

[Valadez on Harrison, 'From the Inside Out: The Fight for Environmental Justice within Government Agencies'](#)

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Jill Lindsey Harrison. *From the Inside Out: The Fight for Environmental Justice within Government Agencies*. Urban and Industrial Environments Series. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019. 328 pp. \$35.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-262-53774-2.

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From the Inside Out analyzes US environmental regulatory agency workplace culture to understand how it contributes to the lack of environmental justice (EJ) policy implementation. The book's central purpose is to enhance existing literature that has identified the key factors holding back EJ reforms. These factors include "budget cuts, limits to regulatory authority, industry pressure, and underdeveloped analytical tools." Jill Lindsey Harrison argues that the slow pace of EJ reform stems from conservative political action and industry deregulation "but also from everyday practices through which some staff, in reacting to proposed EJ reforms, define how these institutions should best protect public health and the environment" (p. 4). Methodologically, Harrison uses interviews and observation to understand the workplace culture of the Environmental Protection Agency. She does this without blaming the individuals for a much larger process that she believes stems from US racial ideologies that pervade the workplace itself.

In the tradition of EJ literature, Harrison's aim is policy oriented. She argues that "the fight for environmental justice—and social justice broadly—requires that we craft government institutions that systematically reduce inequalities and dismantle the structures of oppression that uphold them" (pp. 4-5). Her book provides recommendations for environmental regulatory agencies that should improve the cultural atmosphere and empower staff to build programs with clear EJ principles in mind. In addition, Harrison's self-identification as an EJ scholar-activist informs the accessibility of her research. She writes to the people she is writing about, providing clear arguments and solutions to the problems she cites.

The introduction is robust with foundational knowledge about environmentalism, the EJ movement, the movement's fundamental tenets, and the history of EJ reforms within the government. This concise explanation provides the reader with a clear picture of the processes working against EJ reform at the government level. Harrison underscores what most already know: capitalism and neoliberalism are actively harming the environment. However, the unique perspective of workplace culture allows for a more in-depth interrogation of implementation. Intersecting EJ policy implementation literature with organization theory, Harrison argues that offices working toward EJ reform often face competing institutional logics. Interviews with staff and observations of meetings reveal competing claims about the mechanisms for achieving social change between staff members. Chapter 2 provides an overview of current EJ efforts. In most cases, Harrison finds that agencies

seemed more concerned with public participation than with EJ reform that directly affected communities' surviving environmental harm and discrimination.

In chapter 3, Harrison takes on the *standard narrative*, or common excuses, for slow EJ reform and implementation that have some merit. These excuses include the lack of access to resources, regulatory authority, and lack of analytical tools that quantify vulnerability. However, interviews with staff revealed that the standard narrative might be a hurdle more than an impossible obstacle. Harrison's conversations with staff revealed that staff often fell to the misconception that they lacked authority when they did not or could not use analytical tools to provide EJ data because the data is not airtight. Harrison's interviews found that some staff knew there were opportunities to work around these problems but did not have the support to succeed. Altogether, this chapter is a call to fix these problems so that EJ agencies run better. Still, Harrison clarifies that there are more challenging hills to climb once these issues are resolved.

The fourth and fifth chapters show how staffers and bureaucrats discursively and non-discursively stifle EJ efforts outside of the standard narrative. EJ supportive staff suggested that color-blind language and government neutrality permeated EJ reform implementation conversations. Some staffers believed science effectively won against what they called an "emotional" response from injured communities about environmental hazards. Non-discursive tactics included refusing to translate regulations into other languages for community members to read to not allocating enough money for EJ work in the budgets. These acts are integral to structural oppression. Some EJ supportive staff also cited bullying and policing staff that tried to build relationships with vulnerable communities, which kept them from actually doing EJ work. In both discursive and non-discursive ways, EJ supportive staff pushed back using their relative power to hire and mentor other staff depending on their position in the agency.

The sixth chapter offers a concise list of explanations for the discursive and non-discursive actions of some staffers and bureaucrats who actively impede EJ reform. She focuses on evidence showing how regulatory culture accompanies the standard narrative as part of the problem and is in competition and conflict with EJ principles. Some of these explanations for bureaucrats and non-EJ supportive staffers' actions seem obvious, like the privilege of most staffers who are white and upwardly mobile with professional degrees. The most compelling and less obvious explanation Harrison provides is how staffers and bureaucrats conceive their agency's goals. Competing notions of egalitarianism and utilitarianism create hostility between EJ supportive staffers who are attentive to inequality and bureaucrats who would rather serve a larger group of people than smaller, more vulnerable communities using EJ principles. It becomes evident that the government agency's institutional structure and the various oppressive ideologies embedded within it make EJ reform within a government agency so hard.

Harrison's seventh chapter covers the competing definitions of EJ from EJ supportive staff. She argues that these different meanings can deviate from longstanding EJ movement tenets and contribute to the form EJ takes within any given agency. She found that some staffers believed EJ should change its attitude from an oppositional approach to a propositional one. These staffers sometimes controlled the grant process almost entirely. Harrison finds that about half of her interviewees posited a "new common sense" understanding of EJ. She argues that neoliberalism informs this new definition of EJ and found that those staff who adhered to the common sense model

aligned with the conservative and neoliberal ideology of personal responsibility in some cases. Thus, their EJ practices reflected industry wants and needs while ignoring regulatory bodies' obligation to do something about environmental hazards.

From the Inside Out reveals real-life conversations and conflicts that arise between EJ supportive staff, non-EJ supportive staff, politicians, industry, and non-staff community activists. Without this work, a synthesis on the matter would be incomplete. While pointing out the many failings of environmental agencies that have material consequences for vulnerable communities, she concludes with a call to action for other EJ supportive staff, scholars, and activists to look at the contexts in which agencies have made progress. In doing so, the potential to recreate those conditions may prove beneficial to those communities desperate for relief from environmental hazards.

Overall, anyone looking to gain a complete picture of the problems facing the EJ movement as a whole should read this book. Anyone hoping to work at one of these agencies and those who intend to study their efficacy would benefit from staff narratives and Harrison's ability to flesh out their importance to the EJ movement altogether. Finally, Harrison's work is perfect for scholars and activists looking for more evidence of the impact of neoliberal ideology on upholding structural oppression and the current material conditions of millions of Black, Indigenous, and working-class communities.

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