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Diversifying Environmental Advocacy in Atlanta: A Case Study of Atlanta's African American-Led Community-Based Groups Working Against Environmental Injustices

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DIVERSIFYING ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY IN ATLANTA: A CASE STUDY OF
ATLANTA'S AFRICAN AMERICAN-LED COMMUNITY-BASED GROUPS WORKING
AGAINST ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICES

by

TAMARA SPIKES

Under the Direction of Richard Milligan, PhD

ABSTRACT

An assumption that marginalized communities are not interested in the environment is one barrier to diversifying environmental affairs. Barriers like this one have shaped the ways that these communities respond to both enduring and emerging injustices. It is vital to understand how marginalized communities address environmental injustices including both disparate exposure to environmental harm and exclusions from environmental decision-making. This case study investigates five of Atlanta's African American-led community-based environmental groups that each work on water governance issues in predominantly Black watersheds in Atlanta: the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network, Environmental Community Action, the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council, the South River Watershed Alliance, and the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance. Through their continued efforts, these community-based-groups have worked to diversify mainstream environmentalism while destigmatizing myths associated with African American involvement in the urban environmental landscape.

INDEX WORDS: Environmental justice, Urban watersheds, Qualitative research, Resilience, Environmental racism, Marginalized communities

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Master of Science

in the College of Arts and Sciences

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2019

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DEDICATION

First and foremost, I want to give praise and honor to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Throughout my time in graduate school, God has bestowed unlimited blessings upon me and for that I am thankful. I thank the Lord for granting me with the wisdom and courage to take on this research task and guiding me to its completion. I would like to dedicate this work to my parents, Hydrick and Angie Spikes. Thank you for your continuous love and support. You have always encouraged me to strive for excellence and taught me the importance of hard work and dedication. I appreciate your words of encouragement, endless support, and all of the sacrifices you have made for me. Thank you for instilling strength and confidence in me at a young age. I wouldn't be the woman I am today if it wasn't for you. I am forever indebted to you both. Lastly, I would like to dedicate this work to my Spelman sisters Anna Bright, Torrie Dunn, Lauren-Taylor Fleming, Sydney Hubbert, Krista Montgomery, Aiyana Parks, and Tesia Smith, my childhood friends Ashley Hand and Aja Munson and my mentors Dr. Na'Taki Osborne Jelks and Ms. ChiQuita George who provided a listening ear in times of doubt and frustration. Lastly, I want to dedicate this work to my fur baby, Milo. Your energetic spirit uplifted me during difficult nights. Thank you all for continuously motivating me throughout my time in graduate school. You are truly appreciated!

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS*Abbreviation Explanation*

<i>100RC</i>	100 Resilient City
<i>AWLN</i>	Atlanta Watershed Learning Network
<i>ECO-Action</i>	Environmental Community Action
<i>EJ</i>	Environmental Justice
<i>PCSC</i>	Proctor Creek Stewardship Council
<i>SRWA</i>	South River Watershed Alliance
<i>WAWA</i>	West Atlanta Watershed Alliance

1 INTRODUCTION

Environmental Justice (EJ) scholars argue that in the United States low socioeconomic status and minority community residents face disproportionate exposure to environmental harms (Zimmerman, 1993; Cutter, 1995; Foster, 1998, Bullard, 2008; Mohai et al., 2009). Through such disparate exposures, marginalized people are negatively impacted by the production of uneven forms of environmental degradation, which contributes to resource and economic inequity (Lewis, 2016; Pulido, 2000). In addition to limited access to resources, implicit and explicit exclusions from environmental affairs contribute to the number of negative setbacks that impact urban poor and minority residents. Of the many environmental challenges faced, communities of color continue to face threats associated with urban pollution (Deganian & Thompson, 2012). Bullard and Wright (1986) argue that low socioeconomic status and minority residents are the ones most vulnerable to disproportionately large amounts of water pollution. While these communities are challenged with disproportionate exposure to pollution, they are often excluded from decision-making processes that influence water quality governance.

Marginal involvement in the water governance processes has contributed to the continuation of this injustice. Water governance largely relies on physical science and technical processes to shape decision making (Jepson & Brannstrom, 2015). While these two factors are needed to identify and implement effective resolutions, they often result in the exclusion of those directly susceptible to water marginalization. Ranganathan and Balazs (2015) describe how the patterns of marginalization within vulnerable communities parallel with political exclusion. In order to prevent exclusion from occurring, it is important to consider interdisciplinary approaches that integrate community participation to water governance processes. Though the involvement of marginalized community members is necessary to transform traditional

approaches to water governance, the limited discourse between minorities and environmental decision-makers has perpetuated the invisibility of people of color.

Barriers to participation in environmental affairs facilitated by an assumption that marginalized communities are not interested in the environment has shaped the ways that these communities respond to both enduring and emerging injustices (Finney, 2014). Due to this assumption, it is vital to understand how these communities address environmental injustices that are continuing to unfold. This case study investigates five of Atlanta's African American-led community-based environmental groups that each work on water governance issues in predominantly Black watersheds in Atlanta: the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network (AWLN), Environmental Community Action (ECO-Action), The Proctor Creek Stewardship Council (PCSC), the South River Watershed Alliance (SRWA), and the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance (WAWA). The purpose of this research is to provide a deeper understanding of how these groups approach advocating against environmental injustice and work towards diversifying mainstream environmentalism. This project examines how these five groups address environmental injustices through advocacy and resourcefulness by seeking to discover: 1) the strategies being employed to address environmental injustice; 2) the role community-based groups play in expanding the discourse between mainstream environmental groups and marginalized communities; 3) the challenges faced by these groups as a result of integrating marginalized communities in mainstream environmentalism; and 4) how the concept of resourcefulness can be used to promote minority engagement in environmental decision-making. Through archival research on the history of these organizations coupled with both participant observation and semi-structured interviews with leaders and participants from AWLN, Eco-Action, PCSC, SRWA, and WAWA, this research contributes to current debates on the importance of resourcefulness and diversity in

environmental governance scholarship. By investigating the work of African American-led community-based groups to address environmental injustice and increase diversity in mainstream environmentalism throughout Atlanta, this research makes three points: 1) minority-led community-based groups re-define traditional forms of environmental advocacy by recognizing the innate value in communities that are often socially excluded from the environmental decision-making process; 2) although these groups have made great strides in diversifying mainstream environmentalism, they continue to face challenges regarding inequitable access to resources coupled with tokenization; and 3) in order to enrich the practices of traditional environmentalism, resourceful approaches should be embraced that further promote progressive action towards addressing environmental injustices across scales.

I present the methodology and contributions of this thesis research in three chapters to follow. First, I include a literature review of geographic scholarship on 1) the racialization of mainstream environmentalism and 2) the association between race and patterns of disproportionate exposures to environmental challenges. This literature review makes the argument that the racialized nature of mainstream environmentalism has contributed to the isolation of African Americans in the decision-making process. In response, communities of color have re-explored environmental advocacy to further address environmental injustice and social exclusion. In Chapter 3, I provide a detailed description of the methodology employed to answer my research questions. This chapter also provides details about the case study. Chapter 4 is a freestanding manuscript of a journal article to be submitted to the journal *Geoforum*. The first three sections of this journal are abbreviated version of Chapters 1, 2 and 3, but sections 4, 5, and 6 of the journal article manuscript provide the analysis of my research data and present

relevant findings for the study of environmental injustice in the discipline of geography. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a brief conclusion of this thesis research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Current geography debates around environmental justice emphasize the association between race and environmental inequities. This chapter presents current scholarly debates which identify patterns of unfair and inequitable distribution of environmental challenges. In addition to examining the patterns of social and environmental injustice, this section focuses on debates which also emphasize the racial implications and social exclusions that have been traditionally found within the mainstream environmental movement. Due to the degradation of urban watersheds, many marginalized communities are susceptible to high risk environmental burdens. Maantay and Marako (2009) argue that socially and economically vulnerable populations are more prone to face burdens than of affluent populations when exposed to the same physical phenomena. When there is an evident difference in the political rights and services of a neighboring city, ongoing arenas of inequity and conflict arise. Ranganathan and Balzas (2015) describe this as the production of an urban fringe an urban city that experiences exteriority and marginality.

Over time, Atlanta has produced indirect exclusion of low-income and minority communities from water governance and decision-making processes. This exclusion results in the development of urban fringes where urban communities are susceptible to drinking water marginalization, contamination of water resources, and flooding. In order to address the complexities associated with environmental disparities it is necessary to incorporate environmental justice outcomes into decision-making processes. This shift in governance can promote the importance of environmental justice and increase inclusivity when implementing

environmental regulations. In order to fully embrace this idea, it is important to incorporate members who are often marginalized and excluded from both the decision-making process and mainstream environmentalism. Furthermore, the transformation of traditional governance will eradicate the isolation often felt by minority communities when participating in environmental practices that are linked to improving water quality.

2.1 The Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement

Traditionally, America's mainstream environmental movement has garnered a wide range of support from those interested in addressing issues of preservation, conservation, and land protection efforts (Mix, 2009). The environmental movement has been perceived as the domain of liberals where environmentalists are often characterized as tree-huggers or radical activists who hold strong commitments to leading pro-environmental lifestyles (Mix 2009; Bashir, 2012; Bashir et. al, 2013). Despite a liberal connotation, environmental themes have historically aligned with right wing ideologies that promote white separatism, which is a social movement consisting of various organizations with ideologies focused on the theme of white racial dominance (Mix, 2009). White separatist activists have worked to demonstrate their perspective as belonging to the mainstream. One mainstream theme used by the white separatist movement includes the environment and connection to nature (Mix, 2009).

Scholars argue that white separatists use dialogue concerning environmental skepticism and rights to nature as a way to appeal to pro-environmental organizations and conservative groups (Mix, 2009). Such discourses have led to the development of a dark legacy that is prevalent in national and local environmental organizations. While the practices of many environmental organizations, such as The Sierra Club, the Nature Conservancy, American Rivers, and the Conservation Fund, focus on conservation and preservation of natural resources,

their mission is largely influenced by the beliefs of white men who are considered to be the first class of environmentalist (Mock, 2018). In their efforts to create organizations that fostered hopes of preserving green spaces, environmentalists such as John Muir, Madison Grant, and Frederick Turner to name a few, were also known to use their western frontier as the basis to sustain white American nationalism (Mock, 2018). Racist conservationist principles have transcended into mainstream environmental groups that elevate practices that are not inclusive in nature. This ideology perpetuates the prohibition of people of color and their involvement in addressing environmental concerns.

Recent geographic scholarship has demonstrated mainstream environmentalism as a contributor to the isolation of African Americans' engagement with environmental concerns (Gibson-Wood and Wakefield, 2013; Finney, 2014). Although there are positive perceptions towards those who adopt mainstream approaches to environmental practices, many are resistant to environmentalists who exhibit untraditional qualities when advancing their own environmental concerns (Bashir, 2010). Historically, mainstream environmental groups worked within a framework that was exclusionary of environmental justice concerns. Collin and Collin (2005) argue that this anti-urban attitude within mainstream environmentalism veils unconscious racism that threatens to unintentionally reproduce racist outcomes. Marginalizing the involvement of minorities in environmental practices can perpetuate the invisibility of people of color, limit minority representation, and ultimately influence the way marginalized communities understand and interact with the environment (Finney, 2014). Obstacles to participation in environmental affairs coupled with the assumption that marginalized communities lack interest in the environment has shaped the way these communities respond to evolving environmental injustices.

Geographic research provides evidence that supports the racialization of environmentalism. In her early contributions to the field, Laura Pulido (1996) describes this racialization as a case in which environmentalism has become permeated with racial meaning. Due to the racialized nature of environmentalism, there was increased need for the emergence of a social movement that would bring awareness to the oppositional struggles embedded in the experiences of African Americans. Following a series of studies documenting disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards, the EJ movement was formed and its framework provided the foundation needed for social mobilization (Pulido, 1996).

The EJ movement arose in the United States to address race and class-based disparities in environmental issues and has played a pivotal role in broadening our understanding of African Americans attitudes toward environmental issues in the United States (Finney, 2014). By uncovering the biases and drawbacks of traditional decision making at the local and national level, the EJ movement thrives on the use of grassroots approaches when redressing disproportionate impacts through targeted actions and resources (Bullard & Johnson, 2000). Although the EJ movement has gained national attention, there are many obstacles that prevent working toward the elimination of racially inflected environmental injustices. Laura Pulido (2017) argues that the key to understanding EJ efficacy is to further understand the onset of the environmental racism gap in the form of persistent environmental inequalities between white and minority communities, but also the perpetuation of divisiveness in environmental advocacy and community engagement. While bringing awareness to environmental issues, the mainstream environmental movement has also identified the white and middle-class nature of environmentalism. This has indirectly influenced broader patterns of marginalization across mainstream environmental activism (Gibson-Wood & Wakefield 2013). The marginalization of

people of color from environmental affairs further generates exclusion amongst individuals who are most susceptible to environmental burdens. Even though geographic research facilitates discourse that addresses the production of marginalization in environmental activism, it fails to highlight the ways in which African American-led environmental groups are working to counteract this exclusion by working in their communities to tackle social and environmental injustices. The traditional approach to advocating for environmental concerns holds little promise of promoting social and environmental justice. As a result, the inclusion of marginalized communities is continuing to be neglected. This form of neglect secondarily elevates the operations of governance over the well-being of vulnerable communities (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013). In order to prevent the oversight of marginalized communities and their concerns, it is vital to adopt strategies that are inclusive in nature and promote progressive action.

2.2 Building Resourcefulness

MacKinnon and Derickson (2013) understood the need for a progressive strategy that would work against exclusionary practices that prohibit vulnerable communities from contributing their thoughts towards environmental challenges and potential solutions. As a result, they developed the concept of resourcefulness an alternative to resilience that amplifies disproportionate exposures to environmental burdens. The concept of resourcefulness advances the vision of transforming marginalized communities to resourceful communities in which residents have the capacity to engage in the decision-making process while working to develop alternative agendas that address existing challenges (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013). Most importantly, the resourcefulness concept emphasizes forms of learning and social mobilization based upon the local needs identified by community activists and residents. The adoption of this

relational approach empowers community members to expand past the traditional dependence on local and state governance. In order to address the dismissive behavior taking place in their local governance, Atlanta communities have demonstrated success in using strategies that promote community empowerment and equitable outcomes. The focus of this study aims to highlight the work taking place in Atlanta's marginalized communities while also contributing to debates in geography around the efficacy of environmental justice and the relationship between environmental racism and emerging discourses of resilience in urban environmental governance (Foster, 1998; Pulido, 2000; Gibson-Wood & Wakefield et al. 2013; Derickson, 2016; Pulido et al., 2016).

In conclusion, this literature review chapter provides an overview of current debates about EJ in the field of geography. After discussing EJ research that established that injustice is not only disparate burden of pollution on nonwhite communities, I presented some key debates about the efficacy of EJ from research in the past ten years. Finally, I suggested an important consideration of the concepts of "resilience" and "resourcefulness" that should be brought into greater conversation with this recent scholarship on the shortcomings of EJ approaches. The argument of this literature review can be succinctly summarized as follows: Historically, the racialized nature of mainstream environmentalism has contributed to the exclusion and stigmatization of minorities in their efforts to address environmental injustice. While an abundance of research on EJ has shown that injustices include both disparate burdens for communities of color but also exclusions of nonwhite people from environmental decision-making, current debates in geographical research highlight the failures of EJ as an institutionalized framework. As scholars and activists continue to struggle for environmental justice, I argue, based on this review of literature, that it is important to focus on using

resourceful strategies that will promote diversity, inclusion, and equity within the environmental movement and beyond. The review of literature provided in this chapter outlines the scholarly framework that I employed to develop my qualitative research study on EJ organizing in majority African American watersheds of Atlanta, Georgia. In the next chapter, I provide details about the study area for my research project, and I elaborate the research questions and methodology that I developed to conduct this research.

3 METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this project is focused on a case study approach. This approach was chosen to provide an example that affirms broader processes that can be applied to other occurrences of environmental and social injustice. During this research, I conducted fieldwork in the Westside and Eastside communities of Atlanta, Georgia. The experience gained assisted in examining that role African American, community-based groups play when addressing the issues of water quality governance. Though combating environmental injustice is the primary concern for these groups, they have shown an expanded focus on community empowerment, social engagement, and cross collaboration with both minority groups and mainstream environmental groups.

The central research questions that drive this study are: 1) What strategies are being deployed to equip community residents with the knowledge needed to address environmental injustice? 2) What role do community-based groups play in expanding the discourse between mainstream environmental groups and marginalized communities? 3) Do African American-led community-based groups face challenges as a result of integrating marginalized communities in mainstream environmentalism? and 4) How can resourceful strategies be used to promote minority engagement in the environmental decision-making process? In order to address these

questions, several methods were employed that are discussed in the following sections. Section 3.1 provides details about the selected study area and describes the archival research that was conducted on the history of the five African American-led community-based groups studied. Section 3.2 presents details about the participant observation that was conducted amongst all five community-based groups over the course of two years. Section 3.3 describes in detail the interview process and provides examples of the questions used to conduct all twelve semi-structured interviews. Lastly, section 3.4 summarizes the chosen methodology and re-addresses the purpose of the research study.

3.1 Study Area and Archival Research

In 2012, Green Law, an environmental non-profit organization based in Atlanta, Georgia, compiled a report on demographics and pollution in metropolitan Atlanta. In addition to analyzing pollution points, the report identifies environmental justice hotspot regions that demonstrate a strong correlation between race, poverty, and pollution by examining seven demographic characteristics (Deganian & Thompson, 2012). These demographic characteristics include race, linguistic isolation, poverty, vacant housing levels, median housing levels, high school graduation rates, and median family incomes. The study found that the demographic characteristics are associated with uneven distributions of pollution exposure. Deganian and Thompson (2012) argue that Atlanta communities that are susceptible to high pollution exposure have an average minority population of approximately forty-four percent. On the contrary, communities deemed as low-pollution blocks have an average minority population of approximately twenty-five percent. Of the seven demographic characteristics analyzed across the region, race is the demographic characteristic with the most direct correlation to pollution (Deganian & Thompson, 2012). Deganian and Thompson (2012) further demonstrate that

communities with a minority proportion of over seventy-five percent on average contain more pollution points compared to communities where minorities make up less than twenty-five percent of the population. The direct correlation between race and pollution exposure demonstrates the need for environmental justice advocacy in minority and low-income communities.

Prior to the establishment of minority-led community-based groups, Atlanta suffered from combined sewer overflows (CSOs). The occurrence of CSOs, which is a piped collection of rainwater runoff, domestic sewage, and industrial wastewater, dates back to the late 1900s (Water Keeper Alliance, 2012; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2018). For generations, Atlanta's combined storm-water and sewage infrastructure has led to environmental degradations that disproportionately impact low-income, minority communities. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Inspector General, Atlanta's CSO system continues to experience violations of National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits due to high levels of fecal coliform in treated wastewater (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2018). The continued occurrence of sanitary sewer overflows led to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division and Environmental Protection Agency Region 4 placing DeKalb County under a consent decree. In addition, the Atlanta consent decree was designed to reduce water pollution from sewer overflows through the implementation of CSO construction projects (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2018). Although this technical approach aimed to resolve the issue of CSO overflows, it indirectly reinforced injustices by failing to include system wide separation of combined sewers amongst several minority communities. This reinforcement resulted in the continued

exposure to sewage contamination for the city's predominantly African American communities.

Continued threats including urban pollution, flooding, and combined sewer overflows, influenced the establishment of community-based groups to address disparities in water governance. As a result of lived experiences, residents living within the Proctor Creek, Utoy Creek, and Intrenchment Creek watersheds formed the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network (AWLN), Environmental Community Action (Eco-Action), the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council (PCSC), the South River Watershed Alliance (SRWA), and the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance (WAWA). Although their communities are located in different regions of Atlanta, these African-American led environmental organizations used their experiences of environmental inequities to address the water quality issues taking place within their respective communities.

This case study focuses on the City of Atlanta's predominantly African American watersheds, specifically the Proctor Creek, Utoy Creek, and Intrenchment Creek watersheds. These watersheds have been subjected to urban pollution, combined sewer overflows, and discriminatory waste water treatment practices that threaten the health and quality of life of the surrounding communities (McCreary and Milligan, 2018). Due to the many environmental hazards taking place in the East Atlanta and West Atlanta communities, community members felt the need to respond by developing community-based organizations that share common interest in addressing the water degradation and water governance issues taking place in Atlanta's marginalized communities.

In order to understand how community members chose to respond to growing environmental challenges, five African-American led community-based groups were selected to

be the primary focus of this research project. Prior to conducting research that addresses how these groups are working towards diversifying mainstream environmentalism, it is necessary to understand the mission of each group and the history behind the injustices they face.

3.1.1 Environmental Community Action

Established in 1989, Environmental Community Action (Eco-Action) is a grassroots driven organization that is committed to understanding the environmental problems that threatens communities that are vulnerable to political, social, and economic inequalities (Eco-Action, 2017). This organization serves as a catalyst to the communities it serves by providing resources to low income and minority residents (Urban Watershed Learning Network, 2018). Through partnerships with mainstream organizations, such as American Rivers and the Conservation Fund, and community-based groups, such as the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance and the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council, Eco-Action has assisted in organizing more than 140 community groups across the state of Georgia (Eco-Action, 2017).

Eco-Action has developed training programs designed for educating and empowering the Intrenchment Creek Watershed communities to advocate for environmental protections and equitable outcomes. Among their many initiatives, this organization focuses on addressing storm water issues and advocating for more livable neighborhoods for vulnerable communities (Urban Watershed Learning Network, 2018). Through the facilitation of learning sessions, community residents are equipped with the skills needed to advocate for effective storm water management practices within their communities. Additionally, the work of Eco-Action focuses on the lack of minority representation in local city governance. Due to this, Eco-Action has built partnerships with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and civil rights attorneys to address the hazardous waste in several Georgia counties. Eco-Action has

transformed discriminatory practices that produce inequitable and unjust outcomes in several underserved communities across the local and state level (Eco-Action, 2017).

3.1.2 The West Atlanta Watershed Alliance

The West Atlanta Watershed Alliance (WAWA), founded in 1995, is a community-based organization that has partnered with West Atlanta residents in their fight against environmental justice and the protection of green space and water quality. (West Atlanta Watershed Alliance, 2016). While WAWA developed as a result of community efforts to end discriminatory waste water treatment practices in West Atlanta, this organization expanded its mission by working to educate residents about environmental issues that affect the community. WAWA is unique in nature because it is a volunteer organization that assists in mobilizing local residents through the use of place-based learning. From my involvement with this organization, I have witnessed first-hand how WAWA teaches residents the importance of preserving, maintaining, and revitalizing the viability of green spaces. As a result of this practice, WAWA has been successful in preserving over 400 acres of greenspace from development in Southwest Atlanta (West Atlanta Watershed Alliance, 2016).

While WAWA advocates for environmental justice and the preservation of greenspace, they also use their platform to increase minority participation in Atlanta's urban, environmental landscape. In addition to conducting learning sessions and workshops, WAWA provides residents the opportunity to participate in service Saturday events that promote cultural connection to natural resources and environmental engagement. Service Saturday events, such as creek clean ups, invasive plant removals, gardening, and hiking, introduce community residents to activities that enhance environmental stewardship and the use of sustainable practices.

3.1.3 The South River Watershed Alliance

The South River Watershed Alliance (SRWA), established in 2000, was formed to protect and restore the water quality and bio-diversity of the South River watershed (SRWA, 2019). In order to promote community involvement, the SRWA hosts various projects including paddle trips, river walks, rivercane restoration, and water quality monitoring events. In addition, the SRWA developed the South River Stewardship Network in 2014. The aim of this network focuses on connecting with schools to further provide opportunities for hands-on learning. Although the SRWA works to address water quality concerns and promote learning opportunities, they differ from the other four community-based groups examined by focusing transforming local ordinances. The South River Watershed, which runs through the heart of DeKalb County a predominantly African American, working class community has suffered from various forms of pollution. According to the DeKalb County Department of Watershed Management, over 1,000 sewer spills have occurred in the county since 2006. Of the 1,000 sewer spills, 700 have been a direct result of fats, oils, and greases congesting the sewer pipes (SRWA, 2019). The increased occurrences of these spills led to community members advocating for the revision of the consent decree- a document that set forth by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division that fails to address how the main source of pollution should be remediated. (SRWA, 2019).

Due to the consent decree lacking vital information on how to address concerns of pollution, DeKalb County citizens and the SRWA took five steps in addressing the problem: 1) Citizens and participants of SRWA have begun to hold DeKalb County elected officials accountable for revising the consent decree to include a plan that reduces fats, oils, and grease pollution, 2) Participants are taking personal responsibility to limit urban pollution by properly

disposing of fats, oils, and greases, 3) SRWA has taught residents the importance of preventative strategy when disposing of fats, oils, and greases, 4) SRWA has advocated for aggressive action to be done by DeKalb County by implementing effective public education programs, and 5) SRWA continues to urge elected official to expand and support aggressive enforcement of fats, oils, and grease ordinance. Residents and SRWA participants continue their fight to address concerns of water quality issues within the South River by working to transform local ordinances and water quality governance practices both on the local and state level.

3.1.4 The Proctor Creek Stewardship Council

The Proctor Creek Stewardship Council (PCSC) was established in 2013 through a collaboration with WAWA, the Community Improvement Association, and Eco-Action. Through my involvement with the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council, I have identified the ways in which this organization is unique compared to the other four organizations studied. This organization is led by residents who were chosen by community leaders as a result of their involvement in environmental-justice focused training sessions. The PCSC aims to address the water quality issues taking place in the Proctor Creek Watershed by addressing six goals: 1) develop stewards who are strong and empowered leaders, 2) grow an educated and empowered communities, 3) advocate for the fair treatment and inclusion of the Proctor Creek communities, 4) collaborate with public and private partners, 5) serve the community as an interdisciplinary, scientific and technical collaborative, and 6) influence sustainable land use and water resource planning (Atlanta Watershed Learning Network, 2018).

To further address the goals, members of the PCSC conduct monthly meetings bringing together residents from northwest Atlanta communities that surround the Proctor Creek Watershed. These meeting provide residents the opportunity to come together plan activities that

promote their mission. (Proctor Creek Stewardship Council, 2018). The initiatives set forth by the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council have attracted the attention of government agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency's Urban Waters Partnership (Environmental Protection Agency Urban Waters Partnership, 2018). The continued work of the PCSC encourages the promotion of self-advocacy, a tool that has been instrumental in addressing water quality concerns in Proctor Creek.

3.1.5 The Atlanta Watershed Learning Network

The Atlanta Watershed Learning Network (AWLN), which began in 2017, is a cross collaboration organization that was co-founded by leaders of Eco-Action, WAWA, and American Rivers. This organization evolved from community concerns of urban flooding and the implications it has on the quality of life of marginalized communities (Urban Waters Learning Network, 2018). This network is unique due to the fact that it works across watersheds by bringing together residents from the Proctor Creek and Intrenchment Creek watersheds. By participating in the AWLN's 2019 cohort, I have learned that this organization has a threefold purpose which aims to 1) expand community knowledge and skills to address water quality and storm water challenges, 2) encourage community members to become change agents for the protection of their watershed by advocating for the improvement of water quantity and water quality, and 3) increase participants' participatory engagement by using knowledge management assessment tools (i.e. Noticing, Keeper and Motivation (NKMs) and Motivation, Attitude, Skills, Knowledge and Action (MASKA) tools). These tools are used in a six-module learning session that provides training sessions and learning opportunities focused on the storm water flooding issues, green infrastructure, and environmental justice advocacy.

While the AWLN encourages place-based learning, a tool used to immerse community members in local heritage, culture, and landscapes, this organization introduces community residents to storm water management practices by teaching them the importance of green and gray storm water infrastructure and explaining how each impact structured decision making in their watersheds. By participating in green infrastructure tours, learning sessions, and community meetings, resident participants have the opportunity to inform and educate other residents along with public and elected officials (Eco-Action, 2017). By building the community capacity to support the use of green storm water infrastructure, community members understand sustainable measures that can address urban flooding and further feel empowered to advocate for change (Eco-Action, 2017).

Based on the history of each organization, it is evident that these African American-led environmental groups share similarities in highlighting the importance of residents having access to external advocacy groups. In addition to addressing their own individual issues, these groups embrace the importance of collaborative problem solving and have collaboratively worked together to combat the issues taking place in Atlanta's urban communities. The collaboration of these organizations has demonstrated the value of community knowledge and empowerment. This focus is vital as there has been an increased need to amplify communities of color in the mainstream environmental movement. Although the need for diversifying the traditional environmental sector is an obstacle for many cities throughout the United States, Atlanta proves that this effort can be accomplished through ongoing research, community engagement, transparent dialogue, and collaboration amongst traditional and non-traditional environmental groups. Because Atlanta's African American-led community-based groups deploy a range of practices and strategies as they interact with community members, the scope for understanding

how the strategies are used requires inquiries into their advocacy framework, everyday practices, and how they use these strategies to work against the exclusion of people of color within the environmental movement.

3.2 Participant Observation

In order to explore the everyday practices of the community-based groups studied, participant observation was necessary to understand the role these groups play in the advancement of their communities. Over a two-year period I conducted participant observation to understand not only the practices and strategies of these organizations and the reasoning for lateral engagement among group leaders and participants, but also to interpret how Atlanta's mainstream environmental organizations, such as American Rivers, The Conservation Fund, Park Pride, and The Trust for Public Land, respond to the people based approach used by African-American led community-based groups. Prior to going into the field, I was able to draw on connections with members of the communities which preceded my involvement with the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance beginning in 2015. Through the development of substantial relationships, I was able to collect qualitative data that emphasized detailed discussions with both organization leaders and community members. Although semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather responses, I had the opportunity to have wide-ranging, informal conversations with participants and leaders and further understand the grassroots approaches utilized. Over the course of two years, I engaged in learning sessions, community forums, workshops, conferences, and service events that expanded across urban watersheds. In addition to using these events as methods to empower community members, leaders felt the importance to cross collaborate with similar grassroots organizations that shared the same vision. Table 6.1 summarizes the initiatives and forms of community organizing that I observed with the five

community-based groups with which I conducted the majority of my field work. The table below demonstrates the initiatives and strategies amongst all five African American led community-based groups who focus on water governance issues taking place in Atlanta, Georgia.

Table 3.1 Initiatives and Forms of Community Organizing of Primary Organizations

Organizations	Initiatives	Community Organizing Strategies
Atlanta Watershed Learning Network (AWLN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Empowerment/Learning • Storm Water and Green Infrastructure • Public Information and Comment • Watershed Management and Policy • Environmental Justice Workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Sessions • Green Infrastructure Tours • Municipal Planning • State Permit Enforcement • Local Ordinance Advocacy
Environmental Community Action (Eco-Action)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Empowerment/Learning • Public Information and Comment • Watershed Management and Policy • Storm Water and Green Infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Sessions • Green Infrastructure Tours • Municipal Planning • State Permit Enforcement • Local Ordinance Advocacy
Proctor Creek Stewardship Council (PCSC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Empowerment/Learning • Environmental Justice Workshops • Public Information and Consent • Collaboration with Public/Private Partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring Events • Recreational Events • Community Meetings • Community Workshops • Environmental Workforce Training
South River Watershed Alliance (SRWA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Justice Workshops • Watershed Management and Policy • Public Information and Consent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Recreational Events • Municipal Planning • State Permit Enforcement • Local Ordinance Advocacy
West Atlanta Watershed Alliance (WAWA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor Interaction • Cultural Environmental Education • Citizen Science Monitoring • Environmental Justice Workshops • Creek Restoration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Learning Sessions • Service Events • Monitoring Events • Creek Clean Up Events • Local Ordinance Advocacy

By attending monthly meetings, service Saturday events, and community learning sessions, I reviewed and analyzed concerns that members of the groups expressed about water governance and urban water pollution. Through cross collaboration, community-based groups held community forums across urban watersheds to further identify the priority issues of Atlanta's Eastside and Westside communities. The groups identified the primary issues of concern as pollution, combined sewer overflows, residential displacement, and lack of involvement in governance processes. While identification of the primary concerns was vital, further qualitative research was conducted to understand community members' and group leaders' perceptions of employed advocacy and environmental decision-making processes. In total, I conducted participant observation at a total of twenty-five events where there were roughly over one hundred participants involved. By participating in these meetings, community service activities, and learning sessions, I was able to understand and document the practices of cross collaboration that are involved in the work of these five different organizations.

3.3 Interviews

In addition to conducting participatory observation, I conducted formal interviews with participants and leaders of all five African American-led environmental groups. I conducted twelve, one-hour semi-structured interviews to gain insight on the strategies employed by each environmental group and to further understand how these strategies are being used to empower marginalized communities. Of the twelve interviews conducted, I interviewed six participants and six group leaders of African American-led community-based groups that focus on water governance issues in urban watersheds. In addition to interviewing these community-based groups, I interviewed group leaders from two of Atlanta's mainstream environmental groups: The Conservation Fund and American Rivers.

Following the interviews, responses were collected, transcribed, and coded using NVivo. As a result, common themes were identified amongst both leaders and participants of the community-based groups. The methodology used facilitated the integration of observed behavior and provide a wider range of data. The qualitative methods used furnished a holistic overview of each organization while providing insight on how their work aims to diversify environmental advocacy in Atlanta, Georgia.

3.4 Overview of Methodology

The purpose of this research is to investigate five of Atlanta's African American-led community-based groups that each work on water governance issues in predominantly Black watersheds in Atlanta. In order to understand the how these groups work towards addressing social and environmental injustice, the following questions are central to the focus of the study: 1) What strategies are being deployed to equip community residents with the knowledge needed to address environmental injustice? 2) What role do community-based groups play in expanding the discourse between mainstream environmental groups and marginalized communities? 3) Do African American led community-based groups face challenges as a result of integrating marginalized communities in mainstream environmentalism? and 4.) How can resourceful strategies be used to promote minority engagement in the environmental decision-making process? The archival and field research conducted provides answers to these research questions. Additionally, the interviews conducted provided insight on how minority led community-based groups address the growing challenges found within the environmental landscape. The following chapter provide a manuscript of a journal article that demonstrates the findings of this research methodology.

4 JOURNAL MANUSCRIPT

While there are existing debates around the need to address environmental challenges through advocacy and community empowerment, many scholars fail to recognize the work being done to eradicate environmental injustices taking place in Atlanta, Georgia.

Diversifying Environmental Advocacy in Atlanta: A Case Study of Atlanta's African American-led Community-Based Group Working Against Environmental Injustices

Abstract.

An assumption that marginalized communities are not interested in the environment is one barrier to diversifying environmental affairs. Barriers like this one have shaped the ways that these communities respond to both enduring and emerging injustices. It is vital to understand how marginalized communities address environmental injustices including both disparate exposure to environmental harm and exclusions from environmental decision-making. This case study investigates five of Atlanta's African American-led community-based environmental groups that each work on water governance issues in predominantly Black watersheds in Atlanta: the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network, Environmental Community Action, the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council, the South River Watershed Alliance, and the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance. Through their continued efforts, these community-based groups have worked to diversify mainstream environmentalism while destigmatizing myths associated with African American involvement in the urban environmental landscape.

4.1 Introduction.

Atlanta, Georgia has a long history of socio-ecological segregation, and has previously been characterized as a "hyper-segregated" city (Wilkes and Iceland, 2004; Deganian and Thompson, 2012, McCreary and Milligan, 2018). For generations, Atlanta's combined storm-

water and sewage infrastructure has led to the onset of environmental degradation that disproportionately impacts low-income, minority communities. Although the disproportionate exposure of minority communities was acknowledged by scholars, advocates, and city and state officials, little action was taken to address the impacts of environmental hazards. This soon changed following the flood of 2009 as city officials began working towards corrective action that focused on mitigating urban flooding. On the morning of September 15, 2009, the city of Atlanta experienced prolonged rainfall that lasted for seven days. According to the National Weather Service, the final two days of the rainfall event averaged at approximately twenty-one inches and resulted in a flood event that caused great devastation to many Atlanta communities (National Weather Service, 2014). As a result of the flood, property damage calculated to be \$500 million due to the destruction of residential, commercial, and industrial buildings. In addition to economic devastation, the flood resulted in ten fatalities that drew immediate attention on both the national and local levels (National Weather Service, 2014). Among those most impacted were several of Atlanta's urban and marginalized communities.

The attention that resulted from the flood called for an immediate response from the city of Atlanta's mayor. In efforts to respond to the 2009 flood event, city officials collaborated with the Department of Watershed Management to develop the Southeast Atlanta Green Infrastructure Initiative, which was a proposal for a 30-day investigation that worked to identify a long-term solution to reduce flooding using a phased approach that encouraged the implementation of green infrastructure. The resilient strategies set forth by this initiative gained national attention from the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient City (100RC) network which supports the adoption of urban resilience strategies and efforts to address physical, social, and economic challenges. Atlanta was invited to become a member city of the 100RC network and used this

partnership to development the city's resilience strategy, *Resilience Atlanta: Actions to Build an Equitable Future* (2017).

The City of Atlanta's resilience strategy was published in November 2017 with plans to leverage over a dozen city plans, most of which align with resilience strategies (Adaptation Clearinghouse, 2018). Composing more than 55 short-term and long-term actions, the resilience strategy highlights four visions for the city's resilient future (Resilience Atlanta: Actions to Build an Equitable Future, 2017). The first vision, entitled: *Preserve and Celebrate Who We Are*, focuses on 1) addressing and reconciling structural racism by promoting racial equity and 2) committing to building the city's arts and culture sector with hopes of becoming a growing industry by 2025. The second vision, entitled: *Enable All Metro Atlantans to Prosper*, aims to advance economic and social prosperity by 1) connecting metro Atlantans to at least 10,000 new livable wage jobs by 2020, 2) preparing 100 percent of Atlanta's children for kindergarten, and 3) developing more career opportunities in the city. The third vision, entitled: *Build Our Future City Today*, focuses on the improvement of quality access to affordable housing and transportation across metro Atlanta. In addition, this vision has a two-fold aim to increase sustainable practices in the city. The vision aims to 1) create 500 new acres of accessible greenspace by 2022 and 2) install sustainable energy and water efficient infrastructure improvements in public spaces. The final vision, entitled: *Design Our Systems to Reflect Our Values*, intends to promote resilience planning by 2022 by 1) achieving 100 percent use of clean energy by 2035, 2) improving public safety and community preparedness by strengthening community collaboration, and 3) supporting policies aimed to increase civic participation from Metro Atlantans. Although the strategy developed by the city to pursue the Rockefeller Foundation's 100RC network highlighted a framework of resiliency that would promote

economic and social growth, it fails to explicitly state how these visions would address existing environmental vulnerabilities in Atlanta's highly segregated, majority Black communities.

Many of the initiatives outlined in the resilient strategy failed to acknowledge ways to address urban pollution and marginal access to clean water sources two challenges that are prominent within Atlanta's low socioeconomic and minority communities. While the resilience strategy aims to include inclusionary practices in local and state governance, it falls short of including the concerns of Atlanta's EJ communities. By neglecting to address concerns of urban pollution and marginal involvement in the environmental decision-making process, the resilience strategy perpetuates threats that historically impact urban poor and marginalized communities. Adding to existing environmental injustices, threats of environmental gentrification and residential displacement became a growing concern for families living in Atlanta's urban core.

Due to the implementation of green infrastructure, dozens of impacted families were asked to sell properties to the city as part of a remediation effort (Atlanta Journal Constitution, 2014). Immergluck and Balan (2018) argue how such large scale sustainable urban development projects produce environmental gentrification and present few opportunities for inclusionary outcomes that would benefit the marginalized. Political agendas that champion greening interventions can promote new socio-spatial inequities amongst low-socioeconomic and minority communities (Anguelovski et al., 2018). In addition to water quality degradation and increased urban flooding, environmental gentrification is another concern that promotes social and environmental inequities within communities of color. Environmental hazards have always been a primary concern in marginalized communities. The concerns of uneven distribution to environmental hazards resulted in the development of a social movement that focused on issues within communities of color.

Environmental Justice (EJ) scholars argue that although governments have designed adaptation strategies there is no justification showing that these strategies will benefit communities that face the greatest environmental threats (Lewis, 2016). MacKinnon and Derickson (2013) argue that the promotion of resilience among low income communities normalizes the uneven effects of neoliberal governance. In addition, the development of resilience-oriented policy implicitly encourages susceptible community members to rebuild rather than encouraging the implementation of progressive strategies and fundamental resources needed to overcome the cycle of injustice and prevent the sustainment of unevenness (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2013). Due to the ineffectiveness of current resilience strategies, there is a fundamental need to shift resilience thinking to advocate for resourcefulness (Derickson, 2016). In order to transform resilience approaches to resourceful strategies, it is important to include vulnerable communities in decision making processes that focus on perpetual environmental threats.

This project examines how Atlanta's African American-led environmental groups that focus on water governance address environmental injustices through advocacy and resourcefulness by seeking to discover 1) the strategies being employed to address environmental injustice; 2) the role community-based groups play in expanding the discourse between mainstream environmental groups and marginalized communities; 3) the challenges faced by African American led community-based groups as a result of integrating marginalized communities in mainstream environmentalism.; and 4) how the concept of resourcefulness can be used to promote minority engagement in the environmental decision making process. This project contributes to current debates on the importance of resourcefulness by investigating the work of African American-led community-based groups and their efforts to address environmental

injustice. While Atlanta's African American-led community-based groups focus on advocating against watershed injustice, they amplify their work by empowering residents to realize the importance of self-advocacy. Through these efforts, the community-based groups studied continue to counteract the exclusionary actions taking place within mainstream environmentalism. Furthermore, I argue that while these African American led community-based groups have worked towards addressing environmental challenges, they continue to face challenges when working within the mainstream environmental movement. Although faced with challenges, these community-based groups continue to promote social empowerment that further advances marginalized communities in Atlanta.

4.2 Literature Review

4.2.1 The Association Between Race and Patterns of Uneven Exposures to Environmental Challenges.

Current scholarly narratives around environmental justice emphasize the connection between race and social and environmental inequities. This section presents current scholarly debates that identify patterns of unfair and inequitable distribution of environmental hazards. Environmental Justice (EJ) scholarship argues that in the United States, low socioeconomic status and minority community residents face disproportionate exposure to environmental harms (Zimmerman, 1993; Cutter, 1995; Foster; 1998, Bullard, 2008; Mohai et al., 2009). As a result of such exposure, marginalized people are negatively impacted by the production of unevenness, which contributes to the existence of resource and economic inequity (Lewis, 2016; Pulido, 2000). This production of unevenness leads to marginal access to clean water sources found in communities of color.

As a result of disproportional exposure to pollution, many marginalized communities are susceptible to high risk environmental burdens. Maantay and Marako (2009) argue that those who are socially and economically vulnerable are more prone to face additional burdens than affluent populations when exposed to the same physical phenomena. When there is an evident difference in the political rights and services of non-marginalized communities, ongoing arenas of inequity and conflict arise. Ranganathan and Balzac (2015) describe this as the production of an urban fringe an urban population that experiences exteriority and marginality. Although the term “urban fringe” captures areas that are located on the outskirts of the city, this term can be applied to communities who face unevenness and exclusion while being within the metropolitan area. Metropolitan Atlanta is an urban space which produces the indirect exclusion of low-income and minority communities from water governance and environmental related decision-making processes (McCreary & Milligan, 2018). This exclusion results in the development of urban fringes where urban communities are susceptible to the contamination of water resources. In order to address the challenge of water marginalization, Ranganathan and Balazs (2015) argue that it is vital to incorporate indirect learning into existing best management practices (BMPs). Rather than mimicking the framework of current policies, indirect learning encourages decision making that works alongside fringe communities. Indirect learning can help develop general processes to further support marginalized communities in their quest to address water marginalization in terms of water access, exposures to pollution, governance practices, and political agencies (Ranganathan & Balazs, 2015). Through the use of indirect learning practitioners, environmental activists are able to address water access, state practice, and political agencies. In order to address the complexities associated with environmental disparities it is necessary to incorporate environmental justice into the decision-making process. This shift in

governance can promote the importance of environmental justice and increase inclusivity when implementing environmental regulations. In order to fully embrace this idea, it is important to incorporate members who are often marginalized and excluded from the decision-making processes of mainstream environmentalism and environmental governance.

4.2.2 The Exclusionary Underpinnings of Mainstream Environmentalism.

In addition to limited access to resources, implicit and explicit exclusions from environmental affairs contribute to the number of negative setbacks that impact urban poor and minority residents. For example, recent geographic scholarship has demonstrated mainstream environmentalism as a contributor to the isolation of African Americans' engagement with environmental concerns (Gibson-Wood and Wakefield, 2013; Finney, 2014). This section intends to explore current debates which focus on the exclusionary actions found within the traditional structure of mainstream environmentalism. Limiting the discourse between minorities and the natural environment can perpetuate the invisibility of people of color, limit minority representation, and ultimately influence the way marginalized communities understand and interact with the environment (Finney, 2014). Barriers to participation in environmental affairs facilitated by an assumption that marginalized communities are not interested in the environment has shaped the ways that these communities respond to both enduring and emerging injustices (Finney, 2014). Geographic research provides evidence that supports the racialization of environmentalism. Laura Pulido (1996) describes this as a case in which environmentalism has become permeated with racial meaning. The racialized nature and exclusionary practices found in environmentalism led to the emergence of a social movement that would bring awareness to the oppositional struggles embedded in the African American environmental experience. Following a series of studies documenting disproportional exposure to environmental hazards,

the EJ movement was formed and its framework provided the foundation needed for social mobilization (Pulido, 1996).

The EJ movement arose in the United States to address race and class-based disparities in environmental issues and has played a pivotal role in broadening our understanding of African Americans attitudes toward environmental issues in the United States (Finney, 2014) Although the EJ movement has gained national attention, there are many obstacles that prevent eliminating racially inflected environmental injustices. Laura Pulido (2017) argues that the key to understanding EJ efficacy is to further understand the gap in environmental racism. This gap is presented in the form of persistent environmental inequalities between white and minority communities, but also the perpetuation of divisiveness in environmental advocacy and community engagement. While bringing awareness to environmental issues, the mainstream environmental movement has also identified the white and middle-class nature of environmentalism. This has indirectly influenced broader patterns of marginalization across mainstream environmental activism (Gibson-Wood & Wakefield 2013). The marginalization of people of color from environmental affairs further generates exclusion amongst individuals who are most susceptible to environmental burdens. Even though geographic research facilitates discourse that addresses the production of marginalization in environmental activism, it fails to highlight the ways in which African American-led environmental groups counteract this exclusion by working in their communities to tackle social and environmental injustices.

This research investigates five of Atlanta's African American-led community-based environmental groups that each work on water governance issues in predominantly Black watersheds in Atlanta: the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network (AWLN), Environmental Community Action (Eco-Action), The Proctor Creek Stewardship Council (PCSC), the South

River Watershed Alliance (SRWA), and the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance (WAWA). The purpose of this research is to provide a deeper understanding of how these groups approach advocating against environmental injustice and work to diversify mainstream environmentalism. This study contributes to debates in geography around the efficacy of environmental justice with particular focus on the relationship between environmental racism and emerging discourses of resilience in urban environmental governance (Foster, 1998; Pulido, 2000; Gibson-Wood & Wakefield et al. 2013; Derickson, 2016; Pulido et al., 2016). This cross-fertilization can further identify how urban communities effectively address environmental injustices while simultaneously work towards addressing social exclusion within the mainstream environmental movement.

4.3 Methodology.

The methodology for this project employs a case study approach. This approach was chosen to provide an example that contributes to debates around the broad occurrences of environmental and social injustice. During this research, I conducted fieldwork in the communities surrounding Atlanta's Proctor Creek, Utoy Creek, and Intrenchment Creek watersheds. The field experience assisted in examining the role African American community-based groups play when addressing water governance issues. Though combating environmental injustice is the primary concern for these groups, they have shown an expanded focus on community empowerment, social engagement, and cross collaboration with both minority groups and mainstream environmental groups.

By participating in monthly meetings, service Saturday events, and community learning sessions, I reviewed and analyzed concerns that participants expressed in the realm of water governance and urban water pollution. Through cross collaboration, community-based groups

held community forums across urban watersheds. The collaborative group included: The Atlanta Watershed Learning Network, Eco-Action, the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council, the South River Watershed Alliance, and the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance. As a result of this collaboration, the groups identified the priority issues for Atlanta's Westside communities: urban pollution, increased flooding, and residential displacement. Although the South River Watershed Alliance shares concerns with the other four groups studied, this organization differs by heavily focusing on local ordinance advocacy and transforming existing water quality permits. While the identification of the primary concerns was vital, further qualitative research was conducted to understand community members' and group leaders' perceptions of traditional forms of advocacy and environmental decision-making processes. Twelve, one-hour semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain insights on the strategies employed by each environmental group and to further understand how these strategies are being used to empower marginalized communities. Interview responses were collected, transcribed, and coded to identify common themes amongst group leaders and participants. This methodology used facilitated the integration of observed behavior and provided a wider range of data that would answer the research questions.

4.4 The History of Atlanta's African American-led Community-based Groups Who Focus on Water Governance Issues.

Atlanta, situated on the Eastern sub-continental divide of the southeastern USA, is home to the headwaters of several creeks and rivers, which rise from highly urbanized sections of the downtown region (Urban Water Learning Network, 2018). Five watersheds have their headwaters in downtown Atlanta: Proctor Creek, Utoy Creek, the South River, Intrenchment Creek, and Peachtree Creek. Five African-American led environmental groups that share a

common interest in addressing water degradation and water governance issues each have significant projects and struggles in the Proctor Creek, Utoy Creek, and Intrenchment Creek headwaters.

Due to the environmental problems taking place in the East Atlanta and West Atlanta communities, Environmental Community Action (Eco-Action) and the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance (WAWA) were founded in 1989 and 1995, respectively, in response to eliminating discriminatory waste water treatment practices that threatened the health and quality of life of the surrounding communities. The need to end these environmental injustices led to the development of key resources and programs that strengthened community residents in their efforts to prevent and resolve urban flooding, combined sewer overflows, and water quality issues. Since its inception, both Eco-Action and WAWA have developed programs geared toward increasing community awareness and building capacity within the Turner Field and West Atlanta communities (Urban Waters Learning Network, 2018).

Amongst the many programs created to strengthen community advocacy, Eco-Action has worked to provide support to both the Proctor Creek and Intrenchment Creek watersheds by creating the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network. This program allows residents the opportunity to engage in learning sessions that equip them with the skillset needed to address water quality issues. Furthermore, the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network provide residents with the tools and resources needed to enhance their knowledge on urban flooding and the need for sustainable solutions.

Through the development of programs like the Atlanta Watershed Learning Network, Eco-Action and WAWA continue to strengthen communities and increase advocacy on the local level. In addition to educating community residents, these organizations have been successful in

preserving greenspace and protecting water quality by providing learning sessions, green infrastructure tours, and training workshops. Through the facilitation of these practices, these organizations have addressed flooding and urban pollution two prominent challenges within both East Atlanta and West Atlanta communities. Through partnerships with residents and non-governmental organizations, both organizations have laid the foundation that influenced the development of other African American-led environmental groups that also aim to focus on water governance issues in Atlanta.

4.5 Environmental Community Action

Established in 1989, Environmental Community Action (Eco-Action) is a grassroots driven organization that is committed to understanding the environmental problems that threatens communities who are vulnerable to political, social, and economic inequalities (Eco-Action, 2017). This organization serves as a catalyst to the communities it serves by providing resources to low income and minority residents (Urban Watershed Learning Network, 2018). Through partnerships with mainstream organizations, such as American Rivers and the Conservation Fund, and community-based groups, such as the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance and the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council, Eco-Action has assisted in organizing more than 140 community groups across the state of Georgia (Eco-Action, 2017).

Eco-Action has developed training programs designed for educating and empowering the Intrenchment Creek Watershed communities to advocate for environmental protections and equitable outcomes. Among their many initiatives, this organization focuses on addressing storm water issues and advocating for more livable neighborhoods for vulnerable communities (Urban Watershed Learning Network, 2018). Through the facilitation of learning sessions, community residents are equipped with the skills needed to advocate for effective storm water management

practices within their communities. Additionally, the work of Eco-Action focuses on the lack of minority representation in local city governance. Due to this, Eco-Action has built partnerships with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and civil rights attorneys to address the hazardous waste in several Georgia counties. Eco-Action has addressed discriminatory practices that produce inequitable and unjust outcomes in several underserved communities across the local and state level (Eco-Action, 2017).

4.6 The West Atlanta Watershed Alliance

The West Atlanta Watershed Alliance (WAWA), founded in 1995, is a community-based organization that has partnered with West Atlanta residents in their fight against environmental justice and the protection of green space and water quality. (West Atlanta Watershed Alliance, 2016). While WAWA developed as a result of community efforts to end discriminatory waste water treatment practices in West Atlanta, this organization expanded its mission by working to educate residents about environmental issues that affect community. WAWA is unique in nature because it is a volunteer organization that assists in mobilizing local residents through the use of place based learning. From my involvement with this organization, I have witnessed first-hand how WAWA teaches residents the importance of preserving, maintaining, and recreating the viability of green spaces. As a result of this practice, WAWA has been successful in preserving over 400 acres of greenspace from development in Southwest Atlanta (West Atlanta Watershed Alliance, 2016).

While WAWA advocates for environmental justice and the preservation of greenspace, they also use their platform to increase minority participation in Atlanta's urban, environmental landscape. In addition to conducting learning sessions and workshops, WAWA provides residents the opportunity to participate in service Saturday events that promote cultural

connection to natural resources and environmental engagement. Service Saturday events, such as creek clean ups, invasive plant removals, gardening, and hiking, introduce community residents to activities that enhance environmental stewardship and the use of sustainable practices.

4.7 The South River Watershed Alliance

The South River Watershed Alliance (SRWA), established in 2000, was formed to protect and restore the water quality and biodiversity of the South River watershed (SRWA, 2019). In order to promote community involvement, the SRWA hosts various projects including paddle trips, river walks, rivercane restoration, and water quality monitoring events. In addition, the SRWA developed the South River Stewardship Network in 2014. The aim of this network focuses on connecting with schools to further provide opportunities for hands-on learning. Although the SRWA works to address water quality concerns and promote learning opportunities, they differ from the other four community-based groups examined by focusing transforming local ordinance. The South River Watershed, which runs through the heart of DeKalb County a predominantly African American, working class community has suffered from various forms of pollution. According to the DeKalb County Department of Watershed Management, over 1,000 sewer spills have occurred in the county. Of the 1,000 sewer spills, 700 of these spills have been a direct result of fats, oils, and greases congesting the sewer pipes (SRWA, 2019). The increased occurrences of these spills led to community members advocating for the revision of the consent decree- a document that set forth by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division that fails to address how the main source of pollution should be remediated. (SRWA, 2019).

Due to the consent decree lacking vital information on how to address concerns of pollution, DeKalb County citizens and the South River Watershed Alliance (SRWA) took five

steps in addressing the problem: 1) Citizens and participants of SRWA have begun to hold DeKalb County elected officials accountable revising the consent decree to include a plan that reduces fats, oils, and grease pollution, 2) Participants are taking personal responsibility to limit urban pollution by properly disposing of fats, oils, and greases, 3) SRWA has taught residents the importance of preventative strategies when disposing of fats, oils, and greases, 4) SRWA has advocated for aggressive action by DeKalb County by implementing effective public education programs, and 5) SRWA continues to urge elected official to expand and support aggressive enforcement of the fats, oils, and grease ordinance. Residents and SRWA participants continue their fight to address concerns of water quality issues within the South River by working to transform local ordinances and water quality governance practices both on the local and state level.

4.8 The Proctor Creek Stewardship Council

The Proctor Creek Stewardship Council (PCSC) was established in 2013 through a collaboration with the WAWA, the Community Improvement Association, and Eco-Action. Through my involvement with the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council, I have identified how uniquely different this organization is compared to the other four organizations studied. This organization is led by residents who were chosen by community leaders as a result of their involvement in environmental justice focused training sessions. The PCSC aims to address the water quality issues taking place in the Proctor Creek Watershed by addressing six goals: 1) develop stewards who are strong and empowered leaders, 2) grow educated and empowered communities, 3) advocate for the fair treatment and inclusion of the Proctor Creek communities, 4) collaborate with public and private partners, 5) serve the community as an interdisciplinary,

scientific and technical collaborative, and 6) influence sustainable land use and water resource planning (Atlanta Watershed Learning Network, 2018).

To further address the goals, members of the PCSC conduct monthly meetings bringing together residents from northwest Atlanta communities that surround the Proctor Creek Watershed. These meetings provide residents the opportunity to plan activities that promote their mission. (Proctor Creek Stewardship Council, 2018). The initiatives set forth by the PCSC have attracted the attention of government agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency's Urban Waters Partnership (Environmental Protection Agency Urban Waters Partnership, 2018). The continued work of the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council encourages the promotion of self-advocacy, a tool that has been instrumental in addressing water quality concerns in Proctor Creek.

4.9 The Atlanta Watershed Learning Network

The Atlanta Watershed Learning Network (AWLN), which began in 2017, is a cross-collaboration organization that was co-founded by leaders of Eco-Action, WAWA, and American Rivers. This organization evolved from community concerns of urban flooding and the implications it has on the quality of life of marginalized communities (Urban Waters Learning Network, 2018). This network is unique due to the fact that it works across watersheds by bringing together residents from the Proctor Creek and Intrenchment Creek watersheds. By participating in the AWLN's 2019 cohort, I have learned that this organization has a threefold purpose which aims to 1) expand community knowledge and skills to address water quality and stormwater challenges, 2) encourage community members to become change agents for the protection of their watershed by advocating for the improvement of water quantity and water quality, and 3) increase participants' participatory engagement by using knowledge management

assessment tools (i.e. Noticing, Keeper and Motivation (NKMs) and Motivation, Attitude, Skills, Knowledge and Action (MASKA) tools). These tools are used in a six-module learning session that provides training sessions and learning opportunities focused on stormwater flooding issues, green infrastructure, and environmental justice advocacy.

While the AWLN encourages place-based learning, a tool used to immerse community members in local heritage, culture, and landscapes, this organization introduces community residents to stormwater management practices by teaching them the importance of green and gray stormwater infrastructure and explaining how each impacts structured decision making in their watersheds. By participating in green infrastructure tours, learning sessions, and community meetings, resident participants have the opportunity to inform and educate other residents along with public and elected officials (Eco-Action, 2017). By building the community capacity to support the use of green stormwater infrastructure, community members understand sustainable measures that can address urban flooding and further feel empowered to advocate for change. (Eco-Action, 2017)

Based on the history of these organizations, it is evident that these African-American led environmental groups share similarities in highlighting the importance of residents having access to external advocacy groups. In addition to addressing their own individual issues, these groups embrace the importance of collaborative problem solving and have collaboratively worked together towards combating the issues taking place in Atlanta's urban communities. While working to engage community members, the leaders of each organization have also worked alongside Atlanta government officials, non-governmental organizations, and several Atlanta colleges and universities to bring awareness to the environmental degradation and water governance issues that continuously impact urban watersheds.

In addition to collaborative problem solving, these organizations have worked to transform the perspective of community members by introducing them to environmental advocacy, green infrastructure, and water quality management. Community engagement, education, and public outreach build on the mission of these African American-led environmental groups as they aim to educate and empower communities to advocate for equity and environmental protections that benefit the urban watersheds and eradicate other forms of social and environmental injustices. Furthermore, by deploying effective strategies and developing partnerships with mainstream environmental groups, these African American-led community-based groups contribute to transforming traditional practices found in the mainstream environmental groups. Atlanta proves that the transformation of mainstream environmental practices can be accomplished through ongoing research, community engagement, transparent dialogue, and collaboration amongst traditional and non-traditional environmental groups. Because Atlanta's African American-led, community-based groups deploy a range of practices and strategies as they interact with community members, the scope for understanding how the strategies are used requires inquiries into their advocacy framework, everyday practices, and the response to Atlanta's current resilient framework.

4.10 Re-defining Traditional Environmental Advocacy

This section answers the first research question by discussing the strategies being deployed to address environmental challenges and further empower marginalized community members. The cases presented from my recent research demonstrates how these community-based groups are re-defining traditional forms of environmental advocacy by valuing community knowledge and civic engagement. Finney argues that the dominant environmental portrayal within the United States is primarily constructed and instructed by white voices. Missing from the

traditional narrative are perspectives that remain grounded in the legacy of African American experiences in the United States (Finney, 2014). Historically, the lack of African American involvement in the environmental landscape has led to narrowed forms of environmental advocacy which often times do not address concerns of inequity and disproportionate environmental burdens. In order to mobilize change within urban communities, African American grassroots environmental groups began to adopt unconventional strategies similar to strategies used to address earlier civil rights issues (Bullard & Wright, 1992). The five African American-led community-based groups that I have studied differ from mainstream environmental groups by valuing communities who are often neglected from the traditional environmental practices and decision-making processes. The community-based groups exemplify grassroots approaches when redressing disproportionate impacts through targeted actions. Leaders of these community-based groups characterize their organizations as being catalyst for the community by assisting with identifying the root causes of injustice through informal practices. Different from traditional environmental groups, the African American-led organizations studied understand the value of communities that have concerns which are often neglected. Prior to addressing environmental concerns, these organizations place an emphasis on marginalized communities and examine the environmental challenges these communities continue to face. As one group participant expressed,

I think that is one of the traits that [each of these Black-led organizations] have in common. There is an emphasis on people. By people, I mean people in the community. Their efforts are never dictatorial. It is always something that is partnered. They have the resources; however, they open those resources to the community...

- *Group Participant, WAWA*

The community-based focus of these organizations results in gaining trust from the community members. Furthermore, by understanding the value of community members and their lived experiences, these groups are able to identify the root causes of injustice through informal practices. As one group leader summarized,

Bottom line is we do it [our work] first by listening. We are listening to the communities about their concerns, the issues. Through the process of listening we are able to help them [the community members] analyze the problems into the point of getting to the root cause...it is our root cause that helps us to help them come up with an organizing strategy.

- *Group Leader, Eco-Action*

While group leaders use the informal practice of listening as a way to identify root causes, this practice also function to create a culture of empowerment throughout the community. The promotion of community empowerment produces collaborative, community wide approaches which work towards addressing inequitable conditions and decisions (Bullard, 1996; Bullard and Johnson, 2000). Furthermore, the encouragement of this approach pushes back against the way that community knowledge has been devalued, discredited, and ignored.

There is a notion where the perceived professionals, your scientist, government officials, and large NGO officials, have a certain level of expertise that creates a power dominance over community members...Especially in minority communities, because often times they are overlooked and not brought to the table. When they are not brought to the table, you are missing out on key information and key experiences that you can't get anywhere else. No matter how much research a scientist or planner does, they can never tell you how it actually feels to live there and to experience what they are experiencing. Unless, they actually live there, which often times they don't.

- *AWLN Co-Founder*

When I interviewed another group leader, they too expressed the importance of community knowledge.

Our organization has worked to deploy strategies that would help residents to fight against environmental injustices really by using a grassroots collaborative approach that is responsive to community needs, but also that values the knowledge and expertise of community residents... While on one hand we do a lot to provide education and educational resources, training... we work on some capacity building with respect to people understanding what those environmental issues are based on our expertise. But we also realize and recognize that community residents from their lived experience have a certain type of expertise as well that they are bringing to a lot of the environmental challenges that we face in our communities. So, when I talk about this collaborative approach it's about working hand in hand with the community. It is about using an approach that value the process just as much as we value the outcomes that can result, but it is also a process that values the knowledge that community residents have. So, we see and work from an asset community-based frame. So, we recognize that there are a number of assets in our community... Even in communities that might on the outside appear to be poor and have a lot of challenges, we see the assets in those communities and we work to leverage those assets by working collaboratively with the residents.

- *Group Leader, WAWA*

Understanding the importance of community knowledge is one of the many common threads among the five community-based groups studied. Through this shared focus, these community-based groups are able to use a collaborative approach that is responsive to community needs. This approach aids in the development of organizing strategies that not only aim to address environmental disparities but allow the opportunity to develop long-term training and learning exchange that is beneficial to the community at large.

The five community-based groups studied differ from traditional mainstream environmental groups by appreciating and understanding the value of communities that are often isolated and suffer from perpetual neglect. The perception of vulnerable communities is crucially important when working to develop an organizing strategy that aim to amplify voices of color in their fight against environmental challenges. Though the strategies used by these community-based groups

reflects the concept of Environmental Justice, it also emphasizes the importance of introducing marginalized communities to environmental education and environmental related outdoor activities. Establishing the connection between communities and the greater outdoors influences the empowerment of community members by equipping them with the strategies and tools needed to recognize environmental injustices and effectively combat them. Organizations that embrace grassroots efforts challenge the usual practices of land protection and wildlife habitat restoration that are primarily practiced by conservation oriented groups (Bullard, 1993). These organizations are re-defining traditional forms of advocacy by contributing to a community-based framework that is necessary when addressing vulnerable communities (Bullard, 1993). While these practices reconsider the foundation of environmental advocacy, they are also used to withstand exclusions and stigmas that are often presented in the mainstream environmental movement.

4.11 Counteracting the Exclusions and Stigma Found within Mainstream

Environmentalism

Collin and Collin (2015) argue that exclusionary practices found within mainstream environmentalism veils unconscious racism that threatens to unintentionally reproduce racist outcomes. Due to the lack of collaboration and support from mainstream environmental groups, environmental justice communities struggle against barriers to build a framework for restorative policy based on equitable and just governance. As a result, community-based group leaders saw the need to develop organizations that primarily focus on addressing the concerns commonly found in marginalized communities. In addition to addressing these concerns, these community-based groups use their platform to increase minority participation in environmental related activities. This section answers research question two by demonstrating how African American

led community-based groups are working to expand the discourse between mainstream environmental groups and marginalized communities.

As a result of their efforts to empower minority communities, these community-based groups have gained the attention of mainstream environmental groups, resulting in invitations to collaborate on community focused projects and initiatives. While mainstream organizations, such as American Rivers, the Nature Conservancy, Park Pride, Trees Atlanta, and the Conservation Fund, shape Atlanta's environmental policy, they lack success in attracting low socioeconomic and minority participants. Unlike mainstream organizations, grassroots based environmental groups have had more success in attracting people of color (Bullard & Wright, 1992). In efforts to increase minority participation, mainstream environmental groups look to the African American led community-based groups when learning strategies that will enhance community participation and grassroots efforts. The collaboration between these groups have worked against the exclusionary practices commonly found in the history of environmentalism. As one group leader expressed,

I think historically mainstream environmentalism has been a movement that has excluded the participation of minorities. When I think about how I began doing this work twenty years ago, at that time the mainstream environmental organizations did not even consider many of these issues that we are dealing with now with respect to environmental injustices and equitable development. They did not even see these issues as relating to their issues and their causes...If you were talking about pollution and environmental injustice issues, they kind of put that aside in a separate category and did not integrate it into the mainstream context of the movement that they were trying to advance.

- *Group Leader, WAWA*

A group participant of the PCSC expressed similar views by stating,

I definitely think historically mainstream environmentalism has been a movement that has excluded the participation of minorities.

And even as those mainstream movements started to open up a little bit, I still feel like certain communities were marginalized. When I think about how I began doing this work twenty years ago, fresh out of college essentially, at that time the mainstream environmental organizations did not even consider many of these issues that we are dealing with now with respect to environmental injustices and with respect to equity and equitable development. Environmental justice, or even talking about the environment in cities, was not a part of what they were focused on. They were focused on conservation, wilderness areas. They were not looking inside of the city. It was all focused on outside of the city. If you were talking about pollution and environmental justice issues, they kind of put that aside in a separate category and did not integrate it into mainstream context of the movement that they were trying to advance.

- *Group Participant, PCSC*

By narrowly conceptualizing environmental concerns, mainstream environmental groups often neglect the critical impacts of environmental threats and its impact on social and cultural systems (Collins & Collins, 2005). According to the group leader interviewed, marginalized communities define environmental concerns using a people based approach that has been dismissed by mainstream environmental groups. Since the inception of the Environmental Justice movement, many African American grassroots environmental groups have adopted adversarial strategies similar to those used to address civil rights issues. Through the use of unconventional strategies such as protests, neighborhood demonstrations, and litigation specifically aimed towards addressing marginal concerns, many African American led environmental based groups have re-defined forms of conventional environmental advocacy (Bullard & Wright, 1992). Growing concerns regarding the traditional ideologies and practices within mainstream environmentalism have influenced the need to diversify practices in order to address various environmental concerns. As one mainstream environmental group leader states,

The mainstream environmental community, in the nation, which has a very white history... it's like it's a cyclical thing where every now and then everybody goes... our movement is all white this is

bad. I feel like this time around it is doing a little better and we are digging a little deeper. It's not just that's it been a very white movement, but even if you look back to the 20th century. It's not just that some of your conservation leader were old white men, but there was some explicit racism in the history of the environmental movement. It is important to understand things like that. It is obviously important to think through all aspects going forward.

- *Staff Member, American Rivers*

Mainstream environmental groups are recognizing the importance of eradicating normalized racism within their framework and have begun to collaborate with grassroots organizations to further expand their focus on environmental concerns taking place in urban communities. Unlike mainstream environmental groups, grassroots focused environmental based groups have had more success attracting people of color (Bullard & Wright, 1994). Bullard and Wright (1994) argue African American communities are drawn to interests centered around issues that focus on equity frameworks, endorse political direct action, and seek empowerment of marginalized groups. Focusing specifically on Atlanta, community-based groups and mainstream environmental groups are cross collaborating in order to both address environmental concerns and effectively produce equitable outcomes. A leader of one of Atlanta's mainstream environmental groups expressed,

Working with these community-based groups and seeing them in action has helped me see how deeply important it is to connect with people, to meet people where they are, and truly engage in the environmental issues that we are seeking to address. When you take interest in people, it's amazing. Being willing to start that big, uncomfortable conversation has been a requirement that we've put into all of these partnerships. Trying to make sure that we are replicating all of the good advice that we got. Especially if you [are a] ...national, white non-profit from out of the neighborhood, you need to be aware of that. You need to be the one to take the steps to acknowledge that conversation and be willing to have it...

- *Staff Member, The Conservation Fund*

While mainstream environmental groups use these collaboration opportunities to promote diversity and inclusion, I have examined how African American led community-based groups have use this collaboration as a means to introduce community members to non-urban environmental landscapes and traditional practices used to explore the greater outdoors.

4.12 Increasing Minority Participation in the Urban Environmental Landscape

Studies have addressed the concerns regarding the lack of minority participation in environmental related activities. Singularly, African Americans exhibit the lowest rate of participation in outdoor activities (Floyd, 1999). In order to increase minority participation in environmental related activities, three out of the five African American led community-based groups examined use place based learning as a tool which provides a cultural connection to the greater outdoors. This strategy is one that promotes environmental engagement while assisting community members in understanding the value of nature located in urban settings. As one group leader expressed,

If we want to help protect, revitalize, and restore these natural resources then they [community members] have to feel some type of connection to those resources. Whether it's having people to monitor water quality, pick up trash out of the streams by the way of creek clean ups, or work in some of our forested spaces to remove invasive plants...we have an ethic around caring for the land and helping people to understand how the land cares for us.

- *Group Leader, WAWA*

Through the practice of place-based learning, community-based groups have excelled in introducing residents to various realms of environmental interaction while demonstrating the importance of remaining connected to familiar spaces. According to group leaders, this approach has a two-fold aim. While increasing community participation in environmental activities, this approach works towards destigmatizing barriers between marginalized communities and outdoor

recreation that has traditionally appeared as a “white face” (Finney, 2014). When I asked community members to express their reactions towards environmental based activities, community members who participate in one of the five community-based groups studied, demonstrated a fondness towards participating in outdoor activities. Furthermore, the members have stated their increased involvement in these activities was largely influenced by their connection with the African-American led environmental based groups.

WAWA gave me hands on experience that I was never interested in before. Like camping... Now, I am out in the nature hiking. I am out in parks way more than I used to be... I feel like WAWA has me generally interested in exploring different worlds. Even when I go out to different cities and out of state... I want to see what their green space look like. Yes, it totally has given me a different perspective.

- *Group Participant, WAWA*

When I got involved, that was the real door opening to me and the greater outdoors. During my time, that is when I took my first hike...I experienced my first camping trip. Even my first state park trip... and so being in these organizations especially since they are Black-led I think I have seen familiar faces that has help me transition to the outdoors and help me appreciate it more.

- *Group Participant, WAWA*

Although African American led community-based groups are making significant strides in drawing connections to community members and the greater outdoors, there are many unaddressed challenges that remain unresolved when working to truly diversify mainstream environmentalism. Challenges of inequitable resources coupled with the implications of tokenized behavior has introducing new barriers faced by minority led community-based groups.

4.13 Genuine Diversification NOT Tokenization

This section answers research question three by discussing the challenges faced as a result of integrating marginalized communities into mainstream environmentalism. While

African American led community-based groups have revamped traditional environmental advocacy, there are many unresolved challenges that prohibit inclusive behavior and equitable outcomes. Scholars argue that the goal for most African Americans is equity and equality rather than integration and assimilation (Daniels, 2002; Finney, 2014). As a result of historically being excluded from the mainstream environmental movement, community-based groups suffer from unequal distribution of resources needed to sustain the mission of their work. Bullard argues that a small number of environmental justice groups organized by people of color receive foundation funding. As a result, most groups have limited capacity and operate with resources generated from the local community (Bullard, 1993). The continued lack of funding continues limits the capacity needed to sustain the operations of the organization. To gain further insight, I asked African American leaders to express their concerns regarding the challenges of the unequal distribution of resources. As one leader states,

I would say when you are talking about the environmental movement, [the] environmental community broadly, initially the competition for financial resources was very much siloed. What I mean by that is it was a very competitive process to seek funding to stay operational [and] to get your programs out there. So, it wasn't an environment that fostered collaboration. If you were an environmental education group or an environmental conservation group, you were head down trying to get your programs, projects, and work done and you didn't necessarily look horizontally at who might be able to help you. That environment is changing, and now we are seeing funding that is much more collaborative. Partnerships are so much more important now, but for a long time I believe that that restriction in how we could leverage financial funding really hampered our ability one to work together and work with each other. It also put constraints on the scalability of our organizations. So, it kept us kind of small and mighty. It kept us just short of being able to create real impact.

- *Group Leader, WAWA*

In addition to the battle over resource allocation, environmental justice driven community-based groups are often stigmatized with the assumption that all communities share the same experiences. As a result of continued assumptions that African Americans share a monolithic environmental experience, community-based groups have often felt tokenized by mainstream environmental groups. Finney argues that one of the biggest challenges for environmental groups is how they quickly associate the relationship between African Americans and the environment to concerns of environmental justice (Finney, 2014). Though African Americans are involved in environmental justice work, the work being done by minority communities expand far beyond the EJ spectrum. These continued assumptions not only elicit frustrations amongst minority led community-based groups, but they also constrain progressive action toward transforming the environmental context. In order to explore the notion of tokenism as it relates to the environmental movement, I felt it was vital to understand the perception of African American led community-based group leaders and participants. As one organizer stated:

I think environmentalism is definitely exclusionary. I think that the Proctor Creek Stewardship Council, WAWA, Eco-Action, AWLN... these are all organizations that kind of stand as the poster child... mainstream environmental groups turn to them to diversify. There is a positive and negative to that. The positive is that it is making an effort, it is reaching out to community led organizations but the negative to that is that you are tokenizing these organizations and giving them the power to speak on behalf of the community. It goes back to that notion that Black people are a monolith. No minority group is a monolith. You can't speak on behalf of the entire race.

- *Group Participant, PCSC*

Another participant expressed concerns about tokenism by stating:

We don't want to just be a token. Don't use us strictly for diversity... What you [mainstream groups] can't do is move in on a community and act like you know what is going on when you don't. We don't need saviors. That is not what we need. We need

you to come in and collaborate with us... you need to listen before you come in and project these beautiful projects and these ideas.

- *Group Participant, WAWA*

When asked their thoughts on the idea of tokenism, one group leader responded by stating:

There has been a time, and it still happens, but a big mainstream environmental organization could get money to do a project in X community and then they might come up to a group like [us] and say “Hey, can you help us do this?” Can you help us bring community residents together? Can you help us promote this? Or, get people engaged in that?” But there would be no resources for that work as if the end goal of what they were trying to do was the primary thing of importance... without recognizing that if you don’t have the people with you in the communities that you are trying to affect or help then you are missing a huge part of the equation. We also said, “No, we aren’t just going to do this for you for free.” So, there has been some devaluing...

- *Group Leader, WAWA*

Based on the responses, it is evident that tokenism and unequal distribution of resources are the many challenges faced by African-American led community-based groups. Tokenizing these community-based groups prohibit them to contribute their thoughts toward environmental challenges and potential resolutions. The exclusion from the environmental decision-making process has often been identified in Atlanta’s efforts to addressing environmental concerns. When developing the resilience strategy, many of the community-based groups studied were not included in the process. In order to redress this concern, it is vital to explore the drawbacks of resilient strategies and how these drawbacks have impacted Atlanta’s marginalized communities.

4.14 Resourcefulness Promotes Progressive Action

This section answers the fourth research question by emphasizing strategies that are useful in promoting inclusivity in Atlanta’s environmental decision-making process. To further

examine the responses toward Atlanta's resilience strategy, group leaders and participants were asked to share their thoughts on the city's initiatives. Based on the interviews conducted, community members and group leaders shared similar concerns about the resilient strategy and the implementation of infrastructure that aims to mitigate urban flooding.

So, there are [green storm water infrastructure] installations going around...in areas where we are seeing that gentrification is on the rise. So, I think what we are beginning to see is that there's a constant notion that green space is only available where white faces are, or where white faces should be. You can take, of course, the biggest example: The Beltline. So, the beltline, you have twenty plus year plan of green space and walkability features that are destined for white areas... like areas that are becoming white or that are already white. So, you have the Westside that is scary in becoming white... scary that it is actually becoming gentrified. You have your upper parts of Buckhead that are already white. Even, I think, long term plans to go towards College Park and the airport... That whole effort is a gentrifying effort. Or, at least right now it is a gentrifying effort. That is not to say that the city is doing that purposely, but I do think that these strategies aren't inclusive. Inclusive being that they are not taking into account current community residents.

- *Group Participant, WAWA*

While the city believes the resilient framework encourages community empowerment, residents believe this strategy promotes adverse impacts that perpetuate environmental and social threats. In addition to emphasizing the concerns towards resilience, this section intends to explore the idea of transforming resilience strategy into resourcefulness approach. Although most of the African American community-based groups studied demonstrate passion for increasing participation in environmental education and stewardship, others continue to combat environmental issues by addressing the issues of water quality governance taking place on the local and state level. This type of organizing strategy is pivotal when ensuring that the concerns of the marginalized are included in decision making processes. While these organizations have

used this strategy to address water governance issues in their local municipalities, I wanted to observe how and if these organizations used this strategy when dealing with the outcomes of Atlanta's resilient framework: *Resilience Atlanta: Actions to Build an Equitable Future*. Before understanding the communities' perception of the city's resilience framework, I wanted to first understand community members' feelings toward the concept of resilience.

The concept of resilience is traditionally used to describe a community's ability to recover from environmental interference. While seen as a coping mechanism when dealing with environmental stressors, this concept focuses on the responsive capacities of urban communities (Derickson, 2012). Even though the concept of resilience is normally deemed as an innovative approach to tackle environmental challenges, many argue that resilience is the reinventing of spaces that prevents disruptive changes from occurring. (Derickson, 2012). Although resilience concepts are beneficial when addressing the results of environmental challenges, it limits the opportunity to implement community-based strategy into the traditional functioning of cities. Similar to other metropolitan areas in the nation, Atlanta has embraced the idea of a resilience-oriented policy that offers a set of visions and actions that address social equity and climate change adaptation (Adaptation Clearinghouse, 2011). During the strategy building of this resiliency framework, the city assured that community voices would be a vital component to the strategy building. While this is true for West Atlanta communities, Atlanta's east side residents expressed that they were not brought to the table. One group leader advocating for the environmental rights of Atlanta's southeast community expressed,

They haven't reached out to our organization. I understand that they have reached out to folks on the West Side, because of some other things that are going on that side...

- Group Leader, SRWA

While some community-based groups felt direct exclusion, others felt uncertain about the resilient policies developed by the city and lacked understanding on how the strategy connects with the issues taking place within their urban watersheds. When asked to share responses on the city's collaboration with community-based groups, several group leaders and participants expressed their concern about the resilience framework and the uncertainty around the operationalizing of the strategies set forth by the city.

If I am fighting for South River and Atlanta is promoting resiliency what does that equate to when I am looking at the South River? What does that equate to when I am looking at the major source of trash pollution in the South River... If resiliency is your mantra now, what does that mean to you?...

- *Group Leader, SRWA*

Even though West Atlanta community residents were extended an invite to the decision-making table, they too have expressed concerns regarding the development of Atlanta's resilience strategy. As one group leader stated,

I feel like it took them too long to get something in place. I will just say that. That is the first thing, but in terms of that framework, I actually was a part of that process. I do not think it was a perfect process, but I was encouraged that we were able to begin to get equity on the agenda. Because, I feel like for a minute we haven't really talked about those issues. It's something about Atlanta. We have these widespread disparities, but nobody wants to talk about race. Nobody wants to talk about the history of race and how that history... how race and racial politics have shaped how Atlanta has been developed and how we kind of remain vulnerable in some ways in respect to climate change and other kind of shocks and stressors. Shocks and stressors that we might actually face here in the city. My main response is that... what has been put forward is not enough and it's not moving fast enough in terms of what has been put there...

- *Group Leader, WAWA*

Another West Atlanta resident stated,

I think that there has been a shift of focus to where Atlanta is looking at the term resilience not in the sense of an environmental viewpoint but more so in the sense of just equity. So, I think that Atlanta was on a good pace to become a resilient city based on Rockefeller's outline objectives. I think that that pace is going to start to slow down, because I just don't think it is the focus of the current administration. Which not to say it was the previous mayor's focus either, but I do think it is going to take some getting in front of the current mayor and showing her how the environment also has equitable outcomes... I think in addition to resilience people look at the term equity differently. I think that there are some organizations that look at equity from the viewpoint of that making sure that everybody has an equal chance and opportunity for resources. I think some people look at equity in the sense of the financial term of what equity is when you think about the market and having assets and stuff like that...

- *Group Participant, PCSC*

From the responses received, it is evident that community members and grassroots organizations have concerns regarding the vision of the resilience strategy. Whether those concerns stem from the community member's lack of understanding around the term resilience or failing to understand the connection between the strategies and EJ advocacy, the current approach holds little promise of promoting social and environmental justice. Resilient strategies that neglect the inclusion of marginalized communities elevates the operations of governance over the well-being of communities that are meant to be resilient (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013). Although vulnerable communities are said to be the focus of strategy, they are not dominant at the decision-making table. In order to eradicate this, it is vital to adopt strategies that are inclusive in nature and promote progressive action.

MacKinnon and Derickson (2013) understood the need for a progressive strategy that would address marginal involvement in the environmental decision-making process. As a result,

they developed the concept of resourcefulness- an alternative to resilience that amplifies the injustice of redistribution. The concept of resourcefulness advances the vision of transforming marginalized communities to resourceful communities in which residents have the capacity to engage in the decision-making process while working to develop alternative agendas that address existing challenges (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013). Most importantly, the resourcefulness concept emphasizes forms of learning and social mobilization based upon the local needs identified by community activists and residents. Similarly to the EJ approach adopted by the five African American led community-based groups studied, the resourcefulness framework is defined by four key elements which emphasize the importance of resources, the advancement of skillsets and technical knowledge, the promotion of folk knowledge, and the significance of cultural recognition. The combination of these four dimensions elicit wider connections and continuous forms of skills that allow marginalized communities the opportunity to challenge traditional decision-making practices. Furthermore, the adoption of this relational approach by city and state officials empowers community members to expand past the traditional dependence of local and state governance.

In order to address the challenges in Atlanta's current resilience strategy, resilient concepts should be reconsidered and transcend into a resourcefulness approach that embraces a dual effort to address environmental challenges and promote community empowerment. Through this alternative approach, African American led community-based groups will gain increased leverage at the decision-making table. Furthermore, this provides them the opportunity to amplify their concerns as it relates to combating the growing concern of environmental and social injustice. While this approach is beneficial to the challenges taking place in Atlanta, other cities could benefit from this movement of thought that is counter-systemic and inclusive in

nature (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013). By fostering this approach, forms of local community activism can overcome barriers when working to transform water quality governance and decision-making processes.

4.15 Conclusion.

The cross collaborative structure and framework coupled with a regional focus makes each African American led community-based group unique in its efforts to combat environmental injustices and social exclusion. Although these organizations have made advances in diversifying Atlanta's mainstream environmental organizations, it is evident they continue to face challenges that perpetuate the racial implications and social exclusions traditionally found in the environmental movement. While faced with challenges, these community-based groups remain hopeful in addressing the environmental challenges found within their urban watersheds. Through advocacy, these organizations have expanded their work by bridging the gap between marginalized, urban communities and their exposure to the natural environment. Re-developing traditional advocacy has allowed these community-based groups to successfully equip marginalized communities with effective resourceful strategies that empowers them to advocate for equitable outcomes.

From the research conducted, it is evident that EJ scholarship has influenced the framework of the community-based groups studied. Through the use of boots-on-the-ground approaches, these groups exemplify a "people to power" ideology that fosters the advancement of their community while destigmatizing the assumed relationship between African Americans and the environmental landscape. Although these groups have successfully enhanced their communities, they still face challenges as it relates to environmental decision-making policies and equitable distribution of resources. In order to enrich the environmental movement, it is vital to re-define

the traditional framework of environmentalism and challenge it by implementing progressive action. This transformation of practice requires the cultivation of multi-scalar partnerships between grassroots-driven community-based groups and traditional, mainstream environmental organizations. The adoption of these partnerships will in return address the racialized nature of the environmental movement, stimulate diversity and inclusion, and ultimately embrace a resourceful approach to addressing environmental and conservation related challenges across scales.

5 CONCLUSION

Historically, the mainstream environmental movement has thrived on developed agendas that promote conservation, wilderness preservation, and natural resource management. Although these goals have been primarily supported by affluent whites, there is a shift occurring which promotes participation from minority communities (Bullard, 1993). From the research conducted, it is evident that African American-led community-based groups play an evolving role in addressing environmental challenges. Through the use of their community-based frameworks, these organizations have contributed to the enhancement of marginalized communities by furnishing them with strategies that are needed when addressing environmental injustices. In addition to this skillset, these groups have increased value in communities of color by connecting them to nature through place based learning and environmental engagement.

The unique strategies deployed by these organizations have been pivotal in re-defining the environmental advocacy taking place in Atlanta's urban communities. Although these organizations have greatly contributed to marginalized communities and mainstream environmental groups, they continue to face challenges when working to transform environmental decision-making processes. In order to elevate the environmental movement, it is

vital to cultivate multi-scalar partnerships between traditional environmental groups and grassroots-driven community-based groups. While these partnerships will work towards eliminating the racial undertones traditionally found in the environmental movement, they will promote knowledge transfer between environmental non-governmental organizations, community-based groups, and those who have gained mastery from lived experiences. Furthermore, this collaboration will elicit resourceful practices that re-define how we examine long-established practices of environmental governance.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Questions for Community-based Group Leaders

The following interview questions were tailored towards the leaders of each community-based group:

- 1) How has your organization worked toward deploying strategies that would further equip community residents to fight against the environmental injustices and displacement taking place within their communities?
- 2) Do you perceive mainstream environmentalism to be a movement that excludes the participation of minorities?
- 3) How does your organization contribute to diversity within mainstream environmentalism?
- 4) Have you noticed any obstacles to integrating your work with mainstream environmentalism?
- 5) How did your organization respond to the resilient framework that was deployed by the city of Atlanta following the 2009 flood?

Appendix B: Interview Questions for Community-based Group Participants

The following questions were tailored towards the participants of each community-based group:

- 1) Are you aware of Atlanta's efforts to become a resilient city?
- 2) What is your response towards Atlanta's journey of becoming a resilient city?
- 3) Do you believe the resilient strategies being deployed by the city results in the alteration or exclusion of certain communities?
- 4) Do you see environmental inequalities in Atlanta between different communities?
- 5) How has your participation in this organization contributed towards your understanding of how to address environmental challenges taking place within your community?

6) Has your participation in this group influenced your involvement in environmental based activities?