



Tishman Environment  
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# An Environmental Justice Tour Through Newark, NJ

*By Amanda Sachs*

On Friday, March 20th, a bus full of New School students, faculty, and community members were led on a tour of Newark, New Jersey by Environmental Policy and Sustainability Management Professor [Ana Baptista](#) and environmental justice organizers Melissa Miles and Christian Rodriguez from Ironbound Community Corporation. Ironbound Community aims to “address unmet

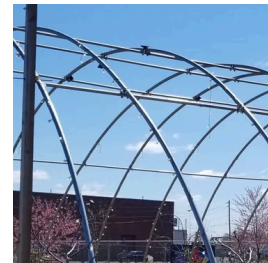
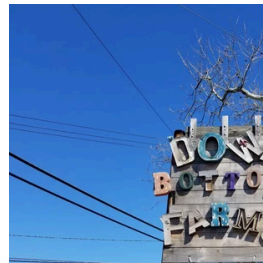
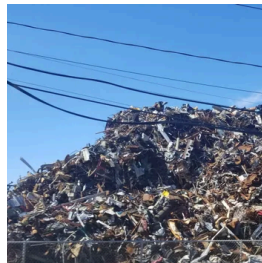
needs and service gaps, particularly for under-served individuals and families” in areas such as early childhood education, youth professional development, environmental justice development, and family outreach. In the environmental realm, ICC is the epitome of grassroots urban environmental justice. The organization links social services and advocacy with community planning, development, and activism. As in many tight-knit communities, there is a tradition of oral history being passed down through generations in Newark, New Jersey. We were fortunate enough to have this history shared with us. On our way to Ironbound, Ana described the ecology of Newark before it became heavily industrialized and how the swampy and brackish land reclaims itself where it can. The Lenape People inhabited New Jersey long before the Dutch, Swedish, and English colonizers arrived. Colonization began the struggle between those who dwelt on the land and outside interests. Ironbound residents have a history of demanding justice when there were threats of displacement and health hazards to their community—from the “Newark Rebellions” in 1967 against police brutality to ongoing fights against garbage incineration in their community. In this area,

there is a long history of community activism and fighting for clean land and green spaces. Some of what we saw was obvious pollution (i.e. waste, truck traffic, etc.) and some of what we saw were environmental injustices hidden in plain sight. Ana explained that the waste handling systems of the entire region sit in New Jersey in concentrated areas. There's Port Newark, the "chemical corridor," two natural gas power plants, the largest fat rendering plant in the country, one of the largest sewage treatment plants in the world, Essex County Jail, and a garbage incinerator all in a concentrated space—All these systems connect in Newark. "Everything we show you, there is an alternative for," Melissa said. The Ironbound Community Corporation is made constantly aware of the cumulative impacts facing their community from having different sources of pollution and industrial waste in a concentrated space. "This is an area where there is dumping of people, power plants, sewage, and other things they don't want you to see," Ana said. From the consumption of imported goods, to our waste, to our running water, we in New York City are a part of the issues people in the Ironbound community face every day. 12% of New York City's waste is incinerated in Newark, 90% of what we

consumer comes through these ports contributing to the community's pollution. The decisions to concentrate the region's hazardous industries in a community of color is a part of a larger unjust and exploitative system. Ironbound Community Corporation does not just fight environmental injustices but promotes sustainable community building and wealth generation within the community. We visited [Down Bottom Farms](#)—a new addition to Ironbound Community Corporation's Urban Agriculture Program. There we met urban farmer Emily Turonis who talked to us about urban farming's potential to generate wealth and build community while providing healthy food. Melissa explained that there is a lot of tension around development in Newark. "We find ourselves fighting industrial pollution on one end and gentrification on the other," Melissa said. As the area becomes more desirable for gentrifiers, it can end up driving the costs of rent higher and pushing out low-income residents. The Ironbound Community Corporation has many success stories having to do with affordable housing, rent control, and inclusionary zoning laws to maintain the cultural legacy of Newark. This tour was a reminder that the production, manufacturing, consumption, and waste model

we've built cannot sustain itself without more and more people getting harmed. The Ironbound Community Corporation is a shining example of how grassroots community organizing can transform lives.

*Amanda Sachs is a graduate student in the Environmental Policy and Sustainability Management Program at The Milano School. She spends her time pondering pathways for equitable and high-impact climate change mitigation/adaptation strategies. She works as an environmental justice research assistant at the Tishman Environment and Design Center.*



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