Issues in Environmental Justice in Toronto
Cheryl Teelucksingh (2007)

• Mid Scarborough has a (relatively) poor racialized community living with environmental contamination
• Richer, white communities have a cleaner environment
• Therefore Mid-Scarborough faces racialized environmental injustice
A problem
City of Toronto: Selected Contamination

- Dense coal smoke 1920s
- Dumps
- Pits & Quarries
Mid-Scarborough

• May be (relatively) poor, is certainly racialized
• But it is relatively clean of historic soil contamination
• The parts of Toronto with the most contaminated soils are in the inner city
• Rich(er), white gentrifiers live on the city’s most contaminated soils.
Mid-Scarborough

• May be relatively poor, and racialized
• But to claim that it is a victim of racialized environmental injustice you need to get your facts right
• Teelucksingh does not have a proper grasp of urban environmental history, and she gets it wrong.
Segregation in Toronto

• Before 1970 Toronto’s wealthier folk headed to the suburbs
  • suburbs relatively prosperous, best schools, most modern housing, lower density
  • plenty of middle-class suburban jobs, stable employment
  • central districts attract the poor, recent immigrants on a budget
AVERAGE INDIVIDUAL INCOME, CITY OF TORONTO, 1970
Relative to the Toronto CMA

Census tract average individual income relative to the Toronto CMA average of $30,800* (estimated to 2001 census boundaries)

- **Very high**: more than 40% above; 36 tracts, 7% of city; average = $54,700*
- **High**: 20% to 40% above; 41 tracts, 8% of city; average = $39,000*
- **Middle income**: 20% below to 20% above; 341 tracts, 66% of city; average = $29,800*
- **Low**: 20% to 40% below; 91 tracts, 18% of city; average = $22,300*
- **Very low**: more than 40% below; 6 tracts, 1% of city; average = $17,000*
Segregation in Toronto

• Census data shows that since 1970
  • the central districts of the city have tended to gentrify
  • suburban areas have tended to attract recent immigrants, visible minorities
AVERAGE INDIVIDUAL INCOME, CITY OF TORONTO, 2005
Relative to the Toronto CMA

Census tract average individual income relative to the Toronto CMA average of $40,704 (estimated to 2001 census boundaries)

- **Very high**: more than 40% above; 76 tracts, 15% of city; average = $104,000
- **High**: 20% to 40% above; 21 tracts, 4% of city; average = $53,500
- **Middle income**: 20% below to 20% above; 152 tracts, 29% of city; average = $39,000
- **Low**: 20% to 40% below; 206 tracts, 40% of city; average = $28,000
- **Very low**: more than 40% below; 67 tracts, 14% of city; average = $22,500
Segregation in Toronto

• Since 1970 the urban economy has changed
  • decline of manufacturing, stable, well-paid blue-collar employment
  • rise of skilled, technical, high-paid creative-economy jobs
• Gentrified inner city:
  • prosperous, plugged into the creative economy
• Suburban belt:
  • faces declining wages, employment stability
Mid-Scarborough

- A place where relatively recent visible-minority immigrant communities have settled
  - in an era, and area of economic decline
- Is this really produced by racism?
Segregation in Toronto

• Basically a consequence of the housing market
  • wealthier people get the best access to desirable living space, poorer people get what’s left.
• Access to housing mainly determined by income, jobs
  • the economy has changed
  • those who can access the higher-paid creative economy do well
  • those who can’t have to struggle.
Darby, Morales et al

• On the Tex-Mex border there are clear injustices
• -- with a strong racial dimension
• -- with a clear environmental dimension
• The injustices seem to be quite damaging and deadly
• Is Teelucksingh exaggerating?
Teelucksingh

• Compared to the Tex-Mex border,
• -- Teelucksingh applies ‘environmental racism’ to situations in which people are only being mildly inconvenienced.
• Environmental justice is an activist’s language game
• -- prone to exaggeration, distortion.