

# Book Review

Fogel, S. J., Barkdull, C., & Weber, B. A., Eds. (2016). *Environmental justice: An issue for social work education and practice*. New York: Taylor and Francis, Routledge

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*Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, Volume 14, Number 2 (2017)  
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It is very appropriate to review this book now as, at this writing, we are in the midst of some of the most extreme examples of environmental disasters. These epitomize environmental injustice for the people suffering from the major hurricanes affecting Houston, Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico. While everyone in these areas is suffering, it has most strongly affected poorer people in low lying areas with fragile housing and the lack of means to secure alternative housing and flood insurance.

This book is devoted to the propositions that environmental justice should be a major topic in social work practice and education and that all social work students should be educated about environmental justice. Students should learn how to recognize the presence of environmental injustice and how to take action with the relevant systems to combat such injustice.

This topic is relevant to social work ethics and values. Social workers, as strongly asserted in this book, should view professional actions that neglect environmental justice as unethical, and the social work profession should place a high value on sustainable social development and the provision of adequate food, housing, health care, income, education, and so forth to everyone.

The editors of this book are faculty at the University of South Florida (Fogel), and the University of North Dakota (Barkdull & Weber). As the editors state in their introduction, environmental justice involves confronting power and privilege. They

state, “The wealthiest populations are the greatest consumers of the products and activities damaging to the global environment, yet the impoverished are most likely to suffer the consequences” (p. xiii). As they also point out, the United States is the world’s top emitter of carbon dioxide, and the burden falls most heavily on those “least likely to either afford the costs or recover from the effects” (p. xiii). Thus, the issue of environmental justice has global implications.

This book is an edited volume with ten chapters that analyze many aspects of this issue. A person-in-environment perspective has too often referred to the social environment to the exclusion of all the other aspects of the environment. Chapter 1 helps the reader to expand a person-in-environment perspective to incorporate the physical environment. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 discuss how this perspective should be incorporated in social work curricula, and the latter chapter has case studies that illustrate this with respect to the Ogoni people of Nigeria, the Roma people of such countries as Romania and Hungary, and people living in a blighted community of Boston. Chapter 5 presents the essentials of a “green social work” curriculum. A useful teaching technique referred to as a “mind map” is described in this chapter. Chapter 6 deals specifically with the topic of “food justice.” Chapters 7 and 9 are especially instructive as they report on environmental justice as experienced in Kenya and in Australia. Chapter 8 recommends changes that should be made in social work curricula so that environmental justice is an essential part of social work education.

The final chapter (10) offers a further analysis of environmental justice as linked to an ecological perspective and economic growth. This chapter also discusses the concept of *reflexivity* as a combination of sensitivity, self-observation, and self-presentation of the social worker.

While this book contains many useful citations to other presentations of environmental justice, I found it an “eye opener” for me as the authors explore so many aspects of this topic. It convinced me well beyond where I was already of the extreme importance of this topic. I recommend this book as a basic text that should be read by all social workers, social work professors, and students.

A limitation I see in the chapters is that while it is clear how environmental justice can be easily seen as one of the most important topics in community organization, agency management, and the creation of social policy, it does not deal sufficiently with social workers serving individuals, families and groups and how they can understand the role of the physical environment in the problems on such individuals and entities. How this can and should be introduced in so-called direct practice is not sufficiently dealt with beyond the recipients of direct practice supported in their involvement in social action - although it is incumbent on the worker to become so involved. These service recipients may be helped, however, to understand the impact of their environments on themselves rather than engaging in dysfunctional self-blame.

The book will be appropriate for all levels of social work education as well as for practitioners and teachers.