

The Hidden Consequences of Climate Change

The Hidden Facts

- Climate change disproportionately negatively impacts those who are least responsible for its advancement, namely persons of color.
- African Americans are least responsible for climate change. African-Americans as a group emit 6,171 kg of carbon dioxide per person, a little over 20 percent less than whites and nearly 18 percent less than all Americans. Yet they are one of the most severely impacted groups.

Impacts of Climate Change

Death due to severe heat conditions

- Climate change would increase heat-related deaths by at least 90%. African Americans are more likely to live in inner cities, which are about ten degrees warmer than non-urban areas.
- Heat-related deaths among African Americans occur at a 150 to 200 percent greater rate than for non-Hispanic whites.

Illness from exposure to pollutants that drive climate change and directly impact health

- Asthma, which is exacerbated by pollutants, affects African Americans at a 36% higher rate of incidence than whites.
- African Americans are hospitalized for asthma at three times the rate of whites and die of asthma at twice the rate of whites.
- 71% of African Americans live in counties in violation of federal air pollution standards, as compared to 58% of the white population
- 78% of African Americans live within 30 miles of a coal-fired power plant, as compared to 56% of non-Hispanic whites. They are also more likely to live adjacent to a landfill or incinerator.
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Physical Displacement

- African Americans have a higher tendency to live in coastal areas, which are impacted by rising sea levels overtaking coastal lands.
- These areas, and others, are also affected by increases in catastrophic or destructive storms.
- Results in widespread civic disenfranchisement, as was the case following Hurricane Katrina.

Changes in Agricultural Yields-- Food insecurity/malnutrition

- At 25.7%, African Americans experience food insecurity at much higher rates than the national average of 14.6%.
- Climate change affects food security through shifts in agricultural yields and due to inequitable “solutions” like biofuels, which result in lack of diversity in farming as farmers shift towards mono-cropping of corn for production of ethanol.

Economic insecurity resulting from drivers and impacts of climate change

- Examples: Shrimpers in the Gulf of Mexico losing their jobs after the Gulf Oil Drilling Disaster (emblematic of challenges perils of fossil fuels); Hundreds of workers affected by flooding in Nashville, Tennessee; Financial devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita
- Heightened rates of illness impact capacity to work, which results in severe compromising of economic wellbeing

Violence and criminalization

- Increases in economic insecurity can drive rises in crime
- Natural disasters have been shown to result in spikes in physical and sexual violence against women and girls.
- Disaster situations tend to result in increased militarism and have been accompanied by the criminalization of survivors, as witnessed by numerous incidents in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Solutions

- Reducing Emissions Significantly
- Shifting to Renewable Energy Sources—Wind, Solar, Hydro, Geothermal
- Putting Adaptation Funding in the Hands of Most Impacted Communities