



# CLIMATE CHANGE, COVID 19 AND RACISM IN CONNECTICUT: MULTI-SOLVING 3 EPIDEMICS

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# OVERVIEW

- Define terms
  - Systemic racism,
  - Environmental racism
  - Environmental justice
  - Climate justice
- Health Disparities Related to the Environment
- COVID-19
- Climate and Health
- Lessons Learned from Hurricane Katrina
- Recommendations



# WHAT IS SYSTEMIC RACISM?

- Systemic racism is not an insult, it is a description
  - Policies that involve multiple institutional disciplines that have disproportionate racial effects
- Examples of policies that have differential racial effects (i.e. systemic racism)
  - Policing policies (e.g. George Floyd's death, stop and frisk)
  - Justice system (e.g. incarceration rates)
  - Health system (e.g. uninsured rates)
  - Housing policies (e.g. access to home ownership)
  - Economic policies (e.g. wage and income gaps)
  - Financial policies (e.g. interest rates on loans)
  - Education policies (e.g. test scores, graduation rates)
  - Transportation policies (e.g. access to jobs, public transportation usage)
- All of these policies and more work together to disadvantage people of color of all income levels

# ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

- Environmental Racism is Systemic Racism
- The greatest predictor of where environmental hazards are placed is the percentage of people of color
  - In Connecticut (DEP, UHART studies)
  - In the United States
  - Globally
- Greater exposure to environmental hazards leads to poorer health
- Racism is a toxicant enhancer



# WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE?

- EJ is about stopping environmental injustice and changing environmental policy to reduce disproportionate health effects

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines Environmental Justice as:



- "The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies."

# WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE?

## CONTINUED

- Fair treatment means that no group of people, including racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences ...”





# WHAT IS MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT?

- Environmental justice requires meaningful involvement
  - involvement of those most impacted in the individual, corporate, and governmental decision-making processes **in a way that can change the outcome of the process.**

# WHAT IS CLIMATE JUSTICE?

- Climate justice is simply environmental justice applied to climate change policies
- Environmental Justice organizations are community-based organizations led by people of color, low income people, or those otherwise most impacted by environmental injustice
- They often see their mission as a broad one to address the related issues of
  - Health
  - Climate
  - Economics
  - Racism



# HEALTH DISPARITIES AND ENVIRONMENT

- West Indian/Afro-Caribbean immigrants are in better health than African Americans for one generation, then their health drops down to that of AA's
- Asthma is 50% higher in urban schools in CT when compared to rural schools
- Asthma deaths are 6 times higher in Black males between the ages of 15 and 24 than White males of that age group
- More than half of lead poisoned children in CT are Black or Latino
- Cancer, Diabetes, Lupus, Depression, ADHD, Low Birthweight, Sudden Death, etc.

# COMMON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ISSUES

## Land and Solid Waste Pollution

- Landfills and Dumps
- Waste Transfer Stations
- Brownfields
- Hazardous Waste
- Abandoned Storage Drums of Chemicals
- PCB's in Soil
- TCE Contaminated Soil
- Arsenic in soil

## Air Toxics

- Trash, Sewage Sludge and Other Incinerators
- Power Plants with Ammonia Gas
- Indoor air contaminants

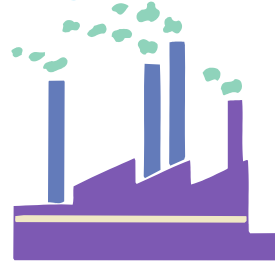
## Water Contamination

- Chemical and Pharmaceutical Sewage Contamination
- Fish Contamination with Mercury, PCB's
- Sewage Sludge Compost/Pellets

# COMMON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ISSUES

## Local Business Toxins

- Auto Body Shops
- Dry Cleaners
- Nail Salons
- Chrome Plating Facilities
- Cement Kilns
- Agricultural Pesticides
- Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) Listed Facilities



## Industrial Pollution

- Refineries
- Chemical Plants
- Plastics/Rubber Factories
- Pharmaceutical Plants
- Paint Manufacturers
- Chlor-Alkali Plants
- Pulp and Paper Processing Facilities
- Industrial or Chemical Fires/Explosions/Spills

# COVID-19

- Is a manifestation of systemic racism
- Black and Latinos are 3X more likely to be infected and 2X more likely to die
- COVID is exacerbated by exposure to air pollution (1ug/m<sup>3</sup> PM<sub>2.5</sub>=15% increase in COVID)
- Although COVID is primarily a health problem it also affects and is affected by
  - Economics
  - Transportation
  - Education
  - Politics
  - Social systems
  - Environment
  - More



# AIR POLLUTION IN CONNECTICUT

- Air pollution not only contributes to COVID, but also
  - Asthma
  - Other respiratory diseases
  - Heart disease
  - Cancer
  - Learning Disabilities
- Air pollution sources are more often located in communities of color

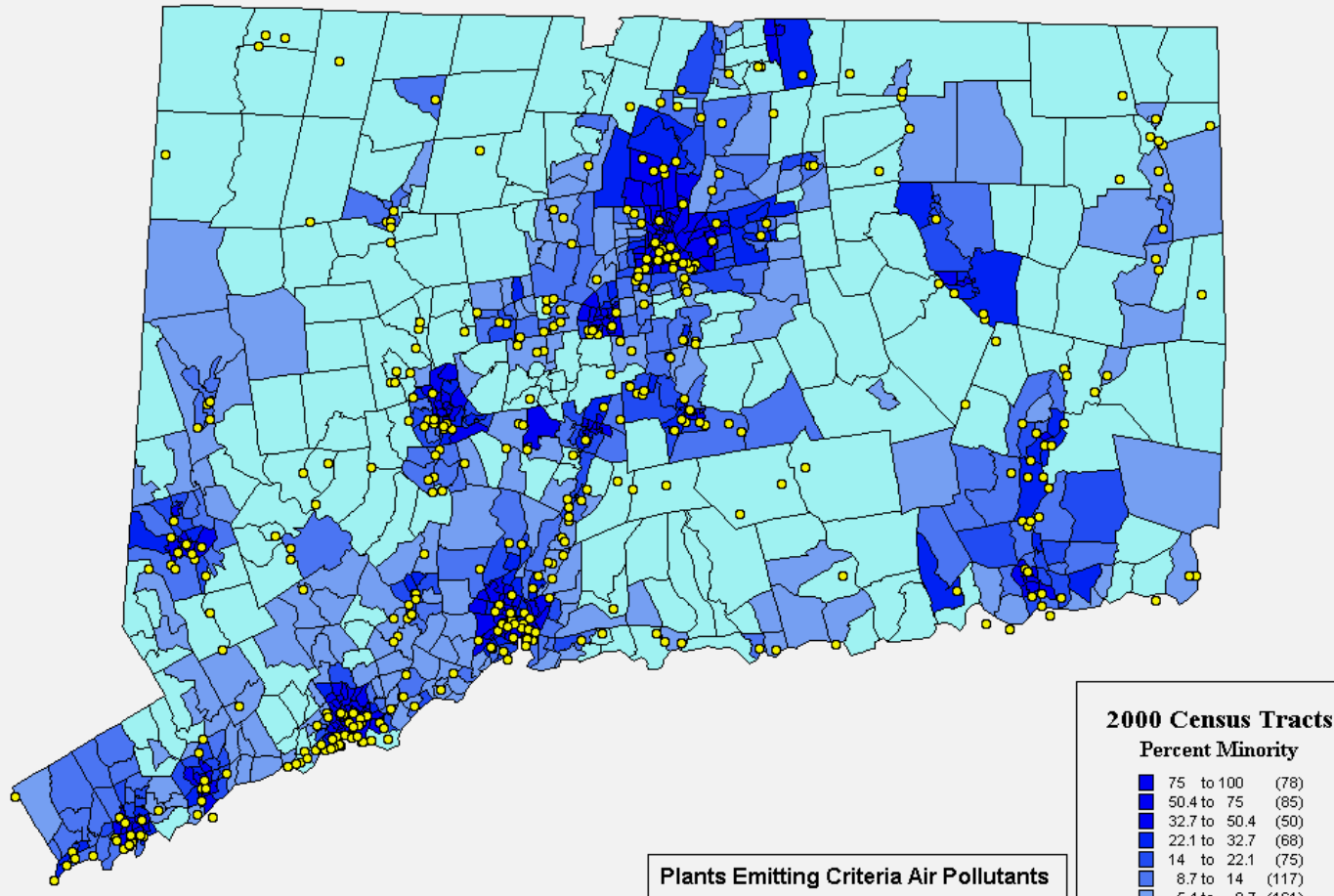


- NOTE: Please forgive the old maps and charts (I need help!)



# POINT SOURCE AIR POLLUTION EMISSIONS IN CONNECTICUT 2000

**2000 Census Tracts Percent Minority & Plants Emitting Criteria Air Pollutants**

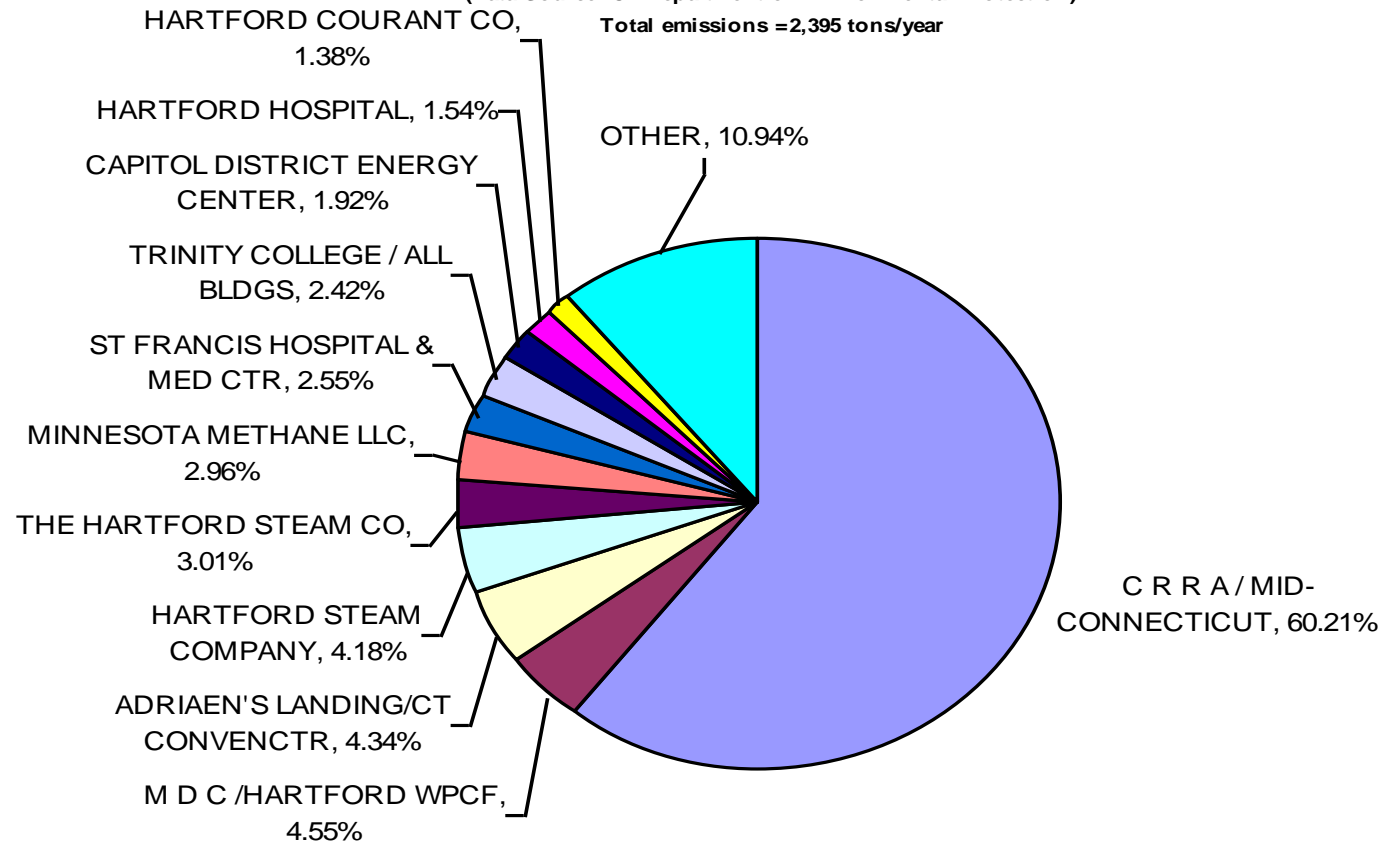


# HARTFORD POINT SOURCE AIR POLLUTION

**Hartford Non-Traffic Air Pollution Sources 2003**

(Data Source: CT Department of Environmental Protection)

Total emissions = 2,395 tons/year

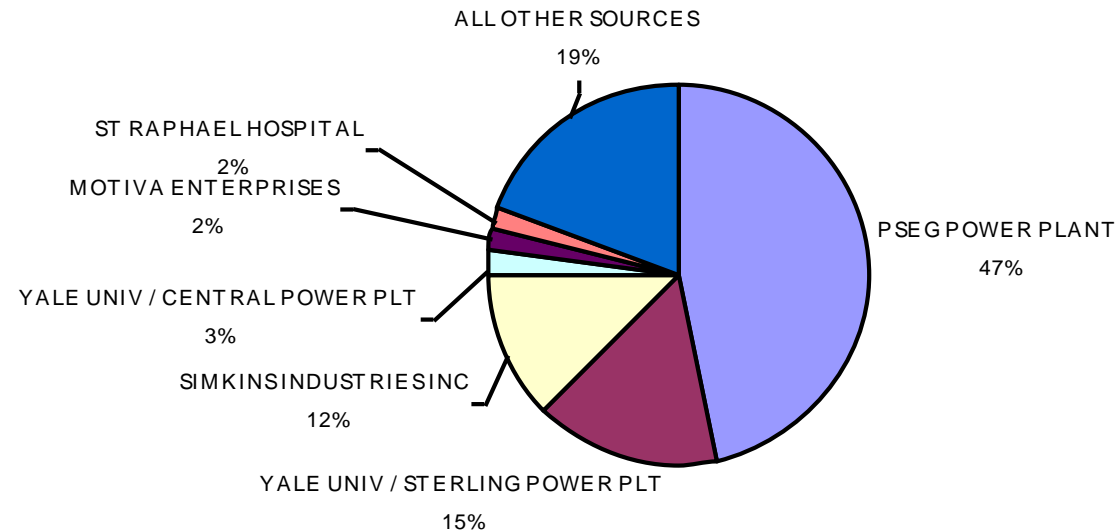


# NEW HAVEN POINT SOURCE AIR POLLUTION 2003

## New Haven Non-Traffic Air Pollution Sources 2003

(Data Source: CT Department of Environmental Protection)

Total emissions = 3,750 tons/year

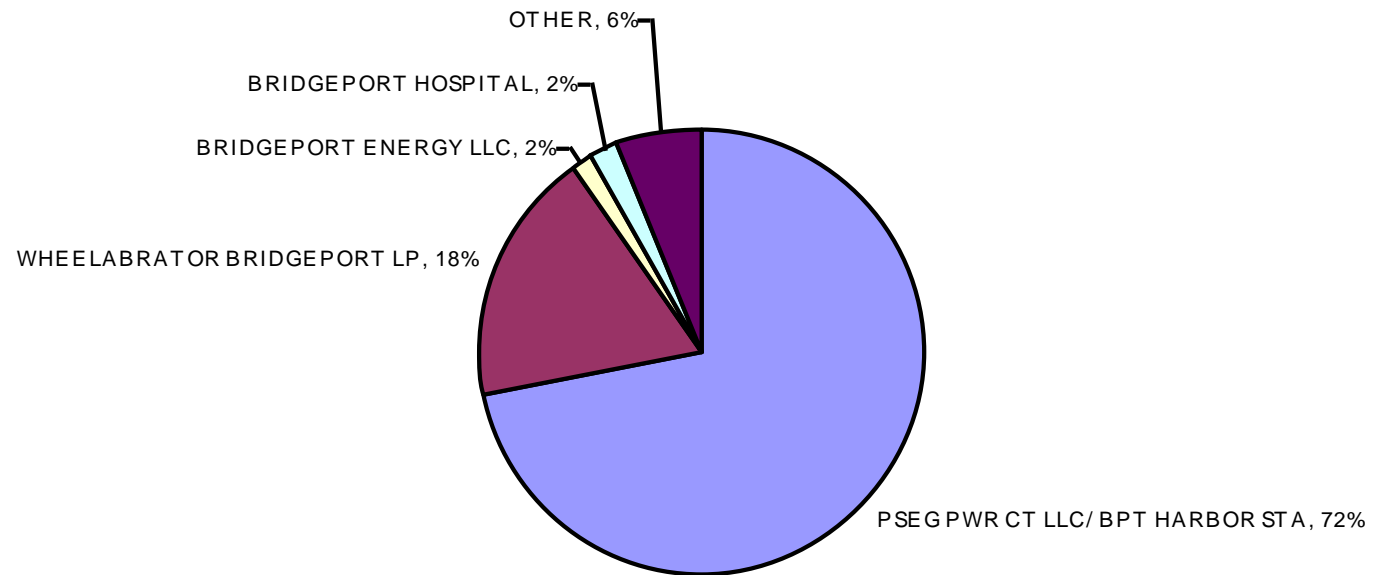


# BRIDGEPORT POINT SOURCE AIR POLLUTION 2003

## Bridgeport Non-Traffic Air Pollution Sources 2003

(Data Source: CT Department of Environmental Protection)

Total Emissions = 8,379 tons/year



# CLIMATE AND HEALTH

- Like COVID-19 all people are affected by climate change, but some are more affected than others
- Those people who are most impacted by climate change have contributed to it the least
- Many people see climate change, or COVID as existential threats, EJ communities see it as another existential threat
- Virtually all studies show that African Americans and Latinos are more concerned about air pollution and water pollutions, but not as involved



# LESSONS FROM HURRICANE KATRINA:

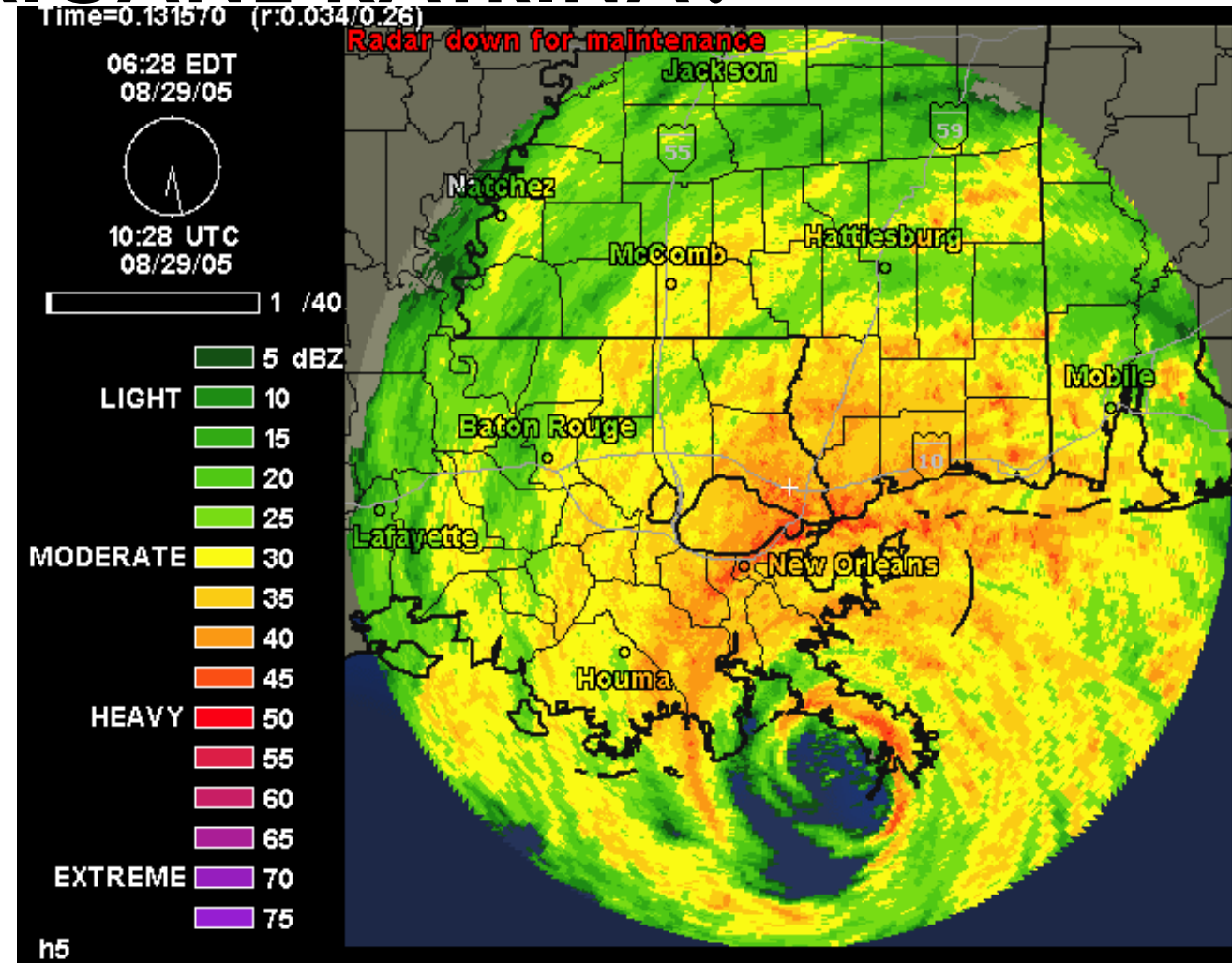


## POP QUIZ

Climate Adaptation

# WHAT DO YOU THINK OF FIRST WITH HURRICANE KATRINA?

- A. Costliest Hurricane on Record (\$125 Billion)
- B. Corp of Engineers Failure (5 levee breaches)
- C. Excellent Example of Climate Resilience (90% of people evacuated, 99.5% of people survived)
- D. None of the Above





# MOST CONSIDER KATRINA RESPONSE A FAILURE

- The most vulnerable were left behind
- The response was mostly judged on death and the human toll of the disaster
- There were many things that could have been done to reduce human suffering and death
- Participation of the most vulnerable in planning the response could have helped prevent much of the suffering



# WHO KNEW?

- ...where and when people without cars were supposed to board evacuation buses?
- ...how residents were to be notified about transportation options?
- ...that some people would not board buses if they did not know where they would be going?
- ...that many would not leave home without their pets?
- ...that many would not leave home without the assurance of security
- ...what would happen to the disabled and those in hospitals and nursing homes?
- ...who were the trusted community messengers?

**If the community were involved in  
planning,  
we would know!**

# RECOMMENDATIONS





# ALL ARE AFFECTED, BUT SOME ARE MORE AFFECTED

- Planning for the most vulnerable will reduce suffering and save the most lives
- Which populations are vulnerable vary by threat and geographic location
  - These populations often have the experience, expertise and information needed to develop more effective plans
- Hyper-local adaptation planning is needed
  - Threats and responses vary widely across the state
  - There should be state funding to pay for planning for each town
  - The people most affected need to be included in planning from the beginning
- GC3 and state agencies can provide information, tools, and guidance



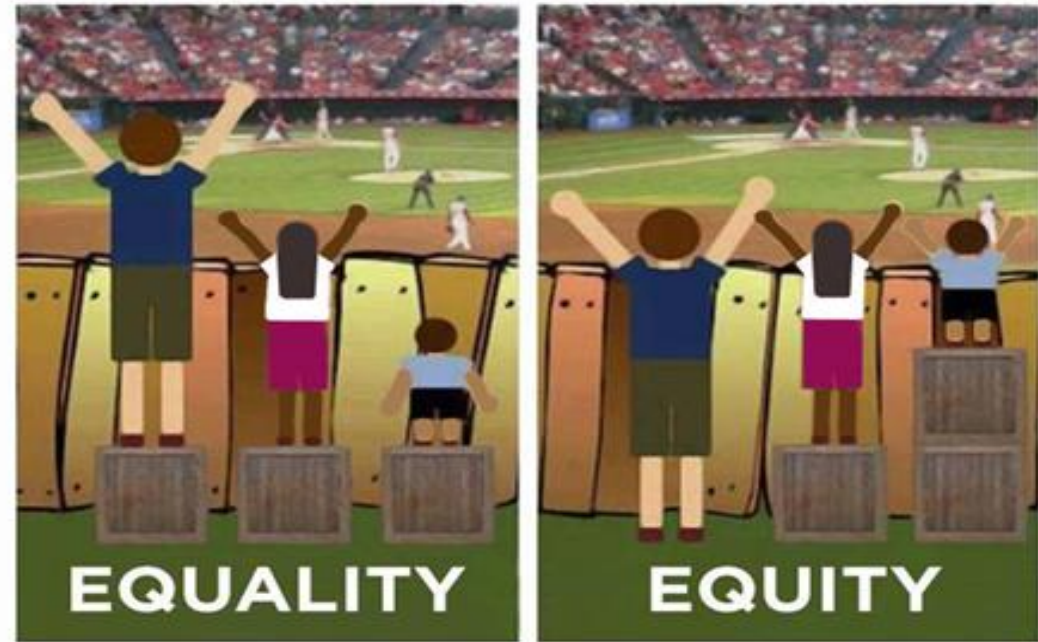
# PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

- There need to be a variety of programs to meet the needs of a variety of households and organizations
- Programs should be designed to work together to make them more user friendly (e.g. common application forms/income eligibility criteria)
- Mitigation funding should not go primarily, if at all, to wealthy households
- Adaptation funding should be proportional to the needs
- There should be funding for community organizations to work with low wealth households to engage them and assist them in assessing their needs and applying for the appropriate programs

# FUNDING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

- Environmental justice organizations in CT have been severely hampered by a lack of funding
- State and private funding is needed
  - It is critical to get state funding to educate and engage those most impacted in the GC3 planning process, especially on the local level
  - There are a very few foundations that fund EJ in Connecticut
  - Encouragement and letters of support from GC3 or government can help
- Some EJ organizations have been funded by lawsuit settlements
- SEP funds can be directed to EJ foundations
- The CT EJ Law needs to be updated to provide funding mechanisms

# LAST THOUGHT: COVID-19



The world will never be as it was before our current crisis. If we are deliberate about our efforts, we can make things better, and be more prepared to address our climate crisis and systemic racism.

**Let's plan to come out of the Coronavirus pandemic to a more prepared, just and equitable world**





# THANK YOU!

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# HEATWAVE MNEMONIC

- H – Heat exhaustion and heat stroke (responsible for the most weather-related deaths annually)
- E – Exacerbation of pre-existing cardiac or respiratory disease
- A – Asthma
- T – Traumatic Injury
  
- W – Water and foodborne illness
- A – Allergies
- V – Vector-borne diseases such as West Nile Fever and Zika
- E – Emotional and mental health conditions such as PTSD

# ADAPTATION PLANNING

- The identification climate vulnerability itself can help build resilience among those who know about them, even before implementation of an action plan
  - It can help in communication, coordination, and prioritization.
  - If those who are vulnerable know about their vulnerability, sometimes they can take action to build resilience or to monitor a threat and react sooner.
- The presence of a vulnerability plans puts communities in a better position to respond to opportunities for funding or act to mitigate the vulnerabilities in other unrelated efforts

# APPROACH TO MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION PLANNING

- Requires a top down and bottom up approach
  - The best adaptation plans require local knowledge and support
  - GC3 can provide guidance, tools, support and seek financing for these efforts
- Engage those who are most affected and their representatives in the planning process
  - This also requires funding to compensate them for their time and expertise
  - Learn from them