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## Evolving Environmentalism: Contentious Partnerships and Transformational Relationships Between the Environmental Justice Movement and the Mainstream Environmental Movement

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Evolving Environmentalism:  
Contentious Partnerships and Transformational Relationships Between the Environmental  
Justice Movement and the Mainstream Environmental Movement

Senior Project Submitted to  
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by  
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## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter I: Introduction and Literature .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction .....	1
Literature Review .....	6
Social Movement Theory .....	7
Collaboration and Partnership Theory .....	10
Organizational Sociology .....	15
<b>Chapter II: Origins, Growth, and Social Movement Interactions Between the Environmental Justice Movement and the Mainstream Environmental Movement.....</b>	<b>21</b>
The Mainstream Environmental Movement .....	21
The Environmental Justice Movement .....	26
Historic Interaction .....	32
<b>Chapter III: WEACT and the NRDC: Factors and Conditions for Transformational Partnerships .....</b>	<b>35</b>
Case One: WEACT’s Founding Story .....	38
Case Two: Dirty Diesels Campaign .....	42
Case Three: New York State’s Ban on Fracking .....	48
Case Four: Climate Policy .....	55
<b>Chapter IV: Cross-Organizational Influence and A Tale of Two NRDCs .....</b>	<b>61</b>
The Influence of the NRDC on WEACT .....	62
The Influence of WEACT on the NRDC .....	69
The Tale of the Two NRDCs .....	75
<b>Chapter V: Movement Fusion: Possible and Desirable? .....</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>99</b>



## Chapter I

### *Introduction and Literature Review*

In 2006, years of federal inaction on climate change spurred subnational climate action in the United States. In California, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and other large, mainstream environmental non-governmental organization (NGOs) cosponsored and spearheaded AB 32, a bill known as the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006. The bill was the most significant legislative step taken by the United States in its fight against climate change. The NRDC, one of the organizations most closely associated with the Mainstream Environmental Movement, applauded its victory and proclaimed that, “California is leading the country in its effort to curb global warming. . . and to a cleaner and more prosperous future” (The Natural Resource Defense Council 2008).

However, not all environmental groups agreed with the NRDC. Environmental justice organizations (EJOs) rejected the bill because it was built on cap-and-trade. They argued that although cap-and-trade programs reduce greenhouse gas emissions, they do not reduce harmful co-pollutants in their already overburdened communities because companies can continue to pollute by purchasing emission allowances. For EJOs, this represented yet another example of how mainstream environmental groups prioritize national goals over the health of low-income communities and communities of color. In 2008, well before California’s cap and trade program went into effect, WEACT for Environmental Justice (WEACT), a Harlem based and nationally recognized EJO, hosted the Environmental Justice Leadership Forum on Climate Change, bringing together 41 EJOs from across the country to mobilize against cap-and-trade. In doing so, WEACT pitted themselves against the NRDC.



Nonetheless, despite opposing views on climate policy, the NRDC continued to work closely with WEACT and other EJOs in New York City, as they had for decades. In 2016, the NRDC and WEACT pressured the city for a ban on styrofoam used for fast food containers. In an attempt to undermine this collaboration, industry groups wrote a press release claiming that the NRDC was working against the interests of low-income communities of color because a ban of styrofoam would hurt these environmental justice communities by increasing food costs. In response, WEACT and other prominent New York City EJOs joined the NRDC in writing a public letter refuting the industry's claim and calling for a ban on styrofoam (Goldstein 2016). Speaking on behalf of New York City's environmental justice community, Eddie Bautista, the head of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance declared, "the NRDC's New York City office, when it comes to Solid Waste, has been a staunch ally of ours going back decades from now."<sup>1</sup> Since the founding of WEACT in 1988, the NRDC and WEACT have had a strong relationship, partnering on a multitude of campaigns such as improving climate change adaptation and reducing diesel bus emissions.

The disagreement over cap-and-trade juxtaposed with the NRDC and WEACT's successful relationship in New York reveals a puzzle. Despite the fact that the NRDC and WEACT fundamentally disagree on how to address some of the most pressing environmental issues, they maintained a close partnership. The resilient relationship between the two organizations questions the popular assumption among scholars and activists that there is a vast gulf between the Mainstream Environmental Movement and the Environmental Justice Movement.

Since the beginnings of the Environmental Justice Movement in the early 1980s, environmental justice has differentiated itself from the mainstream environmentalism in several

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Interviewee 1. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 21, 2017.

ways. Rather than defining the environment as wildlife or natural resources, environmental justice instead defines the environment as the place where people “live, work, and play” (Bullard 1999; Novotny 2000; Taylor 2000). This is a fundamentally different conception of the environment and its relationship to people, and this redefinition has wide-reaching implications. First, it shifts the spotlight from human’s effects on the environment to the environment’s effects on humans. Second, environmental justice introduces a justice lens, heavily focused on race, class, and the unequal distribution of pollution. Third, environmental justice calls for a radical transformation of society to resolves these inequalities instead of incremental change (Hopwood et al. 2005).

Therefore, to understand the points of contention and the points of collaboration between the two movements, I examine the successful relationship of WEACTION and the NRDC over time to unpack the puzzle and to shed light on the future possibility of fusion between the two movements. Recent literature on social movement interactions between the Mainstream Environmental Movement and the Environmental Justice Movement acknowledges this possibility, naming it *movement fusion*. Cole and Foster define movement fusion as the “the coming together of two (or more) different social movements in a way that expands the base of support for both movements by developing a common agenda” (2001, 164). The future success of both the Mainstream Environmental Movement and the Environmental Justice Movement depend on expanding their bases and developing a common agenda.

To assess the potential and the conditions under which movement fusion could occur, this project focuses on a single relationship: the three-decade-long partnership between the NRDC and WEACTION, two social movement organizations that represent their respective movements. Through analyzing their relationship, this project finds several key factors that determine the

ultimate success of their partnership despite moments of contention. First, personal relationships and friendships are key to building trust and collaboration. Second, the NRDC, despite differences in scale, resources, and political connections, is willing to support WEACT's leadership on joint issues, highlighting rather than obscuring WEACT's participation. Building on these findings, I argue that over time this partnership has had a significant impact on the organizations themselves. The NRDC altered WEACT's professionalization and organizational growth, while WEACT shifted the NRDC's beliefs regarding environmental justice. However, in tracing the shift toward environmental justice, I found that the acceptance of environmental justice varied within the NRDC, and depended on the NRDC's internal organizational structure and the balance of power between internal groups within the NRDC.

These findings are based on research conducted in the summer of 2017. I split my time between working at the NRDC, in its New York Program and Environmental Justice Program, and for WEACT's organizing team. At each organization, I participated in and took notes on internal meetings, attended meetings with outside organizations, and accompanied the organizations to events. This participant observation, in conjunction with 19 semi-structured interviews with 18 individuals across the organizations, is the foundation of this project. The interview participants at the NRDC and WEACT were chosen through a mixture of snowball sampling and asking colleagues for recommendations of employees of different ages, perspectives, and departments. In addition, I drew on primary and secondary literature to create a theoretical framework to help me analyze and understand my cases.

Although this project investigates partnerships and organizational change, it does so in light of the inquiry of whether the Environmental Justice Movement could undergo movement fusion with the Mainstream Environmental Movement. Agyeman's "Just Sustainabilities," a

combination of the justice and the sustainability frames is currently the most prominent formulation of movement fusion and focuses on the potential structure of this new movement (Agyeman 2004, 2005). However, Agyeman spends less time on the *mechanisms* of movement fusion, only partially examining how the movements could actually come together. This project fills that gap by examining the NRDC and WEACTION's relationship as a concrete example of how partnerships and organizational change alters both movements over time. Therefore, based on my findings of WEACTION's firm ideology and the NRDC's previous motion toward environmental justice, I argue that potential movement fusion depends on the NRDC and other large environmental NGOs incorporating an environmental justice frame. This is not to say that the large environmental NGOs must transform into EJOs themselves, but rather that movement fusion depends on a transition towards a support model where they support EJOs' existing campaigns or create joint campaigns. As a result, I suggest that the future of both the Mainstream Environmental Movement and the Environmental Justice Movement hinges on whether large environmental NGOs transition toward supporting environmental justice.

This project is organized as follows. The remainder of Chapter One examines literature on social movement theory, partnership theory, and organizational theory in order to build a lens through which to view the NRDC and WEACTION's relationship. Chapter Two summarizes the history of the Mainstream Environmental Movement and the Environmental Justice Movement, their historic interactions, and the major factors that differentiate them. Chapter Three examines the NRDC and WEACTION's relationship by analyzing WEACTION's founding story and three additional cases of interaction between the NRDC and WEACTION. Based on these cases, I explore and enumerate specific factors that determine the success of their partnerships.

Chapter Four builds on Chapter Three's findings and asks, what does this mean for the two organizations? It addresses this question by first examining the effects of their partnership on each organization before analyzing the structure and culture of the NRDC. I focus on the NRDC because it is larger and more heterogeneous than WEACTION. I find that the NRDC is not monolithic, but rather an organization that consists of two distinct groups with differing views on environmental justice. Chapter four ends with looking at whether the NRDC and WEACTION's relationship is indicative of relationships between large environmental NGOs and EJOs in general. Chapter Five concludes with the implications of the findings in Chapters Three and Four for the future of movement interaction. It looks at whether movement fusion is possible, and if so, if it is even desirable. The project closes by offering concrete steps that large environmental NGOs can take toward equitable movement fusion.

### **Literature Review**

To understand the interaction between the NRDC and WEACTION and its implications for the intersection between the Environmental Justice Movement (EJM) and the Mainstream Environmental Movement (MEM), I construct a theory frame that draws on environmental justice literature, social movement theory, collaboration/partnership theory, and organizational sociology. Each literature contributes to building a holistic framework to understand the NRDC and WEACTION's relationship over time. Social movement theory serves as my foundation for analyzing the larger picture of the emergence and intersection of the MEM and EJM. However, within the discussion on movement interaction, there is surprisingly little analysis on the concrete *mechanisms* of interaction. The NRDC and WEACTION's partnership provides an interesting case of both specific organizational change and movement interaction.

To analyze the NRDC and WEACTION's relationship and the resulting organizational changes, I draw from partnership theory to identify how and why organizations partner and how these partnerships affect the organizations. Building on this, I use organizational sociology to illuminate how the NRDC and WEACTION react structurally and culturally to their partnership, but also how their organization dynamics affect the partnership. Finally, I look to institutionalization theory to explain how differing levels of institutionalization influences the NRDC and WEACTION's relationship.

### **Social Movement Theory**

In the 1960s, the Mainstream Environmental Movement (MEM) emerged in the United States amid a plethora of other movements such as the Civil Rights Movement, Anti-war Movement, and Women's Movement. These movements addressed a basic failing of the political system: the lack of access to political power for significant groups of the population. Social movement theory emerged to understand how these movements gained resonance and fundamentally restructured society. This literature has several schools of thought that emphasize different factors: some prioritize resources (McCarthy and Zald 1977), others examine political processes (McAdam 1985; Meyer and Whittier 1994; Tarrow 1994), and still others focus on the critical role of communication in identifying problems and solutions through framing (Benford and Snow 2000). Despite these differences, at the broadest level, a social movement is "a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society" (McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1218).

While some movements have faltered, the MEM has retained a strong political presence (Brulle 2000). Yet to do so, the MEM has gone through dramatic changes in the past 50 plus years since its genesis, so much so that some theorists have questioned whether it is still a social

movement or whether it is composed of interest groups (Eyerman and Jamison 1991, cited in Rootes 2004, 609). Meyer and Whittier, who focus on the political process, view a social movement more strictly as “a sustained challenge to state policy that has observable origins, peaks, and declines in activity, and uses a combination of conventional and non-conventional collected action” (1994, 279). Using this definition, although the MEM began as a social movement, it is now a collection of interest groups because it no longer engages in “non-conventional collected action.”

However, I argue that this definition does not address the nuances of social movements. Synthesizing both the broad and narrow definitions of social movements, Diani defines social movements as, “networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflicts, on the basis of shared collective identities” (1992, 13). Diani’s definition does not necessitate a type of action and therefore dismantles the interest group-social movement dichotomy. As a result, parts of the MEM may act as interest groups while other sections may engage in social movement practices. Furthermore, the same can be applied even within a single social movement organization (SMO); parts of the organization may act as an interest group and other parts as a social movement. This analytical distinction allows for a more expansive perspective on the interactions between social movements because it does not treat social movements, or social movement organizations, as monolithic entities. Now, with this expanded definition of a social movement and SMOs, I move to exploring how social movements interact.

Social movements influence each other through indirect and direct contact. Indirectly, social movements shape the possibilities of other social movements by changing the overall culture and political conditions of society (Meyer and Whittier 1994). However, WEACTION and

the NRDC directly influence each other. The two main mechanisms of direct influence between social movements are informal networks and formal collaboration.<sup>2</sup> Informal networks create what Buechler calls “social movement communities,” which are composed of “informal networks of politicized individuals” (1990, 42). These individuals interact across social movements by sharing knowledge, collective identities, and tactics.<sup>3</sup> Informal networks include personal relationships and participation of individuals in multiple social movements. For example, in the case of WEACT and the NRDC, there are friendships across organizations. In addition, some employees, referred to as shared personnel, have switched from working at WEACT to the NRDC, thereby increasing cross-movement influence (Meyer and Whittier 1994).

Formal collaborations are structured interactions between SMOs, primarily in the form of coalitions and partnerships.<sup>4</sup> Coalitions and partnerships tend to form in periods when there are significant opportunities to work together and low political and financial costs (Hathaway and Meyer 1993). To illustrate, the NRDC and WEACT partnered together on reducing diesel bus emissions because they both had independent campaigns against dirty diesel buses and diesel buses were not a confrontational issue for either organization.

Although social movement theorists acknowledge the important role of coalition and partnerships in social movement interaction, there is less scholarship within social movement

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<sup>2</sup> Although this is a useful analytical distinction, many formal collaboration fosters informal relationships, which can end up being as influential as the formal collaborations.

<sup>3</sup> Tactics are conceived of as not simply a reflection of the similarity between movements but as an active force that leads to a connection between social movements (Whittier 2004, 540).

<sup>4</sup> Coalitions are defined here in context of social movement interaction, “structuring mechanisms that bring a broad spectrum of otherwise distinct organizations into contact, spreading interpretive frames, organizational structures, political analysis, and tactics (Meyer and Whittier 1994, 290).” Partnerships are defined as a, “sustained multi-organizational relationship with mutually agreed objectives and an exchange or sharing of resources or knowledge for the purpose of generating research outputs (new knowledge or technology) or fostering innovation (use of new ideas or technology) for practical ends” (Horton, Prain, and Thiele 2009, 13).



theory on how partnerships are formed or why they work. To understand WEACT and the NRDC's relationship, partnership theory is needed to fill this gap.

### **Collaboration and Partnership Theories**

Theories of collaboration and partnership generally focus on several key aspects that lead to successful partnerships.<sup>5</sup> Yet not all partnerships are the same; both environmental justice and mainstream environmental actors differentiate between transactional and transformational partnerships. Transactional partnerships are defined as “short-term, constrained, and largely self-interest oriented” (Selsky and Parker 2005, 850). Transactional partnerships are the most common, easiest to initiate and maintain, and usually do not change the participating organizations, known as *parent organizations*.<sup>6</sup> They are favored by individuals who see partnerships solely for their ends. Environmental justice activists consider partnerships between mainstream environmental NGOs and EJOs as primarily transactional (Cable, Mix, and Hastings 2005). Transactional partnerships, however, have a very limited potential for movement building and movement fusion.

For transformational partnerships, there isn't a clear definition within the context of social movements.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, I offer a definition: transformational partnerships are long-term and open-ended, based on goodwill trust and personal relationships, concerned with the equity of the partnership in addition to its outcomes, and change the parent organizations.

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<sup>5</sup> These aspects build off of Roberts and Bradley's definition of collaboration as a “a temporary social arrangement in which two or more social actors work together toward a single command end requiring the transmutation of materials, ideas, and/or social relations to achieve that end” ( 1991, 212, cited in Parker and Selsky 2004, 460).

<sup>6</sup> These participating organizations are referred to as parent organizations because together they create a partnership and have joint responsibility for it.

<sup>7</sup> My exposure to transformational partnerships comes from activists working on environmental justice issues. Despite its colloquial usage, transformational partnerships have not been explored in the literature in the context of environmental justice or social movements, however, the term transformational partnership is present in education and healthcare literature (Butcher, Benzina, and Moran 2010), but it doesn't have the same meaning as it does for environmental justice activists. As a result, my definition of transformational partnerships is closer to John Selsky and Barbara Parker's definition of “integrative partnerships.” Selsky and Parker define integrative partnerships as “longer term, open-ended, and largely common-interest oriented” (2005, 850).

Transformational partnerships, as the name implies, include a potential to *transform* the parent organizations. Furthermore, participants see partnerships as important *in and of themselves*. However, they are rarer than transactional partnerships because they require significant time and resources to maintain.

The difference between transactional and transformational partnerships provides the foundation for my analysis of the relationship between WEACTION and the NRDC. Partnership theory is also invaluable in its investigation of (i) why groups collaborate, (ii) factors that influence collaboration, and (iii) how collaboration influences parent organizations.

#### *Why Groups Collaborate: Transactional and Transformational Partnerships*

Transactional partnerships occur because there are *strategic* benefits to partnering. Partnerships are a pragmatic way for organizations to compensate for their weaknesses with the strengths of a partner (Iyer 2003; Pfeffer and Salancik 2003; Selsky and Parker 2005). For example, if a mainstream environmental NGOs has lobbying power and technical expertise but is perceived as unauthentic because it does not have a connection to a community, they will partner with a community organization such as an EJO. If this EJO desires lobbying power and technical expertise, they will form a transactional partnership. Although this resource sharing perspective—known as resource dependence theory—explains transactional partnerships, it does not fully explain transformational partnerships.

To address the extra dimensions of transformational partnerships, emergent culture theory provides a useful perspective. Arising in the mid 2000s, emergent culture theory critiques resource dependence theory in three ways: temporally, emphasis on *a priori* factors, and influences on the parent organizations (Parker and Selsky 2004). First, emergent culture theory does not look at partnerships at a single point in time, but rather examines their historical

development. Second, it emphasizes partnerships as creating a *new space* with emergent characteristics. As a result, emergent culture theory looks at a partnership's dynamic instead of the two parent organizations' degree of similarity in structure and cultures to assess whether the partnership will be successful. As a result, it suggests that a "partnership is essentially a network of ongoing interactions, not a structural relationship between two monolithic cultures" (Parker and Selsky 2004, 465). These networks are the foundation of transformational partnerships' ability to transform the parent organizations. This perspective is crucial for analyzing WEACT and the NRDC, two non-monolithic organizational cultures that are constantly changing themselves and their relationship.

Third, emergent culture theory critiques how success is measured in a partnership. Instead of success being defined solely by shared outcomes, it is also measured by the experience of the partnership itself (Selsky and Parker 2005). Like transactional partnerships, transformational partnership value shared outcomes, but they also include partnership dynamics, such as equity between the participating organizations. Emergent culture theorists, therefore, conceive successful partnerships as those where both partners are satisfied with their relationship (ibid.).

### *Factors that Influence Collaboration*

An important question, therefore, is what factors determine whether a partnership is transactional or transformational? Furthermore, what factors determine if a partnership succeeds or fails? To answer these questions for WEACT and the NRDC's relationship, it is critical to examine the role of trust and power.

Robert Putnam's work in the 1990s refocused attention on the critical importance of trust in building collaboration. Social capital, defined as "features of social organization, such as trust,

norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam 1993, 167), both encompasses and forms the basis of trust for SMOs. Trust is formed through previous successful partnerships, reputation within a social movement sector, and personal networks (Diani 2004; Hathaway and Meyer 1993; Iyer 2003). The amount and type of trust partially determines whether a partnership is transactional or transformational and whether it succeeds or fails.

Typically, trust is primarily viewed as an input for partnerships, a necessary prerequisite; however, trust is also an output of successful partnerships (Iyer 2003; Selsky and Parker 2005). When partnerships are successful, not only in tangible victories, but also in how they are conducted, organizations build trust with one another. Furthermore, trust is an interactive, non-static element that develops within the partnership *itself*.<sup>8</sup> In addition, transactional and transformational partnerships require and produce different kinds of trust. Transactional partnerships predominantly rely on *competence trust* and transformational partnerships are based primarily on *goodwill trust*.<sup>9</sup> Competence trust is “the expectation of technically competent role performance’ (Barber, 1983) and concerns a partner’s abilities” (Parker and Selsky 2004, 466). Competence trust depends on following through on commitments. In contrast, goodwill trust is “an expectation of non opportunistic behavior and concerns a partner’s *intentions* [emphasis added]” (ibid. 466). Goodwill trust is deeper and relies on believing in the other organization’s intentions.

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<sup>8</sup> Emergent culture theory is especially useful in viewing trust as an output and emergent property *within* a partnership or network, “if a partnership is viewed as an ongoing interaction network rather than just as a structural relation between two social entities, then trust may be viewed as both an input and as emergent, collective process of that network (Lewis and Weigert, 1985, cited in Parker and Selsky 2004, 466).

<sup>9</sup> Of course, competence trust and goodwill trust can exist within the same partnerships and the presence of one does not exclude the other. However, partnerships with goodwill trust tend to have competence trust as well, while competence trust does not necessarily include goodwill trust.

Both types of trust, but especially goodwill trust, are developed on a personal level (Iyer 2003; Wildridge et al. 2004). Trust is cultivated by employees that engage directly with individuals from other organizations—referred to as “boundary spanning employees” (Parker and Selsky 2004). The position of these boundary spanning employees is one factor that determines an organization’s potential to shift as a result of a partnership. Within the NRDC, boundary spanning exist at different levels in the organization and their position influences the types of trust they build with individuals from WEACTION.

Power dynamics are another factor that determine whether a partnership is transactional or transformational. Power imbalances can potentially undermine trust and the overall success of a partnership.<sup>10</sup> In addition, if a partnership is extremely unbalanced, one partner may fear cooptation. Consequently, an unbalanced partnership that starts with low trust may have difficulties moving to high trust (Parker and Selsky 2004, 471). Power imbalances have many sources, but they often can be traced back to differences in organizational demographics—known as firmographics.<sup>11</sup> Firmographics include size, workplace profile, internal communication systems, and perception of expertise and legitimacy (Iyer 2003). In general, partnerships with large power imbalances tend to be transactional partnerships. However, conflict over power imbalances is not inherently a bad sign because it can reflect a negotiation of power (Parker and Selsky 2004).

### *Influence of Partnerships on Parent Organizations*

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<sup>10</sup> To maintain a consistent classification of power, it is important to be clear about what it means to examine power within a partnership. I follow Parker and Selsky (2004), who suggest that examining power entails looking at “how different resources or capabilities become more or less valuable as the project evolves, which partner makes which strategic and operational decisions, and who defines or control the meaning of the project” (468).

<sup>11</sup> Firmographics emerged in the 1970s and 1980s within industrial and business segmentation theory as a way to analyze firms (Shapiro and Bonoma 1984). Collaboration theory has borrowed this term and applied it to organizations as a whole.

Transactional and transformational partnerships have significantly different impacts on the parent organizations. Inherent in my definition, a transformational partnerships must have the potential to *transform* the parent organizations. In contrast, transactional partnerships may slightly influence parent organizations, but only to a much smaller degree. Although the influence of parent organizations is one of the most important outcomes of partnerships, organizations rarely enter partnerships with this goal in mind.<sup>12</sup> This is true for WEACT and the NRDC; although both changed over time because of their partnership, neither organization went into the partnership with this change as an explicit goal. If organizational change is not usually a goal, how does it happen?

Acculturation is an important means by which organizations influence each other. Parker and Selsky (2004) write that acculturation is the process of interaction between the culture of two organizations, which creates “cultural interfaces” that produce an “interculture.” Interculture refers to the construction of a shared partnership culture that combines aspects of each organization and includes emergent characteristics that do not exist in either parent organization. In transformational partnerships, there is a dialectic relationship between the evolving intercultural and the parent organizations. In simpler terms, acculturation is when organizations come together and create a space that is different from either organization, and in turn feeds back to change the organizations. Thus, to understand the effects of partnerships on social movement interaction and possible movement fusion, I turn to organizational sociology.

### **Bringing the Organization Back In: Organizational Sociology**

Organizational sociology provides a window to understand how the NRDC and WEACT’s partnership alters each organization. DiMaggio and Powell’s seminal work in the

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<sup>12</sup> In Milne, Iyer, and Gooding-Williams’ 1996 study, they interviewed 24 organizations and none of them answered that going into their partnership they had a goal of changing their parent organization. However, as a result of their partnerships, many of the same organizations reported a change in their perspective on key issues (213).

1980s defines organizational change as the “change in formal structure, organizational culture and goals, program, or mission” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 149). Organizational change occurs in a number of different ways, but I focus on the two main mechanisms from classic organizational sociology: selection and adaptation. Hannan and Freeman’s (1977) foundational article “The Population Ecology of Organizations” applies an evolutionary perspective to the survival of organizations. Emphasizing *selection*, Hannan and Freeman were the first to suggest that the pressure to survive dictates organizations’ life cycle, type, and structure.

In addition to selection pressures, organizations move towards homogeneity through *adaptation*. Analyzing this process, DiMaggio and Powell introduce the concept of institutional isomorphism, which refers to the process by which organizations shift their structure and tactics to reflect the dominant paradigm in organizational structure. As a result, organizations move toward structural homogeneity. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) separate isomorphism into three categories: coercive, mimetic, and normative.

Organizations usually experience all three types of institutional isomorphism concurrently to varying degrees. Coercive isomorphism is the most visible because it occurs when an organization is forced to react to another organization or to the state (ibid.). For example, when WEACTION was not a registered nonprofit, the state pressured them to formalize by offering financial incentives. Due to coercive isomorphism, EJOs tend to formalize and become more homogeneously structured. Consequently, the composition of the EJM is moving from informal to formal organizations (Perez et al. 2015). Coercive isomorphism is not always explicit; it can also occur through unbalanced partnerships. As a result, EJOs fear partnerships with powerful mainstream environmental NGOs, thereby reducing the quantity of partnerships between mainstream environmental NGOs and EJOs.

Mimetic isomorphism, the second type of institutional isomorphism, results from organizations responding to uncertainty. In uncertain times, organizations model themselves on more stable organizations. As a result, pioneering organizations in a field have an outsized influence as other groups attempt to mimic their model. The difference in age between the NRDC and WEACTION produces mimetic isomorphism; younger EJOs like WEACTION may not have a model for expansion until they interact with a larger mainstream environmental NGO like the NRDC who can help guide their development.

Normative isomorphism, the final type of institutional isomorphism, occurs when a group conforms to a different value structure, primarily in reaction to professionalization. Professionalization is the process of an organization moving from an informal group of generalists to a defined group composed of specialists and professional managers (Staggenborg 1988). Higher levels of professionalization within an organization and sector lead to higher levels of normative isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 156). When a less professionalized organization interacts with a more professionalized organization, the less professionalized organization tends to undergo a degree of normative isomorphism. For example, when WEACTION, a younger, less professional organization, interacts with the NRDC, a powerful and professional organization, WEACTION takes on the professional norms of the older organization. Combined together, the three types of institutional isomorphism have mixed results; it increases survival rates among individual organizations, but it also limits the organizational responses and forms within a social movement field by homogenizing the social movement sector (Konra and Hinings 1998).

In addition to classical organizational sociology, social movement theories also examine the critical role that organizations play. McCarthy and Zald's (1977) resource mobilization



theory popularize the organization as a basis unit of analysis in social movement theory. Yet resource mobilization theory did not focus on specific organizational forms, but rather assumes that all organizations operate similarly, taking organizational form as a given. As a result, analyses on how organizational form affects social movements are rare. An exception is Piven and Cloward (1979) who argue that formal organizations hurt the capacity for movements to engage in confrontational and disruptive tactics that pressure elites into yielding power. Therefore, for many years social movement scholars either ignored the influences of organizational form or assumed that all organizations deterred confrontational action (Clemens and Minkoff 2004).

Reacting to this restrictive choice, a second wave of social movement scholars in the 1990s and early 2000s began looking at the organization in new ways (Clemens and Minkoff 2004; Raeburn 2001; Scully and Creed 1999; Valocchi 2001). Minkoff (1999) was the first to apply classic organizational sociology to a SMO with her application of Hannan and Freeman's (1977) ecological model to organizational survival (Clemens and Minkoff 2004, 164). Minkoff suggests specific organizational characteristics, such as size and professionalization, dictate the survival of SMOs. Minkoff argues that smaller, younger, and less formalized groups struggle to establish themselves when larger, older, and more professionalized organizations dominate the social movement sector. Minkoff's perspective underlays the EJM's central critique of the MEM that they are hurting the development of the EJM. NRDC and other mainstream environmental NGOs take up political space and finances that may have otherwise gone to WEACT and other EJOS. As a result, mainstream environmental NGOs and other large centralized groups are more likely to survive over time, thereby homogenizing the tactics used by SMOs.

I follow in Minkoff's footsteps by applying organizational sociology to social movements. However, I differ from Minkoff by drawing more on DiMaggio and Powell (1982) to examine how organizations influence and are influenced by social movement interaction. Nonetheless, for both classic organizational sociologists and social movement theorists, questions around institutionalization have repeatedly emerged. Furthermore, WEACT and the NRDC's different stages of institutionalization have significant effects on many aspects of their partnerships. Therefore, to further understand the NRDC and WEACT's relationship, I turn to institutionalization theory.

Scholars examine the effects of institutionalization on both the social movement and the organizational level (Staggenborg 1988, 2013). On the social movement scale, institutionalization can refer to the process where "movements become established interests groups that are formalized in structure and headed by professional leaders" (Staggenborg 2013, 1). In addition, social movements' ideas, frames, and rhetoric can also be absorbed into mainstream organizations. When the ideas of a movement are incorporated into mainstream organizations, but the actors of a movement are not, activists label it cooptation. As a result, many environmental justice activists, including those at WEACT, fear institutionalization because it could potentially lead to cooptation.

On an organizational level, institutionalization is closely linked to formalization and professionalization. As organizations institutionalize, their staff transitions, accountability shifts, and tactics change. Staff usually change from generalists to specialists, from individuals who are invested in the specific cause of the organization to social movement professionals. For example, Suzanne Staggenborg (1988) found that as pro-choice organizations professionalized, they were more often run by individuals who previously worked for a formalized SMO. As the EJM

continues to grow, the demographics of EJOs' staff will play a significant role in their degree of institutionalization. Importantly, accountability changes when organizations institutionalize; an organization may move from being accountable toward a community to being accountable toward donors and ensuring organizational longevity (Brulle and Essoka 2005). Lastly, as organizations professionalize, tactics change from outsider tactics such as direct action to insider tactics such as lobbying (Kondra and Hinings 1998).

To conclude, although shifts relating to institutionalization tends to be judged negatively on a macro level, institutionalization creates both negative and positive on an organization and movement level, as I will show in Chapter Four regarding the institutionalization of WEACT. Furthermore, the process of institutionalization of the MEM partially contributed to the emergence of the EJM and continues to shape social movement interaction today.

### **From the Literature to the History**

To set up my theory frame, I combined social movement theory, partnership theory, and organizational sociology to examine the NRDC and WEACT's relationship. However, even with this theory frame, we cannot understand WEACT and the NRDC's relationship without situating it within the historical context of the interaction between their movements. Many of the factors in WEACT and the NRDC's relationship are the result of a long and contentious history. Therefore, I turn now to the individual histories of the Mainstream Environmental Movement, the Environmental Justice Movement, and their historical interactions. By doing so, I complete the foundation to analyze the factors that determine WEACT and the NRDC's three-decade-long relationship and its effects on both organizations.

## Chapter II

### *Origins, Growth, and Social Movement Interaction between the Environmental Justice Movement and the Mainstream Environmental Movement*

“We are artists, writers, academics, students, activists, representatives of churches, unions, and community organizations writing you to express our concerns about the role of your organization and other national environmental groups in communities of people of color.”

–Environmental Justice Activists in the Letter to the Group of Ten

The Environmental Justice Movement (EJM) and the Mainstream Environmental Movement (MEM) have a rich, but contentious history. This chapter examines both the movement’s individual histories as well as their historical interaction. I start by exploring the origins of each movement and their developmental trajectories. I then present the environmental justice critique of mainstream environmentalism and their historical interactions. Understanding of the origins and conflicts between the movements is essential for situating the NRDC and WEACTION’s partnerships within their respective movement contexts and analyzing when their dynamic is determined by larger movement influences.

The contemporary MEM refers to a specific stage of the ever evolving environmental movement: the Reform Environmental Movement (REM). Emerging in the 1960s, the REM dominates the environmental space in terms of funding and national influence.<sup>13</sup> The 1960s prompted a shift from first wave environmentalism, concerned with land conservation and wilderness preservation, to second wave environmentalism, concerned with pollution and

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<sup>13</sup> The roots of the REM date back to the mid-19th century and public health environmentalism (Brulle 2000, 174; Gottlieb 2005). At this time in United States and Britain, industrialization had caused public health epidemics within cities. Consequently, groups of individuals banded together to improve public services such as sanitation systems and access to clean water (Coglianese 2001, 89). As the 20th century progressed, environmentalists shifted their focus from public health to conservation and preservation.

ecosystem health (Mitchell et al. 1991). The publication of books documenting environmental destruction such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (Carson 1962) and shocking environmental disasters such as the Cuyahoga River catching fire and the Santa Barbara Oil Spill increased public concern about human impacts on the environment. Out of this transition to second wave environmentalism, the Reform Environmental Movement was born. The REM was built on two foundations; an acknowledgement that nature is delicate, and that human beings are not separate from nature, but part of it (O'Brien 1983, 17-18, cited in Brulle 2000, 183).

The REM emergence was grounded in the shifting political and social movement landscape of the 1960s (Gottlieb 2005). A smattering of social movements, grouped together as the New Left, shaped the evolving environmental paradigm (Rootes 2004). The American New Left was a group of social movements that arose out of older, rigid movements and emphasized participatory democracy, freedom of identity expression, and an understanding that social problems were interconnected. Due to this influence, environmentalists linked pollution to capitalism and the myth of progress<sup>14</sup> (Gottlieb 2005, 138).

As its ideology changed, so did its language and tactics. The Reform Environmental Movement broke away from previous environmental movement by adopting the language and tactics of its peer movements (Brulle 2000, 184). Linguistically, the REM embraced the Nuclear Disarmament Movement and the Anti-war Movement, combining the language of ecology, structural and cultural critique, and scientific ideas such as limits to growth and carrying capacity. Tactically, the REM was heavily influenced by the Civil Rights Movement. The REM shifted its tactics away from land conservation and management to advocacy, litigation, and, in its early years, even direct action. Building on its new ideology, language, and tactics alongside

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<sup>14</sup> The Myth of Progress refers to the rejection of the idea that humanity will overcome economic, social, and environmental problems through economic growth and technology (Wessels 2013).

considerable public support, the REM grew rapidly throughout the 1960s, both organizationally and socio-politically. However, as it transitioned into a mainstream social movement, the influence of the New Left on the REM decreased substantially.

The REM began a rapid organizational expansion in 1967 with the birth of the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), the first explicit REM organization. The Environmental Defense Fund started primarily as a group of scientists focused on ecosystem health. Shortly after in 1970, a group of lawyers who viewed themselves as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, but for the environment, founded the Natural Resource Defence Council (NRDC). Together, the EDF and the NRDC represent the two primary forms of expertise within the REM: formalized scientific and legal expertise. In the next decade, there was an explosion of REM organizations combined with a shift of some traditional conservation groups, such as the Sierra Club, toward second wave issues.

The Reform Environmental Movement declared its prominence to the world on April 22nd, 1970 with the first Earth Day. Around 20 million individuals of all ages across the United States participated in a diverse smattering of events (Brulle 2000, 186). Earth Day signalled the beginning of a decade of major policy victories, organizational expansion, and rapid institutionalization for the REM. The 1970s, commonly referred to as the Environmental Decade, contained the passing of the foundation of environmental policy in the United States. The National Environmental Policy Act of 1970, Clean Air Act of 1970, Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972, Federal Pesticide Control Act of 1972, the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976, and the Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976 established the basis of environmental policy and advocacy. These victories also created a need: the REM suddenly had to defend and implement these numerous and rapid policies.

This need drove the REM toward institutionalization. In the early 1960s, environmental organizations had two full-time lobbyists, no full-time litigators, and no full-time scientists (Mitchell et al. 1991, 229). By the mid 1970s, the REM had become a lobbying force composed of enormous, professional organizations with specialized expertise and complex organizational structures (ibid. 230). In less than a decade, the REM left its radical roots to become a major policy actor.

To illustrate the degree, today there are over 288 environmental lobbyists (Open Secrets 2017). This shift the two major factors: the increase in the number of environmental social movement organizations (SMOs) and the increased preference for lobbying by institutionalized groups. The increase in environmental SMOs has been dramatic; as of 2005, almost forty years after the first REM organization, there were 26,548 registered environmental organizations (Straughan and Pollak 2008). This expansion transformed the REM into the quintessential model of a financially successful social movement. Currently, the REM is more institutionalized, larger, and has more income and assets than any other social movement (Brulle 2000, 107).<sup>15</sup>

This expansion and institutionalization, which occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, is primarily due to four factors: political victories, new technologies enabling recruitment of constituents, funding conditions, and leadership. To defend its policy victories and increasing complexity of legislation, the Reform Environmental SMOs shifted from an outsider role to working within the professionalized Washington D.C. policy world. As a result, their staff transitioned from volunteers and generalists to full-time professionals that could understand and craft complex legislation. Consequently, as is common with institutionalization, Reform Environmental SMOs increased their division of labor to concentrate their expertise within a

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<sup>15</sup> The degree of difference is extraordinary; there are three times as many environmental organizations than Civil Rights organizations and they have approximately eight times as many assets on hand (ibid.).

single field (Staggenborg 1988). For example, the EDF is well known for their “counter science” (Mitchell et al. 1991, 230) and the NRDC is well known for what I call its “counter law” capabilities. Counter science and law expertise gave Reform Environmental SMOs the ability to oppose industry and governmental policy claims, increasing the REM’s capacity within the policy space.

This institutionalization process coincided with the advent of mass mailing, which allowed SMOs to recruit conscience constituents<sup>16</sup> to help fund the transition from small SMOs in the 1960s into the \$100 million a year organizations that exist today. At the same time, there was an increase in foundation grants to NGOs in the 1970s and 1980s with the rise of neoliberalism and the nonprofit sector (Keck and Sikkink 1998). As their funding grew, their size did as well. This expansion necessitated professional managers<sup>17</sup> and formalized organizational structure, both of which tend to further institutionalize SMOs (Staggenborg 1988, 595-596).

Although there are many environmental organizations, the Reform Environmental Movement is dominated by a small group of large, institutionalized, national organizations commonly referred to as “Big Greens.”<sup>18</sup> These organizations command the majority of the funding, professional staff, and members within the social movement field (Brulle 2000, 105-106). Although these organizations are not monolithic, Big Greens are usually national nonprofits that are run by a board of directors and have an “oligarchical” organizational structure

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<sup>16</sup> McCarthy and Zald (1977) define conscience constituents as “direct supporters of a SMO who do not stand to benefit directly from its success in goal accomplishment (1222).” Although, one could make the argument that everyone benefits from environmental work, most benefits are not easily recognizable.

<sup>17</sup> Staggenborg (1988) defines professional managers as “paid staff who make careers out of movement work” (586).

<sup>18</sup> I will use the term Big Green from now on to refer to mainstream environmental NGOs because the NRDC is a Big Green and I am primarily examining this particular type large and powerful environmental NGO.



(Brulle 2000, 190).<sup>19</sup> Their members are primarily conscience and isolated constituents who do not engage in decision making.<sup>20</sup> Big Greens tend to pursue policy reform by employing non-disruptive, top-down tactics such as lobbying, litigation, and market and scientific research (Mitchell et al. 1991, 228). Accordingly, most Big Greens prioritize access to high level government officials and business over connections to community groups and local government.

Overall, the REM began in the 1960s among a smattering of other social movements. Reacting to its policy victories the 1970s, the REM expanded and institutionalized to a degree unmatched by any other social movement. However, this institutionalization deradicalized the REM. The EJM emerged partially in response to the shortcomings associated with the REM's development.

### **The Environmental Justice Movement**

Although the Environmental Justice Movement (EJM) shares many of the goals of the MEM, instead of being incorporated into the MEM, the EJM emerged as a spin-off movement.<sup>21</sup> Spin-off occurs when a movement develops in reaction to a movement, but remains a separate entity (Meyer and Whittier 1994; Whittier 2004). Stemming from the Civil Rights frame,<sup>22</sup> the EJM challenged the MEM's lack of racial and justice oriented analysis. As the dominant environmental movement, the MEM reduced the discourse surrounding the relationship between the environment and justice by focusing on the harmful effects of pollution on ecosystems. In

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<sup>19</sup> Oligarchical structure is defined as “governed by board of directors. The board of directors is a self-replicating mechanism and elects the officers of the organization. No provisions for individual member input exists (Brulle and Essoka 2005, 212).”

<sup>20</sup> McCarthy and Zald (1977) define isolated constituents as “constituents in non-federal SMOs [that] do not normally meet in face-to-face interaction with other constituents and hence cannot be bound to the SMOs through solidary selective incentives” (1228).

<sup>21</sup> Although they are interchangeable, I will use MEM instead of REM for the rest of the project.

<sup>22</sup> The Civil Rights frame and the environmental justice frame are both masterframes (Benford 2005; Cable and Shriver 1995; Taylor 2000). Benford and Snow (2000) define a masterframe as, “functioning as kind of master algorithm that colors and contains the orientations and activities of other movements” (618). The Civil Rights frame underlies the EJM, which in turn influences other movements (Benford 2005).

other words, the EJM did not arise *from* the MEM, but arose *in response* to the lack of a justice-oriented analysis and the high degree of institutionalization of the MEM (Rootes 2004, 616).

The 1982 fight against a proposed landfill in Warrenton, North Carolina is credited as the ‘birth’ of the EJM. Warren County residents, predominantly African-American and low-income, came together to fight the placement of over 6,000 truck loads of PCBs, a toxic chemical, in their community (Faber and McCarthy 2001, 414). Despite a focus on the environment, the EJM emerged from the network, leadership, and frame of the Civil Rights Movement and *without* the assistance of Big Greens (Agyeman et al. 2016; McGurty 1997; Mohai et al. 2009). Activists explicitly grounded their claims in race and inequality instead of the environmental; McGurty quotes an activist involved in the fight, “African Americans are not concerned with endangered species because we are an endangered species” (1997, 314). Through informal networks, such as voter registration and church networks from the Civil Rights Movement and formalized Civil Rights organizations such as the NAACP, organizers initiated a public campaign and lawsuit (McGurty 1997: 303). After these traditional outlets of resistance failed, a group of former Civil Rights activists engaged in a month-long direct action campaign that elevated their fight to the national level.

Although the Warren County fight was about a landfill, Big Greens viewed it more as a social issue than an environmental one. The North Carolina Chapter of the Sierra Club and the Conservation Council of North Carolina were the only large environmental organizations involved in fighting the landfill. However, even they did not engage with the organizers and only contributed technical advice (McGurty 1997, 303). Furthermore, after the direct action campaign, they distanced themselves because the campaign was seen as too confrontational and

antagonistic (McGurty 1997, 316). Facing challenging logistical problems without the help of institutionalized groups, the protests did not succeed in blocking the landfill.

However, during the campaign, Benjamin Chavis, a leader in the Warren County fight and a nationally known Civil Rights activist and a former assistant to Dr. Martin Luther King, first coined the term “environmental racism” (Benford 2005; Bullard 1990). Chavis defines environmental racism as:

Racial discrimination in environmental policy-making and enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the presence of life threatening poisons and pollutants for communities of color, and the history of excluding people of color from leadership of the environmental movement (Holifield 2013).

The term described a phenomenon happening across the country. The term quickly spread throughout media and activist circles. With this new frame, the Environmental Justice Movement was born.<sup>23</sup>

As the term environmental racism and the EJM spread across the United States, activists demanded that the state respond. The United States General Accounting Office answered by drafting the report, the *Siting of Hazardous Waste Landfills and Their Correlation with Racial and Economic Status of Surrounding Communities* (General Accounting Office 1983). The report reinforced the Warren County activists’ claim that low-income, people of color were more likely to have toxic waste facilities in their community. The 1987 United Church of Christ (UCC) Commission for Racial Justice’s solidified this claim with their landmark report *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*, the first report to compile data about environmental racism on a national level. By substantiating the claims of environmental justice activists across the

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<sup>23</sup> Although there had been fights against environmental harm in marginalized communities before such as the Dr. Martin Luther King’s Memphis Sanitation Strike (United States Department of Environmental Protection 2017), Warren County marked the beginning of a movement that clearly framed the linkage of racism and environmental harm.

country, the UCC's report is to environmental justice what *Silent Spring* is to mainstream environmentalism.

Just as Earth Day signalled the growth of the MEM, environmental justice leaders across the country reacted to their own decade of growth by organizing the most important event in environmental justice history: The First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. In October 1991, the summit brought together over 300 leaders from all 50 states and countries across the Americas to discuss the future of the EJM (Alston 1991). The delegates drafted the foundational texts of environmental justice including the Principles of Environmental Justice, which provide cohesion to a relatively decentralized movement (Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit 1991).<sup>24</sup>

In addition to the foundational documents, the delegates made several key decisions that shaped the trajectory of the EJM. First, the delegates decided not to create a national organization, but rather bring back the knowledge and shared experiences from the summit to their own communities (Alston 1991). By rejecting a national organization, the EJM committed to a structure of community-based organizations linked together by regional and identity based networks<sup>25</sup> (Faber and McCarthy 2001, 415). The networks formed the backbone of the relatively decentralized EJM by connecting individuals and organizations to each other and outside. Second, the delegates formed working groups to create policy and strategy around these

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<sup>24</sup> In addition to the Principles of Environmental Justice, the other pillar of environmental justice are the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing (Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice 1996). The Jemez Principles were drafted in 1996 at the "Working Group Meeting on Globalization and Trade" hosted by the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice. They consist of six principles that lay the foundation for successful collaboration and partnership.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Moore, one of the most influential environmental justice leaders theoretically links regional networks and non-hierarchical governance by arguing that regional networks are "best suited [for] the movement's emphasis on non hierarchical decision-making processes" (Faber and McCarthy 2001, 415). Prominent networks include the Southwest Network for Economic and Environmental Justice (SNEEJ), Northeast Environmental Justice Network (NEJN), Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN), and Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN) among others.

reoccurring issues such as solid waste management and power plants. These decision sent strong message about the movement's perspective on institutionalization and the dominant course for social movement progression. The EJM refused to follow the traditional transition from decentralized, grassroots groups to a centralized movement focused on national policy.

However, as the EJM grew in the 1990s, even as it rejected the MEM's trajectory, it rapidly expanded and formalized. The number of SMOs specializing in environmental justice almost tripled from 55 organizations in 1990 to 130 organizations in 2000 (Stretesky et al. 2011). As they increased, they also formalized (Faber and McCarthy 2001). In order to receive funding, especially from foundations, EJOs faced pressure to formalize into nonprofits—a form of both coercive and mimetic institutional isomorphism. As a result, it is much more common for an EJO to be a nonprofit today than at the beginning of the movement (ibid.).

Similar to institutionalization debate, this formalization process has prompted debate within the EJM. One side argues that formalization increases the legitimacy of EJOs in the eyes of philanthropic foundations, political authority, media, and Big Greens (Faber and McCarthy 2001). As a result, they acquire more stable sources of funding,<sup>26</sup> a more significant policy voice, and increased longevity (Staggenborg 1988). Others contend that as EJOs formalize, their organizational structures become less democratic and their ability to mobilize their communities weakens (Brulle and Essoka 2005).<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, professional staff may misrepresent a community's interests or voice, thereby violating the third Jemez Principle of Democratic

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<sup>26</sup> Foundations are more likely to give money to professionalized groups (Staggenborg 1988, 597) and prefer to administer a few large grants instead of many small grants because of the difference in paperwork. For non-formalized EJOs that don't have a development department, or even a development employee, obtaining grant funding is challenging. Furthermore, they struggle to obtain private donations because donations tend to come from the communities they represent, which are usually low-income and are rarely able to contribute large donations.

<sup>27</sup> In their analysis of 49 environmental organizations, Brulle and Essoka find that EJOs have similar percentage of "oligarchic" organizing structures as Big Greens. This, they posit, undermines the EJM because "environmental justice groups based in non-representative governing structures fundamentally undermine the ideological premise and legitimacy of this movement" (2005, 215).

Organizing, which states “Let the People Speak for Themselves” (Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice 1996).

As a result of increasing formalization and political power, the government started to incorporate environmental justice. In 1992, the EPA created the Office of Environmental Equity—later renamed the Office of Environmental Justice. In 1993, the EPA established the National Environmental Justice Advisory Committee (NEJAC), which creates working groups where environmental justice leaders provides the government on recommendations relating to environmental justice.<sup>28</sup> In 1994, President Clinton signed Executive Order 12898, which mandates that federal agencies “make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations” (Exec. Order No. 12898 1994). Although the EJM achieved major bureaucratic victories in just three years, the position of environmental justice within government is tenuous. The role of environmental justice fluctuates dramatically between administrations, as seen by the pendulum between the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations. Furthermore, scholars that are more critical of the state argue that even with cooperative administrations, the EJM has been coopted and rendered ineffective (Harrison 2015). Mirroring a fear of cooptation by the state, environmental justice activists also fear cooptation from Big Greens. This fear of cooptation is based of off thirty years of contentious of interaction between the EJM and the MEM. Therefore, I now turn to the history of interaction between the EJM and MEM before enumerating the most significant factors that differentiate the MEM and the EJM.

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<sup>28</sup> The efficacy of whether their voices are valued and incorporated into policy and implementation decision is highly debated (Liévanos 2012).

### **Historic Interaction between the MEM and the EJM**

In 1990, the SouthWest Organizing Project sent a letter signed by over 40 EJOs to a group of Big Greens entitled the Group of Ten,<sup>29</sup> stating that the Big Greens' environmental work hurt environmental justice communities. They pointed to the Big Greens' support of policies and campaigns that restricting indigenous communities' use of their ancestral land. Additionally, they declared that the Group of Ten lacked diversity and called them out for their racism, which "is a root cause of inaction around addressing environmental problems in our communities" (SouthWest Organizing Project 1990).<sup>30</sup> Lastly, they brought attention to the Group of Ten's funding that they received from corporations such as Exxon. After listing their grievances, they demanded that the Group of Ten cease all activity within environmental justice communities until they were more representative of, and responsive to, the communities where they worked.<sup>31</sup>

Big Greens reacted in divergent manners; some Big Greens, including the EDF, dismissed the letter's demand to stop operating within environmental justice communities. In contrast, other Big Greens attempted to incorporate environmental justice into their work, albeit to varying degrees. The Sierra Club and the NRDC were particularly proactive because of

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<sup>29</sup> At the time, the Group of Ten included the Sierra Club, The Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund (now EarthJustice), National Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation, The Environmental Defence Fund (EDF), Friends of the Earth, Izaak Walton League of Conservation, The Wilderness Society, National Parks and Conservation Association, and the Natural Resource Defence Council (NRDC).

<sup>30</sup> The EJM, a multiethnic, multiracial movement whose diversity is almost unparalleled by other social movements, has significantly different demographics than the very white MEM. Currently, large environmental NGOs' senior staff are 86% white, their board of directors are 78% white, and their full-time staff are 73% white (Green 2.0 2017).

<sup>31</sup> Although the Letter to the Group of Ten brought the concerns to light, the Environmental Justice Movement has had a tenuous relationship with the MEM since its genesis. In Warren County, most environmental justice activists felt that the large national mainstream SMOs were elitist and exclusionary (McGurty 1997, 302).

previous relationships with EJOs. Both of their directors went to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit and they established environmental justice programs.<sup>32</sup>

Since these initial efforts, other Big Greens have formed environmental justice departments and there is increased engagement between EJOs and Big Greens. However, the level of trust between EJOs and Big Greens is still relatively low and relationships remain contentious (Cable, Mix, and Hastings 2005). Furthermore, many Big Greens still do not have environmental justice teams or meaningfully engage in environmental justice work. For the environmental justice teams that do exist, including within the Sierra Club and the NRDC, the programs are smaller and receive less institutional support than other programs. Moreover, environmental justice programs within Big Greens still struggle with collaborating with EJOs because of their many dissimilarities that stem from structural and ideological differences between the EJM and the MEM.

### **From History to Partnerships**

Having examined the histories and differences between the MEM and the EJM, it is clear that there are significant hurdles for movement fusion between the MEM and the EJM, including different focuses, scales, demographics, organizational paradigms, funding, and institutionalization. To predict whether the movements could potentially fuse in the future, there is nowhere better to look than the past. Therefore, I began by examining the current form of the MEM—the REM—that emerged in the 1960s alongside a wave of social movements, quickly achieved policy victories, and therefore, rapidly institutionalized. Partially in response to this institutionalization and other inadequacies of the REM, the EJM emerged from the Civil Rights Movement. As it grew, the EJM intentionally chose to remain decentralized and connected by

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<sup>32</sup> In addition, Greenpeace—which was not listed in the Letter to the Group of Ten—took significant steps to incorporate environmental justice into their programs. They hired staff from Indigenous communities and elected Winona LaDuke to Greenpeace USA’s board of directors (Cole and Foster 2001, 160).



regional and local networks. After examining the individual histories, I turned to the MEM and the EJM's contentious relationship. Their relationship began in earnest with the *Letter to the Group of Ten*, which some Big Greens—including the NRDC—reacted to by creating environmental justice programs. Now, after having added the historical context to our theory frame, I move to our case: WEACTION and the NRDC's relationship. I explore how movement dynamics influence WEACTION and the NRDC's partnerships, affect its success, and determine whether it is transactional or transformational.

## Chapter III

### *WEACT and the NRDC: Factors and Conditions for Transformational Partnerships*

“[The NRDC’s] overall objectives, for the most part, are clean air nationally. Not clean air on 125th Street. . . That’s the divide.”  
–Interviewee 7, WEACT Employee

“The NRDC has had a hard time really saying, ‘we are opposed to all fossil fuels, all fossil fuels are a problem.’ It’s not to say that we do not agree with that position, but what are the political positions of making that public?”  
– Interviewee 13, NRDC employee

On Martin Luther King Day, 1988, a group of seven prominent activists and politicians were arrested for blocking traffic on Harlem’s West Side Highway while protesting the North River Sewage Treatment Plant. Invoking Dr. King’s call for racial justice, the seven activists, referred to as the “Sewage Seven,” called for an end to environmental racism in their community. Two years earlier, the North River Sewage Treatment plant had opened in West Harlem and residents immediately noticed a noxious odor and decrease in air quality. Spurred into action over the public health risks in their community, two of the Sewage Seven—Peggy Shepard and Chuck Sutton—joined another West Harlem resident, Vernice Travis-Miller, to form New York City’s first explicit environmental justice organization: West Harlem Environmental Action (currently known as WEACT for Environmental Justice).

In their fight against the North River Sewage Treatment Plant, WEACT wanted to sue the city, but did not have the capacity to do it themselves. At the time, Eric Goldstein, a NRDC lawyer who founded of the NRDC’s Urban Program,<sup>33</sup> was known in NYC to champion issues beyond the normal scope of a Big Green. As a result, Peggy Shepard asked Goldstein and the

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<sup>33</sup> The NRDC’s Urban Program was the first program by a national environmental group to specifically focus on urban issues. Goldstein currently works for the New York Program, the first place-based program within the NRDC.

NRDC to represent WEACT in court. Despite no previous connections between WEACT and the NRDC, Goldstein sued the city using nuisance law, arguing that the odor from the treatment plant harmed West Harlem residents. In 1994, the court awarded WEACT, the NRDC, and a local day care center \$1.1 million and required the city to spend \$55 million on improving the plant (Perez-Pena 1994). Following the lawsuit and with the help of pro bono legal work that Goldstein acquired from a law firm, WEACT incorporated into an 501c3, an official nonprofit, with Goldstein as one of their founding board members.

In the three decades since WEACT solicited the NRDC's help, WEACT and the NRDC have had a successful, yet sometimes contentious, relationship. Focusing on this relationship, this chapter examines the factors that determine the formation and maintenance of their partnership. Through examining WEACT's founding story and three additional cases of interaction between WEACT and the NRDC, this chapter illustrates how different movement and organizational cultural and structural elements lead to varying degrees of success and determine whether a partnership becomes transactional or transformational.<sup>34</sup> WEACT's founding story highlights three important factors in building relationships between Big Greens and EJOs: the role of personal relationships, letting the grassroots lead, and equal media representation. The first additional case, the Dirty Diesel Campaigns, examines the effects of the two organizations' different scale, focus, accountability, and relationship to place. The second additional case, New York State's ban on fracking, addresses the intersection between radicality and connection to place and the possibility of a tactical synthesis. The last case, climate policy, also illuminates the intersection between radicality and place, but focuses on the importance of procedural justice.

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<sup>34</sup> Recalling the literature review, transactional partnerships are defined as "short-term, constrained, and largely self-interest oriented" (Selsky and Parker 2005, 850). In contrast, transformational partnerships are long-term and open-ended partnerships that are based on goodwill trust and personal relationships, concerned with the equity of the partnership in addition to its outcomes, and change the parent organizations.

Furthermore, each case draws on the previous chapter's analysis of the structural and cultural differences between the EJM and the MEM and their impacts on the NRDC and WEACT's relationship.

Before diving into these case studies, it is crucial to discuss the organizational demographics and structure of the NRDC and WEACT. The NRDC is an organization with over 500 employees and an operating budget of over \$133 million as of 2016 (Charity Navigator 2017a). The NRDC is nationally focused and accountable primarily to their board of directors, funders, and institutional goals. Similar to a university, it is separated into departments/programs, which operate relatively autonomously. There are currently 16 programs, ranging in size, ideology, and influence. The New York Program and the Environmental Justice Program have the most interactions with EJOs such as WEACT. The New York Program, which used to host the Environmental Justice Program and is still closely linked to it, was the NRDC's first place-based program.<sup>35</sup> Together, the New York Program and Environmental Justice Program currently have 12 employees, which is small compared to other programs such as the Energy and Transportation Program.<sup>36</sup> As a result, the NRDC is not monolithic and the NRDC often holds multiple positions or beliefs about a single issue, a characteristic that will be extensively discussed in Chapter Four. Despite this, throughout this chapter, I will refer to the NRDC as a single entity because they are perceived as such by most of their partners. When I discuss their positions, I refer to the dominant perspective within the NRDC.

Although WEACT is one of the largest and oldest EJOs, its size is dwarfed by that of the NRDC. Currently, WEACT has 18 full time staff, and in 2016 WEACT had an operating budget of just over \$2,100,000—or about 1.5% of the NRDC's operating budget for the same year

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<sup>35</sup> Although the New York Program formerly housed the Environmental Justice Program, there are members of the Environmental Justice Program in the Midwest Branch in Chicago and in the Santa Monica office.

<sup>36</sup> Interviewee 1. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 21, 2017.

(Charity Navigator 2017b). In contrast to the NRDC, WEACT is relatively uniform in its ideology and culture. Furthermore, WEACT is locally focused, accountable toward northern Manhattan, and ideologically homogeneous.



### Case One: WEACT's Founding Story

Since Goldstein's initial work on the North River Sewage Treatment Plant, WEACT and the NRDC have had an intertwined history, with each organization playing an important role in the other's development. However, the NRDC has legally represented other organizations with whom a lasting relationship did not develop. Why did WEACT and the NRDC's relationship blossom into a resilient, albeit sometimes contentious, three-decade-long partnership? I argue that this partnership would not have flourished without strong personal relationships and friendships, NRDC's flexibility and willingness to let WEACT lead, and NRDC's awareness of the effects of power inequality on issues such as media representation.

Goldstein's initial legal work on the North River Sewage Treatment Plant was critical in building a rapport *between individuals* across the organizations. While discussing the creation of long-lasting partnerships, an individual from NRDC who works closely with WEACT stresses,

“It's all about relationships.”<sup>37</sup> Goldstein and Al Huang, a senior attorney in the NRDC's Environmental Justice Program, both sit on WEACT's board of directors while WEACT's co-founder Vernice Miller-Travis was the first environmental justice employee at the NRDC.<sup>38</sup> Goldstein, Huang, and other NRDC employees' relationships with WEACT have pushed the organization away from the initial transactional partnership toward a transformational partnership.

In addition to building personal relationships, Goldstein trusted WEACT's leadership, giving them the chance to lead their partnership. After the North River Sewage Treatment Plant settlement, WEACT wanted to incorporate into an official nonprofit in part to help decide the distribution of the \$1.1 million awarded for the community. Goldstein initially assumed that WEACT would donate the settlement to an organization like the Sierra Club to do environmental projects in Harlem. As a result, Goldstein was surprised when WEACT informed him that they wanted to create an “NRDC up North,” referring to northern Manhattan.<sup>39</sup> Due to Goldstein's trust in the co-founders of WEACT, he accepted this change and agreed to let WEACT decide the allocation of the funds. In an interview, a WEACT employee central to WEACT's organizational development said that Goldstein's flexibility and ability to let WEACT lead was crucial in building a long-term partnership between the two organizations.<sup>40</sup> The respect implied in this action was an initial seed for goodwill trust, the foundation of transformational partnerships.

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<sup>37</sup> Interviewee 1. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 21, 2017.

<sup>38</sup> The NRDC claims that they were the first national environmental organization to dedicate full-time staff to environmental justice issues. If this is correct, then Vernice Miller-Travis was the first full-time staff member dedicated to environmental justice at a national environmental organization.

<sup>39</sup> Interviewee 7. Interview by the author. WEACT's Harlem Office, New York, NY. August 2, 2017.

<sup>40</sup> Interviewee 7. Interview by the author. WEACT's Harlem Office, New York, NY. August 2, 2017.

In addition, the same interviewee attested that Goldstein recognized the power dynamic between the NRDC and WEACT and, therefore, ensured that both organizations were fairly represented in the media coverage of the lawsuit. The question of unequal media representation and the ability to tell one's story is so important to EJOs that it is codified in the Jemez Principles as, "Let the People Speak for Themselves." This emphasis arises from a common, destructive pattern in which a Big Green partners with an EJO on a campaign within an environmental justice community and then publishes the environmental justice community's story using their media connections. By doing so, the Big Green links the EJO's fight to their own organization. Resultantly, when major media outlets cover the story, they turn to the Big Green, thereby highlighting the Big Green and neglecting the EJO that started the campaign. Thus, the Big Green effectively coopts the community's story.<sup>41</sup> An individual at WEACT explains the consequences of unequal media representation, "it means that they [Big Greens] get more time, more money, more donors, more respect. When you take that away from a group like ours, *on our issue*, then the funders that are giving us a little bit of money will say, 'why, if I'm funding you for this, am I reading about the NRDC or someone else?' [emphasis in original]"<sup>42</sup> In other words, the survival of EJOs depends on their ability to tell their own story.

This classic pattern of cooptation was present in the campaign against the North River Sewage Treatment Plant. According to the same interviewee, Goldstein received multiple calls from the *New York Times*, requesting an interview and more information on the story. After responding a couple of times, Goldstein stopped accepting their requests and told the *New York*

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<sup>41</sup> Interviewee 12, an employee from the NRDC that works on storytelling, affirms this as a pattern. They remarked that there were instances where they reach out to EJOs and offered to help tell their story and publish it through their media outlets and connections. Several EJOs rejected this offer because they felt that the NRDC had already used their story in the past and then was not there for them when "shit popped off." They felt that the NRDC profited from their story without forming a lasting partnership.

<sup>42</sup> Interviewee 7. Interview by the author. WEACT's Harlem Office, New York, NY. August 2, 2017.

*Times* that he would not talk to them anymore until they reached out to WEACT directly. Goldstein, without direction from WEACT, turned down the extra media attention in solidarity with the values of the EJM, letting ‘the people’ speak for themselves. The same individual from WEACT called this an “act of integrity” and a solution to a problem that “is a huge bone of contention with [environmental justice] groups around the country in terms of dealing with [Big] green groups” before adding that “it happens whenever you deal with a group more powerful than you, or has more status.” Furthermore, elaborating on this case, the WEACT employee cited Goldstein’s actions as a reason that WEACT and the NRDC initially overcame the structural problems of interacting “with a group more powerful than you.” Uneven power structures often lead to transactional partnerships, but Goldstein prevent its impacts on media representation, thereby creating an opportunity for a transformational partnership.

Between Goldstein’s personal relationships, his desire to give WEACT control over the allocation of the settlement funds, and his response to the *New York Times*, Goldstein demonstrated that he had the *intentions* and concerns of WEACT in mind. Recalling the definition of goodwill trust, the basis of transformational partnerships, goodwill trust is “an expectation of non opportunistic behavior and concerns a partner’s *intentions* [emphasis added]” (Parker and Selsky 2004, 466). Due to Goldstein’s actions, throughout the lawsuit and the transition period into the formalization of WEACT, the NRDC and WEACT developed the beginnings of a transformational partnership. Over the following thirty years, as the NRDC and WEACT’s relationship evolved and they partnered on a larger range of issues, conflicts emerged that complicated the transactional versus transformational distinction. The following three case studies reveal the factors that shape or remediate conflict and determine whether a partnership between a Big Green and an EJO is transactional or transformational.



## Case Two: Dirty Diesel Campaigns

Standing in Harlem in 1997, Shepard, one of the three co-founders of WEACT, announced WEACT's Dirty Diesels Campaign in front of a bus stop advertisement reading "If you live Uptown, breathe at your own risk" (WEACT for Environmental Justice "The Dirty Diesel Campaign"). The campaign displayed its message across bus stops throughout northern Manhattan as part of a larger attempt to address the asthma epidemic of northern Manhattan. Swati Prakash, the environmental health director for WEACT at the time, declared Harlem the asthma capital of the United States: "Compared to a national average of one in 16 kids having asthma, Harlem's childhood asthma rate of one in four is mind-boggling. We need to concentrate on the preventable exposures that may contribute to childhood asthma, and air pollution is at the top of that list" (Chance 2003).

To reduce air pollution, WEACT went after the most visible cause of air pollution: old diesel bus billowing black exhaust and the unequal distribution of diesel bus depots. In 1997, five of Manhattan's seven bus depots were located north of 100th street in primarily low-income communities of color. In response to this classic case of environmental injustice, WEACT launched their Dirty Diesel Campaign, aimed at New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). WEACT addressed both causes of air pollution by advocating a transitioning from diesel buses to cleaner compressed natural gas buses and changing the locations of the bus depots.

Around the same time, the NRDC was also concerned about diesel emissions in New York City. In 1993, several before WEACT's Dirty Diesel Campaign, the NRDC launched their own campaign: Dump Dirty Diesels Campaign. Two years later, NRDC placed ads on the backs of buses, next to the exhaust pipes puffing out billows of black exhaust, that read, "Standing

behind this bus may be more dangerous than standing in front of it” (Kassel 2005). However, unlike WEACT’s sole focus on northern Manhattan, the Dump Dirty Diesels Campaign was international, with partners such as the United Nations Environmental Program. Nonetheless, NRDC began by focusing on Manhattan. Due to their significant degree of goal alignment, the NRDC and WEACT created a partnership to address diesel emissions in Manhattan.

By the late 1990s, the NRDC and WEACT had worked together for several years to pressure the governor's office to reduce diesel emissions in New York City. In 2000, the governor’s office mandated that the MTA buy twice as many compressed natural gas buses to replace the dirtier diesel buses (Kennedy 2000). The NRDC and WEACT responded differently to this concession: the NRDC took out a full page advertisement in the *New York Times* thanking the governor for his support, while WEACT felt that the commitment was not strong enough and more importantly, that it did not address the *distribution* of bus depots.<sup>43</sup> When WEACT expressed this concern to the NRDC, Interviewee 1 claims that Rich Kassel, the former Director of Clean Clean Fuels and Vehicle Project, responded, “our priority has *never* been depots [emphasis added].”<sup>44</sup> What began as a partnership based on seemingly strong alignment on goals and complementary tactics ended with WEACT feeling disappointed and even betrayed because of their differences in scale, accountability, and relationship to place.

The NRDC’s response and WEACT’s disappointment illuminates that although both organizations were focused on diesel emissions, they were actually approaching the issue with distinct priorities because of their different scales. The NRDC’s Dumping Dirty Diesel Campaign focused on reducing the *overall* levels of diesel pollution. The NRDC’s advertisement campaign “standing behind this bus may be more dangerous than standing in front of it”

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<sup>43</sup> Interviewee 7. Interview by the author. WEACT's Harlem Office, New York, NY. August 2, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Interviewee 7. Interview by the author. WEACT's Harlem Office, New York, NY. August 2, 2017.

highlights the danger of the air pollution from the diesel buses. In contrast, Shepard announced WEACT's campaign in front of a backdrop that read "if you live Uptown, breathe at your own risk" and behind a podium with a map of the locations of the bus depots. WEACT's messaging highlights their primary concern: the *distribution* of the pollution. Of course, WEACT also wanted to reduce the overall levels of pollution from the buses, but as a means to reach their primary goal: reduced asthma rates in northern Manhattan. A WEACT employee powerfully sums up the repercussions on their difference scales, saying that the NRDC's "overall objectives, for the most part, are clean air nationally. *Not clean air on 125th Street*. Clean air nationally. If all the national metrics show that air is cleaner, they are happy. . . That's the divide [emphasis in original]."<sup>45</sup>

Partially as a result of their differing scales, the NRDC and WEACT have different focuses. Their missions statements illustrate this difference; the NRDC's mission statement is "The NRDC works to safeguard the earth—its people, its plants and animals, and the natural systems on which all life depends" (The Natural Resources Defense Council "About Us"). The NRDC is focused on the earth *as a whole*. In contrast, WEACT's mission statement is to "build healthy communities by ensuring that people of color and/or low income residents participate meaningfully in the creation of sound and fair environmental health and protection policies and practices" (WEACT for Environmental Justice "Our Story"). Similar to other EJOs, WEACT's mission centers around the community they represent. Furthermore, in WEACT schema of their theory of change, their final goal is "northern Manhattan is a healthy community" (WEACT for Environmental Justice "Schematic of WEACT's Theory of Change").

WEACT's and the NRDC's differences in focus and scale relate directly to their relationship to place. As a national group, the NRDC is not attached to a single community. In

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<sup>45</sup> Interviewee 7. Interview by the author. WEACT's Harlem Office, New York, NY. August 2, 2017.

contrast, WEACTION and other EJOs are inherently focused on the environmental conditions of a specific place. In other words, they are “place-based.” This difference dialectically creates and stems from WEACTION and the NRDC’s divergent demographics, accountability, and organizational structure. To examine why WEACTION and the NRDC responded differently to the governor’s directive, one must first ask the question, who are WEACTION and the NRDC accountable towards?

As a community-based and place-based organization, WEACTION responds to the conditions of their community. They are responsible for these conditions because they are held accountable by their members who are affected by them. The co-founders of WEACTION were all West Harlem residents. Their children, friends, and neighbors are the ones that suffer from poor air quality and asthma.

In addition, WEACTION’s attachment to place is embedded in their organizational structure: to be a WE ACTION member, the core of WEACTION’s membership, one must either live or work in northern Manhattan. The due-paying members of WEACTION have a stake in the community that WEACTION is working to improve. In social movement theory terminology, WEACTION’s members are beneficiary constituents (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Furthermore, WEACTION’s members are predominantly low and middle-income people of color who face higher levels of environmental injustice. A WEACTION employee discusses the relationship between being a membership organization and accountability, “this is a membership organization, that expertise is more valuable than anything else we have. The expertise of people who say, ‘hey I live this, this is my lived experience and I am responsible paying an electric bill and I am low-income, these are the priorities.’”<sup>46</sup> WEACTION was not satisfied with the governor’s directive because it did not address the problems that directly plagued their community. If WEACTION accepted the governor’s

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<sup>46</sup> Interviewee 15. Interview by the author. Harlem's WEACTION Office, New York, NY. August 11, 2017.

directive as a success, but the public health of their community was not substantially improved, their members would have questioned the efficacy of their advocacy. In turn, WEACT would lose respect within their community and their membership, their main source of power and expertise.

Distinct from WEACT's membership model, and typical of other Big Greens, the NRDC is accountable toward a mix of their funders, board of directors, as well as their institutional goals, all of which push them to measure success using national metrics instead of non-quantifiable aspects such as the development of transformational partnerships. As a result, the NRDC's Clean Fuels and Vehicle Project reacted to the governor's directive as a success because overall emissions were reduced. Taking out an advertisement in the *New York Times* showed their funders and the environmental field the success of their campaign. Unlike WEACT, the NRDC did not perceive themselves as being accountable to any particular community regarding the unaddressed distributional injustice.

In contrast to WEACT's reliance of their members, the NRDC has over a million national members, but their members do not make any strategic decisions. Unlike WEACT's membership requirements, the NRDC's members are almost exclusively conscience constituents, passive members who simply donate money and who do not personally feel the costs or benefits (McCarthy and Zald 1977). As an NRDC employee puts it, "we're not a grassroots organization. Our power does not derive from the actions of our members."<sup>47</sup> As a result, the NRDC is not, by and large, accountable to their membership.

Clearly these two organizations have different focuses, scales, attachment to place, and as a result of all three, accountability. Together, these factors affect the type of trust formed and the organizations' motivation to enter the partnership. Before the campaign, there was already a

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<sup>47</sup> Interviewee 4. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 31, 2017.

mixture of competence and goodwill trust between the two organizations because of Goldstein's work on the North River Sewage Treatment Plant. The partnership started as a mutually beneficial partnership; WEACT provided a community voice and pressure the governor through grassroots organizing and the NRDC offered scientific proof of the negative effects of the diesel buses, technical solutions, and access to high-level government officials. The NRDC, using a resource dependence theory perspective, understood the partnership as strategic because they could provide complementary tactics to the same issue.

In contrast, stemming from an emergent cultural perspective, WEACT wanted to work together because of the goodwill trust and personal relationships unique to the partnership itself. WEACT believed that the NRDC was interested in partnering because they aligned with WEACT's goals and concern for the wellbeing of northern Manhattan. Given the previous work of Goldstein and the NRDC's New York Program, WEACT trusted the NRDC's intentions. Furthermore, they conceptualized their partnership as each organization taking on the other organization's goals. As a result, WEACT assumed that the NRDC was interested in helping address the locations of the bus depots. When the NRDC took out their full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* and responded to WEACT's call with "our priority has never been depots," WEACT felt that they had the rug pulled out from under them. The NRDC broke WEACT's goodwill trust, who then pulled back from interacting with parts of the NRDC. As a result, the potential for a transformational partnership was reduced.<sup>48</sup>

Although the Dirty Diesel Campaigns strained the relationship between WEACT and the NRDC, both campaigns had significant positive outcomes. Due in large part to personal relationships between Goldstein and WEACT, the NRDC and WEACT continued to work

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<sup>48</sup> Parts of the NRDC that were involved in the Dirty Diesel Campaign, including Goldstein, had clear alignment with WEACT. However, as a whole, the NRDC was more focused on overall emission reduction. The implications of this internal divide will be explored in-depth in Chapter Four.

together on reducing diesel emissions. WEACTION continued protesting the unequal distribution of the bus depots, including the reopening of Mother Clara Hale Bus Depot in northern Manhattan. In 2000, Shepard and Goldstein stood together at a press release to announce that WEACTION and other northern Manhattan residents were filing a title VI complaint against the MTA. The lawsuit, filed with the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT), argued that the MTA violated the civil rights of the northern Manhattan communities. A year later, the USDOT found that the MTA did not follow federal guidelines regarding bus depots, providing a breakthrough for WEACTION in their fight for distributional justice (WEACTION for Environmental Justice “Title VI Complaint Against the MTA”).

Meanwhile, the NRDC continued to pressure the governor’s office and the MTA to phase out diesel buses. A decade after the start of the two campaigns, New York City’s bus fleet, the country’s largest, had transformed into one of the cleanest. While both organizations claim that their campaign was the catalyst for the transformation of New York City’s fleet, the combination of the two campaigns demonstrates the potential of partnerships between EJOs and Big Greens (WEACTION for Environmental Justice “Mother Clara Hale Community Task-Force”). To conclude, although their partnership on diesel buses was mostly successful, it illuminates the challenges that stem from the organizations’ differences in scale, focus, relationships to place, membership and accountability, and variations in trust and power. As a result of all of these factors, the NRDC responded to the governor’s directive in a way that broke WEACTION’s goodwill trust, reducing the potential to expand their transformational partnership.

### **Case Three: New York State’s Ban on Fracking**

On December 17th, 2014, environmental justice activist within and outside of Big Greens erupted onto the New York City streets to celebrate New York State’s ban on hydraulic fracking

(Kaplan 2014). As the first state with large reserves of natural gas to ban fracking, New York sent a message that reverberated across the country: the health of communities is more important than the potential economic benefits of extracting natural gas. Alongside Keystone XL, New York State's ban on fracking is perceived as one of the largest environmental victories of the 21st century. The collaboration between frontline communities and Big Greens was a key ingredient in the recipe of victory. Although WEACTION was a firm supporter of the ban on fracking, due to their urban location, they were not in danger of having fracking within their community. Therefore, this case focuses on the NRDC's relationship with a coalition of EJOs and other grassroots organizations including WEACTION.

When the possibility of fracking emerged in New York State in the mid 2000s, environmental justice and frontline community groups were the first to respond.<sup>49</sup> In response to the potential environmental impacts in their communities, frontline community organizations called for a permanent ban on fracking. Meanwhile, many Big Greens had nuanced positions on fracking. The NRDC viewed natural gas as a bridge fuel between dirtier fossil fuels, such as oil and coal, and renewable energy (Buccino et al. 2010). Nonetheless, the NRDC's New York Program joined grassroots groups across New York State in resistance. However, the NRDC and other Big Greens called for a moratorium, a temporary prohibition of fracking, instead of a ban.

As the fight against fracking intensified, the NRDC's New York Program increased their support of the grassroots mobilization against fracking. Due to their partnerships with EJOs, the NRDC transitioned to calling for an outright ban of fracking in New York State. Furthermore, they supplemented grassroots efforts by providing technical, financial, legal support as well as

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<sup>49</sup> Grassroots, environmental justice, and frontline communities will be used interchangeably for the section on fracking.



leading a insider political campaign. Together, this combination overpowered industry efforts and led to the groundbreaking permanent ban.

The difference between the NRDC's initial call for a moratorium and the EJOs' call for a permanent ban fits into a larger pattern where environmental justice and frontline communities call for radical solutions while Big Greens call for moderate solutions that appear more politically feasible. This gulf exemplifies what I call the *inherent red line effect*. In this case, similar to WEACTION's rejection of the governor's initial response to the Dirty Diesel Campaign, the EJOs' uncompromising position on fracking stemmed from their connection to a specific place. Frontline and environmental justice communities physically suffer the public health effects of fracking, which range from respiratory problems to birth defects and cancer. To fully protect their families and communities from these negative public health effects, the only solution for frontline communities was a permanent ban.

The inherent red line effect stems from a combination of three structural factors: connection to place, degree of institutionalization, and tactics. Feeling the costs of the decisions within one's community creates the *inherent* of the inherent red line and drives the radicalism of EJOs' claims. In a meeting with the NRDC years after the fracking ban, an EJM leader stressed the difficulties of this structural discrepancy; they said that for an NRDC employee, "the environment starts at 9am and ends at 5pm. For someone with an incinerator outside their window, it doesn't turn off."<sup>50</sup> If an environmental justice activist has an incinerator outside their window, they have no choice but to draw a clear *red line*—a line that cannot be crossed—for the health of themselves and their community.

Additionally, while EJOs' tactics push them toward uncompromising positions, the NRDC's degree of institutionalization and resulting tactics push them towards less radical

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<sup>50</sup> Observed at a meeting at the NRDC's Manhattan Office, August 8th, 2017.

solutions. As the NRDC institutionalized alongside the MEM, the NRDC transitioned into being a useful partner to the state. Therefore, the NRDC's influence within the policy realm depends on their ability to maintain access to high-ranking government officials. Taking radical or adversarial positions endangers their access. In the fracking case, the NRDC's campaign targeted Cuomo. Therefore, alienating Cuomo through adversarial positions was tactically disadvantageous. Individuals within the NRDC's Environmental Justice Program recognize the division between the political limitations inherent in their institutionalization and tactics and an EJOs' position within a community. An employee explains,

The NRDC has had a hard time really saying, 'we are opposed to all fossil fuels, all fossil fuels are a problem.' It's not to say that we do not agree with that position, but what are the political positions of making that public? For frontline communities and environmental justice communities, they have no choice to take that position because it has implications for their very survival. . . They would be sacrificing their own communities. With the Environmental Justice Movement, you see almost a *red line* of issues that cannot be negotiated on [emphasis added].<sup>51</sup>

As reflected in the question "what are the political positions of making that public?", the NRDC must ensure that their stance on a particular issue does not hurt their overall strategy.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, institutionalization, tactics, and degrees of radicality have a dialectic relationship. The radicality of the NRDC, WEACT, and frontline groups determines the tactics that they utilize but their radicality is also influenced by their tactics. Once a group uses more institutionalized tactics and takes mainstream positions, it is caught in a feedback loop where it is difficult to break out of a moderate position because the group does not want to jeopardize its relationship with the governing elite. Therefore, the group does not use radical tactics, which

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<sup>51</sup> Interviewee 13. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 10, 2017.

<sup>52</sup> NRDC employees understand that individuals will be hurt by their compromise, but they still have to make a decision and because they are detached, they do not have an inherent red line. Interviewee 4 explains, "It's not like any of our goals are ever going to be 100% satisfied and that means someone out there is still going to be suffering from whatever impacts we're seeing today. At some level you have to make a decision about who is going to continue to suffer those impacts."

keeps it in its moderate position and completes the feedback loop. To give a concrete example of the tactical gulf between the NRDC and WEACT, the Sewage Seven blocking traffic during the birth of WEACT was a form of direct action that does not fit with the institutionalized NRDC.

To further explore the role of tactics, I codify the patterns of tactical difference between the NRDC and WEACT. In broad strokes, the NRDC engages in the “inside game,” while EJOs such as WEACT engage in the “outside game.”<sup>53</sup> The inside game is a top-down approach that creates change by utilizing connections with top decision-makers. Through the NRDC’s reputation as a relatively unbiased organization with a great deal of legal, scientific, and market expertise, they are able to influence the top levels of government. In short, the NRDC acts as a partner to the state. In contrast, the outside game is a bottom-up approach that creates change through decentralized grassroots pressure. WEACT and other environmental justice and frontline communities build power within their communities by bringing non-professionals together to pressure government officials. This difference generates conflict between the NRDC and WEACT and other EJOs; EJOs view the NRDC as advocating for piecemeal change, while the NRDC sometimes sees EJOs as unrealistic.<sup>54</sup>

Often these differing perspectives push the NRDC and WEACT away from transformational partnerships. However, in the fight against fracking, I argue that these two tactics were complementary instead of antithetical. New York State’s ban on fracking represents a synthesis between the outside and inside game that offers a potential model for future partnerships that is both politically effective and acceptable to both sides. This model offers a solution to one of the largest sources of conflict between the NRDC and WEACT and the EJM

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<sup>53</sup> The terms inside game and outside game come from language used within both Big Greens and EJOs.

<sup>54</sup> In reality, there is overlap between inside and outside strategy, both within the movements as well as within a single organization. In addition, parts of the NRDC engage almost exclusively in the outside game, but the overall perception of the NRDC is that they are an inside game organization.

and the MEM. Moreover, the model is predicated on goodwill trust and drives organizations toward transformational partnerships instead of pushing them apart.

During the New York State fracking campaign, the NRDC engaged in their typical insider strategy. They put pressure on the top levels of state government through a campaign where high level political players targeted Governor Cuomo. Furthermore, they spent millions of dollars hiring the top experts on fracking from around the country—something that the under-resourced frontline communities were unable to do.<sup>55</sup> Utilizing this expertise, they were also preparing to sue New York State if they ruled in favor of fracking.<sup>56</sup> Due to this strategy, the NRDC pressured the government from the inside while maintaining access and credibility with top decision-makers.

While the NRDC engaged in the inside game, frontline and environmental justice communities pressured Cuomo from the outside. Activists lined up outside every meeting that Cuomo attended, pressuring him to ban fracking. At every public hearing, activists completely filled the space. These groups bashed Cuomo and were unapologetic about their occasionally disruptive tactics. Together, frontline communities and the NRDC put pressure on Governor Cuomo from all sides. An employee at the NRDC describes this effective, complementary strategy:

They were people that were bashing Cuomo, bashing the state government of New York on the outside, while simultaneously organizations were working the inside and feeding information back out. It was this kind of beautiful, trusting, unbelievably messy effort. But it was all predicated on trust. You had the grassroots collaborating with big organizations in a way that doesn't really happen that often. I think that allowing the

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<sup>55</sup> The NRDC also helped increase the amount of financial resources in the fracking fight through joint fundraising with frontline community groups. Although there are critiques that joint fundraising increases dependence between EJOs and Big Greens, one of the NRDC's largest contributions to partnerships are their financial resources.

<sup>56</sup> Another significant tactical contribution of the NRDC is their legal expertise. Almost every member of the NRDC's New York and Environmental Justice Program has a law degree. In contrast, most EJOs do not have the capacity to engage in litigation because it is expensive, time intensive, and requires professional staff. Therefore, the NRDC's litigation capacity is another of its largest resources it offers to an EJO.

frontline [to] actually lead the people that live in the shell fields...and lead the messaging was enormously successful.<sup>57</sup>

This quote reveals the potential of a possible synthesis and the *specifics* that make it work. The NRDC simply leading an inside game campaign while EJOs lead an outside game campaign does not create a synthesis. The dirty diesel case illustrates that groups can have complementary tactics and still be driven apart by the inherent red line effect. The employee mentions two factors absent in the dirty diesel case that are necessary for successfully combining the inside and outside game: grassroots leadership and constant inter-organizational communication.

The grassroots led in the battle against fracking. The NRDC did not try to take over the leadership, but instead helped frontline communities' efforts by backing up their claims with expertise recognized by the state. As a result, the EJOs developed goodwill trust and pushed the NRDC toward a transformational partnership. Starting with the campaign against the North River Sewage Treatment Plant, almost all of the NRDC and WEACT's successful partnerships have occurred when WEACT determined the messaging and direction. The NRDC signalled their trust in WEACT's intentions by supporting their leadership, which, in turn, prompted WEACT to trust the intentions of the NRDC. This trust facilitated constant and open communication between the organizations. The communication was sometimes chaotic, but continued flowing both ways.

This tactical synthesis transformed the NRDC; as a result of their interactions with frontline communities, the NRDC changed its position from calling for a moratorium to a permanent ban on fracking in New York State. Yet the NRDC's national position remains nuanced, as they advocate for the use of natural gas as bridge fuel to a clean energy economy. The implications of the limits to the transformative aspects of this partnership will be discussed

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<sup>57</sup> Interviewee 13. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 10, 2017.

extensively in Chapter Four. Overall, this case introduced the inherent red line effect, a factor of possible division, before suggesting a tactical synthesis, a potential solution that hinges on grassroots leadership and open communication.

#### **Case Four: Climate Policy**

Federal climate policy is the “most contentious policy disagreement”<sup>58</sup> between WEACT and the NRDC, mirroring divisive national conflict between EJOs and Big Greens over the past two decades. Recalling the introduction, the NRDC has been an ardent supporter of cap-and-trade,<sup>59</sup> helping design the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) and the California cap-and-trade bill as well as promoting cap-and-trade in two of the most important environmental policy events of the past decade: the Clean Power Plan (2015) and the unpassed American Clean Energy and Security ACT, referred to as the Waxman-Markey Bill (2009).<sup>60</sup> In contrast, WEACT calls cap-and-trade a “false solution”<sup>61</sup> and argues that cap-and-trade programs hurt, rather than help, the health of the environmental justice communities.<sup>62</sup> Disagreement over federal climate policy augments the patterns examined in the previous two cases, but also introduces procedural justice. However, unlike the previous cases, this case is not a specific campaign, but an ongoing pattern of engagement.

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<sup>58</sup> Interviewee 6. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 31, 2017.

<sup>59</sup> Not every individual and program in the NRDC supports cap-and-trade, but the majority do and the NRDC is seen as a whole as a supporter of cap-and-trade (Doniger 2009).

<sup>60</sup> The Clean Power Plan was a plan by the EPA to reduce the amount of carbon emissions from existing power plants. The Clean Power Plan gave each state an emissions reductions target and allowed them to design their own plan. One of the main mechanisms for emission reductions is cap-and-trade. The Waxman-Markey Bill was regarded as the best chance to pass a climate change bill in the 21st century. In 2009, the Waxman-Markey Bill passed the House of Representatives but failed to pass the Senate. The Waxman-Markey Bill's main policy mechanism was cap-and-trade.

<sup>61</sup> Drawing on the way “false solutions” is used in the EJM, I define false solutions as a proposed policy that either exacerbates or does not address ongoing problems while making the public and government believe that they have fixed the issue.

<sup>62</sup> A recent study show that EJOs are likely correct. Studying the effects of the California Global Warming Solutions Act California, which established California's first cap-and-trade program, the authors found that many of the polluters increased local air pollutants that are harmful to public health even while decreasing carbon emissions (Cushing et al. 2016).

The gulf between WEACTION and the NRDC's positions on cap-and-trade stem from many of the same factors that were in play with the Dirty Diesel Campaign, including scale and accountability. Cap-and-trade operates by setting an overall cap for emission reduction, creating a corresponding number of pollution allowances, and allowing firms to trade the allowance to each other. As a result, for a given source of pollution—such as a power plant in an environmental justice community—the owners may purchase allowances to continue polluting the same amount. If this happens, overall carbon emissions decrease, but carbon emissions and harmful co-pollutants in the environmental justice community remain unchanged. The NRDC and other Big Greens support cap-and-trade because they are concerned with overall emissions, while WEACTION and other EJOs reject it because it does not necessarily reduce pollution in their community. The NRDC is focused on the most politically and economically feasible option while WEACTION has an inherent red line against cap-and-trade.

While this case reinforces patterns found in the previous cases, its main contribution is the introduction of procedural justice. The division between the MEM's focus on outcome and the EJM's focus on procedure has been a continuous source of conflict. When crafting climate policy, the NRDC has only meaningfully engaged with EJOs *after* a decision has been made to remediate resulting fallout. For example, when the NRDC helped design the Clean Power Plan, they did not consult environmental justice or frontline communities. When the Clean Power Plan was publicly released, environmental justice communities were blindsided by the aspects of the plan that hurt their communities.<sup>63</sup> WEACTION and other EJOs were particularly upset that they were not meaningfully involved in the creation of the plan. As a result, many EJOs resisted the bill and the NRDC lost a potential ally. Speaking on the Clean Power Plan and the Waxman-

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<sup>63</sup> Interviewee 13. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 10, 2017.

Markey Bill, a member of the NRDC's New York Program reflects on negative impacts of procedural injustice,

While it [The Clean Power Plan] was super important, it was done in a super top-down way that all of the sudden, you have communities that are dependent on coal in active rebellion to it, organizing against it. You had communities that were concerned it would increase natural gas organizing against it. You didn't actually build power doing that. You didn't actually educate people about the opportunities about a economic diversification or transition. It just became about these federal regulations that both failed.<sup>64</sup>

After WEACT and other EJOs began to organize against the Clean Power Plan, the NRDC responded by meeting with these communities to try to explain their position. At WEACT's Environmental Justice Leadership Forum on Climate Change, David Doniger, the NRDC's Senior Strategic Director of the Climate and Clean Energy Program at the time, fielded questions regarding cap-and-trade and the Clean Power Plan. However, the EJM viewed it as too little, too late. A member of the New York Program discusses bringing Doniger to talk to WEACT's forum on cap-and-trade: "all of this is after our decision to support this [cap-and-trade] as a policy. . . It's not like we brought the EJ [environmental justice] folks in and said 'hey let's work together to develop a climate change policy.'"<sup>65</sup> Meaningful procedural justice involves partnering at the *beginning* of the process, not waiting until after a decision is made and attempting to remediate it.<sup>66</sup> As the widely used saying in the environmental justice community goes, "if you aren't at the table, you're on the menu."

The Clean Power Plan fiasco reveals that a lack of procedural justice hurts the NRDC in three ways. First, it creates opposition to its campaigns while simultaneously losing potential

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<sup>64</sup> Interviewee 13. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 10, 2017.

<sup>65</sup> Interviewee 6. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 31, 2017. Environmental justice is commonly called EJ and will be referred to as such throughout quotes from my interviews.

<sup>66</sup> Engaging EJOs only after a decision has been made is a pattern across the country. After the EDF supported California Assembly Bill 398, the recent cap-and-trade extension bill, their relationships with EJOs significantly worsened. As a result, they hired Quinten Foster, who previously worked at the California Environmental Justice Alliance, to mend their relationship. However, the damage was already done. To avoid this situation, the EDF has to involve EJOs early in the process.



allies. Second, it hurts ongoing and potential future relationships with EJOs. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it pushes the NRDC and WEACT away from transformational partnerships. A lack of procedural justice takes away the NRDC and WEACT's chance to address their structural and cultural differences that create intense disagreement around climate policy and impede transformational partnerships. As a result, a lack of procedural justice strains the NRDC and WEACT's relationship as well the NRDC's interactions with environmental justice communities across the country.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter, I investigated two questions, what factors determine the NRDC and WEACT's relationship? And how do these factors lead to transactional or transformational partnerships? To answer these questions, I looked to the founding story of WEACT and three additional cases of interaction between the NRDC and WEACT: the Dirty Diesel Campaigns, the New York State ban on fracking, and climate policy. Each case revealed different factors that determine whether a partnership is transactional or transformational and can cause or remediate conflict between the NRDC and WEACT. Throughout this chapter, I focused on telling the stories of the cases and illuminating the most important factors. However, by doing so, I only hinted at how WEACT and the NRDC's partnership influences both organizations and the role of organizational structure in determining whether their partnership is transactional or transformational. In addition, although I suggested factors that lead to transactional or transformational partnerships, I never explicitly answered the question: Is the NRDC's and WEACT's relationship transactional or transformational? Therefore, I now turn to Chapter Four, which builds on Chapter Three's main factors and their effects on the NRDC and WEACT's partnership and ask, what do these reveal? I explicitly examine the effects of the partnership on

both organizations, how these effects depends on organizational structure, and I finally answer the question of whether WEACT and the NRDC have a transactional or transformational partnership.



## Chapter IV

### *Cross-Organizational Influence and A Tale of Two NRDCs*

“I, professionally and personally, have had almost a 180 in understanding the issues, being not just sympathetic but having empathy for EJ [environmental justice]. . . realizing that [environmental justice] should be a core principle was not where I started off.”

–Interviewee 5, NRDC Employee

“When the NRDC signs the Jemez Principles, is it just the Environmental Justice Program?” –  
Environmental Justice Activist at NRDC meeting

Chapter Three identifies the main factors that determine the NRDC and WEACT’s partnership. To analyze the meaning of that partnership, this chapter asks four interrelated questions: How does the NRDC influence WEACT? How does WEACT influence the NRDC? What do these influences reveal about the organizations’ internal dynamics? And, what are the effects of the internal dynamics on partnerships and organizational transformation? To answer these questions, I first analyze the influence of the NRDC on WEACT and the influence of WEACT on the NRDC. I argue that the NRDC’s main influence on WEACT has been its institutional guidance, which has resulted in higher levels of professionalization and formalization for WEACT. Through institutional isomorphism and personnel exchange, the NRDC was a key, and potentially catalytic, factor in WEACT’s transformation into a relatively stable and formalized nonprofit. In contrast, WEACT’s influence on the NRDC was primarily ideological and programmatic. WEACT shifted the NRDC’s perception of environmental justice and was instrumental in creating the NRDC’s Environmental Justice Program through its movement work, personnel exchange, and direct contact with NRDC employees.

In the second half of the chapter, I dive deeper into the NRDC to examine how its organizational structure and internal dynamics dictate the success of its partnership with WEACT. I introduce the “Tale of the Two NRDCs,” a story of division between two main groups within the NRDC, which I deem the “Alignment Group” and the “Status Quo Group.” The Alignment Group *aligns* with environmental justice and tends to build transformational partnerships, while the Status Quo Group primarily builds transactional partnerships for strategic reasons. Due to this division, I argue that WEACT and the NRDC have both transactional *and* transformational partnerships,<sup>67</sup> but within different programs in the NRDC. Furthermore, this division reveals that the dynamics between these internal groups, which operate relatively autonomously, cause much of the conflict discussed cases from Chapter Three. I conclude by taking a step back and examining whether this division is generalizable to other Big Greens.

### **The Influence of the NRDC on WEACT**

The NRDC is WEACT’s closest and longest partner among Big Greens. Starting with their work on the North River Sewage Treatment Plant, a long-time WEACT employee calls the NRDC the “most community friendly” Big Green.<sup>68</sup> The NRDC has shifted WEACT’s trajectory primarily through organizational guidance that lead to higher degrees of institutionalization. Although there are many important elements to the growth of WEACT, the NRDC’s organizational support was a key and potentially catalytic factor that led to WEACT becoming one of the oldest and most well-established EJOs in the country. The NRDC propelled WEACT to undergo four of the principal characteristics relating to professionalization and formalization:

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<sup>67</sup> Once again, I define transformational partnerships as long-term and open-ended, based on goodwill trust and personal connections, concerned with the equity of the partnership in addition to the outcomes, and change the participating organizations. In contrast, transactional partnerships are defined as “short-term, constrained, and largely self-interest oriented” (Selsky and Parker 2005, 850).

<sup>68</sup> Interviewee 7. Interview by the author. WEACT's Harlem Office, New York, NY. August 2, 2017.

hierarchical and formalized organizational structures, increased division of labor, stable funding, and access to the state and Big Greens (Clemens and Minkoff 2004; Staggenborg 1988).

As noted in Chapter Three, in 1995, after their successful lawsuit against the North River Sewage Treatment Plant, WEACTION wanted to formalize into a registered nonprofit. To aid in this transition, Goldstein and the New York Program provided organizational assistance by securing pro bono assistance from a law firm to assist WEACTION. However, more importantly, when WEACTION was young and unsure of their organizational path, they turned to the NRDC for guidance on how an environmental organization could grow—a classic example of mimetic isomorphism.<sup>69</sup> The NRDC had already experienced growing pains from their own institutionalization process into one of the largest environmental NGOs in the world. Therefore, the NRDC was able to offer practical advice on how to develop stability while increasing capacity. Due to Goldstein and other boundary spanning employees, WEACTION's organizational structure is relatively similar to the NRDC's structure despite their ideological differences. They both have an “oligarchic” structure, a common nonprofit organizational structure that is run by a board of directors.<sup>70</sup>

As they formalized, WEACTION also moved from generalists to specialists. WEACTION currently has 18 full-time employees, composed of organizers, lawyers, public health experts, and fundraisers (WEACTION for Environmental Justice “Our Team”). As the staff grew and transitioned into specialists, NRDC employees— particularly Huang and Goldstein—took on

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<sup>69</sup> As discussed in the literature review, higher levels of professionalization within an organization and its sector lead to higher levels of homogeneity across organizations, known as institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 156). Mimetic is one of three types of isomorphism, alongside normative and coercive.

<sup>70</sup> Brulle and Essoka (2005) introduce the concept of oligarchic organizing structure relating to environmental justice organizations. They define an oligarchic organization structure as, “governed by board of directors. The board of directors is a self-replicating mechanism and elects the officers of the organization. No provisions for individual member input exists” (212). However, it should be noted that their organizational structures are also similar because they both react to coercive institutional isomorphism by the state, which through tax structure and other incentives pressure nonprofits to have similar organizational structures. One cannot attribute the oligarchic structure of WEACTION primarily to the NRDC, but it is a key factor.

mentorship roles that led to normative isomorphism. Normative isomorphism involves the transferring of values and is the form of isomorphism commonly associated with professionalization (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Yet unlike most forms of isomorphism, WEACT's ideological values were not affected by the NRDC. Instead, their interactions shifted WEACT's institutional practices, the *how* of organizational development more than the *why*. Accompanying this professionalization was a need for increased funding.

For most EJOs, obtaining sufficient and consistent funding is their most significant challenge. WEACT is one of the oldest and nationally known EJO in large part because of its ability to market itself and raise revenue.<sup>71</sup> Goldstein and the NRDC were instrumental in helping WEACT establish revenue sources, with both WEACT and NRDC employees crediting the NRDC.<sup>72</sup> The NRDC's impact has been wide-reaching, but most significantly, Goldstein encouraged and supported WEACT in creating an annual fundraising gala that helps WEACT raise non-discretionary funding.<sup>73</sup> At the gala, the NRDC buys a table each year, thereby creating a mechanism to financially support WEACT.<sup>74</sup> As a result, the gala is currently both WEACT's largest source of non-discretionary funding and a mechanism that helps remediate some of the funding discrepancies between WEACT and the NRDC. Overall, consistent and high levels of

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<sup>71</sup> Unlike many other EJOs, WEACT has two full-time staff members that work solely on development. However, their development team is minute relative to the NRDC, which has a development team four times the size of the entirety of WEACT (Rutter "Major Gifts Officer Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) Prospectus"). WEACT still struggles to fundraise enough money for their ongoing projects and staff; Interviewee 7 describes the challenge, "I'm not going to say there's a struggle to meet payroll every year but there have been many years where it's been a struggle. We did it, but it was sleepless nights of worrying that this wouldn't work if something didn't come in next week." However, relative to many EJOs that fluctuate dramatically year by year, WEACT is comparably stable.

<sup>72</sup> Interviewee 1. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 21, 2017. And Interviewee 14. Interview by the author. WEACT's Harlem Office, NY, NY. August 11, 2017.

<sup>73</sup> Interviewee 1. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 21, 2017.

<sup>74</sup> The Gala has become a way for WEACT to gain financial support from other Big Greens including EDF, the National Audubon Society, EarthJustice, the Sierra Club, 350.org, and the Nature Conservancy—listed in order of financial contribution for the 2017 Gala (WEACT 2017 "Gala 2017").

funding leads to stability, longevity, and increased capacity, which in turn promotes access and legitimacy with Big Greens and the state.

WEACT's institutionalization increased their access and legitimacy in three main ways: policy influence, movement building, and participation in coalitions and advisory boards. First, policy advocacy depends on longevity, which hinges on stable funding. Over time, as WEACT institutionalized, it built a reputation based on its staff's expertise and consistent mobilization of their members. Second, due to its relatively stable funding, WEACT had the capacity to prioritize movement building work when other EJOs were fighting for survival. For example, WEACT helped organize a multitude of events and conferences, including the Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. Third, WEACT's interactions with the NRDC increased their legitimacy in the eyes of the state and other Big Greens. Although, WEACT worked with the NRDC and interacted with New York City government before institutionalizing, Big Greens and the state now *consistently* turn to WEACT.

The composition of the donors at the gala, which includes The Sierra Club, EDF, The National Audubon Society, and Earthjustice, demonstrate the number of relationships that WEACT has with prominent Big Greens. Furthermore, WEACT participates in a range of coalitions with Big Greens—including on issues that do not directly affect their community such as offshore wind—<sup>75</sup> and are frequently called upon to provide an environmental justice perspective to coalitions that would otherwise be composed entirely of Big Greens.<sup>76</sup>

Additionally, the state seeks out WEACT's perspective through a number of advisory roles. On a

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<sup>75</sup> Interviewee 17. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 16, 2017.

<sup>76</sup> The limitation of WEACT's participation in coalitions is not due to a lack of access, but rather that coalition work is rarely funded. As a grassroots organization, WEACT is understaffed and must choose between coalition work and work that directly helps their community. Interviewee 11, an NRDC employee that works in a coalition with WEACT, discusses WEACT's limited investment in the coalition, "if we are all having four full day meetings and they do not have the support, funding, and staff, that makes it hard. There's been a good dialogue but I think that it could be more robust if they had vast support."



federal level, WEACTION serves on a number of working groups for the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC), which Shepard used to chair.<sup>77</sup> WEACTION employees currently serve on city and state environmental justice-related advisory committees. Overall, the NRDC has been a key factor in WEACTION's transformation into an organization that is recognized by the traditional actors within the environmental policy space: Big Greens and the state.

*Assessing the Influence of the NRDC on WEACTION*

It is clear that the NRDC has altered the trajectory of WEACTION's organizational development over time. However, is this influence positive or negative? Some environmental justice activists accuse WEACTION of selling out and claim that they left their radical beginnings behind in favor of a more influential role within the mainstream policy advocacy space that the NRDC belongs to. In the words of Pink Floyd, "Did you exchange a walk on part in the war, for a leading role in a cage?" (Pink Floyd 1975). To answer this question, I examine the effects of WEACTION's institutionalization on itself and the EJM.

WEACTION's transformation into a formalized nonprofit with an oligarchic organizational structure both benefits and harms its work. Some activists<sup>78</sup> and scholars (Brulle and Essoka 2005) argue that formalization shifts EJOs from a true democratic process to a structure where the leaders of WEACTION, or outside forces such as funders, determine their agenda. Therefore, when WEACTION formalized, it lost a direct democratic structure. Brulle and Essoka write:

Environmental justice is a 'rights-based' discourse focusing on the democratic participation of all concerned citizens to secure environmental equality. From a practical standpoint, environmental justice groups based in non-representative governing structures

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<sup>77</sup> Although WEACTION serves in many different government advisory roles, many WEACTION employees remain unconvinced about the efficacy of their efforts collaborating with government. They claim that they rarely receive responses from the federal government when they submit NEJAC reports. Considering that the work is unpaid and WEACTION has limited resources, there is debate over whether their advisory work with the state is worthwhile.

<sup>78</sup> Observed in conversations with members of the NRDC's Environmental Justice Program when discussing the perception of environmental justice organizations.

fundamentally undermine the ideological premise and legitimacy of this movement (2005, 215).

Underlying Brulle and Essoka's claim is that environmental justice calls for a radical, democratic transformation of society (Hopwood et al. 2005). Therefore, the argument follows that if WEACT wants a democratic movement, they should have a truly democratic organizational structure. As WEACT grows, it spend more time on organizational maintenance, which takes time away from directly addressing community needs. There are times when WEACT has had to choose between working on a pressing community need or engaging in organizational maintenance, and it must choose *against* working in direct service of their community.<sup>79</sup>

Despite its organizational shift, WEACT maintains a profound connection to its community despite a less democratic organizational structure. WEACT still acts and perceives itself as a member-based organization. WEACT has community representation— two of the seats on WEACT's board of directors are reserved for community members— and monthly membership meetings where it listens to community concerns and bases it agenda on issues raised by community members. Moreover, WEACT's first priority remains the health of its community. Recalling Chapter Three, the end goal of WEACT's theory of change is “northern Manhattan is a healthy community.” WEACT's office culture reflects this commitment; throughout the summer, I observed community members continuously streaming through the office, whether to chat, volunteer, or seek help on a broad range of problems.

Focusing entirely on WEACT's organizational structure obscures WEACT's community focus; in daily conversations around WEACT's office, the staff stresses that their work is grounded on an accountability to northern Manhattan. Furthermore, although WEACT must currently focus more on organization maintenance, it is worth the price to pay for increased

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<sup>79</sup> Interviewee 14. Interview by the author. WEACT's Harlem Office, NY, NY. August 11, 2017.

longevity, even if this means slightly diluting the work that is directly helping the community. Resultantly, in sum, I argue that although WEACT moved towards a less democratic organizational structure, the negative consequences of this transformation were mitigated by its cultural and organizational accountability toward the community.

For WEACT, the benefits of its institutionalization justify the costs, but what about its effects on the EJM? When organizations formalize, they tend to engage in less radical tactics such as direct action (Staggenborg 1988). WEACT is no exception; even though WEACT was formed on the direct action of their founders and the rest of the Sewage Seven, they rarely engage in direct action today. Within the literature, there is debate over whether more moderate tactics are harmful to social movements by displacing radical tactics, which are assumed by scholars to have a greater potential for transformative change (Clemens and Minkoff 2004). Following Jenkins and Eckert (1986) and Staggenborg (1988), I argue that although formalized organizations do not engage in radical tactics, they do not inherently reduce radical tactics of other organizations. Therefore, although WEACT is less radical, it does not deradicalize other non-formalized organizations. However, I concede if a majority of EJOs followed WEACT, it would limit the organizational responses of the EJM as a whole, thereby harming the movement (Kondra and Hinings 1998).

Although a social movement completely composed of formalized organizations can be ineffective, the creation of a few formalized organizations are valuable for younger social movements. Formalized organizations help social movements through lean times and play an important role in movement and coalition building (Valocchi 2001). Therefore, although WEACT is less likely to use radical tactics, as long as all other EJOs do not follow suit, WEACT's formalization helps develop the EJM. In addition, as previously discussed, due to

their organizational stability, WEACT can engage in movement building that other EJOs do not have the resources to pull off.<sup>80</sup> Overall, weighing the costs and benefits, I contend that if every EJO went through WEACT's transformation and embraced less radical tactics, it would hurt the EJM, but as an early EJO, WEACT's ability to focus on movement building outweighs its less radical tactics. As a result, even if WEACT did move toward a "lead role in the cage," it benefited itself and the EJM.

### **The Influence of WEACT on the NRDC**

In contrast to the NRDC's influence on WEACT, WEACT shifted the NRDC's ideology and organizational structure. WEACT did so through three main mechanisms. First, as part of the EJM, they pressured the NRDC indirectly through their movement building work that challenged Big Greens. Second, they directly influenced the NRDC through personnel exchange, the process where employees moving from one organization to other. Third, WEACT employees directly interacted with NRDC boundary spanning employees, which changed the culture and ideas of NRDC employees.

First, recalling Chapter Two, in 1990 "The Letter to the Group of Ten" shifted the landscape between Big Greens and the EJM. In response, John Adams, the co-founder and president of the NRDC at the time joined environmental justice activists, including WEACT co-founders, at the 1991 First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. After the summit, the NRDC reacted to continued pressure from the EJM and WEACT by creating the Environmental Justice Initiative.

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<sup>80</sup> However, the coalitions that WEACT, as a formalized SMO, creates tend to be more formalized. Theorizing on the role of formalized SMOs, Staggenborg writes, "formalized SMOs play an important role in maintaining coalitions, but they also influence coalitions toward narrower, institutionalized strategies and tactics and make the participation of informal SMOs difficult" (Staggenborg 1988, 603).

The second mechanism, personnel exchange, is exemplified by the fact that the first director and employee of the Environmental Justice Initiative was Vernice Miller-Travis, one of WEACT's cofounders. The significance and impact of this personnel exchange is monumental; the initiative that grew into the Environmental Justice Program, one of largest and oldest environmental justice programs within a Big Green, *started with the hiring of WEACT's cofounder*. From 1993 to 1999, Miller-Travis pushed the NRDC to change the way that they interacted with EJOs and engaged with environmental justice issues. She was instrumental in turning the Environmental Justice Initiative, of which she was the sole member, into the Environmental Justice Program. Furthermore, during her time, the NRDC signed the Jemez Principles of Democratic Organizing, one of the foundational documents of the EJM.<sup>81</sup> A significant portion of the resonance of environmental justice within the NRDC traces back to Miller-Travis. She exemplifies that personnel exchange transmits culture and ideology across organizations and movements.

Third, during her time at the NRDC and the almost two decades since Miller-Travis left, WEACT and the NRDC have partnered on a variety of topics, exposing NRDC employees to environmental justice values. The partnerships started an acculturation process, in which WEACT's boundary spanning employees transferred culture and ideology to the NRDC's boundary spanning employees. To illustrate, an NRDC employee involved in a coalition with WEACT, but who is not part of the Environmental Justice Program, discusses the way that their perspective on environmental justice (which the interviewee refers to as EJ) shifted due to their interactions with WEACT: "I, professionally and personally, have had almost a 180 in understanding the issues, being not just sympathetic but having empathy for EJ. . . realizing that

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<sup>81</sup> Although the NRDC signed the Jemez Principles, they do not often follow them. This has frustrated environmental justice activists and will be discussed later in the chapter.

[EJ] should be a core principle was not where I started off.”<sup>82</sup> Before their “180,” the employee described their attitude toward environmental justice as “dismissive” and said they struggled to understand why EJOs were upset if overall greenhouse gas emissions were decreasing—the perspective that led to conflict in the Dirty Diesel Campaigns. Yet after years of interactions with WEACT, this employee has transformed into an internal advocate for environmental justice. Their reversal is so complete that they now struggle with feeling that their personal views are more aligned with WEACT than the NRDC.

This individual directly attributes their transformation to the acculturation process formed through partnering with WEACT; reflecting on why they experienced this “180,” they said, “I think you cannot say enough about those groups who have been banging on the door for forever, WEACT being one of them.” WEACT’s direct engagement with the NRDC shifted the ideology of an NRDC employee, giving the EJM another voice within the NRDC.<sup>83</sup> Individual transformations such as this are common responses to continued interaction with EJOs and have ripple effects that lead to further internal transformation. While WEACT continues to influence the NRDC from the outside, individuals such as this employee also pressure the NRDC from within to adopt environmental justice principles. Therefore, in a transitive manner, WEACT influences the NRDC through these changed boundary spanning employees. In other words, WEACT influences NRDC employees, who shape other NRDC employees, who then change the culture and ideology of the NRDC.

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<sup>82</sup> Interviewee 5. Interview by the author. NRDC’s Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 31, 2017.

<sup>83</sup> This same NRDC employee, interviewee 5, remarks on the ability of younger, progressive individuals within more conservation programs to change the way that other the “old guard” thinks about equity, “some of our new attorneys who are coming from places grounded in wanting to see equitable outcomes have been so key in helping move the other folks forward because they can talk their same language.”

*Discussion of the influence of WEACT on the NRDC*

WEACT's influence has significantly shifted the role of environmental justice within the NRDC both structurally and ideologically. There are two main factors to judge the strength of environmental justice within the NRDC: the size and presence of the Environmental Justice Program and the cultural resonance of environmental justice values. The size and presence of the Environmental Justice Program is easy to measure. It grew from only Miller-Thorne in 1993 to six full-time staff and is continuing to grow. Additionally, the directors of the New York Program and Environmental Justice Program are able to influence internal policy, such as pushing the NRDC to change its position on fracking in New York State from a moratorium to a ban.

The cultural resonance of environmental justice is harder to measure. Yet it is clear that the presence of environmental justice is indubitably growing.<sup>84</sup> The NRDC has begun to incorporate environmental justice values when partnering with EJOs and considers environmental justice in some decision-making processes. To illustrate how the NRDC has incorporated environmental justice values, I ask, what were partnerships like before Goldstein's initial involvement with WEACT? The vast majority of partnerships between the NRDC and EJOs were transactional and had uneven power relationships. Falling into the usual pattern between Big Greens and EJOs, the NRDC led the partnership and focused on outcomes, not process. As the NRDC formed more partnerships with EJOs, this began to change.

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<sup>84</sup> Although change has mostly moved toward environmental justice, there are some steps away from environmental justice. The NRDC recently removed environmental justice from their mission statement, which was added in 1992 in reaction to the Letter to the Group of Ten. The old NRDC mission statement was, "The Natural Resources Defense Council's purpose is to safeguard the Earth: its people, its plants and animals and the natural systems on which all life depends. . . We seek to break down the pattern of disproportionate environmental burdens borne by people of color and others who face social or economic inequities. Ultimately, NRDC strives to help create a new way of life for humankind, one that can be sustained indefinitely without fouling or depleting the resources that support all life on Earth (Guidestar 2018)."

The new NRDC Mission Statement is, "NRDC works to safeguard the earth—its people, its plants and animals, and the natural systems on which all life depends" (The Natural Resource Defence Council "About Us").

One employee's story illustrates this change. The employee, working in a coalition that includes WEACTION, was initially concerned entirely with outcome. They encountered the feeling that "you are trying to make advocacy happen in a very rapid period of time. . . but *you're not building relationships* with new folks and you're not necessarily collaborating."<sup>85</sup> After years of working with WEACTION, the employee began believing that "the process itself is what leads to the outcome." Emphasizing procedural justice as equally, if not more, important than the outcome exemplifies a substantial transition from mainstream environmental ideology to the environmental justice paradigm. Furthermore, the employee transitioned toward letting communities lead; they stated that they run their coalition by "letting folks take the lead and not trying to impose your own kind of model on it." This individual's ideological transformation creates a greater capacity for forming transformational partnerships.

Even outside of partnerships with EJOs, the presence of environmental justice values and the perceived value of engaging in environmental justice work within the NRDC is increasing. However, employees do not fall into clear black and white lines on whether they accept or reject environmental justice. For every interview within the NRDC, I asked whether the NRDC should be engaging in environmental justice work and why. The majority of the individuals agreed that working on the environmental justice and equity issues is "the right thing to do" and many cited the NRDC's mission statement. However, individuals were divided along a spectrum on whether engaging with environmental justice work was the right thing *for the NRDC* to do. On one end on the spectrum, there is a group that believes that engaging in environmental justice campaigning leads to the risk of "mission drift or losing track of what anyone or any organization can do best."<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, they believe that working with environmental justice

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<sup>85</sup> Interviewee 8. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 4, 2017.

<sup>86</sup> Interviewee 4. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 31, 2017.



communities does not build power. “I’ve heard the argument a few times that we need to work with them so that we can win,” said one NRDC employee, “which is sort of like we need to work with them so we have more power. *I just don’t see the argument. These groups are disenfranchised.*”<sup>87</sup> This group argues that the NRDC derives its power from its expertise, not “disenfranchised” communities and, therefore, should stick to what it does best.

In contrast, a group on the other side of the spectrum argues that working on environmental justice is essential to the evolution of the NRDC and helps them achieve their objectives by broadening their base. They see the recent losses by the NRDC and the rest of the MEM, such as the failure of the Waxman-Markey Climate Bill, as a result of a lack of community engagement and movement building.<sup>88</sup> Individuals who work directly with WEACT and other EJOs fit almost exclusively in this group. In contrast, individuals with few or no interactions with EJOs were more likely to find environmental justice work as non-beneficial. This divide illuminates that even the foundational belief about the value of the NRDC engaging in environmental justice work is influenced by cross-organizational influence.

Furthermore this split reflects points made in Chapters Three and Four: the NRDC is not a monolithic organization. The divide between these two groups illustrates a larger ideological divide within the NRDC. This disconnect is the root cause of many of the problems from the cases in Chapter Three, and the balance between these two groups underlies the way that the NRDC engages with EJOs. The second half of the chapter explores this internal division and its effects on the NRDC’s partnerships and cross movement influence.

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<sup>87</sup> Interviewee 4. Interview by the author. NRDC’s Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 31, 2017.

<sup>88</sup> Interviewee 13. Interview by the author. NRDC’s Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 10, 2017.

### **The Tale of Two NRDCs: Transformational and Transactional Partnerships**

In this project, I argue that to understand a social movement, you have to understand partnerships between social movement organizations. To understand a partnership, it is necessary to analyze the organizations themselves. The NRDC's organizational structure and culture change the way that the NRDC interacts with environmental justice organizations and incorporates environmental justice values. Within the NRDC, there are two main groups—and a spectrum between them—with opposing ideologies regarding environmental justice. The presence of these two groups, what I deem the “Tale of the Two NRDCs,” affects almost every decision that the NRDC makes regarding environmental justice, including many of its interactions with WEACT.

This division reveals the organizational influence on building transactional and transformational partnerships, thereby answering one of our original questions: do WEACT and the NRDC have a transactional or transformational partnership? *The answer is both, but within different programs in the NRDC.* Different programs and individuals within the NRDC build divergent types of partnerships with WEACT. I argue that WEACT has a transformational partnership with the New York Program, the Environmental Justice Program, and scattered individuals from other programs, but their partnerships with other programs are primarily transactional. Consequently, the relationship between types of partnerships and programs offers insight into the limitations and potential of cross-organizational influence. However, before analyzing their impacts, who are these groups?

There are two main groups within the NRDC regarding environmental justice, which I deem the Alignment Group and the Status Quo Group.<sup>89</sup> The Alignment Group *aligns* closely

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<sup>89</sup> Once again, assuming that everyone falls evenly into one of these groups would dismiss the complexity of how people and organizations change. However, the vast majority of people fall predominantly into these groups and

with WEACT and the EJM and prioritizes building transformational partnerships. The Status Quo Group follows the traditional pattern of engagement, or *status quo*, of Big Greens with EJOs and primarily forms transactional partnerships. These groups split along programmatic and demographic lines, but their main division is ideological.

The Alignment Group is generally composed of individuals from the New York Program, Environmental Justice Program, and individuals from other, more progressive programs such as the Litigation Program. Demographically, they tend to be younger and have worked at the NRDC for a shorter time. Some individuals, especially within the Environmental Justice Program, previously worked for EJOs, but the majority are simply ideologically aligned. The Alignment Group has less internal political sway because their members are not formed into critical masses within programs, except within the Environmental Justice and New York Programs.

In contrast, the individuals in the Status Quo Group are more likely to come from more conservative, or traditional, programs such as the Energy and Transportation Program or the Climate and Clean Air Program. They tend to be older and have worked at the NRDC for longer. The program directors and senior management tend to fall into the Status Quo Group. However, Rhea Suh, NRDC's president, is more aligned with environmental justice compared to past presidents.<sup>90</sup>

Although these are some indicators of who falls into what group, they reveal trends more than definitive characteristics. The true difference is mainly ideological: what do the groups

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creating this analytical distinction is crucial to understanding how the NRDC operates regarding environmental justice.

<sup>90</sup> Rhea Suh has visited environmental justice communities and the New York Program views Suh as more aligned with their perspective than past presidents (Greenfield 2015). Interviewee 1 discusses the movement toward the New York Program's theory of change, "I think there's some basis to think that is the direction we might head. . . because of the leadership of Rhea, who I think wants to move the organization in this direction."

believe in? The Alignment Group's ideology is closely related to the environmental justice paradigm. One member of the Alignment Group described environmental justice as "evolved environmentalism."<sup>91</sup> Their theory of social change is bottom-up and decentralized, procedurally focused, and place-based.<sup>92</sup> They believe that although social movement professionals play an important role, the power of social movements stem from mass mobilizations of people without one leader or organization. Furthermore, they prioritize the procedural aspects of their work in addition to the outcomes and they ground their change in a specific community and place. As a result, they believe in the inherent value of movement building and view partnerships as valuable not simply as a means, but as an end.

In contrast, the Status Quo Group's theory of social change is top-down and centralized, outcome based, and national. They believe that the key to change is access to the highest level of policy makers and government officials. Therefore, the NRDC views influential, centralized organizations as the primary agents of change. Their number one priority is results and the *how* of their advocacy takes a backseat.<sup>93</sup> Lastly, they believe in creating change on the broadest scale possible, thereby employing a national, or even international focus. As a consequence, the Status Quo Group remains untethered to a specific community. In many ways, the tactical difference between WEACT and the NRDC introduced in the fracking subsection mirrors the internal divide between the Alignment Group and the Status Quo Group.

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<sup>91</sup> Interviewee 6. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 31, 2017.

<sup>92</sup> A theory of change is an individual or organizations' long-term goals and the path to reach them.

<sup>93</sup> The procedure versus outcome debate is a foundational debate between the MEM and EJM, but also plays out within the NRDC. A lawyer in the Environmental Justice Program recounted an ongoing debate with John Adams, a co-founder and former president of the NRDC. Adams argued that if a mountain is under threat that you need to save it through any means because 30 years later, people will only remember the result. The lawyer in the Environmental Justice Initiative responded that the interactions with partners during the process are equally important. If you save the mountain, but destroy a valuable partnership, then it is not actually a success because it does not build future power (Observed in a brown bag meeting at the NRDC's Manhattan Office, July 31st, 2017).

Individuals sort themselves into these groups by how closely their individual ideology lines up with each group's conception of what and how the NRDC should engage with environmental justice. In other words, each individual and group's ideology hinges on a more existential question of organizational identity: who is the NRDC? The Alignment Group sees the NRDC as a changing organization grounded in policy advocacy, but moving towards community partnership and movement building.<sup>94</sup> Alternatively, the Status Quo Group conceives the NRDC as a policy advocacy organization that derives their legitimacy from their expertise. As a result, the two groups disagree on the role of partnerships and movement building. One of the main goals of the Alignment Group is movement building and, consequently, they believe that the NRDC should form relationships with communities, even if there is no immediate payoff. A lawyer in the New York Program discusses the Alignment Group's emphasis on movement building:

There is a goal of movement building or a goal of creating a partnership that *in and of itself* is important. Historically that has not been given equal rate. Generally, at least speaking for the NRDC, very often the starting point is, what is the substantive goal? If there is a movement building goal or a benefit, that is great, but that is usually not the primary goal. I think that it is critical that movement building and partnerships, *in and of themselves* are given more weight in determining what types of projects we work on. We aren't going to win this movement without strengthening partnerships with other groups [emphasis added].<sup>95</sup>

The Alignment Group views forming partnerships as worthwhile *in and of itself*. In contrast, the Status Quo Group views partnerships as strategic, as a means to reach a substantive goal. As a result, they see movement building as drifting away from their original mission. An employee from the Energy and Transportation Program elaborates:

It makes me anxious to prioritize movement building in and of itself. If we are going to prioritize movement building I feel like we have to be really clear on what our end is. If

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<sup>94</sup> Interviewee 16. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 16, 2017.

<sup>95</sup> Interviewee 9. Interview by the author. Coffee Shop near NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 7, 2017.

movement building in and of itself is the end, you're kind of justifying all sorts of things that would very far from who we are. . .that's not what we do. We don't have the capacity. We shouldn't be trying. We have to be much more targeted than that. We are not a grassroots group. We don't go out and mobilize the public.<sup>96</sup>

The employee believes that prioritizing movement building is a drift away from his conception of the identity of the NRDC.

The NRDC's involvement in the 2017 Women's March highlights the two groups' different conceptions on forming partnerships and movement building. Members of the Alignment Group pushed the NRDC toward becoming a partner of the march, but members of the Status Quo group resisted because they worried it was too strong of a partisan position and could jeopardize their access to high-level government officials.<sup>97</sup> This difference indicates that when the Status Quo Group views partnership as utilitarian and strategic, they stick to their own issues.<sup>98</sup> As a result, they do not share intentions with their partners, a prerequisite to creating the goodwill trust that underlies transformational partnerships. Therefore, they limit themselves to transactional partnerships.

Furthermore, each group has a different relationship to place. Similar to EJOs, the Alignment Group centers their work around connection to a particular place. The New York Program, the core of the Alignment Group, was the first place-based department within the NRDC, and one of the first place-based departments in any Big Green.<sup>99</sup> The New York Program and the Environmental Justice Program are more accountable to their partners because they work in the same place over long periods of time. As a result, they are more likely to form

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<sup>96</sup> Interviewee 4. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 31, 2017.

<sup>97</sup> Interviewee 5. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 31, 2017.

<sup>98</sup> Although they prioritize their issues, they sometimes see equity and environmental justice favorable outcomes as desirable. However, they believe that their added value is their expertise and top-down tactics. This indicates that even when they are looking for equitable outcomes, members of the Status Quo Group separate procedural justice from equitable outcomes. In contrast, the Alignment Group views equitable outcomes as dependent on a foundation of procedural justice.

<sup>99</sup> The second and only other place-based program within the NRDC is the Midwest Program, which also works heavily on environmental justice issues including litigation surrounding the Flint Water Crisis.

transformational partnerships. In contrast, the Status Quo Group is nationally focused, usually leaves once a partnership is over, and not accountable to a specific place. Without accountability, partnerships will always be transactional.

Place-based programs are also more likely to form trustful, long-term relationships because other place-based organizations from previous successful relationships vouch for them. Multiple NRDC employees told similar stories of forming successful partnerships because a former partner recommended them to another EJO within the same location.<sup>100</sup> For example, the New York Program and Litigation Program worked together with an EJO in Newark, New Jersey for many years. When a different EJO wanted sue the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) over mold, they reached out to the NRDC because the EJO in Newark vouched for the integrity of the NRDC. Considering the low baseline of trust between Big Greens and EJOs, a starting point of at least a small amount of goodwill trust is crucial for starting a relationship. As a result, the NRDC worked together with community groups to successfully sue NYCHA. An individual from the New York Program<sup>101</sup> explains the relationship between connection to place and credibility, “if you’re going to be working on EJ and you’re not working locally then I do not know how you have credibility doing EJ.”<sup>102</sup> In sum, the EJM is a place-based movement and it is not a coincidence that the majority of the NRDC’s transformational partnerships are with place-based programs.

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<sup>100</sup> Interviewee 18. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 16, 2017. And Interviewee 6. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 31, 2017.

<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, many individuals within the New York Program have an individual connection to place; Interviewee 13 remarked, “I think that being in New York has been very important because I have a strong sense of place and that is something that is intrinsic to the environmental justice fight and the community. . . [which] has a strong place-based identity. When I go to meetings, people traditionally introduce themselves, where they do their work, and which community they serve or who they are accountable to. That is a very strong indication that your accountability doesn't just rest on your organization, it's much bigger than that.” Grounding their work in place, this employee is accountable to their partners and the work itself in addition to the NRDC.

<sup>102</sup> Interviewee 6. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 31, 2017.

Overall, despite the Alignment Group and the Status Quo Group's conflicting ideologies, identities, and relationship to place, they often work on similar issues, sometimes with the same partners, and always sharing the name of the NRDC. Yet they have different priorities within a partnership. The resultant division within the NRDC harms partnerships, including the NRDC's partnership with WEACTION.

The effects of the divided NRDC are numerous and wide ranging. Therefore, to ground this inquiry, I return to the cases from Chapter Three because they exemplify the range of repercussions that stem from internal division. In Chapter Three, I examined how each case highlights factors that cause conflict between the NRDC and WEACTION and determine transactional and transformational partnerships. However, I did not ask how the internal dynamics within the NRDC affected each case. Together, the Dirty Diesel Campaign, fracking ban, and climate policy cases illuminate three key ramifications of the division between the Alignment Group and the Status Quo Group: broken trust and reduced interactions, diminished cross-organizational influence, and harmful effects on forming and maintaining partnerships.

The case of the Dirty Diesel Campaigns illustrates how the Status Quo Group's perspective on movement building and partnerships limits trust and reduces future interactions. When members of the Status Quo Group partnered with WEACTION as a means to reach their goal of reducing overall emissions from diesel buses, they did not take on the main concern of WEACTION: the unequal distribution of bus depots. Due to WEACTION's history with the Alignment Group and ongoing work with Goldstein, WEACTION assumed that their partnership with individuals from the Status Quo Group meant an alignment of priorities and intentions. When the Status Quo Group reacted to the governor's directive by taking out a full page advertisement, they revealed that their priorities were overall emissions, not distributional justice. As a result,



they broke WEACT's goodwill trust and WEACT subsequently withdrew from partnering with some individuals from the Status Quo Group. Therefore, the potential to expand WEACT's transformational partnerships beyond Goldstein and the New York Program greatly diminished.

The fracking case reveals how even when there are transformational partnerships, the division between the Alignment Group and the Status Quo Group limits the partnerships' cross-organizational influence. In the process of advocating for a ban on fracking, the NRDC built transformational partnerships with EJOs and frontline communities. As a result, the NRDC shifted their position on fracking in New York State. Yet this did not lead to a change in the NRDC's overall position on natural gas. Why? The transformational relationships were limited to the Alignment Group. The Status Quo Group has more sway regarding the official positions of the NRDC because a great deal of power lies with the program directors, who are almost all members of the Status Quo Group. As a result, although transformational partnerships between EJOs and the NRDC changed the way the New York Program approached fracking, the NRDC as a whole resisted change. In an organization as large as the NRDC, the fracking case shows the serious limitations of the potential for transformational partnerships because changing one program does not result in complete organizational metamorphosis.

The climate policy case further reveals the imbalance of power between the Alignment Group and the Status Quo Group.<sup>103</sup> A member of the Alignment Group explains how the Environmental Justice Program does not work on climate issues because their attempts at changing the NRDC internally have failed, "we don't work on climate right now. . .internally when we've tried to correct the NRDC to our climate positions in EJ, we're not heard. So it

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<sup>103</sup> The Alignment Group argues against cap-and-trade while the Status Quo Group's preferred mechanism for reducing carbon emissions is cap-and-trade. Yet from the outside, it seems that there is no debate, the NRDC is simply very pro cap-and-trade.

makes it untenable for us to do our EJ work.”<sup>104</sup> In addition, the internal divisions surrounding climate policy reveal how the division hurts the Alignment Group’s efforts to form and maintain partnerships. Multiple NRDC employees recounted times when they reached out to EJOs to create a new partnership and were turned away because of the NRDC’s position on cap-and-trade.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, it strains existing relationships. For example, when the NRDC helped pass the expansion to California’s cap-and-trade bill, the Environmental Justice Program received a significant number phone calls from unhappy partners who questioned whether they could maintain a partnership with the Alignment Group while other parts of the NRDC were actively fighting against them.<sup>106</sup> The vast amount of time the Environmental Justice Program spends to resolve disputes that occur between their environmental justice partners and other parts of the NRDC illuminates the repercussions of the internal division.

However, despite these harmful effects on building transformational partnerships, the relationship between WEACT and the NRDC is still strong. How does the Alignment Group maintain strong partnerships with WEACT and other EJOs while they are being undermined by other parts of the NRDC? The answer lies in the development of personal relationships and WEACT’s understanding of the internal workings of the NRDC. A long-time NRDC boundary spanning employee, who has a strong personal relationship with WEACT, argues for the importance of personal relationships:

One key challenge we face in trying to strengthen the bonds between mainstream environmental groups and environmental justice groups is getting/building these relationships and establishing long-term friendships and working relationships. It doesn't

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<sup>104</sup> Interviewee 1. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 21, 2017.

<sup>105</sup> Interviewee 18. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 16, 2017. And Interviewee 6. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 31, 2017.

<sup>106</sup> Responding to this challenge, Interviewee 5, an NRDC employee, said with resignation, “I can’t tell you how many times somebody in California has said something to a group that has pissed a group off . . . You are just like, ‘I’m so sorry. I do not know what to do, I can’t fix that, I wish I had known and maybe I could talk to them.’”

mean you'll always agree on everything. But if you have a relationship, you're way, way down the line in terms of getting progress.<sup>107</sup>

This individual has a working relationship, but also a friendship with many WEACTION employees, thereby allowing them to overcome disagreements, even key challenges such as climate policy.

The second key to resilience is WEACTION's understanding of the NRDC's internal divisions and the resulting limitations to their partnership. They accept that they are not able to change all of the NRDC. Discussing the role of boundary spanning employees and divisions within the NRDC, a WEACTION employee remarked, "when you make changes it's because you found one or two people at an organization that were the right people, that think the right way and are going to help. It's never the whole institution."<sup>108</sup> Although this may be clear to us after dissecting the internal dynamics of the NRDC, this requires a significant amount of insight from an outside group. Furthermore, the Environmental Justice Program is extremely upfront and honest about their limitations and place within the rest of the NRDC. An NRDC employee discusses how a member of the Environmental Justice Program emphasizes transparency:

She's very frank. When she works with EJ groups, even when she knows we are going to end up on the other side, she explains that. I think she's very consistent and transparent as to what NRDC's position is. They don't like it, when they are pissed, but they respect her and will talk to her after things go down. I think that a big difference is being able to say, 'yes these are our institutional priorities and this is what we are standing behind. But we are going to be honest with you about that.'<sup>109</sup>

To conclude, the "Tale of the Two NRDCs" affects the NRDC's relationships with EJOs and enables both transactional and transformational partnerships. The cases from Chapter Three reveal the most significant repercussions of the internal division: broken trust and reduced interactions, diminished cross-organizational influence, and harmful effects on forming and maintaining partnerships. As seen in the Dirty Diesels case, the Status Quo Group's perspective

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<sup>107</sup> Interviewee 1. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 21, 2017.

<sup>108</sup> Interviewee 7. Interview by the author. WEACTION's Harlem Office, New York, NY. August 2, 2017.

<sup>109</sup> Interviewee 5. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 31, 2017.

on movement building and partnerships ended up breaking WEACT's goodwill trust, which in turn caused WEACT to partner less with individuals outside of the Alignment Group, thereby limiting their cross-organizational influence. The fracking case illuminates how the presence of the two groups limits partner EJOs' ability to change NRDC policy. In addition, it reveals the disparity of power between the two groups. The climate policy case uncovers how disagreement between the two groups can hurt partnerships between the Alignment Group and EJOs, and can even prevent partnerships from beginning. Despite all of these negative effects, WEACT and the NRDC have continued to have a successful partnership because of their strong personal relationships and WEACT's understanding of the dynamics between the NRDC's internal groups.

The effects of the NRDC's internal division are not limited to WEACT. During a meeting at the NRDC, an environmental justice activist expressed frustration over internal division within the NRDC and its impact on the NRDC's ability to follow the Jemez Principles; they asked, "When the NRDC signs the Jemez Principles, is it just the Environmental Justice Program?"<sup>110</sup> Environmental justice partners across the country feel the effects of the NRDC's division.

Furthermore, this problem is not confined to the NRDC; the activist continued, "it's the same story with the Sierra Club." Both WEACT employees and individuals within the NRDC's Environmental Justice Program assume that there is internal division regarding environmental justice within almost all Big Greens, composed of a minority that aligns with environmental justice and a majority following the status quo. As a result, my findings regarding the Tale of the Two NRDCs may be applicable across partnerships between Big Greens and EJOs.

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<sup>110</sup> Observed at a meeting at the NRDC's Manhattan Office, August 8th, 2017.

### **Chapter Conclusion: Implications for Movement Interaction**

In this chapter, I discussed how the NRDC and WEACT have shifted each other's trajectories through their three-decade-long partnership. The NRDC contributed to the professionalization and formalization of WEACT in four main ways: organizational structure, division of labor, funding, and capacity, access, and legitimacy to the state and Big Greens. Although this led to a less democratic organizational structure and less radical tactics, WEACT continued to be accountable toward their community while also increasing their funding, policy and movement building presence, and interactions with Big Greens and the state. As a result, I argued that the NRDC's influence on WEACT helped the development of their organization and the EJM. In contrast, WEACT's influence on the NRDC was primarily ideological. WEACT pushed the NRDC toward embracing environmental justice values through exchanging personnel—including WEACT's co-founder, who became the first director of the Environmental Justice Initiative—and altering the culture and ideas of NRDC employees. As a result, the NRDC shifted structurally and culturally toward environmental justice.

I then examined the NRDC's organizational structure and culture. I posited that there is an ideological spectrum regarding the NRDC with two main groups at the ends: the Alignment Group and the Status Quo Group. Differentiating between these groups provides an answer to the question: do WEACT and the NRDC have a transactional or a transformational partnership? The answer is both, but in different places within the NRDC. The Alignment Group primarily builds transformational partnerships and the Status Quo Group usually constructs transactional partnerships. These two groups differ demographically and between programs, but they are divided primarily by ideology—especially regarding their organizational identity and relationship to place. The ideological division within the NRDC has harmful effects, which I

explored through looking at the cases from Chapter Three. The cases reveal three key ramifications of the division: broken trust and reduced interactions, diminished cross-organizational influence, and harmful effects on forming and maintaining partnerships.

Through meetings with environmental justice activists, I found that this problem is not confined to the NRDC; there are internal divisions within most Big Greens. Therefore, the NRDC and WEACTION's relationship offers insight into the interactions between Big Greens and EJOs in general. Specifically, the transformational partnership between parts of the NRDC and WEACTION illustrates that EJOs are more likely to react to partnerships by undergoing organizational change than shifting their core ideology. In contrast, as shown by the development of environmental justice values within the NRDC, Big Greens have the potential to shift their ideology. As a result, in order for Big Greens and EJOs to move together toward common ground, *the majority of the ideological shift must come from Big Greens*. Looking to the future, what does the cross-organizational influence of WEACTION and the NRDC and the "Tale of the Two NRDCs" tell us about potential movement fusion? To answer this question, I turn to Chapter Five where I conclude this project and analyze the movement implications of the findings from Chapter Three and Four.



## Chapter V

### *Movement Fusion: Possible and Desirable?*

“Environmental justice is evolved environmentalism.”

–Interviewee 6, NRDC Employee

“We shouldn’t try to be EJ groups. The challenge is more how do we fully embrace EJ as part of our movement collectively and then embody it in a principled way, which is focused on the communities themselves.”

–Interviewee 6, NRDC Employee

This project began by juxtaposing the contentious fight over cap-and-trade in California with the strength of the NRDC’s New York Program’s relationship with New York City EJOs. This contradiction reflects both the challenges of, and the potential for, movement fusion between the Environmental Justice Movement and the Mainstream Environmental Movement. To examine the intersection between these movements, I explored the NRDC and WEACT’s three-decade-long relationship to determine the conditions of transformational partnerships and investigate how their partnerships changed each organization. I did so to understand how partnerships between organizations such as the NRDC and WEACT shed light on the future of the two movements and the definition of environmentalism.

Using the transactional versus transformational partnership lens, I looked at WEACT’s founding story and three additional cases which illustrate contentious, yet ultimately successful, interactions between the NRDC and WEACT, and the factors that determine whether a partnership between a Big Green and an EJO succeeds or fails. These factors stemmed from both the historical interaction between the EJM and the MEM as well as emergent properties specific to the NRDC and WEACT, including grassroots leadership, equitable media representation, and conflicting scale and focuses. Furthermore, looking at the intersection between radicality and



connection to place, I introduced the inherent red line effect to explain why EJOs consistently call for more radical solutions while Big Greens continually compromise. Then, based off of the NRDC's partnerships with EJOs in the fight against fracking, I offered a solution to the inherent red line effect: tactical synthesis. Finally, across all of the cases, I argued that personal relationships are the foundation of the NRDC and WEACT's partnership and are the reason they have overcome the conflicts that arose from their structural and cultural differences.

After illuminating these elements in Chapter Three, I tied them into the larger question of organizational change in Chapter Four. I asked, what do these factors mean for cross-organizational influence, organizational dynamics, and movement fusion? I found that the NRDC's influence on WEACT was primarily professionalization and organizational development. In contrast, WEACT's influence of the NRDC was primarily ideological and structural. Furthermore, through an organizational analysis of the NRDC, I discovered that the increase in environmental justice values is not spread evenly throughout the NRDC, indicating the presence of multiple groups within the organization. This division, which I named the "Tale of the Two NRDCs," suggests that WEACT and the NRDC have both transactional *and* transformational partnerships, but with different groups within the NRDC. The division between the two main groups, the Alignment Group and the Status Quo Group, has a serious impact on the NRDC's partnerships with EJOs; it harms existing and potential partnerships and frustrates environmental justice activists who ask, "When the NRDC signs the Jemez Principles, is it just the Environmental Justice Program?"<sup>111</sup>

Although the NRDC and WEACT are both perceived as representative of their movements, the NRDC and WEACT are only one relationship among many between Big Greens and EJOs. However, judging from the perspectives of environmental justice activists within and

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<sup>111</sup> Observed at a meeting at the NRDC's Manhattan Office, August 8th, 2017.

outside of WEACT, I argue that this internal division around environmental justice is not confined to the NRDC, but exists within most Big Greens. Many Big Greens, including members of the Group of Ten, struggle with internal divisions surrounding environmental justice. Therefore, the implications of the NRDC and WEACT's relationship reverberate across both movements and have implications for the future of movement interaction. Given that the NRDC has both hurt and helped WEACT and they have formed transactional *and* transformational partnerships, what does this duality mean for the future interactions between the two movements?

### **The Possibility for Potential Movement Fusion**

To look at the future of both movements, I return to my original questions surrounding movement fusion. First, what are the conditions of movement fusion? Second, is it possible? And, third, if possible, is it desirable? Considering that the NRDC shifted ideologically toward WEACT more than WEACT did toward the NRDC, I suggest that the conditions for movement fusion hinge on the evolution of the NRDC and other Big Greens toward environmental justice. However, as noted in the quotes that start this chapter, the NRDC or Big Greens do not need to become EJOs, but rather they must move into a supportive role for EJOs.

My research found that the NRDC is currently moving toward incorporating environmental justice. Does this indicate that movement fusion is possible? Given the numerous structural factors laid out in Chapters Two and Three, even as the NRDC creates more transformational partnerships with EJOs, they will never become an EJO. The NRDC is not place-based, they are rarely confrontational with the state, and they derive their expertise from highly educated staff, not their members. These three characteristics, which are highly antithetical to environmental justice, are intimately connected to the NRDC's structure and thus

unlikely to change. Therefore, although the NRDC signed the Jemez Principles, they are unlikely to ever completely abide to them. A member of the Alignment Group highlights this, “Jemez very strictly lays out, ‘let the community lead.’ I don't know, being fully honest, [if] that is something that we could ever fully do.”<sup>112</sup>

However, as the NRDC and WEACT’s relationship illustrates, the NRDC does not need to be an EJO in order to meaningfully engage with environmental justice. The NRDC and other Big Greens can support the EJM without becoming EJOs. A member of the Environmental Justice Program argues, “we shouldn’t try to be EJ groups. The challenge is more: how do we fully embrace EJ as part of our movement collectively and then embody it in a principled way, which is focused on the communities themselves.”<sup>113</sup> As illuminated by the fracking example, Big Greens and EJOs *can* work together in a principled manner as long as Big Greens build personal relationships and support the EJOs, allowing them to lead and tell their own story.

This reality suggests a potential transition for the NRDC and other Big Greens from a leadership model to a support model. Instead of addressing environmental justice by leading campaigns on environmental justice issues, the NRDC could lend its expertise and political power to existing campaigns led by EJOs or create joint campaigns. Corresponding to this shift, an NRDC employee suggests symbolically renaming the Environmental Justice Program the “Environmental Justice Ally Program.” However, the NRDC and other Big Greens will not become allies to the EJM without internal shifts. As shown in Chapters Three and Four, Big Greens must rethink how they incorporate environmental justice values to truly support EJOs. This rethinking, however, does not require them to completely abandon their existing national advocacy model that is at the heart of their mission.

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<sup>112</sup> Interviewee 5. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 31, 2017.

<sup>113</sup> Interviewee 6. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 31, 2017.

If Big Greens can support EJOs without completely redefining their organizations, is this still movement fusion? Cole and Foster's definition of movement fusion is "the coming together of two (or more) different social movements in a way that expands the base of support for both movements by developing a common agenda" (2001, 164). Given the findings of Chapter Two, it is clear that the two movements will never completely leave behind their previous identities and combine into a single movement. However, as shown by WEACTION and the NRDC's partnership, the EJM and MEM can "expand the base of support for both movements by developing a common agenda," which, within Cole and Foster's definition, is movement fusion. Through embracing environmental justice goals and values, Big Greens can shift toward what an NRDC employee calls "evolved environmentalism."<sup>114</sup> As a result, the NRDC and the MEM would expand their base and stay relevant within a rapidly changing field of social movements. At the same time, the EJM would gain support by unlocking forms of financial and political capital as well as expanding its base to include conscious constituents. The NRDC and WEACTION's partnership offers an initial model for this fusion.

As the potential for movement fusion increases, the question becomes, is movement fusion desirable? Many environmental justice activists are apprehensive about the effects of Big Greens continuing to take on more environmental justice work without becoming EJOs. A WEACTION employee worries about cooptation, fearing that the NRDC could "defang" the EJM because the NRDC will never be fully bottom-up. Speaking on the possibility of Big Greens moving towards hiring people of color without becoming an EJO, they said:

We want to diversify [Big Greens] and have people of color work and influence [them]. At the same time, *we don't want to defang the EJ movement*. If all of the Big Green groups suddenly say, 'the doors open, We're not going to have EJ but we'll have people

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<sup>114</sup> Interviewee 1. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 21, 2017.

of color.’ Suddenly we won't get any money, because they are doing EJ work [emphasis added].<sup>115</sup>

This individual’s fear indicates a larger anxiety that movement fusion could lead to cooptation.

Cooptation of the EJM by Big Greens could happen through a number of avenues. The two largest possibilities are Big Greens working on environmental justice issues without building relationships with environmental justice communities and taking funding away from EJOs.<sup>116</sup>

Yet at least within the NRDC, the individuals who are currently engaging in environmental justice work are almost exclusively part of the Alignment Group and are, therefore, committed to working directly with EJOs. A transition to the support model would further eliminate the risk of Big Greens working on environmental justice issues without partnering with EJOs.

Funding, the second concern regarding cooptation, is trickier. As indicated in Chapter Two, the difficulty of establishing a consistent funding stream is perhaps the most limiting factor for EJOs. If the NRDC begins to take major sources of funding away from cash-strapped EJOs to do their own environmental justice work, the NRDC will critically harm the EJM. Interviewees cited this as the EJM’s worst nightmare: a Big Green, which is not place-based or accountable to the communities that they are working in, receiving funding for environmental justice work instead of the EJO that represents the community.

Currently within the NRDC, each program is awarded institutional funding but is under considerable pressure to raise their own program funds. This structure incentivizes the Environmental Justice Program to solicit funding from outside sources that may otherwise go to

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<sup>115</sup> Interviewee 7. Interview by the author. WEACTION's Harlem Office, New York, NY. August 2, 2017.

<sup>116</sup> Other methods of cooptation include claiming representation of communities and cooptation of stories, discussed in Chapter Three regarding Eric Goldstein’s interactions with *The New York Times*.

EJOs.<sup>117</sup> However, this too can be prevented. To remedy this problem, an employee within the Environmental Justice Program reimagines the future of funding for environmental justice within Big Greens:

The biggest thing is you're going to have to invest in that [environmental justice] using your own general funds, not going to foundations and donors and trying to compete for money that would have otherwise gone to community-based groups. So you have to view it as an essential part of your organization. Much like our development department, our communications, our IT, our finance; we don't get foundation grants to support those roles. Those are based on the institution saying 'we have to have this role.' If we don't have an office manager for IT, then how are we going to operate this organization. So then you invest your dollars in saying EJ has to be treated that way too.<sup>118</sup>

If Big Greens employed this model, the potential for financial cooptation would diminish.

However, the NRDC and other Big Greens are currently unlikely to shift their funding to reflect this concern, thereby maintaining the concern of possible future financial cooptation.

Overall, through looking at the NRDC and WEACTION's relationship, I posit that it is the way in which Big Greens and EJOs partner that will ultimately determine whether movement fusion is possible or desirable. To have equitable movement fusion, organizations must address their structural and cultural differences to prevent cooptation and overcome the barriers that prevent them from creating and maintaining successful partnerships. As previously stated, this hinges more on the development of Big Greens toward EJOs, rather than EJOs adapting to Big Greens. The NRDC and other Big Greens have two possible trajectories; they can continue with the status quo, creating more situations like the California Cap-and-Trade Bill *or* they can follow the Alignment Group and move toward a support model, forming transformational partnerships that generate circumstances like New York City EJOs publicly backing the NRDC on styrofoam.

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<sup>117</sup> Although this is the structure, the directors of the New York and Environmental Justice Programs intentionally try to avoid fundraising within the same space as EJOs to reduce the possibility of taking funds away from EJOs that have considerably less funding than the NRDC.

<sup>118</sup> Interviewee 6. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 31, 2017.

At the start of this project and my work at the NRDC and WEACT, my initial motivation was a desire to assist in the development and understanding of the EJM. As this project comes to a close, my goal remains not simply to further the field of environmental justice or increase the understanding of how partnerships change organizations; I also strive to provide readers from Big Greens and EJOs with pragmatic steps to increase the resonance of environmental justice within Big Greens. Big Greens have a key role to play in supporting the development of the EJM. Transforming a Big Green into a supportive partner requires a lot of hard work and intentionality. Therefore, building on the main findings of Chapters Three and Four, I conclude by offering five steps that Big Greens can take to further this transition.

First, if they do not have one already, Big Greens should create an environmental justice program, but only fund it with institutional funds, prohibiting the program from raising money that would otherwise go to EJOs. Second, Big Greens should create more place-based programs and work to ground all of their programs in accountability toward communities. Third, Big Greens should prioritize the process, not the outcomes, within all their partnerships. In conjunction with this, Big Greens should see movement building as an end in and of itself and seek to create transformational partnerships. Fourth, Big Greens should seek to recognize when differences between their movements and organizational structures create conflict between them and EJOs, such as with the inherent red line effect or differences in scale and accountability. Following this recognition, Big Greens should prioritize their personal relationships and work directly with EJOs to prevent or remediate the issue. Lastly, Big Greens should listen to their EJO partners and internal environmental justice advocates whenever a conflict arises. Judging from conversations around the offices, on bus rides to events, and within my 19 interviews, it is evident that environmental justice activists within both EJOs and Big Greens know what is

needed to overcome the historical and structural contention between the two movements. The path toward supporting environmental justice exists and people are already fighting to make equitable movement fusion a reality.





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#### Interviews

- Interviewee 1. Interview by the author. NRDC’s Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 21, 2017.
- Interviewee 2. Interview by the author. NRDC’s Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 25, 2017.

- Interviewee 3. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 26, 2017.
- Interviewee 4. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 31, 2017.
- Interviewee 5. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 31, 2017.
- Interviewee 5. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 17, 2017.
- Interviewee 6. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. July 31, 2017.
- Interviewee 7. Interview by the author. WEACT's Harlem Office, New York, NY. August 2, 2017.
- Interviewee 8. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 4, 2017.
- Interviewee 9. Interview by the author. Coffee Shop near NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 7, 2017.
- Interviewee 10. Telephone interview by the author. Telephone Interview in NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 9, 2017.
- Interviewee 11. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 10, 2017.
- Interviewee 12. Telephone interview by the author. Telephone Interview while at NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 10, 2017.
- Interviewee 13. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 10, 2017.
- Interviewee 14. Interview by the author. WEACT's Harlem Office, NY, NY. August 11, 2017.
- Interviewee 15. Interview by the author. Harlem's WEACT Office, New York, NY. August 11, 2017.
- Interviewee 16. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 16, 2017.
- Interviewee 17. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 16, 2017.
- Interviewee 18. Interview by the author. NRDC's Manhattan Office, New York, NY. August 16, 2017.