OIL INDUSTRY IN THE GULF COAST:
A HISTORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICES

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OVERVIEW

• Put a human face on the impacts of climate change
• In the Gulf Coast, cannot just look at Climate Change in isolation
• Gulf is the hub of the oil industry in the Western Hemisphere
• Communities along the Gulf Coast are already impacted
• Examine Climate Change as part of cumulative impact
ROOTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Extraction → Transportation

Distribution → Refinement & Storage

Combustion → Climate Change
THE TOXIC COAST

- Oil Refinery
- Oil-Extraction Region
- Hydrocarbons
- Heavy Metals
- VOCs
The primary oil-extraction region of Mexico is inhabited by indigenous communities & campesinos.

Forced to give up farming, fishing, and traditional ways of life.

Bioaccumulation of PAHs, hydrocarbon pollution in topsoil (120-2000 ppm).

Mercury in the Gulf, 12x EPA safe levels.

Biomagnification of Methylmercury.

Mercury Levels in the Gulf of Mexico

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<th>Levels of Mercury in parts per million</th>
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Safe Levels Actual Levels
Oil Refinement

- Oil Refining Capital of the World
- 57 refineries in Gulf Coast, over ½ in noncompliance with EPA
- Huge complexes that are surrounded by 100s of storage tanks & petrochemical industries
- Process 60% of oil used by U.S.
- Most likely located in community of color, next to schools, parks, churches & homes
- 80% of people in refinery neighborhoods have heart or respiratory problems
- Leading toxins include: benzene, dioxins, lead, mercury, hydrogen sulfide, ozone, etc.

Chart 3. TRI (Toxic Release Inventory)

Chart 4. Actual vs. Reported Emissions by Refineries in Million Pounds

- Texas
- Louisiana
- California
- Illinois
- Pennsylvania
- New Jersey
- Washington
- Mexico

Millions of pounds of pollutants released per year

- Reported Emissions
- Actual Emissions
ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

• Denied equal protection
• Illegal, dangerous activity by oil industry
• Disregard of communities by local, state, & federal environmental agencies
• Lies, cover-ups, & misinformation campaigns by government & corporate agencies
• Intentional disempowerment of local communities
• Corruption of political officials
HEALTH IMPACTS

- Cancer (childhood leukemia)
- Brain Tumors
- Heart & Respiratory disease
- Asthma
- Disorders of nervous, blood, endocrine & immune systems
- Genetic Damage
- Miscarriages & birth defects
- Deaths & Injuries from Explosions
- Developmental disorders
- Persistent nose bleeds
- Skin irritation
Stories from the Grassroots

• In Texas, Petrochemical industry accounts for 75% of unhealthy air emissions
• 2/3rd of petrochemical plants in TX are within 1 mile of schools; 73% of ‘at risk’ kids are people of color
• Beaumont, Texas
• Kennedy Heights, Houston, Texas
• Texas City, Texas
• “Cancer Alley,” Louisiana
• Mexico’s Gulf States: Loss of fishing grounds, farmland, water supply; militarization of region
CLIMATE CHANGE: LASTING LEGACY

- Not just localized impact
- Rising Temperatures => Increase VOC levels, ozone
- Heat waves, oscillations between floods & droughts
- Loss of water resources
- Toxic Algal Blooms, Decrease fish populations
- Risk to Agriculture & food security
- Increase contamination of water sources
- Spread of infectious diseases
- Perpetuate & Intensify Injustices
Final Thoughts

- Profit of oil industry is founded on perpetuation of environmental injustices
- Allowed to hide pollution, misinform public, poison communities & workers
- Using ‘globalization’ as another mechanism to extend profit
- Protection of health, livelihood & culture is integrally linked to opposition of current system of corporate control
- Struggle for justice requires an independence from the addiction to fossil fuels
NEXT STEPS

• Create bi-national convergence between those burdened by the oil industry along the Gulf Coast to dialogue, strategize and envision a different future

• Strive toward a regional strategy that will be equitable, healthy and empowering for the communities and workers of the Gulf Coast