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Coopted environmental justice? Activists' roles in shaping EJ policy implementation

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and wildlife. Although all of these practices and substantive foci have roles to play in environmental problem-

define ‘EJ

2011, 2014; Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010). It also dovetails with industry's and other elites' long-standing tactic of

hazard reduction. These grant programs thus appear to be dropping the task of reducing hazards threatening marginalized and overburdened communities, which the EJ movement has long held as a priority.

Additionally, the growing predominance of such pro-

policy change? Because you have to have the policy change to get the real outcomes.' Another leading EJ organization's representative critiqued agency EJ grant programs on the same grounds:

> You often don't get the funding you need to change the systems the government is running. There's nothing wrong with funding for community gardens. But let's be clear that those are by no means the only challenges these communities are dealing with.

I responded that nearly half of the agency EJ grants in his state were awarded to community gardens in recent years. He paused and said, 'It doesn't make any sense.'

Multiple individuals who asserted such views worked for leading EJ organizations in California before being appointed to design and run CalEPA's EJ grant program. One explained that the CalEPA RFA's emphasis on fostering public participation in regulatory decision-making processes stems from the fact that he and other EJ activists believed that EJ requires greater community influence over regulatory decision-making processes. 'When I came in, the question was, how do we get folks to participate?' Another emphasized that he revised the RFA to explicitly encourage projects focused on hazard reduction: 'I just want to know, what are you doing to reduce pesticide exposure, . . . to have safe drinking water, . . . to reduce the air [pollution]?' These convictions help explain why the CalEPA EJ grant program more closely reflects the EJ movement's historical mechanisms of change and substantive priorities than do the other EJ grant programs. As I detail elsewhere, these current and former CalEPA representatives were the only agency EJ grant program staff (of nearly 30 that I interviewed) who conceptualize EJ in these terms and felt able to implement the program accordingly (Harrison 2015). That they were able to put their beliefs into practice stems from multiple factors: their politically appointed status (whereas other agencies' EJ staff are mostly career employees either worried about rocking the boat or unfamiliar with EJ principles), the state legislature's growing Latino caucus, California's demographic transition to a majority minority state, and the state's politically influential EJ community (see also Perkins 2015).

Ref a g: c af g a ew co o e e

The other half of the EJ activists I interviewed expressed a different, 'new common sense' about what EJ means – one that legitimizes the problematic ways in which the other agencies have implemented their EJ grant programs. This new common sense disparages the hazard reduction and state-focused work that has long been the core of EJ advocacy and glorifies other types of activist practice. Many characterized the practice of fighting toxic industries and pressing for stronger environmental regulations in pejorative terms, as 'reactive' and 'oppositional', led by the 'old guard', ineffective, and lacking solutions. They also waxed enthusiastically about their efforts to build gardens, green spaces, and alternative energy infrastructure through charitable service provision and individual behavioral change, characterizing such work as 'proactive' and 'propositional', led by the 'new guard', effective, and 'solutions-oriented'.[1] Many lauded the movement for 'evolving' toward such practice. By holding leadership roles in their own organizations and/or regional EJ alli-

– applying his beliefs in that capacity and within the regional EJ coalition of which his organization is a prominent member.

Another EJ activist who joined an agency and designed an EJ grant program stated that similar ideas shaped his thinking about how to design the program. Tom, who still works for the agency and identifies as part of the EJ movement (akin to Santoro and McGuire's [1997] 'institutional activists'), stated, 'I wanted to develop a model for' solving problems in a 'collaborative' way. He applied those ideas in designing the grant program:

> A lot of the communities themselves are trapped in [thinking that] if you're talking about environmental justice, you're only talking about the regulations, or you're only talking about making the government solve the problem for us. . .. But to a large extent, to really be transformative, you can't rely on anybody else to do it – you have got to do it yourself. Those that have succeeded are doing that.

Although implying that both regulatory and collaborative approaches are part of EJ, he ultimately denigrates activists who expect the government to protect them and situates regulatory protections as outside the scope of

regulatory reform: 'There is no satisfaction in butting your head against the wall until it's bloody just to say, "I went through the process."...What's the point?...[EPA] waits on you to sue, and then they fight you.' She emphatically criticized activists demanding the state reduce pollution as foolish and ineffective – as 'too busy fighting this phantom they can't identify, rather than going out and saying, "Hey, let me see what I can do to make this better."' She asserts that she has 'evolved' to using charitable contributions to organize outdoor activities and get volunteers to remove garbage and invasive plants, practices she hails as effective and 'active':

> The tire cleanups: it gets folks in touch with the river. ... You feel like you are doing something. The canoe outings: that was building rapport with folks as it relates to the river. ... You're going to improve the environment with active kinds of initiatives, and that's what we do.... Then, it was fighting people. Now, it's fighting for something.

That is, she dismisses the 'traditional EJ' pursuit of pollution reduction through state protections as 'passive' and lacking solutions and instead hails other activities as uniquely able to accomplish change.

Other advocates reinforced this new common sense even while displaying ambivalence. For example, Linda is the executive director of a long-standing EJ organization that is a key player in a statewide EJ coalition and widely regarded as a leading EJ organization nationally. She insisted that pollution reduction through regulatory and policy mechanisms is the core of her organization's practice and that the organization's new community garden helps keep members engaged amidst the slow pace of regulatory and policy reform. Yet she also characterized policy reform as 'reactive' in comparison with their new community garden project, which she hailed as

members themselves over what EJ means and how the state should implement EJ programs. These intramovement factions manifest both in EJ advocates' tacit understandings and conscious, intentional reframings (Oliver and Johnston 2000). Building on others' findings that EJ advocacy has been pushed in increasingly conservative directions, I have shown how some EJ activists discursively reinforce that narrowing.

These findings serve as a reminder that social movement theorists must approach movement factions and shifts with a critical eye. On the one hand, my findings are consistent with Campbell's (2001) argument that out-

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