

Twenty five years ago on October 24-27, 1991, over 300 Black, Latino, Native, and Asian American delegates gathered in Washington DC for The First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. Many of these delegates are people we know, work with and admire and this is a celebration of anniversary of the summit as well as an exploration into the ways that academia can contribute to the discussion, research and actions of the environmental justice movement.

Dana Alston, an advocate for environmental and social justice, and a co-convener of the Summit described the purpose and guiding ideals of the summit:

*Joined by delegates from Puerto Rico, Canada, Central and South America, and the Marshall Islands, those present at the meeting in Washington, D.C., set in motion a process of redefining environmental issues in their own terms. People of color gathered not in reaction to the environmental movement, but rather to reaffirm their traditional connection to and respect for the natural world, and to speak for themselves on some of the most critical issues of our times. For people of color, the environment is woven into an overall framework and understanding of social, racial, and economic justice. The definitions that emerge from the environmental justice movement led by people of color are deeply rooted in culture and spirituality, and encompass all aspects of daily life—where we live, work, and play. This broad understanding of the environment is a context within which to address a variety of questions about militarism and defense, religious freedom and cultural survival, energy and sustainable development, transportation and housing, land and sovereignty rights, self-determination, and employment.*

Delegates to the Summit exchanged stories of environmental racism experienced by their communities, which were routinely targeted for disposal of toxic waste, or the placement of hazardous industries. They noted not just the environmental impacts of these practices, but the human health effects like cancers, birth defects, asthma, and miscarriages.

Delegates to the summit worked to also develop solutions and policy proposals to support just and equitable approaches to address the environmental crisis, the ecological impact of war, underground nuclear testing, the international waste trade, and U.S. foreign aid and trade policies. Through a process of consensus building, they also penned and adopted the 17 Principles of Environmental Justice to guide the movement "to eradicate environmental racism and bring into being true social justice and self-determination."

Now we are gathered here on the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Principles, to explore the themes of the Principles and opportunities for achieving environmental justice across different social movements, practices and disciplinary perspectives. Many of the concerns voiced by delegates to the Summit are still very real today. In 2014 activists took to the streets, led by frontline communities, to advocate for global action on climate change in the People's Climate March. In 2015, outside the closed-door meetings at COP21 in Paris, we saw a growing unification of movements for climate justice, the deepening of transnational, solidarity movements across the globe and the creative expressions of people and communities determined to achieving solutions to the climate crisis on their own terms. Last year we looked on in disbelief as news broke about lead and other contaminants poisoning the water in Flint, Michigan -- a community that is 56% african American -- and closer to home, in Newark, New Jersey. Just last night, I was with Mayor Karen Weaver, who was reminding us that the fight still continues, they still have to use

bottled water and that there have been nine deaths and numerous lives that have been irrevokably harmed from contaminated water in Flint. Tonight, and in recent weeks, our thoughts are with the tribal nations and their allies standing in solidarity in opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline.

Tonight we are recognizing that institutional racism and a long national history of undervaluing certain people and places have left a persistent legacy of environmental injustices borne disproportionately by low income communities of color. But we are also here to talk about reasons to have hope. Pipelines have been stopped by local activists in the past, and they can be stopped today. Technological advances, and efforts to promote digital equity are supplying frontline communities and grassroots organizations with new resources with which to advocate for justice, health, and wellbeing. You are all here, ready to learn from our distinguished faculty and to dialogue on ssues of race and the environment in the 21st century. Let's all concentrate on finding ways that you can contribute to a more equitable future.

So let's begin!