

## **Not in My Backyard, Not in Theirs Either**

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### **Abstract**

The industrial pollution from factories, trash incinerators, and power plants in low income communities, specifically in Baltimore City, largely goes unnoticed by the general public. In order to raise awareness and action for this environmental injustice, we are giving the people in these communities a voice to speak out on their experiences surrounding the environmental damage. Through public displays of art and interviews via murals, social media campaigns, podcasts and a website, people directly affected by the industrial pollution can voice their stories and give witness to the effects of injustice.

### **Description**

Art, including graffiti, is the predominant form of expression that ropes in the largest audience; it compels people to reevaluate their values and empathize with the world. We propose an arts campaign to set up murals around public spaces in Baltimore in order to raise the salience of pressing issues that disadvantaged communities face. These issues, ranging from unmitigated environmental damage to excessive pollution, are often swept shamefully under the rug. Social media, podcasts, and a website will be secondary marketing tools by which we will further publicize the issues around the globe. We propose that the art should be created by members of the communities directly affected by said issues, as those members will gain sufficient recompense for their part in the project through fundraising and publicity.

As the news weaves its way around the city, local clean up projects and/or rallies can be organized, and companies/sponsors will be more willing to work with the communities to solve some of their problems. Moreover, if government officials were to order the removal of the art, it would attract controversy and further promote our message to facilitate change.

Figures 1 & 2 are a mock up of a mural displaying the darkness of living amongst industrial facilities that pollute the air that communities breathe (created in Photoshop using free stock photos from Pexels).



*Fig. 1*



*Fig. 2*

### **Significance & Distinction**

Many people of privilege are unaware of how environmental issues disproportionately affect people of a lower socio-economic status. For example, waste disposal locations being built near predominantly black and lower income neighborhoods is a serious issue in cities across the United States that is often ignored by the general public. By painting murals depicting such issues not only in lower-class communities, but also in upper middle class communities which are unaffected by this, we would be forcing people to pay attention to those affected and learn their stories. This will prompt them not only to investigate issues concerning environmental damage in their communities, but also motivate them to investigate their own actions that may be exacerbating these issues. The

podcast and art gallery are additional social media sources to give those affected a way of sharing their voice. Through these media, people can increase their understanding of environmental issues in their communities.

By employing those directly impacted by the issues to create the artworks/media outlets, we can give our project a greater sense of authenticity, give those people a voice, and give back to the community by providing temporary job opportunities and experiences that could lead to permanent positions.

Through the prominent, graphic illustrations, we will also be able to warn those currently unaffected by the issues that environmental damage and pollution can and will spread to *their* backyards in the future; the only way to prevent it is to nip it at the bud, or at least kill it before it mutates into an invasive parasite. This would prompt people to push for immediate action and significant legal change to clean up the communities.

Our campaign will not only leave a virtual mark, but also a permanent visual mark on the city by integrating the established culture of graffiti with environmental justice.

### **Approach**

We wanted to give the impacted communities a platform to represent and express themselves by commissioning and working with artists from those communities to paint the murals. The murals should communicate the proximity of environmental damage, that “not in my backyard” means “in someone else’s backyard”. The murals would be physically painted or spray painted onto walls that are visible and prominent to people in more privileged areas, so that people would be made aware of the issue and would be forced to acknowledge that it is happening. The murals should depict scenes or emotions illustrating the negative impacts of environmental racism and the impacts of waste disposal on the artist’s community. We will need artists who can paint murals from the impacted areas of and around Baltimore.

We will also need people who can work with digital technologies to communicate information to others. The website will have links to images of the murals along with more information on the message, background, and creative process of such murals. It will also include ways to connect with the artists, affected people, and other organizations that can address the problem. Similarly, the podcast will have people from all backgrounds talking about environmental racism within their community: the artists, the affected people, and those who are working against this. The social media campaign will involve major social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram, and will be updated daily to share stories of impacted individuals. We will also share the murals online and invite people to help fund the project as well as reach out to potential artists and contributors and directly ask people to reply or comment with their own stories.

### **Timeline**

Since the murals of this project will primarily be completed by members of the community that are directly affected by the environmental injustice, we understand that they may not have a considerable amount of spare time to contribute to the project. Thus, we are allocating about two years time to complete the murals that will stay in the

cities until they deteriorate as a result of weather or human interaction. While the murals are being created, we will simultaneously work on developing and publicizing our social media accounts, website, and podcasts. Our hope is to continue our arts campaign that addresses the issue of low income communities being disproportionately exposed to air pollution and placed near industrial sites until significant legal change is made.

### **Audience**

This project will be a local campaign focused on those in the Baltimore area. Our murals are made specifically to shed light on the struggles faced by the city's residents who are affected by the environmental damage caused by industrial pollution and other unethical corporate actions. While a wide variety of people will be able to see the art, our target audience is the suburban middle class residing in or near Baltimore. The middle class alone offers a variety of perspectives that can relate to the cause we are bringing to attention. Some may be directly affected by these issues -- for example, the economic and social disadvantages associated with living near landfills, factories, sewage, etc. Others may be exposed to it on a daily basis as they commute to work or school. Some may be totally unaware of this issue and need to be exposed to it. Compared to the upper and lower class, the middle class is more likely to consist of individuals who are both sympathetic to the issue and have the financial means to be able to donate to the cause. A goal of this project would also be to grab the attention of and involve local governments to begin the process of mitigating these environmental problems.

### **Budget & Funding**

In order to fund this outreach program, resources such as the \$40,000 Office of Sustainability grant and the various Do Good Institute grants are available for use in cases such as ours that promote a better and more stable environment for all people.

The most expensive portion of our project will be the large murals. A single large mural can cost several thousand dollars. To give a rough example, if we painted six large murals in high-density areas for \$5,000 each, the total cost of painting the murals would be \$30,000. Assuming a majority of funding comes from the Office of Sustainability grant, at least another \$10,000 would remain for lower-cost elements of the project such as organizing a podcast, creating and hosting a website, and organized social media activity.

<https://www.homeadvisor.com/cost/painting/paint-a-mural-or-tromp-loeil/#pricing> - details typical costs of a mural