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## Environmental Injustice in Louisiana

By Deacon Chris Kellerman, SJ

### Take Five For Social Justice



### Take Action!

Click the button below to sign a  
petition & send advocacy emails.**Stop Solitary  
Confinement**

#### JSRI Future Activities

##### March 10

Fr. Fred Kammer, SJ, will do a presentation on Jesuit history for alumni as part of the programming for Loyola Homecoming Week.

##### March 22

Fr. Kammer will participate virtually as vice-chair in the national meeting of the board of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps.

JSRI staff and associates—working from home—will continue monitoring local, state, and federal administrative, legislative, and judicial actions regarding our priority issues and the impact of Covid-19; participating in advocacy communications with authorities; recommending resources on our website and by social media; research and writing for our publications; and activating our advocacy network.

#### JSRI Recent Activities

##### January 27

Dr. Sue Weishar met with leaders of Mujeres Luchadoras to discuss plans to address their members' social service needs.

##### January 28

Dr. Dennis Kalob participated in the meeting of the Care for Our Common Home Commission of the U.S. Central and Southern Jesuit Province.

##### February 5

Dr. Weishar moderated a panel discussion she had helped organize for the Louisiana Stop Solitary Coalition on recent research findings regarding the use of solitary confinement in Louisiana prisons.

##### February 6-9

Dr. Kalob attended (virtually) the annual Washington, D.C. Catholic Social Ministry Gathering.

##### February 9

Dr. Weishar and five other Louisiana attendees of the annual Louisiana Catholic Social Ministry Gathering spoke via Zoom with staff members in the three Louisiana Congressional offices on the need for comprehensive immigration reform.

##### February 12

Fr. Kammer provided a social analysis presentation concerning New Orleans to novices of the Jesuit Central and Southern Province working here in the city.

##### February 13

Dr. Kalob had an [op-ed](#) supporting a minimum wage increase published by *The Maroon*, Loyola's student newspaper.

When activists speak of environmental racism, they are describing a phenomenon based on the facts of history: that non-white Americans are more likely to live in polluted neighborhoods due to generational poverty, housing discrimination, and the U.S. government's failure to live up to its treaty obligations with Native Americans. It's tougher to fight back when you're not the ones in power, and poor Louisianans and Louisianans of color often feel the brunt of this injustice. As Dr. John Balmes of Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital [recently said](#), "You know, they don't put power plants or refineries or rail yards in rich, White neighborhoods."



Bishop Michael G. Duca of Baton Rouge leads the community in an All Saints Day Prayer Service near the graves at the Formosa Plastics building site.

Examples of this reality are numerous. [USA Today](#) recently profiled the havoc wreaked by the Denka Performance Elastomer in Reserve, LA, in St. John the Baptist Parish. And the state-recognized Isle de Jean Charles band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe, due to rising sea levels caused both by climate change and by the oil industry's excessive canal-digging, has had to [relocate](#) from its tribal lands.

Pollution and its impacts on communities of color has also played a significant role in the COVID-19 pandemic. As Black and Brown Americans were dying at higher rates than white Americans, the [media](#) devoted more attention to a sad fact that communities of color already knew: the health disparities between white and non-white Americans caused in large part by the [levels of pollution](#) where people live.

Thankfully, Gov. John Bel Edwards recently brought together a [task force](#) to study the effects of climate change on Louisiana and how the state can plan for a healthier, more equitable, and sustainable future. But if this task force is going to be more than window dressing, the state of Louisiana must put an end to the Sunshine Project.

The Taiwanese-owned Formosa Plastics "Sunshine Project" is a \$9.4 billion, 14-plant petrochemical complex that could stretch over 2,400 acres in District 5 of St. James Parish. It will potentially be located within walking distance of an elementary school which has nearly 100% Black enrollment in a district which is 85% Black. It is even supposed to be built on grounds containing the graves of enslaved Black Americans who were forced to work in sugar cane fields to build up a Louisiana economy that today poisons their descendants.

Formosa Plastics would emit 7.7 tons of ethylene oxide (ETO) into the air each year. ETO is a cancer-causing chemical that is dangerous for adults, children, and the unborn, but the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality [still has not adequately addressed](#) the problems posed by ETO to Louisiana's communities. The cancer-causing chemical from Formosa Plastics will increase the health risks for residents for dozens of miles in all directions—right in the heart of Cancer Alley. To learn more about the Sunshine Project, check out [JSRI's special report](#).

You can help. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recently announced that it would engage in a re-evaluation process of the Sunshine Project's air permits. The [Louisiana Bucket Brigade](#) has made an easy commenting campaign to help people get the message to the U.S. Army Corps that we do not want more big polluters poisoning our communities. You can help in a big way by participating in that campaign [here](#).

*Monthly articles reflect the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Loyola University New Orleans.**Please send feedback to [jsri@loyno.edu](mailto:jsri@loyno.edu)***CLICK TO JOIN OUR ADVOCACY NETWORK**

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