



Ensuring Equal Access to Earth and Dew for all of Humanity | The Intersection of Racial Justice and Environmental Justice During Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah marks the anniversary of creation and a time to celebrate all of God's works. Rosh Hashanah and the *Yamim Noraim*, the Days of Awe, also provide an opportunity for personal reflection. It is important to celebrate the world around us and all of creation, but also consider the inequality in our country when it comes to access to our natural resources.

"Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said: Three things are equally important: earth, humanity, and dew. Rabbi Levi bar Chiya said: These three terms are each composed of three letters [in Hebrew] to teach that without the earth there is no dew, without the dew there is no earth, and without them both there is no humanity" (Midrash Genesis Rabbah 13:3). This text reminds us that we must value and protect all works of creation equally. Without dew and earth there is no humanity and therefore, we must not just protect our environment, but ensure that all people have equal access.

Everyone deserves equal access to air, water and land free from pollutants that cause numerous health concerns. Throughout the United States, there is a clear connection between race, class and access to natural resources. Additionally, those who contribute the least to climate change and greenhouse gas emissions often face the greatest burden of its consequences.

- [People who live closest to U.S. chemical facilities](#) are 75% more likely to be black and 60% more likely to be Latino.
- 71% of African Americans live in counties in [violation of federal air pollution standards](#), as compared to 58% of non-Hispanic whites.
- [Lead poisoning](#), such as what happened in [Flint, Michigan](#), impacts black children twice as much as white children. From 2007-2010, the percentage of black children with high levels of lead in their blood was 5.6%, while it was just 2.4% in white children.
- The last two years were the hottest on record, and 2016 is projected to continue the trend and break previous records. [Heat-related deaths](#) occur at a 150 to 200 percent greater rate in black communities than in white communities, due to large population of black people who live in [cities which trap heat](#) and warm more quickly.

In a truly just society, all people deserve equal access to clean air, water, energy, land and all natural resources.

As we examine the past year and strive to make the next year the best it could be, let us also take time to learn about the environmental injustices in our country and consider solutions to address them:

- What do the above statistics show us about environmental injustices in the United States?
- Why do certain communities lack access to basic natural resources?
- How do environmental inequalities impact our ability to live in a truly just society?
- The African Methodist Episcopal Church, one of the largest and oldest black churches in the U.S., recently passed its [first resolution focused on climate change](#), highlighting the disproportionate impact of climate change on the black community. How can we partner with communities most impacted by environmental injustice to ensure they too can enjoy the works of creation?