

Environmental Crime: From Conflicts to Transformations

Randall Amster, J.D., Ph.D.

Director, Program on Justice and Peace, Georgetown University

The water crisis in Flint, Michigan, has drawn attention to a set of issues that is unfortunately too common, increasingly so as mounting environmental crises driven by patterns of militarism and commodification are destabilizing the life-sustaining capacities of the planet. The deprivation of essential resources to already-impacted communities in urban and rural settings alike is a fundamental aspect of environmental justice, illuminating how the stratification of benefits and burdens is routinized through processes of disenfranchisement, displacement, and disruption. Less considered in the analysis of these issues is how mechanisms of crime control can serve to (a) insulate certain actors from bearing full responsibility for environmental harms, (b) hinder those impacted from resisting the effects of these harms, and (c) perpetuate structures of unequal access to essential resources like water. All of this undergirds profound environmental conflicts at scales from the local to the global, leaving open the question of how to incorporate restorative and/or transformative processes in confronting ecological crises. This presentation will explore environmental crime through a conflict transformation and peacebuilding lens, drawing upon concrete cases to develop a constructive framework for addressing these critical justice issues.