Introduction to Research

My journey to this research topic has been a continual process that began way before I even decided to embark on the path of undergraduate research. I am an African-Filipino American that grew up in impoverished areas that were racially biased and subjected to some of the worst industrial and agricultural waste and injustice. My birthplace is Hanford, California in the Central Valley, however due to my family's socio-economic condition we were constantly on the move in small agricultural towns in the San Joaquin Valley. I lived in Lemoore, Visalia, Dinuba, Tulare, and Clovis in my youth. All of these cities are in a corridor through the valley and are sites of commercial agriculture and industrial production. In studies done on the environment in the Central Valley by the Cumulative Health Impacts Project (London 2012) nearly all of these cities were ranked high on the Cumulative Environmental Vulnerability Actions Zones, meaning that these areas are of particular health concerns because of pollution from plants and industrial sites (London 2012). I remember as a child in elementary school there was an inhaler caddy because so many children had asthma, or not being able to go outside because it was a "bad air day". I remember seeing planes fly over fields near my home dropping chemicals as it flew over head, or living just a short walk away thousands of cows whose treatment polluted the air and water. As a kid I did not really pay much mind to the heavy machinery that processed food, or the constant stream of pesticides and dust being stirred up in the environment, however as an adult I look back at these memories and see how this shaped the landscape and racial distribution of the Central Valley.
As I mentioned, I moved around a lot as a kid, so at times I lived in predominantly white neighborhoods and at others I lived in communities that were mostly Latino, Hmong, and Black. While the environmental degradation from commercial agriculture affects communities in the Central Valley across color and class lines, I have discovered that it affects people in different ways. Often times I noticed that the white people knew tended to be land owners, farm owners, owners of industrial processing plants or packing houses. Or their livelihood and neighborhoods were far removed from these sites. Many of the Black, Latino, and Asian people I knew either were agricultural workers (often their parents) or they lived in closer proximity to these sites because rent and property was cheaper.

This dynamic was also relative to the type of education that was available in working-class neighborhoods of color, because in areas with children whose parents were mostly farm workers the education was very poor, gang activity was rampant, and so was crime. I particularly noticed this about Tulare, Dinuba, and parts of Visalia, and I can remember living around or going to school with gang members, and being friends with kids whose parents and older relatives were in gangs. This relationship of degraded environment, education systems, and social systems is important because they are intrinsically linked and rooted in racial hierarchies that both create these conditions and profit from their existence.

Another big business in this Valley are the State penitentiaries, both male and female. One town in particular I remember visiting to see my cousin, was Corcoran. This small town had very little beside farmland and the prison nearly everyone that lived there was Mexican and was involved with the agriculture or the penitentiary. People that lived in this area primarily
worked in the prison system, labored in agriculture, were service workers, were unemployed, or were incarcerated. The exploitation of land and labor are the central issues that have created this social and ecological landscape of inequality.

The exposure to toxins and exploitation of labor disproportionately affects people of color in the San Joaquin Valley. Historically and globally we can see the connections between social and environmental degradation because corporations, industries, and decision makers that disregard the environment also disregard human life. This leads to environmental, economic, and social decay of targeted communities which highly affects opportunities for higher education and social mobility; a complex dynamic that is funneling people into the "for profit" prison industrial complex. Agribusiness and the prison system are multi-billion dollar industries whose ugly face is often hidden from the greater population because San Joaquin Valley is a vast span of land with little attraction to outsiders, however it produces a substantial proportion of the nation's food and houses an overwhelming amount of California's prison population.

I am drawing on these memories because this is how I have come to understand the link between the environment and race. Communities of color were distributed and shaped around the agriculture industry, whether it was directly through employment as farm workers or indirectly through land partitioning that was determined by land owners and government that support the industry. This results in unequal access to wealth, environmental health, education, and social mobility. These memories and understandings of the environmental and social conditions in the Central Valley have made it impossible for me to separate how race
determines our location within our environments, and how that location can determine our role and interactions with nature. In the course of my research on this paper, early African American intellectuals, such W.E.B. Du Bois wrote about slavery as a disposssession of the land and argued that ownership and a relationship to one's environment was essential to freedom. This concept can be applied to our contemporary prison population and farm worker population whose conditions can be paralleled to slavery in the way that much of these populations do own property, have little political or decision making power over land management and their labor is being exploited by two very large industries, agribusiness and the prison industrial complex.

As I have continued on the path of higher education, I have found myself engaging with environmental studies and social justice work in academe because as I have mentioned from my personal history, these issues are inextricably linked and are deep passions of mine. However, as I have pursued these interests in academia a couple of things have happened. Subversive acts of systematic racism have discouraged my participation in the field of science and environmental studies, and until recently I have found a great disconnect between the sciences and social/humanities in academia despite their intersections in the real world.

The same can be said about the energy industry in the U.S. and how the infrastructure and policy decisions have played out across color and class divisions. Sustainability and the green revolution headline topics today in America and globally as we face food and water shortages, unprecedented pollution, and global climate change. Many people are finally waking up to the hazards of fossil fuels on our planet and there is a push to find alternative energy
sustainable. Fossil fuels have played a controversial role in our economy and government, particularly in the last decade as prices have skyrocketed at the pump and the war raged in the Middle East arguably over petroleum. Not to mention the BP oil spill that damaged the Atlantic Oceanic communities that depended on fishing and oceanic trade. Climate change is no longer just a speculated concept; it is evident in the dramatic changes in weather occurring globally; in large part we can look to automotive emissions as a source of greenhouse gases that are altering weather and climate at an expedient rate. Dependency on unsustainable energy practices is deeply engrained in the American culture and way of life, which is why I am interested in diversifying the discourse on environmental thought by examining it through a social perspective lens. The changes we need to avoid further environmental/resource calamity will have to come from all walks of life, and currently this diversity is lacking in environmental scholarship and thought.

Also as a student that is active in the environmental and natural sciences, I can’t help but notice that I am often the only black person in these classes or organizations. Over and over again I have been faced with this perplexing examination and have often asked why other Black people are not present in these genres of work and study. Is it that African Americans care less about the environment, or are there racial barriers and histories that can explain this dynamic? This question in combination with the changing face of energy management in the U.S. spurred my overall research question: “What role do African Americans Play in the emerging renewable energy industry?” As I have pursued the answers to my questions I have discovered that there is a far dating history of African American environmental discourse and thought. The fields of science and environmentalism are rooted in Eurocentric thought and discourse that was initially
used to justify white supremacy (also known as scientific racism) the framework of this genre has developed in a way that is not inclusive of multiple perspectives and largely (until recently) does not integrate social and racial theory.

It was interesting to see in my Urban Ecology class how many of my peers that were Landscape Design and Environmental Studies majors that admitted they have not heard of environmental justice or environmental racism, and have rarely if, ever taken courses in the Humanities or Sociology. A friend of mine from this class met up with me for a study session, and in casual conversation I mentioned my research project to her, and she replied "You know, Black people don't go camping". A bit stunned by the shortsightedness of this comment, I asked her if she knew very many Black people and she admitted that she didn’t and that she was afraid of them because of a few childhood experiences that left her with a negative opinion of all Black people from that period forward. I asked her if she realized that I was a Black person and she replied, "But you are only half Black" as if that somehow made me more acceptable. I mention this experience because it is indicative of the common attitudes and perceptions I run into in courses and work related to environmental studies. We can ask "Why is it that environmental studies are not concerned with black people?", instead of " Why are black people uninterested in the environment?"

I also interned at a marine life reserve for two years, and constantly was faced with ignorant comments like those I just mentioned from my classmate, however it was coming from my supervising naturalists. The marine life reserve lead field trips for school groups, and I remember looking in the schedule book and they would mark in red pen the predominantly African American groups and low-income groups that were predominantly children of color,
despite the fact that these programs were free to everyone regardless of income or race. Once I realized that, I approached one of the naturalists and asked what the purpose of marking these groups served, and she said that it prepared the naturalists for the behavior and learning impediments they would encounter with these groups. People leading these field trips would then go into it with short patience and low expectations despite the actual learning abilities or behavior of the children. Once they made the mistake of marking a private charter school in red. The school was a dual emersion program that taught children in multiple languages, not because they could not speak English but because the school prioritized being multi-lingual. The children were mostly Filipino and Latino, extremely intelligent, and well-behaved. Nevertheless, because of that red heading in the schedule book, the naturalist approached the group with a poor attitude and was quite condescending. She assumed that the children did not speak English, and approached their teacher after her embarrassing display of an educational program, and with pity made a remark to her about how the children were struggling with English. The teacher was extremely offended and gave her a lecture about how the children were not struggling with a learning disability, but actually excelled intellectually because they were learning in their native languages and English simultaneously. I was really glad that the teacher called the naturalist out for her racial assumptions, but I could tell that the naturalist didn’t really get why the teacher was so offended. They continue to mark said groups in red pen.

One of the most offensive experiences that I witnessed at this park was one time when we lead a shoreline clean-up and dozens of upper middle-class white families gathered for the event. We handed out cheap plastic trash grabbers (that would probably be floating around on
that same shoreline in a week) and reusable shopping bags filled with organic snack samples. Despite the irony of the crap we handed out at the clean-up, that was not the insulting part, what was insulting was the group of inner city African American students that they bussed in that were a part of a work service program in the park district. I thought the kids were being punished because they were wearing orange vests, were not interacting with anyone from the event, and looked generally unhappy. Again I approached a naturalist for some explanation of who this group of Black students were because they were around and working but were not welcomed in the event or apart of any of the educational talks. Come to find out these students missed actually missed valuable class time to labor on trails, clean up parks, and provide free/cheap manual labor to the parks. I then asked what educational elements they were receiving and the program coordinator pointed at one girl and said she was really good at using a chainsaw. While I am all for environmental stewardship, I did not see this as such because these students were not being exposed to the environmental education aspect that would make their work environmental stewardship; the kids were a source of free/cheap labor. This racial dynamic played out through the park district because all of the people of color tended to be lower level gate attendants, park rangers, office assistants and so forth, but all of the naturalists and higher positions were white. There was a bold color line, and it seemed like I was the only one who saw it or cared, it was quite crazy making.

Social and ecological systems meet and the landscape is designed according to the values and perceptions of the residing culture. Environmental racism is no accident or coincidence but rather a manifestation of a color-blind approach to urban planning and
environmental policy that does not acknowledge the social hierarchies that perpetuate systems of injustice through our identities and our relationship to the environment. Figuratively one could view it as a pollution of the collective consciousness that results in a pollution of the land. I am arguing that our social and environmental histories are not mutually exclusive, but rather are different perspectives on past phenomena that have led to our present conditions. By integrating the social, economic, historical, and environmental epistemologies in academia and environmental discourse we can build bridges of understanding that emulate how these elements interact in the real world because they do in fact overlap and interact with one another on all levels from micro to global.

I found academic sanctuary in the Women and Gender Studies in my junior college experience because my identity was acknowledged and integrated in my course work and for the most part my peers and teachers in the field were versed on systematic racism and oppression and therefore were not apathetic to my struggles in the education system and day to day life. They also were more cognizant of appropriate behavior that did not attack my identity as an African American woman, which made me feel safe and valued in the major. This pulled me away from my interests in the environmental sciences even though I continued to take up classes and environmental education where I could fit it in. By integrating race, class, gender, and other social ideologies and works, this would make the genre more appealing and welcoming to African Americans.
Sustainability and renewable energy are terms that we hear often in this era of the "green revolution", however there are few discussions about race within this movement. I found a paper by David Soll that discusses the environmental image in the media, titled Race and the New Green Media: Lessons from Environmental History, that so humorously and perfectly illustrates my sentiments on the subject of race and environmental history that I had to include an excerpt of it in my introduction

In a recent issue of *Mother Jones*, the country’s premier left-wing investigative journal, Jacques Leslie led readers on an environmental catastrophe tour of China. From deforestation to desertification, Leslie deftly chronicled the country’s myriad [of] environmental challenges. Toward the end of the article appeared a strategically placed presumably likely to appeal to a reader who had invested the time to read thirteen pages about another country’s environmental woes. The tagline for GreenSingles.com was straightforward: “Find Love & Save the Planet!” The ad’s breezy supposition that a website could help environmentally minded singles achieve two of their weightier life goals seemed unremarkable; products change, but grandiose claims have been a staple of American capitalism since the nineteenth century. What caught my eye was the photo of the late-thirties white couple that graced the ad. The interplay between environmentally themed advertisements and news coverage exemplifies the enthusiastic embrace of “green” issues by both the media and the businesses whose advertisements support the media.

Nonetheless, the disconnect between this health-oozing couple and the dynamics described in Leslie’s article was a bit jarring. Surely these two were tap water–drinking, recycling fanatics who worked in LEED-certified buildings and eschewed cheap Chinese-made goods in favor of handmade American products. As if to confirm this, my eye wandered up the page to an inscrutable advertisement for buyolympia.com. The 1950s-style graphic depicted a white woman with an infant strapped to her back and read simply, “I love public transportation.” Just below this, forming the third side of the white environmental triangle, was a plug for earthtones.com, a cellular phone service that invests 100 percent of profits in environmental causes. A fit-looking white man perched on a precipice gabbed away.
These white people were doing all they could to save the environment. Visit a few websites and I could be just like them. Where were the racially balanced ads that we have come to expect from American companies? Were these progressive businesses beyond such transparent pandering? The answer to these questions is disarmingly simple: environmentalism, or at least the cutting edge, entrepreneurial slice of it, is not green, but lily white. Changing this perception is a crucial ingredient in the recipe for environmental restoration.

If anything can bridge racial divides, concern for the well-being of the planet, the air we breathe, and the water we drink would seem to be a prime candidate. Unfortunately, the tendency of the mainstream media to treat the environment as a discrete topic rather than as the meeting place where virtually all other realms of human existence—economy, health, government policy, weather—converge, reinforces familiar racial barriers. By subtly and not so subtly coding environmental issues, particularly green consumption and business, as white, America’s newspapers, magazines, and television stations undermine the development of the broad, multiracial constituency required for progressive environmental action. In doing so, they unwittingly mimic the narrow approach that, until fairly recently, dominated the mainstream environmental movement itself.

Environmentalism as we have envisioned it as a culture up until now has not been inclusive of people of color, and we need to re-imagine environmentalism as inclusive of African Americans as well as other peoples of color in order to create the large scale change we need to change our unsustainable cities, industries, communities, lifestyles, and attitudes that have lead to the unprecedented degradation of the planet we face today.

The scope of my research will look at African American environmental thought from slavery until now. By understanding the historical relationship of African Americans and the environment we can better understand their contemporary role in the environmentally sustainable field of renewable energy. It will also reveal the cultural phenomena which draws or
dissuades them from participating in this industry that has the potential to redirect our current course from ecological and resource calamity. In addition to unpacking and defining what is African American environmental thought I will move on to contemporary leaders, organizations, and debates that focus on Black people's role in renewable energy.

The works and ideas of Van Jones have sparked my interest in renewable energy as a means to replace manufacturing jobs that have left America due to outsourcing and the recession in a way that is transformative and uplifting to African American communities that have been heavily impacted by the loss of these jobs. The written works of Kimberly Smith and Dorceta Taylor, have been formative and definitive of African Environmental Thought and for that reason, my research has been highly guided by their scholarship. This project has also been strongly influenced and informed on a personal level by my professors and courses that integrate social and environmental education (Julie Sze, Mary Cadenasso, Jonathan London, Stephen Wheeler). These contributors as well as other leaders and great thinkers on these topics have shaped my understanding of the social, historical, and environmental elements of modern environmentalist scholarship and have inspired me to produce knowledge where the environmental meets the social.
Introduction To Chapter I

The relationship between African-Americans and the environment is correlated with their social and lived realities. African American environmental thought is intertwined with social and civil rights issues because their location within the environment is highly determined by the social occurrences that shape their lived experiences and identities in relation to the natural world. African Environmental thought is a racial perspective in the genre of environmental history. Environmental history is an attempt to integrate social and ecological history because it is understood within this field of study that both are formative of how societies function and shape the landscape. African American environmental thought is different from mainstream discourse on environmentalism because the historical position of Black people has created a perspective that is unique to that cultural history.

In the course of this Chapter I will be analyzing the works of African Americans writers and environmentalists from slavery until now that have been viewed strictly for their civil rights content. I will also be exploring and cross examining my findings from African American environmental works with environmental history teachings. The purpose of my research in this chapter is to gain a better understanding of what African American environmental thought is and how it compares and contrasts with mainstream environmental thought. By understanding this as a discipline it frames African Americans in an environmental context and re-imagines them as environmental actors and contributors to the field. It also serves as a means to uncover the rich history and legacies that have shaped contemporary African American roles in the
green revolution and participation in the sustainable industry of renewable energy. Answering the question, "why are African Americans not highly involved in environmentalism?"

**Defining Environmental History and African American Environmental Thought**

Environmental History as a discipline came to be in the 1960's and 1970's (Environmental History 2012), it combines social and environmental history with the understanding that there is a fluidity of the two and that they at the same time shape and influence each other. The field has emerged as people have become increasingly more aware of the impact of human actions have on the planet and how those environmental impacts have changed over time, "[Subjects] include how communities have altered natural systems for fields, villages, and cities, how they have represented nature in painting, literature, and oral traditions, and how organisms and ecosystems respond to social changes with unforeseen biotic shifts, new disease environments, or other developments requiring people to reshape cultures, economies, and politics. We study the social frictions and unrest - - from fence cutting to clean air litigation - - that flow from these processes." (UC Davis Department of History 2012) Environmental history has been defined concisely by one of its leading proponents, Donald Worster, as the study of 'the role and place of nature in human life' (Mosely 2006). Environmental history distinctly positions nature as an active participant in history as it determines the survival and biogeophysical limitations of a society, where we live, what we eat, how we live, virtually every aspect of human life is determined by the conditions and provisions of our surrounding nature.

African American environmental thought is the African American perspective of Environmental History. Stephen Mosely offers a critique of environmental history, while it has
added complexity to how we study history and the environment, the field has in large part approached human history as unilateral in difference amongst cultures and sub-groups. The precedential works of Kimberley Smith and Dorceta Taylor have broken out of this mold, by intersecting environmental history with race, class, and gender dynamics to deepen our understandings of nature and culture. Smith re-examines works by W.E.B Du Bois and other African American leaders that have been heralded for their work on human and civil rights issues, and extracts their renderings of nature that are often over looked. By framing African American history in an environmental context we can see how African Americans have experienced nature in a unique way as well as the different ways they have rendered the natural world through art, language, and environmental activism. This gives insight to contemporary issues we face in the environment as well, and offers some answers to the question, "Do African Americans care less about environmental issues, and if so, why?"

**Slavery and The African American Relationship to Wilderness, Nature, and the Environment**

The peculiar institution of slavery that bonded millions of Africans and exploited their labor for generations had various affects on the African American relationship to nature. In some ways it dispossessed and estranged Black people from nature by forcing them to work the land in hostile conditions. Slavery also prevented African Americans from owning land or having political power over land management and development. In others ways however, it forged even stronger relationships to natural processes and phenomena that provided spiritual fortitude from the atrocities of slavery. Since African American environmental consciousness
was rooted in the racial injustice they experienced, leaders in this genre are primarily acknowledged for their civil and human rights content versus framing them in an environmental context.

When we think of Harriet Tubman and her leadership that freed dozens of slaves through the underground railroads, we think of her as an abolitionist, but what happens when we think of her as an expert naturalist and transcendentalist thinker like Ralph Waldo Emerson, who contributed to pre-environmentalist thought? Tubman since girlhood paid close attention to cycles and systems in nature such as weather, astronomy, waterways, and the landscape, all of which she utilized in her navigation to freedom. She was well acquainted with medicinal plants and herbs and mimicked the calls of birds to communicate with slaves and those that helped them through the underground railroad, which exemplifies her deep knowledge of the surrounding flora and fauna. In historical renderings of Harriet Tubman her determination, belief in god, spirit, and lucky northern stars are attributed to her success in liberating herself and so many others, but many fail to acknowledge her natural expertise. Dorceta Taylor, breaking new ground in environmental history through her works on African American environmental history (as well as through works that examine the ways in which race, class, and gender determine our environmental identities.) acknowledges Tubman for her natural expertise in her article, "Green Power: Long Before the Green Movement, Tubman, Du Bois and Others Fought Against Pollution and Other Ills", she writes:

Tubman behaved like a Transcendentalist — some of the most influential environmental thinkers of the 19th century. Before launching a raid, Tubman did what Henry David Thoreau and John Muir (considered two of the "fathers" of American environmentalism)
did when they wanted to intensify their connection to the earth. She lay alone in the
forest all night. Tubman reported that on such occasions, her whole soul would be filled
with the awe of a mysterious, unseen presence that thrilled her with such emotion that
her fear vanished. If she felt this sensation, she went ahead with the planned raid.
Tubman traveled to Concord, Massachusetts to meet with the leading
Transcendentalist, Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Tubman was in fact a part of that circle of transcendentalist thought that incorporated a
primacy for individual communion with nature, religious spirituality, and a belief that one
should be free from overarching institutions and government that dominated life on a large
scale.

What changes when we view her in this context? It for one can redraw the lines of who
brought forth these early theories that informed environmentalist movements to come. It also
allows African Americans to understand their history as one that is integral with nature, rather
than one in opposition to nature. We can envision Tubman as a natural expert instead of
imagining her as a passive survivor of the wilderness. While Emerson theorized about liberty in
conjunction to the individual's connection to the natural and spiritual, I am arguing that
Tubman was a living example of transcendentalist principals that literally liberated her from the
bondage of chattel slavery. This diversifies the historical roots of environmentalism beyond the
scope of white male-hood and it becomes inclusive of African American and women's
histories/herstories. Analyzing Tubman's life from this perspective provides a platform to
discuss overlapping social and environmental historical themes bridging environmental and
social disciplines and theories.

W.E.B Du Bois, also an abolitionist intellectual of the 19th century, was highly active in
environmental justice way before the concept was coined. He conducted the sociological study
*The Philadelphia Negro*, published in 1899, which can be viewed as an early work of
environmental justice. In this study he surveyed the degraded conditions blacks were living and working in comparison to white slum dwellers (Green Like Me). He also conducted similar studies on the conditions of black communities in the northern urban centers of Boston, and New York along with investigations of blacks throughout the South. The scope of Du Bois' environmental work and literature is a research topic in and of itself, and despite his vast body of work on both environmental and social predicament the American negro was in at the turn of the century you will not find it in environmental literature sections. He writes, "Herein the longing of black men must have respect: the rich and bitter depth of their experience, the unknown treasures of their inner life, the strange rendings of nature they have seen, may give the world new points of view." (W.E.B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk. New York: Penguin Books, 1989) By looking at his and other African Americans renderings of the natural we do indeed extract a new perspective on the matter. He critiqued the conservation and preservation movements of his era of being delusional by romanticizing nature as "an imaginary, picture-postcard natural world in which all trace of human suffering and oppression was erased from the landscape.(Taylor 2011)"

Kimberley Smith, who writes extensively about Du Bois in an environmental context, was a professor of American Environmental thought. The class featured Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Aldo Leopold and others, however she was disturbed by the absence of black voices from the 18th and 19th centuries. Her book, African American Environmental Thought, is her attempt to made the voices of Henry Bibb, Martin Delany, Fredrick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver and others of the like heard (Taylor 2009). By doing this Smith and others like her break open a path for African American history to coincide with
environmental history and this is important because it provide black people today with some heed of past patterns. As explicated in Spike Lee's documentary on Hurricane Katrina, *When The Levees Broke* (Lee 2006), The New Orleans Ninth Ward, which was hit hardest and never rebuilt after the 2005 hurricane, was also intentionally flooded in the early 1900s to save the other wards from destruction. This is a pattern to take heed of because it is a racial legacy of America that has imperiled the well being of thousands, and a sign that African Americans need to take a proactive and new approach to environmental understandings for the safety of future generation. I also think that many African Americans cannot see themselves in environmental studies and discourse so they are dissuaded, but and by providing this history it is a source empowerment to take pride in one's rich history of environmental thought and action.

**Do Black People Really Care Less About Environmental Issues?**

Access to politically meaningful roles and careers in the environmental fields are primarily through university institutions, this is an added barrier to the challenges African Americans face in playing a influential role in this genre. " In 2007, the immediate college enrollment rate was 70 percent for white high school graduates and 61 percent for Latino high school graduates, compared with 56 percent for African American high school graduates. ([http://naacp.3cdn.net/e5524b7d7cf40a3578_2rm6bn7vr.pdf](http://naacp.3cdn.net/e5524b7d7cf40a3578_2rm6bn7vr.pdf))" Schools that African American children attend in their secondary education are also less likely to offer advanced placement courses, so opportunities for excellence in the sciences are diminished early on in the education system ([http://naacp.3cdn.net/e5524b7d7cf40a3578_2rm6bn7vr.pdf](http://naacp.3cdn.net/e5524b7d7cf40a3578_2rm6bn7vr.pdf)). As African American
people are more likely to go to prison than to college it should not be surprising to see that they are also not becoming leaders in energy, resource, and land management because these roles require post graduate educations that many are not reaching, and when they do reach that level of education, the field can be so culturally irrelevant and alienating that it is not a point of interest.

Despite the multiple aspects of exclusion in the mainstream realm of environmental work and knowledge production, African Americans have been and continue to be active in environmental work. The realities of life in Black communities tend to position their environmental concerns differently than white environmental concerns. Presumably, a working-class African American person that grew up in an inner city most likely will not be interested in saving some endangered species of song bird, but will be more inclined to be concerned with industrial pollution that is causing higher cancer rates in their communities. In the 1980’s scholarship and close investigations started to link concepts of race and exposure to toxic waste, which led to the coining of the term “environmental racism” (Taylor 2009). Environmental racism can be defined as a way in which people of color and marginalized peoples are disproportionately exposed to toxins and pollution in their environment, while being systematically and politically excluded from the decision making process (Pulido 1996). It was during this time of activism and political change within environmentalist movements began to focus on environmental inequality that existed in neighborhoods. More often than not communities of color were exposed to environmental hazards, while whites received environmental privileges and benefits(London 2012). When we see people of color involved in environmentalism it tends to be more so in grassroots, non-profit, environmental justice work.
Paul Mohai and Bunyon Bryant conducted a study to test whether or not there was an actual race effect on concern for the environment. Their goal was to test validity of the idea that Black people had less concern for the environment and environmental issues, and if they did why. "The earliest assumptions were that African Americans and other people of color were not concerned about the environment, at least not as much so as were white Americans, because their attention was necessarily focused on higher priority issues, such as housing, education, jobs, crime, discrimination and other 'survival' concerns '(Hershey and Hill 1977-78; Kreger 1973).' (Mohai et al 1990)."

The study was conducted in the Detroit, Michigan area and surrounding counties in 1990; in conjunction with the University of Michigan Detroit Area Study, the Institute for Social Research, consisting of 793 interviews. The interviews contained close-ended and open-ended questions; the open-ended questions were intended to gather differences in black versus white perceptions of important environmental issues. There were three hypothesis based on (1) hierarchy of needs (income to care for more than basic needs) (2) cultural differences, and (3) environmental deprivation (proximity to waste sites), if proved to be true would show: (a) income is positively associated with concern for the environment, particularly for conservation issues "as higher income people have greater means to take care of their survival needs...and can focus on higher needs (Mohai et al)"; (b) cultural differences would reveal African Americans to be consistently and drastically less concerned for environmental issues; (c) African Americans would be more concerned about regional pollution issues than white respondents.

What they actually found was that of black respondents (77 percent) and white respondents (70 percent) mentioned concern for pollution issues. Another discovery was that
31 percent of African Americans expressed preservation concerns, while 33 percent of European Americans expressed preservation concerns, which is quite contrary to earlier beliefs and dispels income and culture to be determining factors of care for one's environment. Income was actually found to be negatively associated with environmental concern in almost every aspect of environmental issues. Lastly, what they did find was that African Americans were inclined to care about pollution on a regional scale whereas their counterparts were more concerned with global pollution issues. As a result of more African Americans living in closer proximity to industrial waste sites, they were found to be more concerned with pollution which proved the deprivation hypothesis to be true. One interesting finding that came about during the interviews was that European Americans overwhelmingly, were more concerned about ozone layer depletion in connection with concern for skin cancer. Mohai et al attribute this to a lot of news coverage circa 1990 that reported that white people were more vulnerable to skin cancer than darker people, and the hole in the ozone layer presented this as an even higher threat.

This study was one of very few conducted to test the relationship between race, class, culture and environmental concern, and like any study it has its limitations. This survey is only indicative of the Detroit area it was conducted in, and might vary according to region. It however was very provocative to see how race shapes the concerns one has for the environment. The purpose of dissecting African American education relations and the Mohai et al study of black versus white concern for environmental issues was to illustrate the way race shapes our concerns and action toward the environment. I am arguing that African Americans are not inherently less concerned about environmental issues, but rather their perceptions and
interactions are different than European Americans that dominate environmental work, study, and discourse. Therefore, the ways in which they act and talk about the environment is very different and may not fit into our initial ideological perceptions of what it means to be an environmentalist.

**Hip Hop Tracks As Environmental Literature**

When I was fine tuning my general topic to a more specific research topic, I was roving Youtube in search of inspiration. I then found an amateur hip-hop video by an artist named Markese titled, "The Dream Reborn: My President is Green". It opens with a montage of news audio about asthma, Hurricane Katrina, and pollution, then it fades into Dr. King's most well known speech, "I Have a Dream". The video takes place in Oakland, and primarily in West Oakland neighborhoods which are known for the disproportionate amount of pollution from the ship yards and freeway system; West Oakland also has high concentrations of poverty, violence, and desperate youth. Markese spits some bars, "It's time to go green, we gotta go green, the food ain't fresh, and the air ain't clean, you ever wonder why your little cousin has asthma, and auntie has cancer. It's like you've always known the problems, but no one knows the answer. (The Dream Reborn 2009)" Then he goes on to talk about the despair of political leaders not delivering solutions, and despite popular belief, he as a black man expresses concern about conservation. I was immediately moved by this song upon first listen, it directly influenced the specificities of my research.
He poetically expresses many of the arguments and sentiments I am conveying in my thesis, linking the issues of labor, education, and degraded environmental conditions. Not only is he talking about the environmental hazards and injustice that exists in Oakland (and black communities in America), he even moves on to talk about renewable energy as a means to create positive social and environmental change. While fancy cars and money are often the center piece of popular rap videos, Markese talks about these as well, but he mentions the Prius and electric cars. When he raps about renewable energy he talks about the capital making potential that investing in renewable has to make money for the people. African Americans do care about the environment and related issues, however I think we as a culture have learned to dismiss this discussion and have a hard time viewing black people as environmental actors because of preconceived notions that black people simply do not have the resources or capacity to care about such issues.

World renowned Hip Hop Artist, Mos Def, has a song called new world water. In this song provides commentary and accounts of the burgeoning water crisis due to misuse and the increasing privatization of water supplies. He also pays tribute to climate change refugees such as Hurricane Katrina victims, and African/third world nations that are suffering from drought and bacteria and pollution contaminated waters. He writes:

New World Water make the tide rise high
Come inland and make your house go "Bye" (My house!)
Fools done upset the Old Man River
Made him carry slave ships and fed him dead nigga
Now his belly full and he about to flood somethin
So I'ma throw a rope that ain't tied to nothin
Tell your crew use the H2 in wise amounts since
it's the New World Water; and every drop counts
You can laugh and take it as a joke if you wanna
But it don't rain for four weeks some summers
And it's about to get real wild in the half
You be buying Evian just to take a fuckin bath
Heads is acting wild, sippin poor, puffin dank
Competin with the next man for higher playin rank
See I ain't got time try to be Big Hank,
Fuck a bank; I need a twenty-year water tank
Cause while these knuckleheads is out here sweatin they goods
The sun is sitting in the treetops burnin the woods
And as the flames from the blaze get higher and higher
They say, "Don't drink the water! We need it for the fire!"
New York is drinkin it (New World Water)
Now all of California is drinkin it (New World Water)
Way up north and down south is drinkin it (New World Water)
Used to have minerals and zinc in it (New World Water)
Now they say it got lead and stink in it (New World Water)
Fluorocarbons and monoxide
Push the water table lopside
Used to be free now it cost you a fee
Cause oil tankers spill they load as they roam cross the sea

Not only does Mr. Def speak about contemporary water issues, he uses imagery and language of slavery, such as references to "old man river" and ships tossing slaves into the ocean, which creates a historical saga connecting colonial injustices from the past to issues we face in the environment today. He, like Kimberly Smith and Dorceta Taylor, has created a work of African American environmental history. Although he does so in a very unorthodoxed manner by academic standards, this method is of the oral tradition that is signature the African Diaspora. African American music, and particularly hip hop has penetrated not only American culture but the global culture as, well so delivering these messages and histories has the potential to reach the masses of popular culture

I need help concluding chapter 1
Works cited


*When the Levees Broke*. Dir. Spike Lee. 40 Acres and a Mule, 2006. DVD.