

Environmental justice stands as one of the great challenges of the 21st century. In community after community, the juxtaposition of wealth and poverty and of clean versus contaminated is abundantly self-evident. So too is the need for action. As the traditional manufacturing belt of the United States continues its decades-long decay, the communities within the region are doubly affected. First, the economic loss of manufacturing jobs and dollars typically initiates the transition of a community from self-sustaining to one of dependence. The hollowed out industrial core not only serves as a constant reminder of better economic times, it can also remain an ongoing threat to the populace. Nowhere is the issue of environmental justice more prevalent than in the decaying cities of the rustbelt. From Buffalo to Cleveland to Detroit and beyond, collectively these cities serve as the poster child of contamination.

To address the declining manufacturing base of these cities, I employ the economic base analysis technique in my *Urban Geography* class. The issue of the economic base of a city is first explored, and the functional classification of cities is demonstrated with examples from around the United States. Next, students are provided an overview of the basic and non-basic sectors of a local economy, after which the Location Quotient (LQ) technique is taught. The LQ is defined as the ratio of an industry's share of the local economy to the industry's share of the national economy. Using data from the U.S. Census Bureau, we then calculate the location quotient for the manufacturing sector in various cities. Students find that the importance of manufacturing to the employment base of rustbelt cities has declined over the past decades. These calculations and findings are followed with a discussion of the consequences of this decline. Typically, students identify issues of increases in unemployment, crime, social duress, and outmigration. Less typically do they identify concerns of contamination from the now abandoned industrial sites or any thoughts on environmental justice.

This leads naturally into discussion of the issue of environmental justice. The 1978 chemical release in the Love Canal neighborhood of Niagara Falls, New York, which spurred the federal government to enact the 1980 Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA or Superfund) is discussed. The principal goal of the CERCLA legislation is to identify sites of hazardous contamination, to identify the responsible parties, and to assign costs of cleanup. Questions of just how clean is clean, and just who is to be held liable for the costs of the cleanup, have dogged the legislation since being enacted more than three decades ago. Fear of being stuck with the tab has served as a tremendous deterrent to potential buyers. In community after community, not just in the rustbelt but across the United States, former gas stations, textile mills, Laundromats, and more, remain abandoned. The absence of redevelopment is costing the communities tax revenue, employment opportunity, and social cohesion. Moreover, these abandoned and potentially hazardous sites are disproportionately found in neighborhoods of lower income or higher minority population. To demonstrate the reality of the situation, the students in the *Urban Geography* class then use free online software to map out Superfund sites in our home state of New Hampshire. Frequently surprised to learn of such sites in their own or nearby communities, it can be a transformative experience for students who are able to relate personal stories of environmental justice.