

Garbage Governmentalities and Environmental Justice in New Jersey

In this dissertation I research the evolution of garbage governance approaches in New Jersey and related geographies from the 1870s through the 1970s. My goal is to examine how governance approaches are implicated in the production of contrasting but mutually-constituted landscapes of garbage disposal and environmental cleanliness. This work gives special attention to how the current pattern of landfills, incinerators, and solid waste transfer stations in the State came to be distributed among differently situated people and places, especially during the State's implementation of a solid waste flow control policy in the 1970s and its cited spatial, environmental, and economic components. Research questions are directly informed by environmental justice studies that consider the role of the State and specific government policies in producing differential landscapes of environmental quality in relation to larger power structures and socio-spatial processes of capitalism, colonialism, and racism. However, this work differs by situating the production of environmental (in)justice within a more diffuse notion of power, using Foucault's concept of governmentality as a model of governance. Accordingly, this work examines the story of how garbage governance practices have become internalized and enacted at multiple scales, from the individual, to households, to the formal institutions of government, and in relation to how the state promotes certain subjectivities and social relations to achieve the general population's health, safety, and welfare; ensure circulation within the political-economic system; and deploy space in governance projects. As garbage and society scholarship shows, garbage is simultaneously a human resource and a burden, and therefore the object of multiple governmental interventions within which environmental justice issues emerge.



Rubbish Dump, showing Italian Girl Engaged in Her Daily Occupation of Culling Rubbish.

From the 1898 New Jersey State Board of Health Annual Report. Practices such as scavenging were common at dumps prior to the establishment of formal garbage collection and disposal services by municipal governments and private companies.