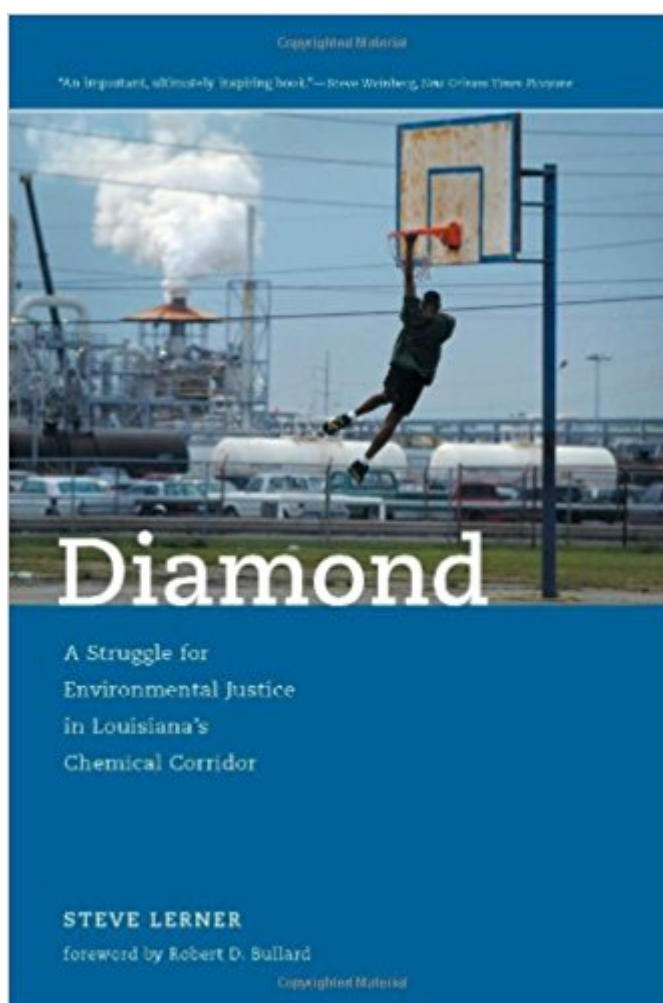


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Diamond: A Struggle For Environmental Justice In Louisiana's Chemical Corridor (Urban And Industrial Environments)



Synopsis

For years, the residents of Diamond, Louisiana, lived with an inescapable acrid, metallic smell -- the "toxic bouquet" of pollution -- and a mysterious chemical fog that seeped into their houses. They looked out on the massive Norco Industrial Complex: a maze of pipelines, stacks topped by flares burning off excess gas, and huge oil tankers moving up the Mississippi. They experienced headaches, stinging eyes, allergies, asthma, and other respiratory problems, skin disorders, and cancers that they were convinced were caused by their proximity to heavy industry. Periodic industrial explosions damaged their houses and killed some of their neighbors. Their small, African-American, mixed-income neighborhood was sandwiched between two giant Shell Oil plants in Louisiana's notorious Chemical Corridor. When the residents of Diamond demanded that Shell relocate them, their chances of success seemed slim: a community with little political clout was taking on the second-largest oil company in the world. And yet, after effective grassroots organizing, unremitting fence-line protests, seemingly endless negotiations with Shell officials, and intense media coverage, the people of Diamond finally got what they wanted: money from Shell to help them relocate out of harm's way. In this book, Steve Lerner tells their story. Around the United States, struggles for environmental justice such as the one in Diamond are the new front lines of both the civil rights and the environmental movements, and Diamond is in many ways a classic environmental-justice story: a minority neighborhood, faced with a polluting industry in its midst, fights back. But Diamond is also the history of a black community that goes back to the days of slavery. In 1811, Diamond (then the Trepagnier Plantation) was the center of the largest slave rebellion in United States history. Descendants of these slaves were among the participants in the modern-day Diamond relocation campaign. Steve Lerner talks to the people of Diamond, and lets them tell their story in their own words. He talks also to the residents of a nearby white neighborhood -- many of whom work for Shell and have fewer complaints about the plants -- and to environmental activists and Shell officials. His account of Diamond's 30-year ordeal puts a human face on the struggle for environmental justice in the United States.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Issues of environmental justice and civil rights come to the fore in this fine account of a Louisiana community's battle with its petrochemical company neighbors. Drawing heavily on interviews with residents and local activists, Lerner (Eco-Pioneers) chronicles how the people of Diamond, an African-American subdivision sandwiched between a Shell chemical plant and a Motiva oil refinery in the town of Norco, lobbied Shell (which also owns Motiva) to pay for their relocation after decades of exposure to the plants' toxic emissions. Led by Margie Richards and her Concerned Citizens of Norco, Diamond residents argued that the Shell plants' pollution caused a variety of problems, including kidney and nervous-system damage and lung cancer, while their white neighbors, who lived further from the plants' shadow, tended to dismiss such claims. Lerner charts the growth of a grassroots, community drive to get Shell to recognize its impact on Diamond, the movement's expansion to encompass assistance from national organizations such as Greenpeace and the Sierra Club and its ultimate success in convincing Shell to pay for the relocation of many Diamond residents (though Shell did so without acknowledging that its plants caused health problems). Lerner does an excellent job of explaining concisely both the scientific and the legal issues involved, never slowing down or oversimplifying a compelling and complicated story. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Hundreds of communities worldwide are being poisoned, living and dying in the shadow of petrochemical giants. Most of them remain powerless and anonymous. Steve Lerner has artfully captured the story of one community that fought back and refused to be made expendable. The story of Diamond is one of hope, tenacity, and the hunger for justice. (Gary Cohen, Environmental Health Fund and Health Care Without Harm) Diamond is an important, ultimately inspiring book. (Steve Weinberg The Times-Picayune (New Orleans))Lerner does an excellent job of explaining

concisely both the scientific and the legal issues involved...a compelling story. (Publishers Weekly) Steve Lerner's story of Diamond, Louisiana, is one of the most remarkable tales that has ever been told about the environmental justice movement. (Ruth Rosen Dissent) There are thousands of communities all across America just like Diamond, where poor people share a fence line with polluting refineries, chemical plants, or waste dumps operated by multi-billion dollar corporations. Many of these communities also have homegrown heroes and heroines who have stood up to the powers that be and insisted, enough is enough! What Diamond has that other fence line communities do not is a brilliant writer like Steve Lerner to tell its tale and cull the invaluable lessons for the rest of us. Diamond is a must-read for anyone concerned about the environment, civil rights, or their intersection in environmental justice. (Ken Cook, Environmental Working Group)

"Diamond" by Steve Lerner is a compelling account of a community's struggle for environmental justice. This highly-readable work skillfully examines the subject of toxics pollution and the petrochemical industry's tendency to disproportionately harm people of color. In particular, the book is noteworthy for the care and compassion with which Mr. Lerner has profiled and documented the remarkable individuals who successfully led a grassroots campaign for justice in Diamond, Louisiana. In so doing, the author has alerted us to the potential for the environmental and racial justice movements to collaborate and work for change. The first section recounts the unique history of Diamond. The tight-knit African-American community had endured centuries of slavery and segregation only to find itself on a collision course with Big Oil due to Diamond's location near the Gulf of Mexico. Over many years, the massive amounts of pollution released by Shell's refineries and chemical plants located adjacent to Diamond had caused ill health among the local population and spurred the citizens into organized action. The second section discusses Shell and its relations with its neighbors. Through numerous interviews and visits to Diamond and the adjacent community of Norco, Mr. Lerner uncovered a startling difference in how the two ethnically stratified towns perceived reality. The mostly white residents of Norco, many of whom were employed by Shell, seemed unwilling to acknowledge the ill effects of the pollution and openly questioned the motivations of the black residents of Diamond, most of whom did not benefit economically from the plant and consequently did not shrink from vocalizing their discontent. In my view, the author's mature treatment of this particular aspect of the story provides insight into the deep-rooted racial divide in America and helps us understand how we might heal the relationship. The third and fourth sections document the increasing tension as hard evidence of toxic releases exposed Shell's

non-compliance with EPA regulations and elevated the level of distrust in the community. Greenpeace and other organizations joined with the local residents in highlighting the injustice and brought increased media scrutiny on the situation. The fifth section shows how victory was achieved through the linking of the struggle in Diamond with the well-known case of the Ogoni people and their victimization by Shell's operations in Nigeria. The threat of negative publicity prior to a prominent international conference proved to be decisive, moving Shell management to strike a deal with Diamond residents. In the final section, Mr. Lerner discusses the lessons learned. The author recommends buffer zones around plants, better monitoring of air and the phase-out of toxic chemicals. In the Conclusion, Mr. Lerner credits Shell with doing the right thing but discusses the human costs of relocating the residents, a strategy that took people out of harm's way but divided neighbors who had lived near one another for generations. But in winning this David-versus-Goliath struggle, the author praises Diamond resident Margie Richards for her faith, intelligence and perseverance in leading the struggle to fruition. Ms. Richards is compared with Rosa Parks as a role model and an inspiration to all who are struggling for environmental justice. I highly recommend this pathbreaking and important book to everyone.

Mr. Lerner does an excellent job of reporting exactly what happened to the Diamond subdivision of Norco, Louisiana. He interviews many residents of Diamond and neighboring Norco and gives invaluable perspective to the struggles of both: one, a community smushed between two toxic-spewing behemoths and the other, a largely white, largely Shell-employed suburb trying to "protect" their company and town. Basically, the white residents are being paid to suffer the health and environmental consequences of living next to chemical and petrochemical refineries, whereas the black community, Diamond, was not only suffering the brunt of the chemical emissions but not even hired by Shell--I think the rate was 3% in Diamond. The history of this particular part of Louisiana was fascinating and well researched. The racial divides in this part of Louisiana are historically intense (as they were in southeastern Texas, where I grew up); the environmental racism perpetuated by Shell is obvious and appalling. That it took as much time as it did for Shell to relocate this community, then to do it in stages that decimated generations of family ties, is proof of their utter lack of concern for the human cost of their operations. I tried to feel a little good for Shell in the giving credit where credit is due part of the book, but I still am appalled by their utter lack of concern for the health of the community, and when they did care it was only because they were threatened with bad publicity. The suggestions made by the author at the end of the book for change were excellent, and I loved Margie Richards's statement to the chemical companies that they should be

doing this cleaner, cheaper and healthier. theirs was not a total victory, but a big one nonetheless. i look forward to any new books written by mr. lerner and i am really looking forward to seeing what happens to the current and former residents of diamond, who i hope bring forth a massive suit against shell for the damage done to their health.

This is a great book that is emotional and very informative. I had to read for class, but I would highly recommend it to anyone that cares about humanity.

This is an exceptional book. Hard hitting, informative, life affirming and full of the pulls and pushes of the real challenges people face. That said, I could not help but think what a great movie this would make. I could see this book. The images are so vivid. The stories so real. The wins so bittersweet. Mr. Lerner is a gifted writer with a warm heart and brilliant mind. Thank you for writing this story. Hopefully it will inspire other real life stories.

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