

April is often regarded as National Garden Month. With nature returning to its full regalia and beauty after the long season of winter, there is always a shift in the atmosphere. It is an appropriate time to highlight the work of our Environmental Justice and Climate Change Committee. The committee has been fast at work in recent months, and we are especially grateful to Dr. Andrew Wymer and committee members.

While the NAACP has long been the oldest and boldest civil rights organization in the nation, people often fail to make a connection with environmental injustice. Such injustice often takes shape in the form of structural violence and systemic racism. When I served as president of the Trenton, NJ branch of the NAACP in the mid-1990's, one of the branch's most important contributions was stopping a waste incinerator from being built in the poorest neighborhood in the city. A private developer was in negotiations with the city, pending approval of the county commissioners. The branch became aware of the proposed deal. After significant research and accumulation of data, the branch presented their findings at a meeting of the Mercer County Commissioners.

Every indicator pointed to the deal having enough votes to build the incinerator. But when the branch presented alarming findings, including the significant health issue of people living near waste incinerators, troubled pregnancies, the high rate of asthma and respiratory viruses in children and cancer, the commission delayed the vote. A short time later they voted down the construction of the waste incinerator. I remain convinced these thirty years later, that lives were saved as a result of the branch's presentation.

Ecological racism comes in many different forms, and we have seen many of them in recent years. The terrible malfeasance causing the Flint, Michigan water crisis, the same for the water crisis in Jackson, Mississippi, lead poisoning in communities of color, lack of/poor sanitation, contaminated water at Camp Lejeune, are all examples of environmental racism. The results are almost always catastrophic; asthma, cancer, lead poisoning, obesity, hyperactivity and reproductive problems are high on the list of outcomes due to environmental racism.

This month, the Evanston/North Shore NAACP is an organizing co-sponsor of the Evanston Environmental Justice Conversation Series. The keynote speaker is Cheryl Johnson, Executive Director of People for Community Recovery. The event will take place at the Fleetwood-Jourdain Community Center on April 13 at 1:00 PM. We will also support Evanston's Interfaith Earth Day Prayer for the Planet scheduled for April 21st at Raymond Park, 4:00 PM, 1501 Hinman. Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary released an important article in their newsletter titled, "Partnering for a Healed and Whole Community." The article focuses on networking for the purpose of educating and informing Evanston about the danger of environmental racism.

Racism in its many forms, does not have a hierarchy. Every form is heinous, deplorable and wretched, whether it is in education, housing, health care, the judicial system, law enforcement, politics or the environment. Evanston/North Shore NAACP is proud to bring

attention to the environmental racism and climate change. The more we know, the more we grow and the further we go. Thank you for your support of the branch and our continued commitment to fight against racism and defend civil rights.

Peace and Power,

Rev. Dr. Michael Nabors
President