**Some of us are more "in it" than others**

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In Southwestern Ontario, just across the St. Clair River from Michigan's "Thumb," is the largest concentration of petrochemical plants, refineries, and related facilities in Canada. At the north end of this industrial area is the city of Sarnia; in the midst of the heaviest industry to the south is the Aamjiwnaang First Nation reservation. As a cultural anthropologist specializing in indigenous peoples of the Great Lakes Region, I had been aware of Aamjiwnaang since graduate school in the 1980s. But it wasn't until 2006, when I was beginning to develop a strong interest in environmental anthropology, that I learned of the extremely compromised environmental conditions plaguing that community. Since then, I have spent a six-month sabbatical and several summers in the area conducting ethnographic and archival research at Aamjiwnaang. Recently, I have expanded to include industrial workers and their families, and residents of other communities along the St. Clair Corridor (St. Clair River, Lake St. Clair, Detroit River) where heavy industry is wreaking environmental havoc.

When I first began this research, Earlham College was in the process of forming a major in Environmental Studies, and given my new-found research interests, I joined the core group that was developing the major. Since that time, the major has been approved and I have developed a number of new courses with a strong environmental focus. What it took me several years to recognize, however, is that the key element that distinguishes my particular focus and subject matter from that of my colleagues in the program is not that I am the only anthropologist, but rather that I am the only one who is centrally and passionately concerned with environmental justice.

There's a saying common in environmentally oriented circles: "We're all in it together." That is, when pollution poisons the air and water, when national parks are opened to resource extraction, when climate change leads to increasingly harsh and violent weather conditions, no one is entirely immune from these changes – they eventually affect us all. Therefore, we should all do our part to control and reverse these trends. I do not disagree with this perspective. But as I have spent time at Aamjiwnaang, and in Sarnia with the widows of workers who have died of mesothelioma and other occupational diseases, as I have met with mothers whose children with rare childhood cancers and traveled through Southwest Detroit (designated the most toxic zipcode in Michigan by University of Michigan researchers) where neighborhood blight and serious ailments predominate, the message comes through all too clearly that we are not, in fact, all in it together. Some of us – people of color, industrial workers, low-income people – are much more "in it" than others if the "it" is heavily polluted air, water and soil, high-risk work, and disproportionate rates of cancer and other deadly conditions.

This, then, is the message I seek to convey to students in my environmental studies classes. There are benefits to be had from industrial growth, and there are costs, and the harsh reality is that these are not distributed equally; rather, the benefits accrue disproportionately to some, while the costs are disproportionately borne by others. Most of us – my students and myself included – are in the middle. My mission is to instill in my students a deep and abiding understanding of what it's like, on a daily basis, to live in an area that has been "sacrificed" to industrial pollution, and the extent of the toll that takes on those who have no choice but to remain there.