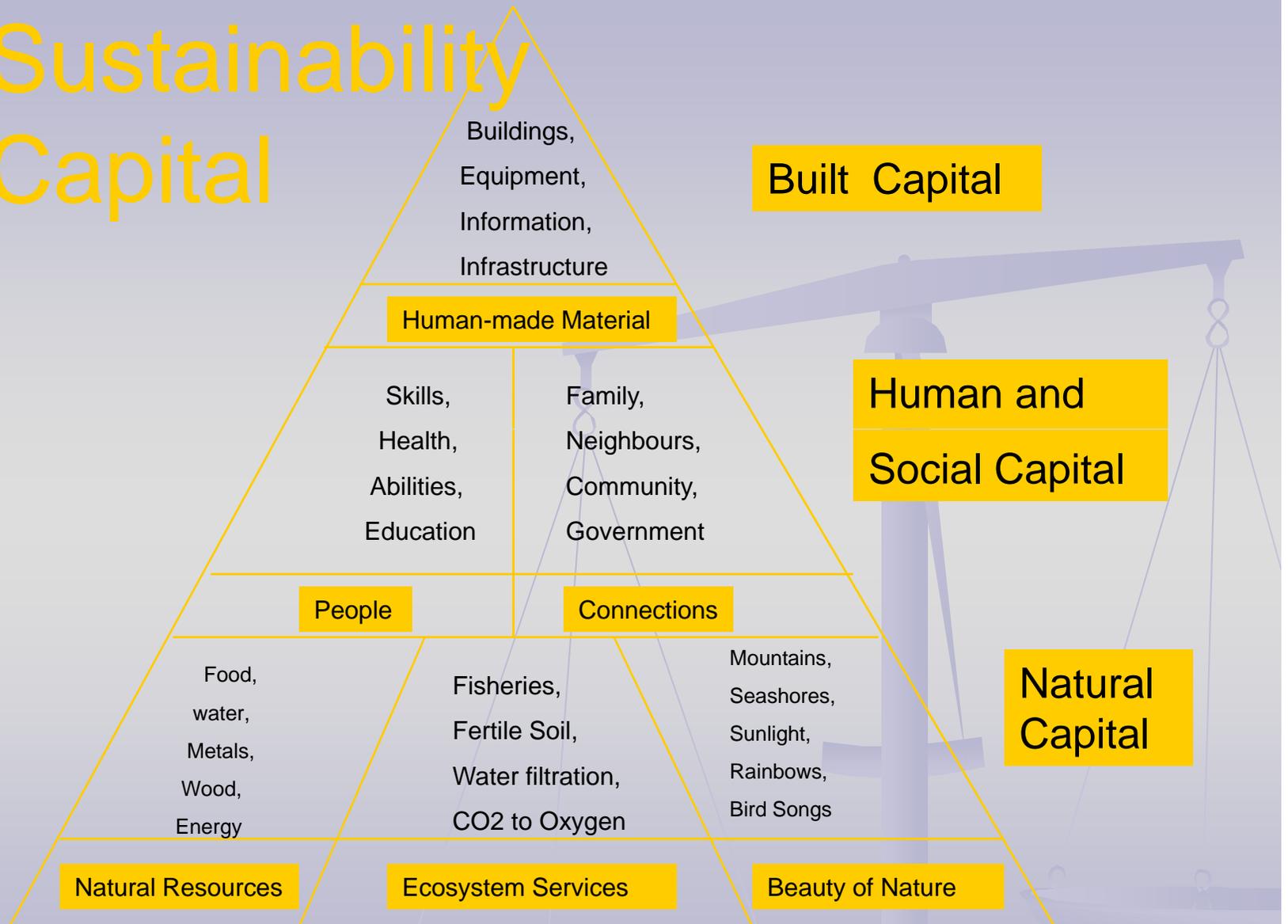
Who benefits and who loses from resource management and technological expansion?

# Equity

Do all people have similar rights, opportunities and access to all forms of community resources (sometimes called capital)?



# Sustainability Capital

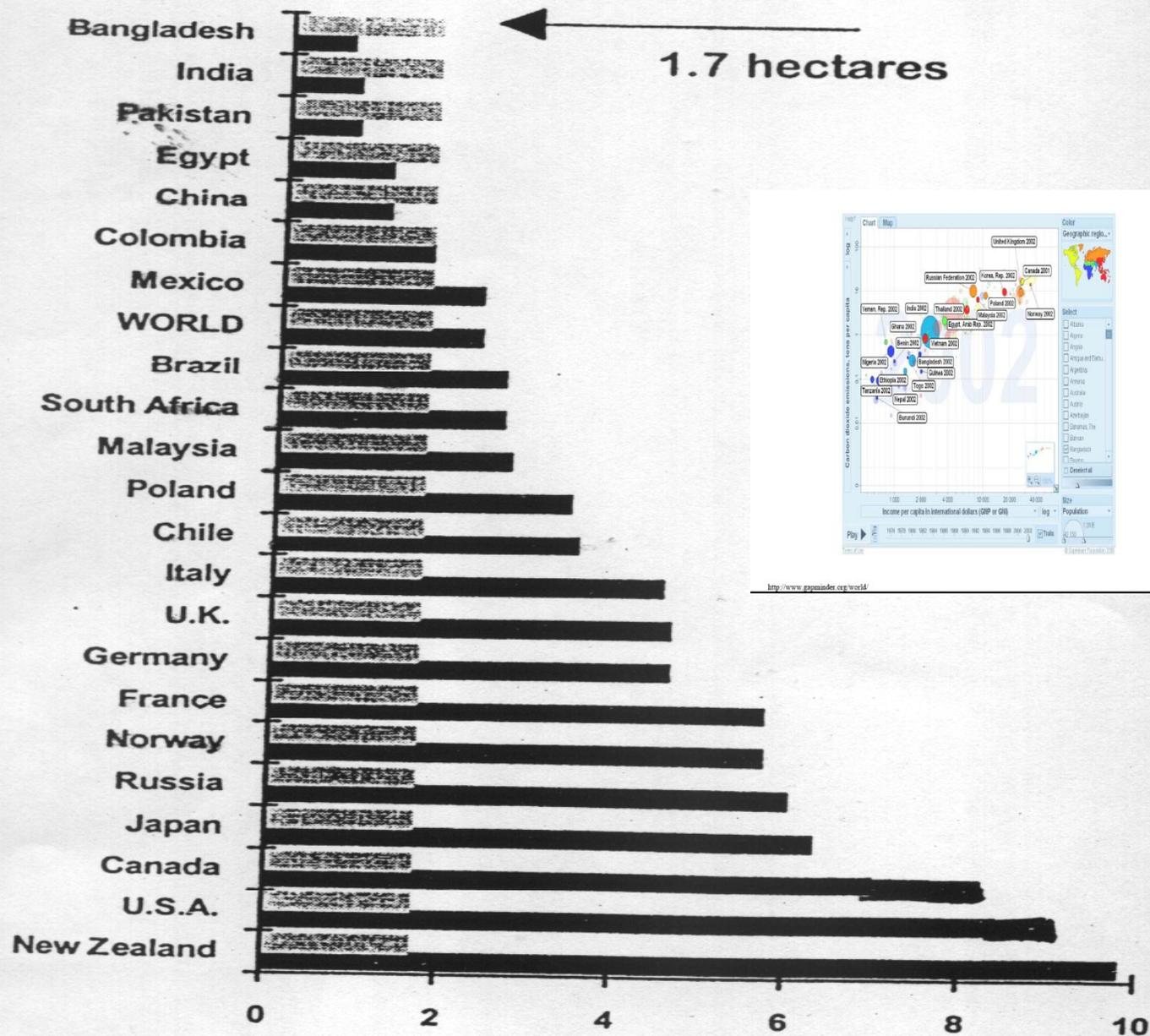


(Source: <http://www.sustreport.org>).



[Http://www.myfootprint.org](http://www.myfootprint.org)

## Ecological Footprints of Selected Nations Relative to 1.7 Hectares Available per Person



<http://www.gpsinsider.org/world/>

2/12/2008

# Environmental justice

Takes into account:

- “goods”: equitable access to healthcare, safe jobs, wildlife habitat, safe neighbourhoods, playground facilities, high quality woods, wild salmon; and,
- “bads” : air pollution, hazardous work, urban blight....





United States  
Environmental Protection  
Agency

ENVIROJUSTICE  
MAPPER



## U.S. EPA's Definition of Environmental Justice

- “The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.”
- Office of Environmental Equity established in June 1992. President Clinton issued Executive Order 12898 requiring federal agencies to consider environmental justice. (<http://es.epa.gov/oeca/ofa/ejepa.html>).



Health Information

# EPA on environmental justice

EPA further elaborated that environmental justice:  
is based on the premise that it is:

- 1) a basic right of all Americans to live and work in “safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings”;
- 2) not only an environmental issue but a public health issue;
- 3) forward-looking and goal-oriented; and
- 4) inclusive since it is based on the concept of fundamental fairness, which includes the concept of economic prejudices as well as racial prejudices.

# First People of Colour Environmental Leadership Summit (1991)

Principles declare the right for workers and community members to:

- clean air, land, water and food to be a fundamental right.
- participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making in community planning.
- political, economic, cultural, and environmental self-determination of communities.



## Every person experiences risk ...



Yet not all individuals are equally at risk...

- Racial disparities were found in 87% of studies and income disparities in 74%. Disparities were in a variety of areas, (i.e., exposure to toxins and solid waste, siting of hazardous facilities and occupational health) (Goldman, 1993).

# United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice (1987) findings:



- 3 of 5 African Americans live in communities with abandoned toxic waste sites
- 3 of 5 largest commercial hazardous waste landfills are located in predominantly African American or Latino American communities and account for 40% of the nation's total estimated landfill capacity.

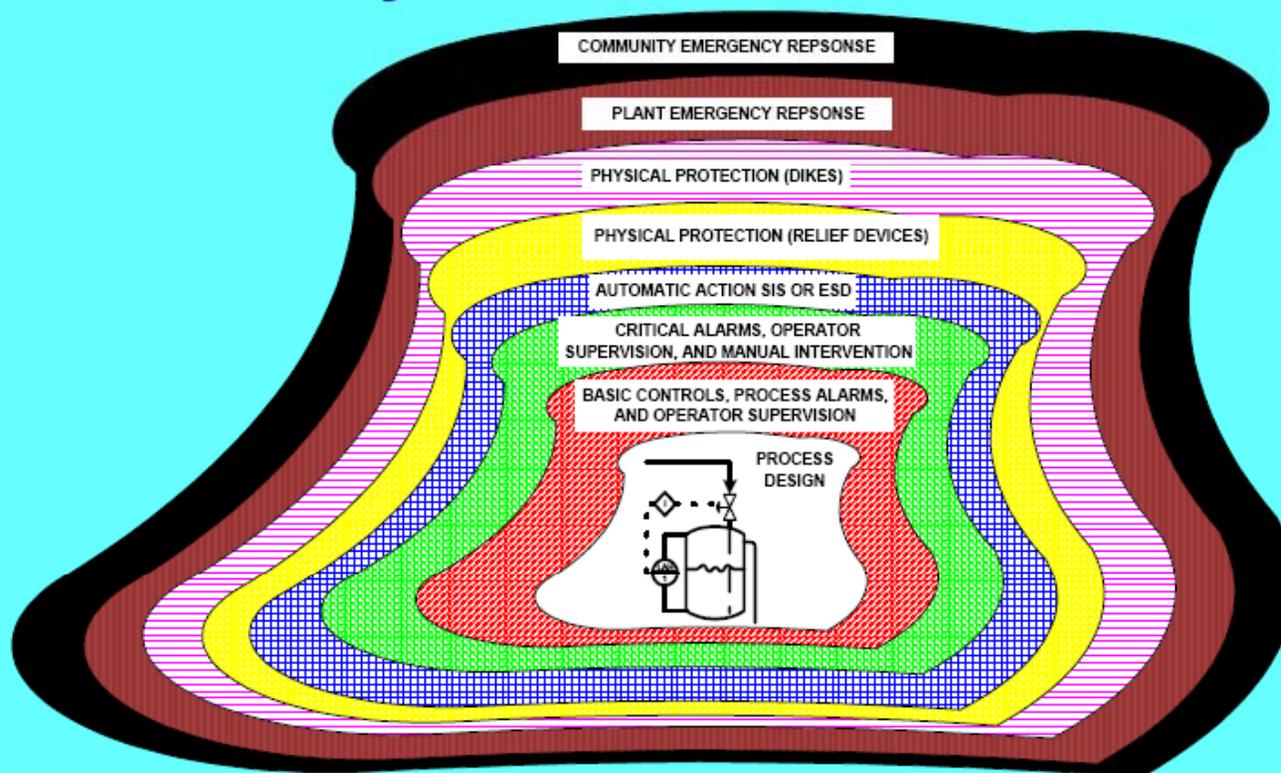
# What happens when the chemical industry lives next door?



Bhopal, India, 1984

Pasadena TX 1980

## Layers of Protection



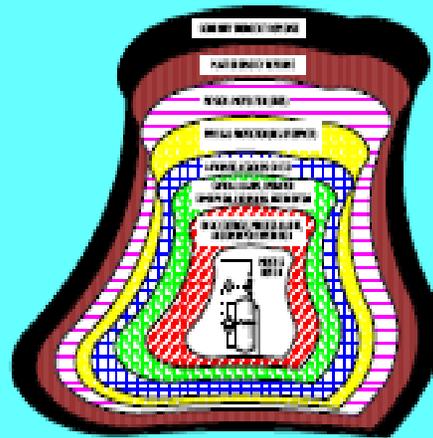
# Managing multiple hazards – Process Option No. 1

Toxicity

Explosion

Fire

.....



Hazard 1 -  
Inherent

Hazard 2 –  
Passive,  
Active,  
Procedures

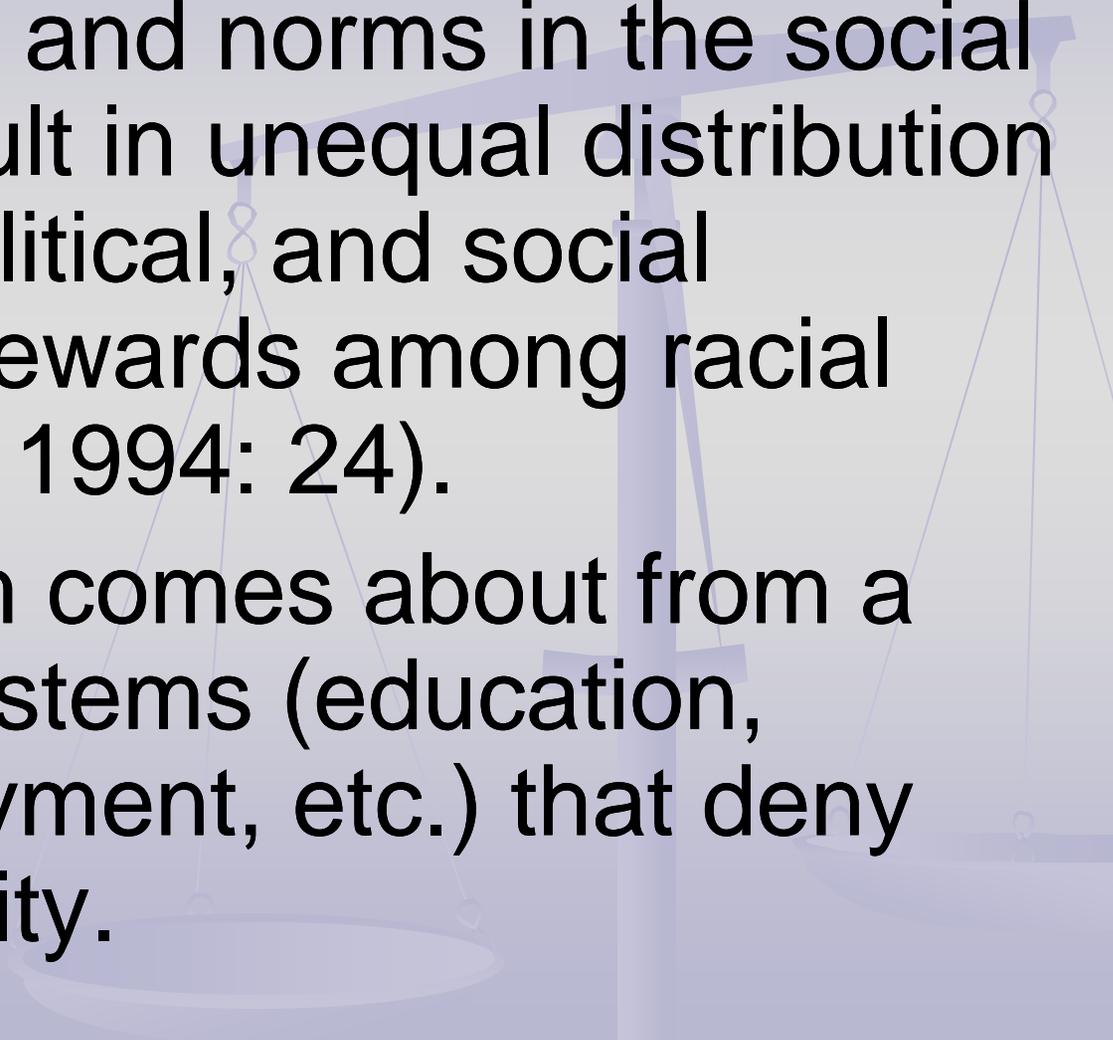
Hazard 3 – ...  
Passive,  
Active,  
Procedures

Hazard n –  
????

# To eliminate hazards:

- Eliminate the material
- Change the material
- Change the conditions of use

# Systemic Racism



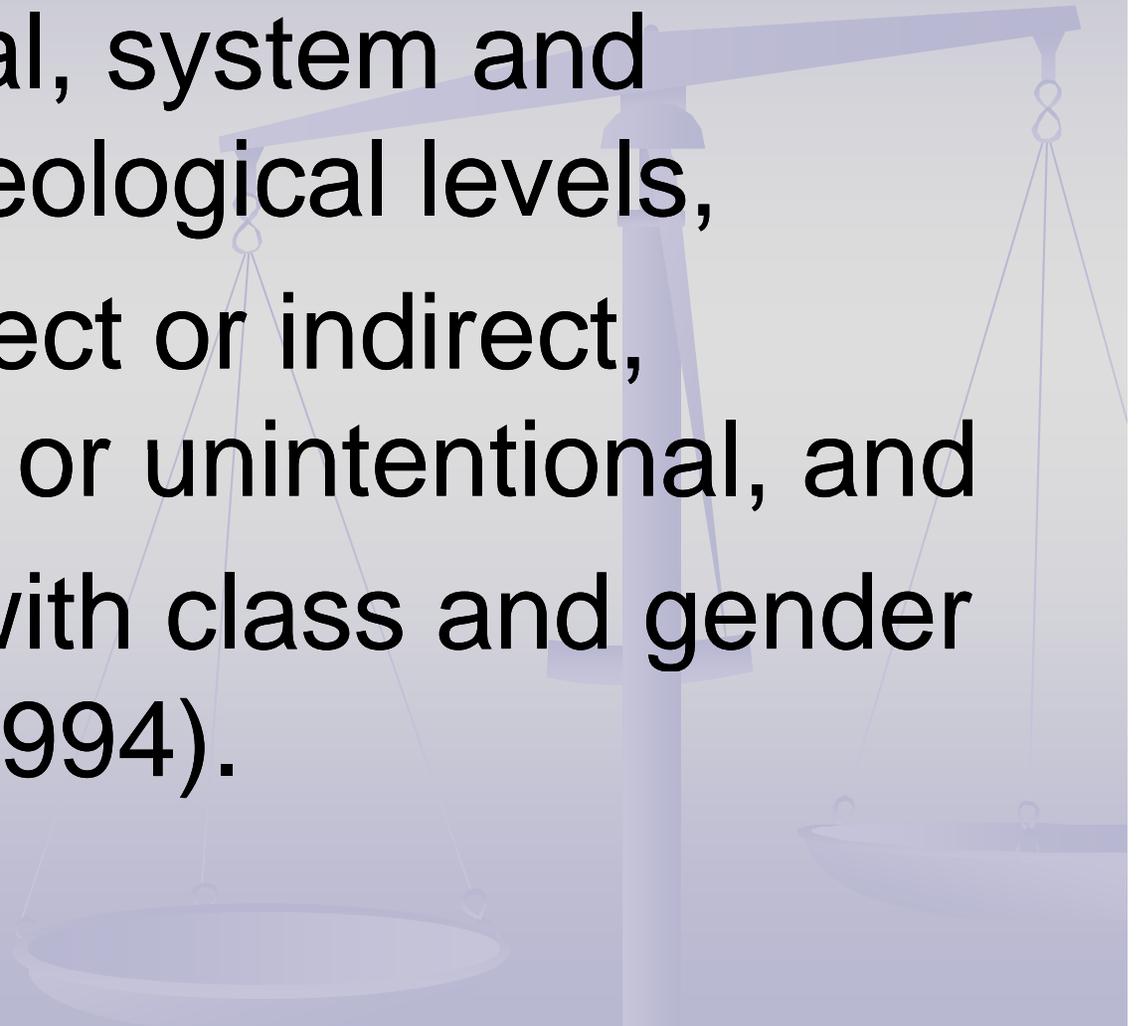
- The “laws, rules and norms in the social system that result in unequal distribution of economic, political, and social resources and rewards among racial groups” (Henry, 1994: 24).
- Systemic racism comes about from a multiplicity of systems (education, housing, employment, etc.) that deny access and equity.

## Institutional racism

- Those organizational policies and practices that, regardless of intent or motivation, are directly or indirectly disadvantageous to racial minorities (Henry, 1994: 24).
- Institutional racism encompasses overt manifestations of racism, as well as practices that may unwittingly entrench social inequality.

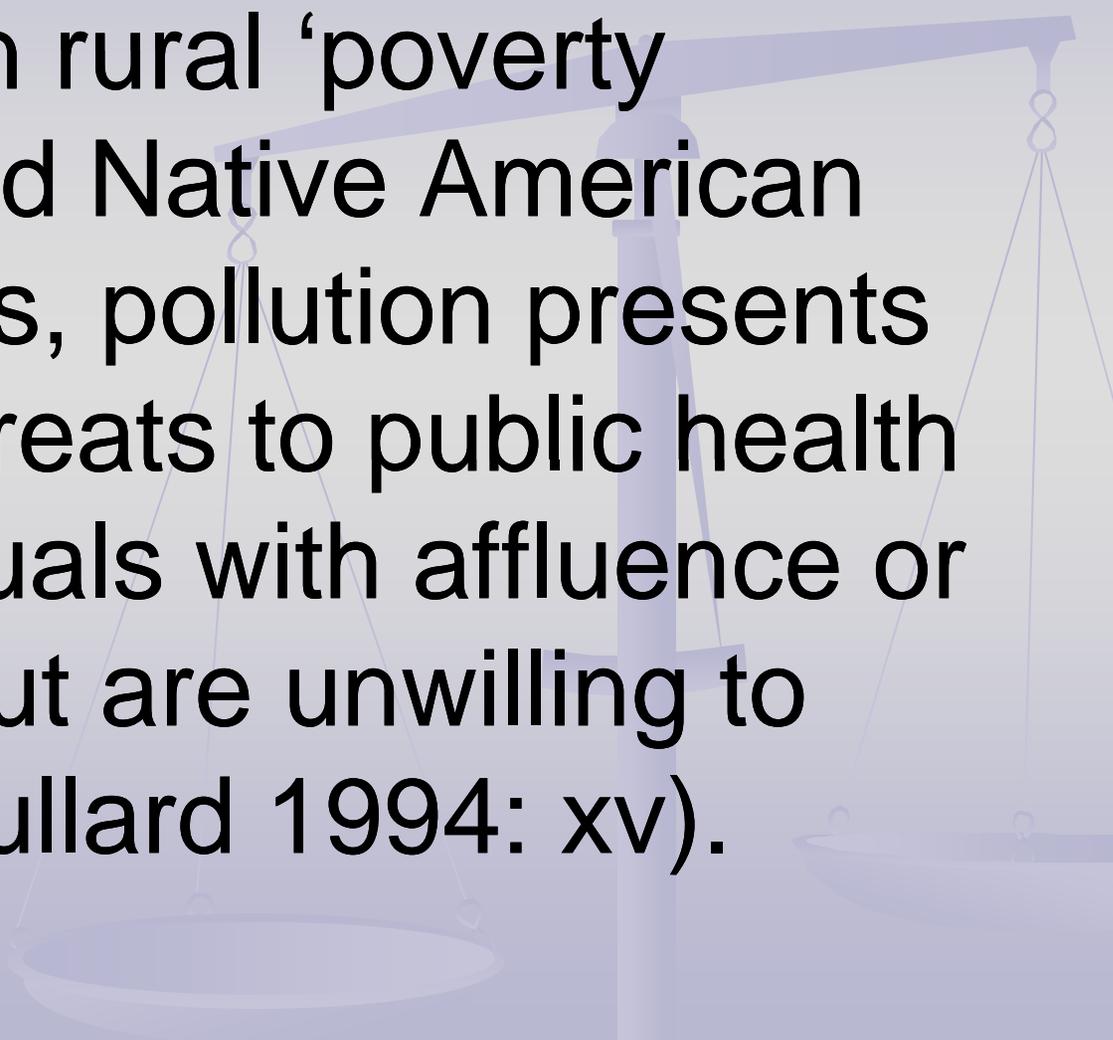
## Racism is multi-layered:

- Occurs at individual, institutional, system and cultural/ideological levels,
- can be direct or indirect, conscious or unintentional, and
- interacts with class and gender (Bullard, 1994).

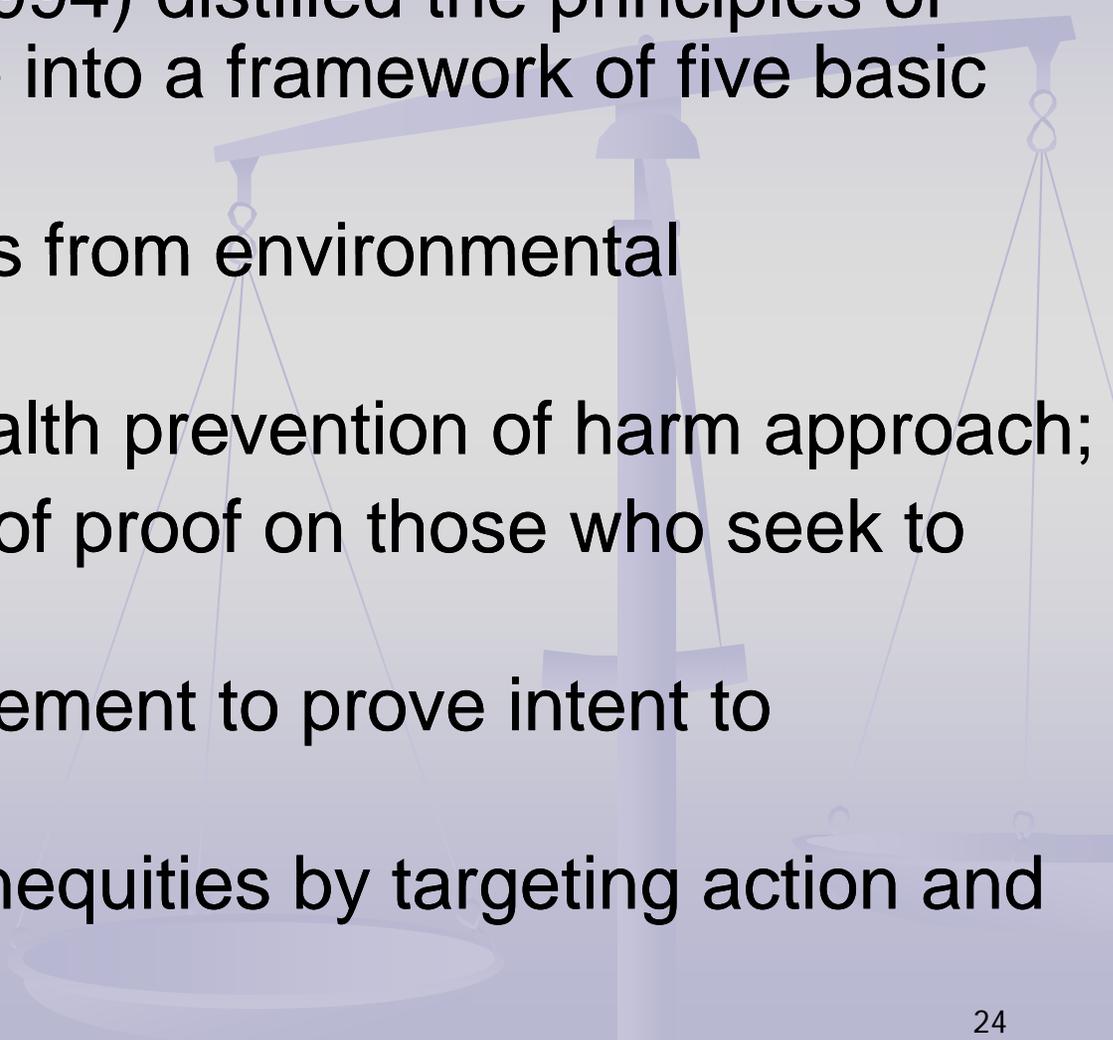


# Eurocentric laws, economy and politics

- “For half a millennium.... Western legal thought has sought to erase the difference presented by the American Indian in order to sustain the privileges of power it accords to Western [European] norms and value structures.... From the initial European conquest of the Americas to the present, Eurocentrism has been widely accepted and pervasive” (Berry 1998: 118).

- 
- “Whether in urban ghettos and barrios or in rural ‘poverty pockets’ and Native American reservations, pollution presents potential threats to public health that individuals with affluence or political clout are unwilling to accept.” (Bullard 1994: xv).

# Principles of Environmental Justice

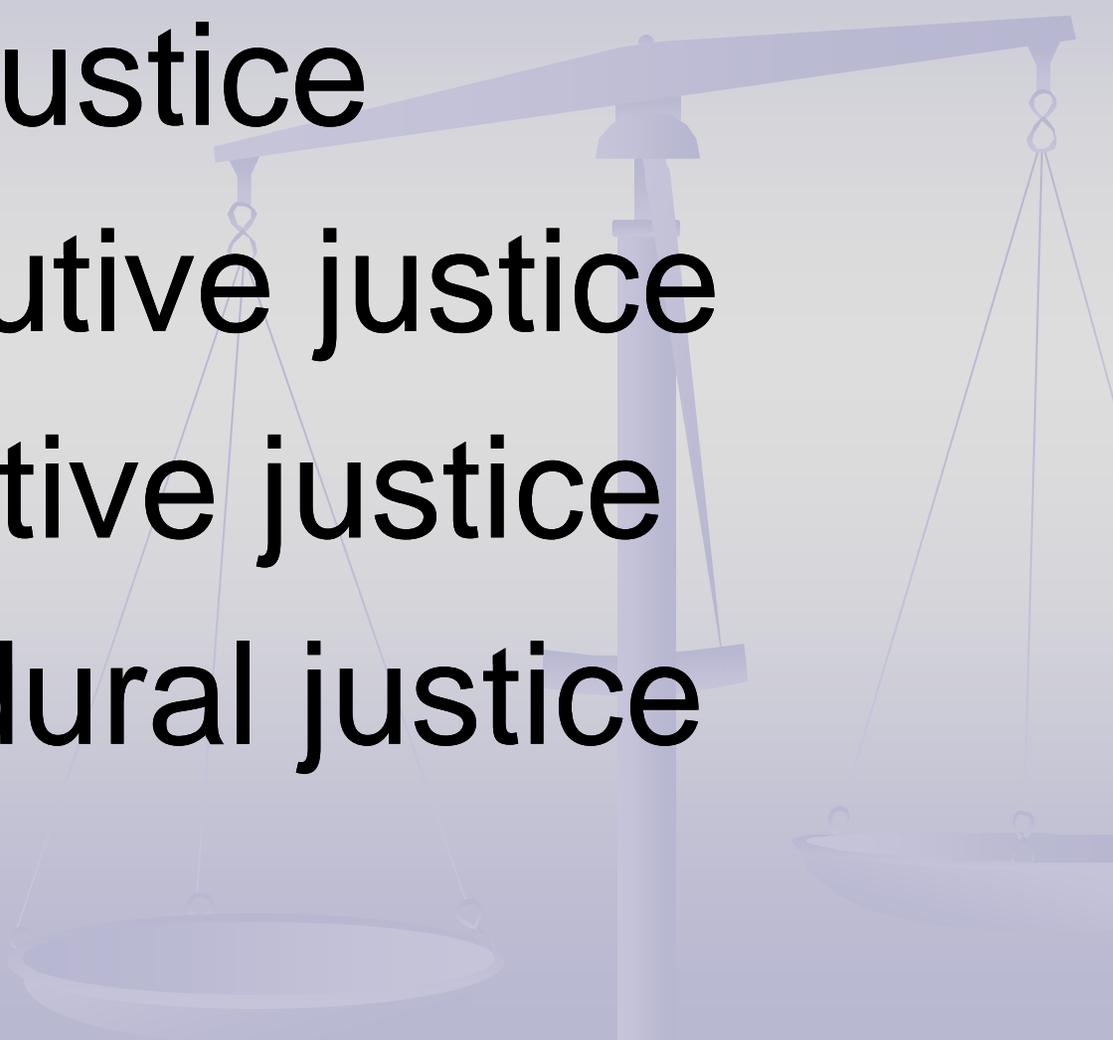


- Dr. Robert Bullard (1994) distilled the principles of environmental justice into a framework of five basic characteristics:
- (1) protect all persons from environmental degradation;
- (2) adopt a public health prevention of harm approach;
- (3) place the burden of proof on those who seek to pollute;
- (4) obviate the requirement to prove intent to discriminate; and
- (5) redress existing inequities by targeting action and resources.

# Environmental justice at different levels

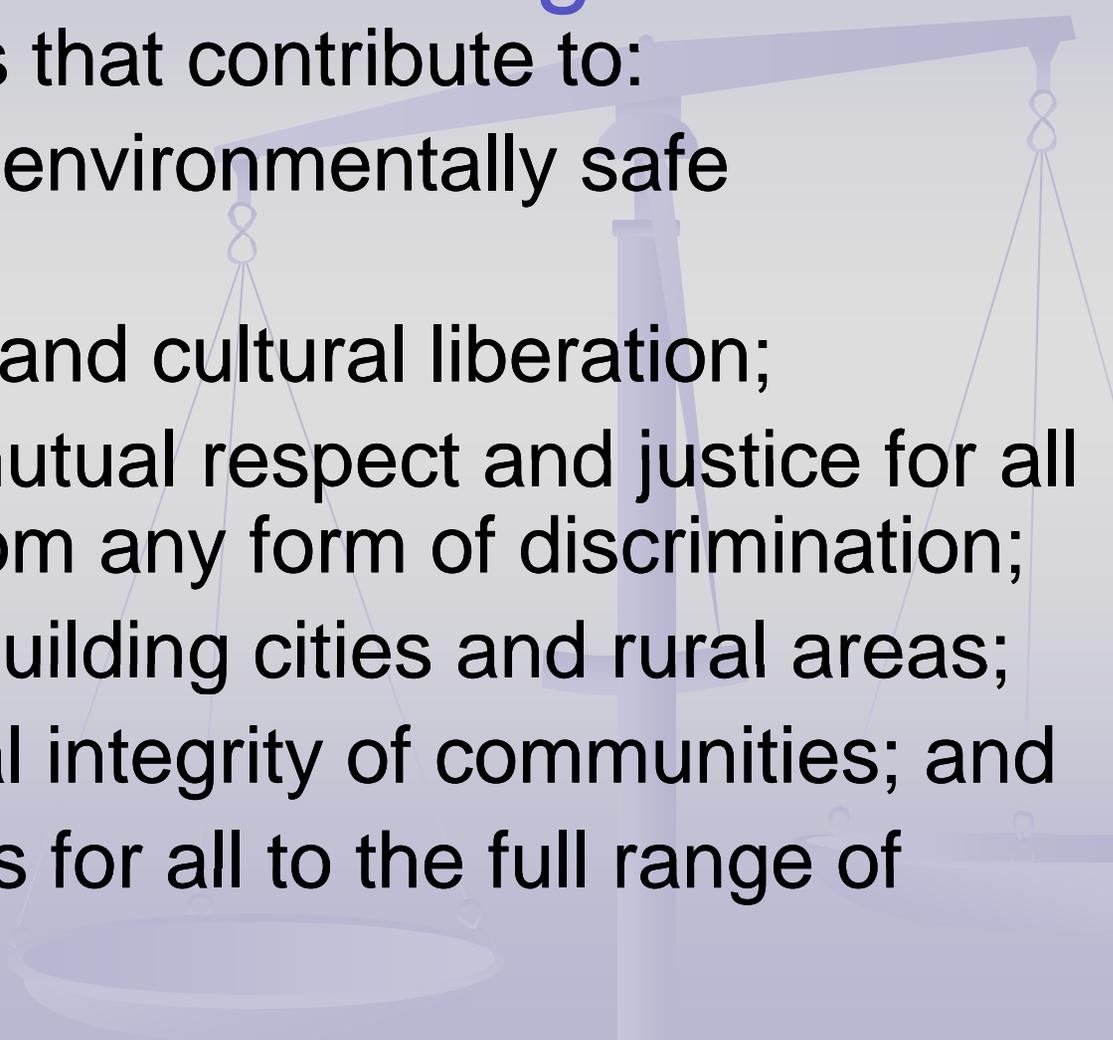
- **International level**: Exploitation of indigenous peoples and the impoverished conditions of developing nations by multinationals and government.
- **National level**: Disparities between exposures in environmental hazards and economic/environmental opportunities, as well as political and legal responses.
- **Local level**: Unfair distribution of environmental burdens and benefits.

# Environmental justices

- 1) Social justice
  - 2) Distributive justice
  - 3) Corrective justice
  - 4) Procedural justice
- 

# The Principles of Environmental Justice are grounded in ideals of social justice calling for:

Economic alternatives that contribute to:

- the development of environmentally safe livelihoods;
  - political, economic, and cultural liberation;
  - policies based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples and free from any form of discrimination;
  - cleaning up and rebuilding cities and rural areas;
  - honoring the cultural integrity of communities; and
  - providing fair access for all to the full range of society's resources
- 

# Why are the poor and people of colour more at risk?



- *Lack of Political representation*
- *Lack the Knowledge of risks*
- *Lack resources to organize effective resistances as spend more on mere survival*
- *Limited job alternatives to short-term jobs in toxic industry*
- *Subsistence activities*
- *Isolation/lack of services*

# Distributive justice = “geographic equity”

- Public health and environmental risks borne by people of color and lower income neighbourhoods and occupations.
- Unequal distribution of benefits of environmental programs and policies, such as parks and beaches, public transportation, safe drinking water, and sewerage and drainage.
- DATA SOURCE: National pollutants release inventory
- [http://www.ec.gc.ca/pdb/querysite/query\\_e.cfm](http://www.ec.gc.ca/pdb/querysite/query_e.cfm)

# Occupational hazards

- Issues of distributive justice are also impacted, for example, by nongeographic allegations that certain racial, ethnic, or income groups are disproportionately exposed to occupational hazards.

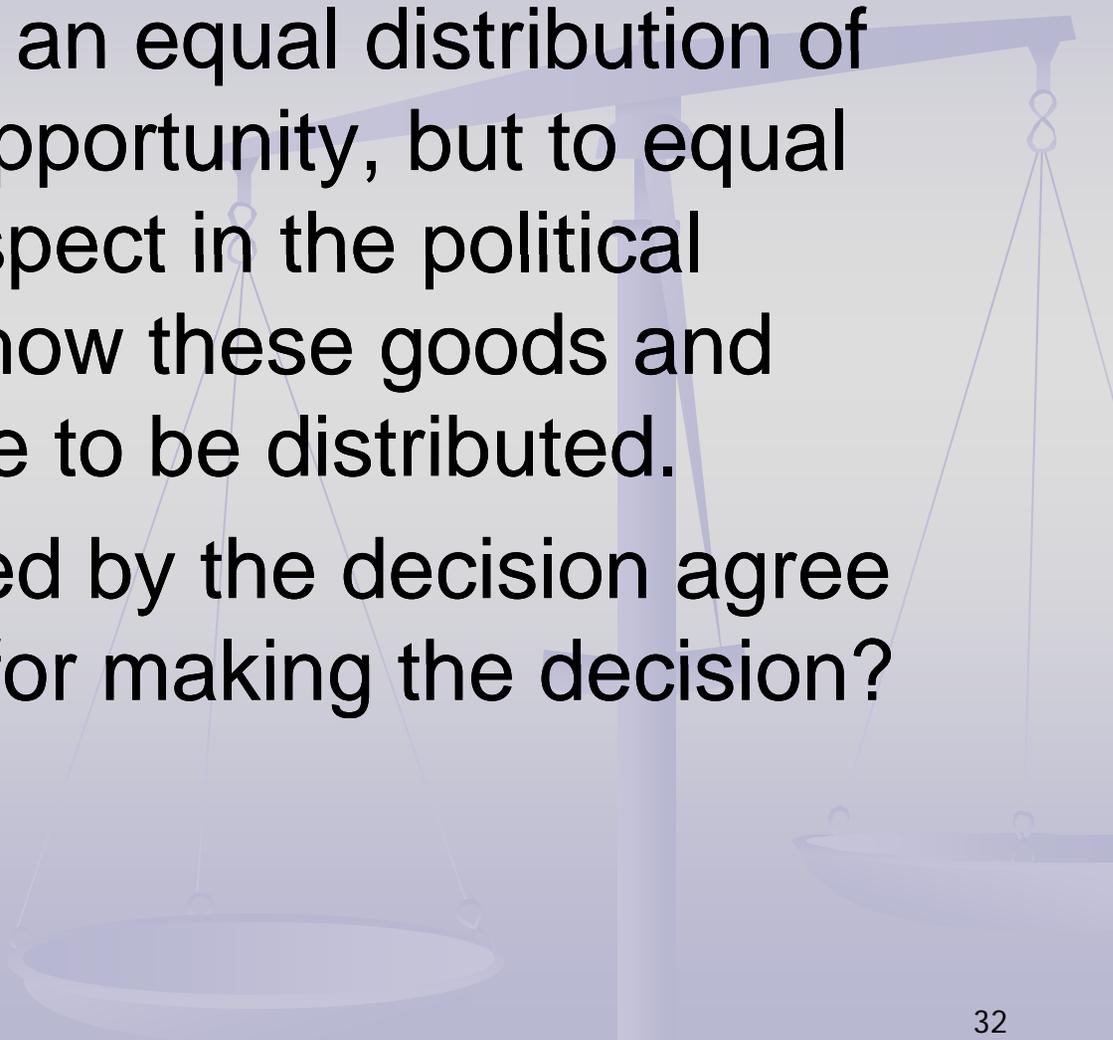
# Why do poor and minority neighbourhoods have more risks?



1. *Workers live close to the factory in which they work.*
2. *Land next to factories is cheap and people poor.*
3. *Compatible land use – one industry invites more industry.*
4. *Less political clout in poor and minority neighbourhoods to determine community development.*

*(Austin and Schill, 1994)*

# Procedural Justice



- The right, not to an equal distribution of some good or opportunity, but to equal concern and respect in the political decision about how these goods and opportunities are to be distributed.
- Do those affected by the decision agree on the process for making the decision?

## Role of government in environmental victimization?

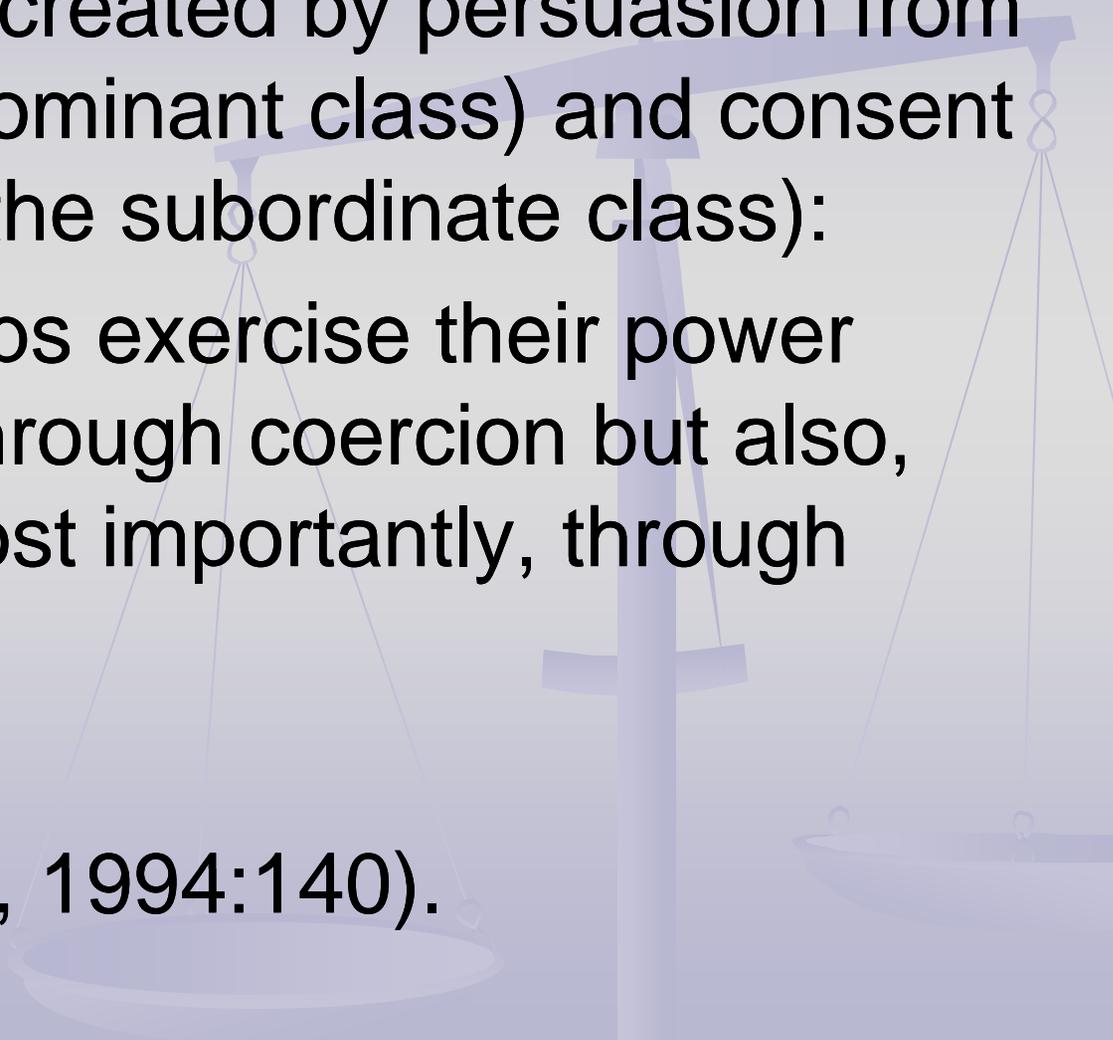
- 1) Rule by the majority may mean costs for the minority (hydroelectricity benefits many people while displacing less people).
- 2) The state profits from using natural resources (e.g., taxes, royalties), not their protection.
- 3) The government is dominated by elites, with vested interests in development.
- 4) Opacity of government.
- 5) Capitalist dominance operates in ideological terms as citizens see the free market, with minimal government interference, as the foundation of societies' well-being (Penz, 1998).



# “Racist...unparliamentary language” according to Speaker of Manitoba House of Assembly (Nov. 95)

- “I live on a reserve, a reserve that comes from what I call a racist system. I have a number that was given to me by the government. My number is 802. That is racist. My Cree language, my mother tongue, the government also tried to take that away from me....my freedom of speech was put into question.” *Oscar Lathlin, Opposition Member for The Pas, 1995*
- “If this member for The Pas wants to be able to be treated as an equal, then he ought to treat others as equals and not make the kind of discriminatory, inflammatory and irresponsible allegations that he made in the House last evening” *Gary Filmon, former Premier of Manitoba*

# Hegemony

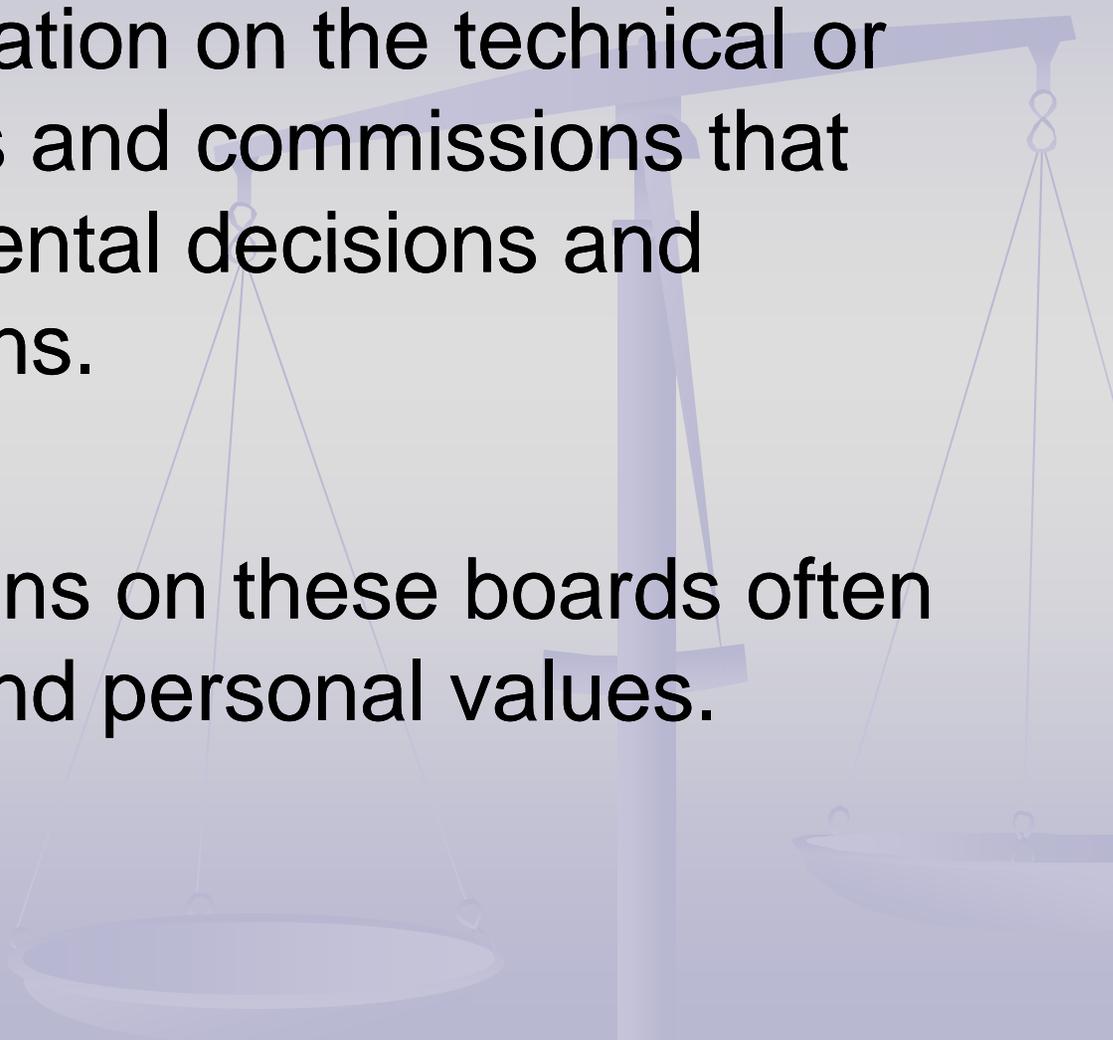


The status quo is created by persuasion from above (by the dominant class) and consent from below (by the subordinate class):

“Dominant groups exercise their power not merely through coercion but also, and perhaps most importantly, through consent”

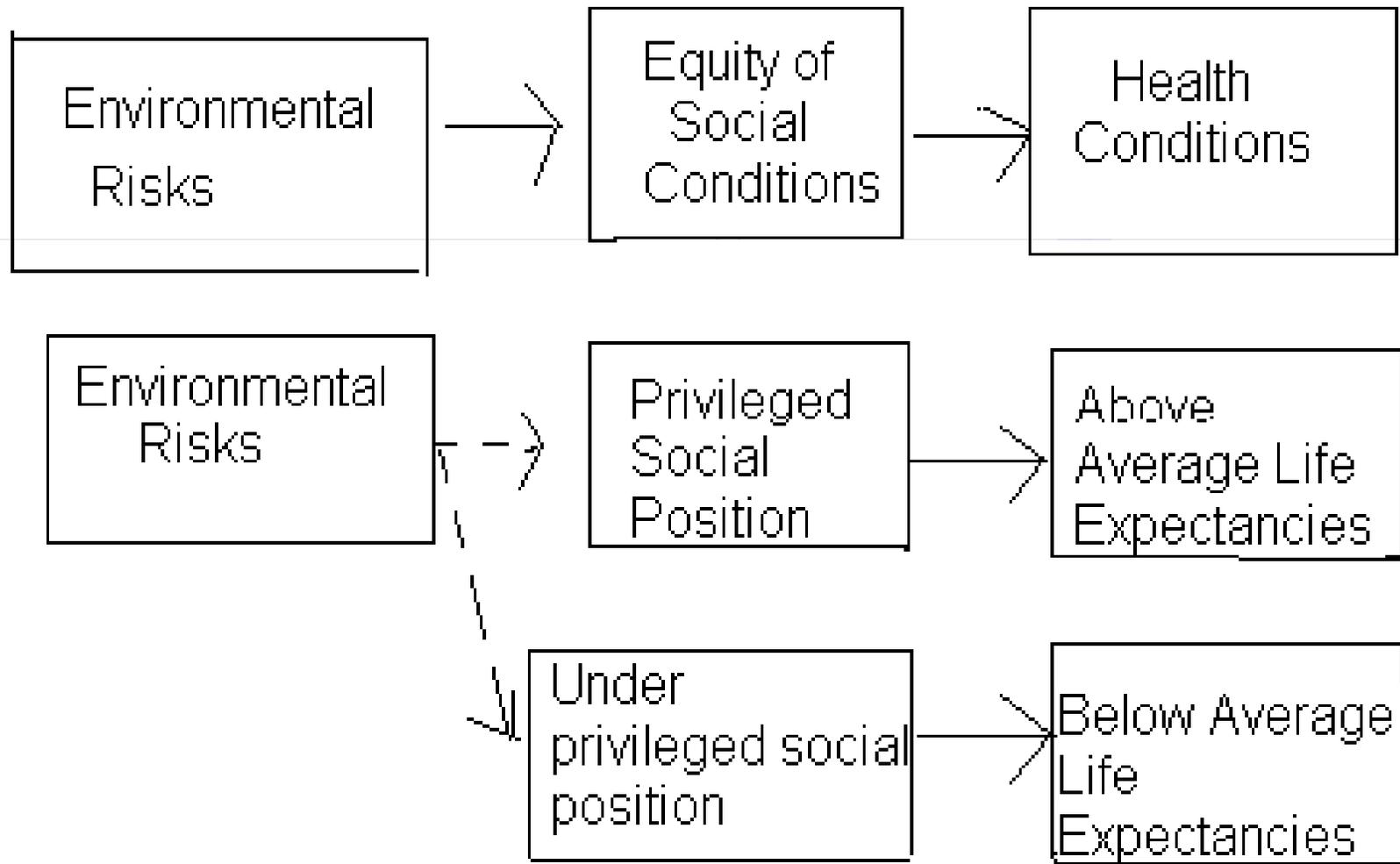
(Gramsci in Mayo, 1994:140).

# Corrective justice



- Underrepresentation on the technical or scientific boards and commissions that make environmental decisions and recommendations.
- 
- NOTE: the actions on these boards often reflect politics and personal values.

**Figure 1: Equitable Health Community Model**



# The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (1995)

*Aboriginal people endure ill health ,  
run-down and overcrowded housing,  
polluted water, inadequate schools,  
poverty and family breakdown at rates  
found more often in developing  
countries than in Canada. These  
conditions are inherently unjust. They  
also imperil the future of Aboriginal  
communities and nations  
(<http://www.ainc.gc.ca/ch/rcap/rpt/>)*



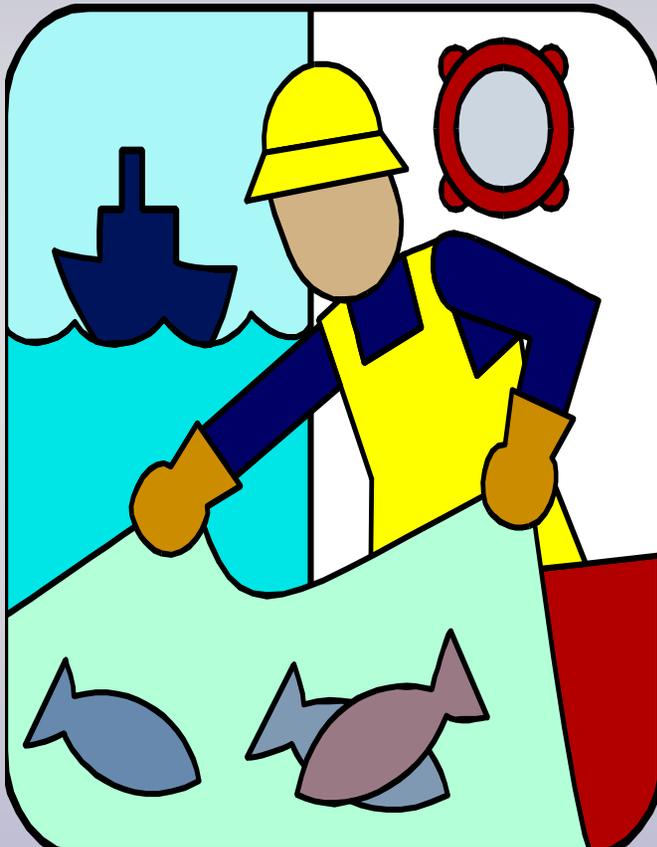
# Higher contaminant levels in Aboriginal people?



*“People in Aboriginal communities may be accumulating toxic chemicals at greater rates than the Canadian general population” (Health Canada, 1997: 76)*

*“1 of 5 Aboriginal people tested between 1970 and 1992 and 22 percent of umbilical cord blood samples, in prenatal screening, had blood methyl mercury above the 20 ppb [parts per billion] level considered safe” (Health Canada, 1997:154).*

# Environmental Equity considerations in Canada for First Nation Communities



*First Nations at risk due to:*

- (1) Lack of adequate representation in decision-making.*
- (2) Subsistence activities,*
- (3) Poverty,*
- (4) Isolation of some reserves,*
- (5) Reduced services and poor infrastructure (e.g., some communities lack safe drinking water).*
- (6) Siting of development.*

# Conclusion

- Environmental justice can provide an alternative way of viewing the world that deeply challenges are economic, political and social institutions and thinking.
- Readings on WebCT and powerpoint.

## Next week

- Environment and class, race/ethnicity and sex
- Tools to consider gender issues