



Breathing Free: Environmental Justice and Advancing Black Reproductive Health

Our Week 4 discussion highlighted the alarming link between environmental racism and Reproductive Justice. We were privileged to have Dr. Astrid Williams, Founder & CEO of Sienna Girl Jones, and Activist Mari Copeny, Little Miss Flint, lead a discussion on how environmental racism negatively impacts our reproductive futures. Together, we examined how Black communities are disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards like air and water pollution, and how these exposures increase risks of infertility, pregnancy complications, and birth defects.

Key Definitions

- **Environmental Justice:** The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.
- **Reproductive Justice:** A framework that goes beyond the limited focus on abortion rights, and encompasses the human right to control our sexuality, our gender, our work, and our reproduction. Reproductive Justice can only be achieved when all women and girls have the complete economic, social, and political power and resources to make healthy decisions about our bodies, our families, and our communities in all areas of our lives. At the core of Reproductive Justice is the belief that all women have: the right to have children; the right to not have children; the right to nurture the children we have in a safe and healthy environment.
- **Environmental Racism:** The disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on communities of color due to discriminatory policies and practices.

Talking Points for Friends & Family

- **Black communities bear the brunt of environmental injustices:** Black communities are more likely to live near polluting factories, highways, and other areas with higher pollution. This leads to higher rates of asthma, cancer, and other health problems that affect reproductive health. Discuss how environmental racism shows up in the Black community.
- **Black communities are also disproportionately exposed to dangerous chemicals than other demographics:** Even everyday products like makeup and hair relaxers can contain harmful chemicals. This is especially concerning for Black women, who are often targeted with products containing these toxins. Reproductive Justice includes the right to live and raise families free from the health risks posed by exposure to dangerous chemicals. Use

resources like the Think Dirty app to learn more about what chemicals are in the products you buy.

- **Many Black communities do not have safe drinking water.** The lack of safe drinking water in communities like Flint Michigan, or Jackson Mississippi, can have a devastating impact on the health of Black communities, leading to increased rates of lead poisoning, gastrointestinal illnesses, and other health problems. In Flint, for example, the lead poisoning crisis caused by contaminated water has had a lasting impact on the health and development of children. The crisis has also led to a decline in property values and an increase in crime.
- **It's not fair that Black communities are treated like dumping grounds.** Discuss solutions for standing up to environmental racism, and creating a healthy environment where all humans can thrive.

Remember:

Environmental justice is Reproductive Justice! Let's work together to protect our communities and ensure a healthy future for generations to come.

Call to Action

- Contact your elected officials and urge them to pass legislation that specifically addresses the risks Black women, girls, and gender-expansive individuals face from climate change.
- Get involved with local organizations working to defeat climate change and mitigate the impacts of environmental racism for marginalized communities.