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Dr. Ana Baptista Published in Toxic Heritage: Legacies, Futures, and Environmental Injustice



Figure 16.4. Down Bottom Farm, Ironbound Community Corp, EJ tour stop 2018, photo courtesy of Kristin Reiman. (Baptista 290)

Blog by Tian-Tian He

An article by Dr. Ana Baptista, Associate Professor and co-director of the Tishman Environment and Center, was recently published in the open-source book *Toxic Heritage: Legacies, Futures, and Environmental Injustice* (edited by Elizabeth Kryder-Reid and Sarah May).

Dr. Baptista's chapter "Environmental Justice Tours: Transformative Narratives of Struggle, Solidarity, and Activism" reflects on the power of Environmental Justice (EJ) tours to symbolically and concretely counteract the marginalization of communities that live in frontline EJ

firsthand experience leading EJ tours and collaborating with other activists in the Ironbound neighborhood of Newark, NJ.

For those unfamiliar with EJ tours (also known as toxic tours), they are typically conducted by frontline EJ community members and bring participants face-to-face with sources of pollution, places affected by pollution, or other places significant to local environmental movements while “sharing stories, memories, and experiences of place (Baptista 281).”

Tours led by the Ironbound Community Corporation in Newark provide a good example (although they are conducted nationwide).

The exact routes have changed over the years. Still, one tour led by Dr. Baptista in 2005 “included stops at a local park that residents saved from demolition, Chemical Row where many industrial accidents occurred, and an active campaign to clean up the garbage incinerator. It also showcased the community’s vision for Riverbank Park, a proposed future park ... along the Passaic River (287).”

Ironbound Toxic Tour

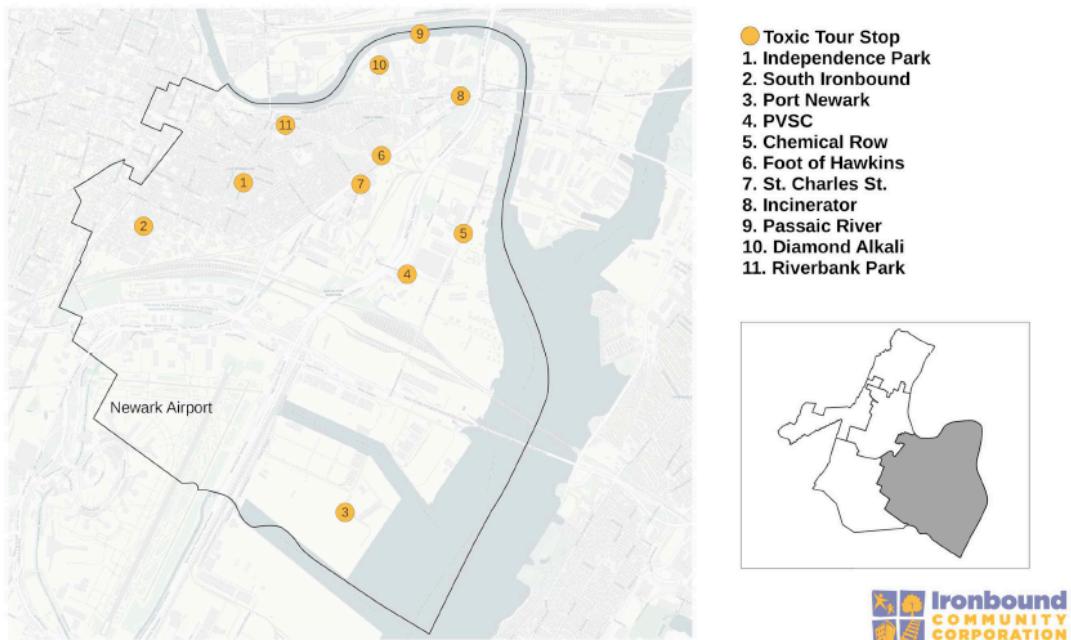


Figure 16.3. Map of ICC Ironbound EJ Tour, circa 2005. Prepared by Ana Isabel Baptista. (288)

As Dr. Baptista argues in *Toxic Heritage*, these tours serve many valuable functions in the EJ movement. For one, they can be consciousness-raising tools as they work to “build solidarity and organize residents” (281) around the struggle for environmental justice. The dangers of polluting facilities are often invisible, “buried both figuratively and literally (286).” EJ tours rely on the retelling of lived experiences and thus reveal “how multiple realities of environmental injury come together in ways that are not always readily discernible through policy or scientific practice (282).” By simply informing people about the hidden harms they have faced living in a toxic neighborhood,

these tours can spur residents to join the movement for environmental justice.

The chapter also illustrates how EJ tours are an act of counter-mapping as they “reconstitute and amplify community-centered narratives about EJ (281).” While the communities in which tours take place have often been “made to feel invisible or disposable” (287) by powerful actors like governments and corporations, the very act of drawing attention to these communities can recast them as “rich, culturally important places that are abundant in treasures amid the toxics (282).” EJ tours thus provide a platform for telling stories that challenge mainstream narratives about the tour stops.

Additionally, EJ tours can drive change by allowing communities to contact decision-makers directly. When lawmakers and regulators participate in these tours, they come face-to-face with the landscapes and people they impact: “It is much harder for decision-makers to obfuscate or skirt questions and demands when residents confront them with the material realities of pollution (291).” Here, communities can hold decision-makers accountable for their actions and make demands in a “more directly democratic, unfiltered” way (291) - although there is always the risk that decision-makers may simply use

the tour for a performative photo-op.

Dr. Baptista also acknowledges that conducting an EJ tour is not without costs. Organizing and conducting a tour takes significant time, resources, and emotional energy for activists. But, the chapter concludes, EJ tours are an invaluable tool for “pass[ing] down rich oral traditions,” “visioning justice, deepening political education, and building solidarity (292)”

Congrats to Dr. Baptista on the publication! Check out the full chapter and more explorations of toxic heritage around the world [here](#).



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