



**Drake Undergraduate Social Science Journal**  
Spring 2019 Edition

Gender, Race, and Class at Love Canal:  
Women as Leaders in Environmental  
Activism

Katlyn Schulz

*College of Arts & Sciences*

## Introduction

In broadly outlining the environmental history of the United States, the ways in which Americans have viewed the environment and its resources have drastically changed over the years. During the early days of Westward expansion, the natural environment was seen as no more than a challenge to be conquered and a resource to exploit. In the early twentieth century, Americans started to recognize the value in protecting the environment, and set aside land for conservation measures within national parks, forests, and monuments. Part of this initiative was prompted by the discovery of ‘ecosystem services,’ or the benefits that humans can freely gain from healthy environments, such as natural water filtration and oxygen production. However, in terms of changing environmental mindsets, one of the greatest controversies stemmed from the events of the 1970s Love Canal Disaster, when the nature of human interactions with the environment provoked Americans to reconsider the toxic effects of hazardous wastes on communities. Remaking themselves as protesters and activists, the working-class, stay-at-home mothers of Love Canal were largely responsible for the eventual decontamination of their community. As effective leaders during a time when women were still largely viewed as second-class citizens, these women not only affected the way that hazardous waste sites were dealt with in the country, but drastically changed perspectives about women in leadership roles as well.

Although the Love Canal Disaster eventually became known as one of the most controversial environmental disasters in United States history, as a relatively recent historical event, very few historians have actually written interpretations of the grassroots movement. Initially, the focus of historical attention surrounded the gender dynamics of the leaders protesting the disaster. Lois Gibbs, a white, working-class mother and the leader of the Love Canal Homeowners Association (LCHA), wrote her own account of the struggle to politicize

motherhood and win support for federally funded relocation from the area. Historians like Amy Hay followed Gibbs' lead, exploring how gender shaped mothers' activism and the consequences that stemmed from it. Elizabeth D. Blum's *Love Canal Revisited: Race, Class, and Gender in Environmental Activism*, offered an even wider perspective, emphasizing how gender, race, and class shaped the environmental movement. In her section about gender, Blum demonstrated how Love Canal mothers used the confines of their restrictive gender roles to work to their own advantage, using maternalistic rhetoric and a plea for a return to normalcy to tug at the heartstrings of fellow Americans. For race and class, Blum discussed how the concerns of the African American women were not taken as seriously as those of the working-class white women, due largely to institutionalized racism and misunderstandings based on class differences. However, while Blum included sections on both race and class, there is relatively little analysis on their intersectionality with the gendered expectations of women and its subsequent effect on the movement.

This paper, therefore, acts as a case study of how gender, race, and class shaped the activist strategies of these women. Due to the nature of women's social status in the 1970s, the question must be asked – how were women able to act as effective leaders in the community in a time when post-World War II gender roles had largely restricted their realm of influence to the home, and how were their actions interpreted by the public during that time? Additionally, to what extent did race and class dynamics shape the leadership of the LCHA and the African American women of Griffon Manor? The approaches both groups took to protest greatly modified the way that many feminists had been attempting to confront societal change, as the Love Canal leaders claimed to fight not for themselves, but for the wellbeing of their children. Expanding on Blum's analyses, this study addresses the intersectionality between gender, race,

and class, as well as how arguments of motherhood successfully resolved one of the most controversial environmental disasters in United States history.

## **History**

In the early 1900s, entrepreneur William T. Love began to dig a canal north of the Niagara River in an attempt to use Niagara Falls' water power as a source of renewable and continuous energy.<sup>1</sup> Although less than a mile of the original canal was completed before the project was abandoned, the excavated space was put to use only ten years later as a dumping site for the city of Niagara Falls, the U.S. Army, and the Hooker Chemical company.<sup>2</sup> For the next thirty years, a wide variety of wastes were dumped into the abandoned canal, ranging from caustic solvents and pesticides to radioactive waste from the Manhattan Project's atomic weapon development.<sup>3</sup> At the time of the dump's closure, around 21,000 tons of chemicals had been deposited into the canal, mainly in 55-gallon barrels.<sup>4</sup>

During the 1950s, the Niagara Falls School Board purchased the land from Hooker Chemical for one dollar in response to a rapid increase in the local area's population, and an elementary school was constructed 75 meters from the site.<sup>5</sup> The suburb of Love Canal that was built around the school (and consequently the chemical dump site) remained largely unaffected by the dump's contents until the mid-1970s, when heavy rainfall rusted the barrels and released chemical sludge into the surrounding ground and water.<sup>6</sup> Shortly afterwards, residents began to complain about "chemical smells...in the drainage ditches around their basements" and unexpected health issues such as "asthma, liver problems, immune system problems, urinary tract disorders," miscarriages, and birth defects.<sup>7</sup> The residents were given no explanation for these occurrences until April, 1978, when a *Niagara Gazette* reporter released an article detailing the area's history.<sup>8</sup> Finally understanding the cause of her son's unexpected health concerns,

stay-at-home mother Lois Gibbs began to discuss the issue with her neighbors. With the city still refusing to take action, Gibbs and many of the other women of the community banded together to create the Love Canal Homeowners Association (LCHA), protesting for over five years before successfully suing Hooker Chemical and demanding relocation by the federal government.

### **Gender**

As much of American society during the 1970s still viewed women as the equivalent to “second-class citizens whose proper place lay in the home,” Gibbs and the women activists of Love Canal faced many challenges before they were able to achieve their goal of relocation by the federal government.<sup>9</sup> Although backlash for their activist actions was to be expected from the powerful figures within the governmental agencies that they were confronting, the men in their families and community ultimately created some of the greatest challenges that the LCHA faced, due to their negative reactions over the “dramatic changes in the family roles over the course of the Love Canal Crisis.”<sup>10</sup>

The men in the Love Canal community had adopted a strict interpretation of gender roles, believing that tradition dictated the man to be family’s sole “leader, protector, and provider.”<sup>11</sup> However, as a majority of the men in the community were employed by the local chemical industry, they were effectively banned from participating in the protests, lest they risk their careers and livelihoods.<sup>12</sup> Many of them felt trapped – trapped between the desire to financially support their families and the desire to protect them from harm. Their stay-at-home wives, on the other hand, suffered from no monetary ramifications by taking action in the protests, and so began taking leadership positions within the LCHA. However, even though many of the men were reluctant to participate in the protests themselves, they refused to give their support to the

women who were defending the rights of their community, as they “resented the leadership roles exercised by women.”<sup>13</sup>

Those that deeply resented their wives’ actions frequently encouraged them to quit the LCHA, despite the risks of staying in the neighborhood.<sup>14</sup> Norman Cerrillo, husband to activist Debbie Cerrillo, worried that his wife’s activism would result in divorce, due to her frequent absence from the home.<sup>15</sup> He, along with many other men in the community, felt as though women’s activism was challenging their masculinity and threatening the stability of traditional family roles. In Cerrillo’s mind, Debbie’s only worth in the world was “to be a good wife and good mother,” and her activism took her away from her “proper role.”<sup>16</sup> Believing women’s leadership to be an “attack on the traditional male role,” some men even went as far as to work in direct opposition with the LCHA, accusing Gibbs of being too “emotional” and questioning her right to authority.<sup>17</sup> Charles Bryan, a resident of Love Canal, stated that “those government people are just walking all around that little girl. Lois is just this skinny girl and she can’t handle it. She’s got to get up there and tell them to go screw themselves.”<sup>18</sup> He claimed that ‘that kind of assertiveness’ was “for a man to do.”<sup>19</sup> The LCHA received similar treatment from the state health authorities, who viewed the housewives as “well-intentioned but essentially clueless about matters beyond domestic duties.”<sup>20</sup> This dismissive attitude by the government towards the women activists made it increasingly difficult to legitimize their protests, public hearings, and health surveys as little more than “useless housewife data.”<sup>21</sup>

Despite these tensions, some men in the community were more cooperative than others. A few were supportive of their wives’ activist actions, as long as the “entire environment of the household would return to normal” after the situation was resolved.<sup>22</sup> However, even those that showed their support often had trouble adjusting to their temporarily reversed gender roles. As

the women of the LCHA spent an increasing amount of time in meetings, at protests, or in the case of Lois Gibbs, in jail, husbands often found the “women’s work” being redistributed to them.<sup>23</sup> Although many men saw this as their contribution for helping to get their family out of the neighborhood, household chores and childcare had always been “devalued” as an occupation, leading many of them to resent their wives’ absence from the home.<sup>24</sup> Harry Gibbs, the husband of Lois Gibbs, once asked, “when are we going to have some normalcy? I’m tired of changing the damned diapers.”<sup>25</sup>

Although many of the men resisted the women’s leadership, their tactics were so successful that their effectiveness could no longer be plausibly denied. A small group of men tried to challenge the women’s leadership, arguing for community revitalization rather than relocation and insisting that “citizenship granted them the right to property ownership.”<sup>26</sup>

Although the men aimed to win financial support from the state, they only succeeded in further alienating themselves from the government. As the primary leader of the movement, Lois Gibbs quickly discovered that discussing economic concerns of the town’s property values and “not being able to get a good price for her home” was not an effective strategy to garner public support, even when deployed by other men in the community.<sup>27</sup> Arguing that the men’s tactics appeared to be ‘too selfish’ to the public, Gibbs argued that the Love Canal community needed to change tactics in order to win their sympathies – they needed to “take the moral high ground.”<sup>28</sup>

Shifting the focus of their argument from financial concerns to one that was more inclusive, the women of the LCHA adopted a strategy reflective of Alice Hamilton and the municipal housekeepers of the late 1800s, which argued that women’s “instinct for caring for other people... [obligated them to] apply their expertise outside the home.”<sup>29</sup> Finding that it was

“far more effective” to use maternalistic rhetoric to grab the attention of the government and the media, local mothers began to stage “marches to bring attention to the impact of toxins on their children.”<sup>30</sup> As historian Rich Newman has argued, their role reversal as protectors of the family made sense: as a woman’s daily life revolved around her home and family, she was the natural candidate to fight the “toxic waste and government apathy [that] threatened that life.”<sup>31</sup> Proudly declaring herself to be a wife and mother, one Love Canal resident stated “I was the one who had to take care of the household and the children and stuff like that . . . protecting the family and everything and see what's going on with our health and our home and everything else.”<sup>32</sup>

Surprisingly, despite their political involvement and leadership, many of the women of the LCHA vehemently rejected the notion that they (or their work) should be labeled as “feminist.” Although second-wave feminism was in full force during the 1970s, as working-class housewives, the movement itself seemed to be not only “irrelevant” to them, but “exclusive and unrepresentative” to any woman not seeking a career or trying to break gender boundaries.<sup>33</sup> In their minds, the feminist movement “had very negative connotations of being ‘antifamily,’” and Patti Grenzy of the LCHA stated that “it didn’t involve me because I was a family mother.”<sup>34</sup>

Especially as their protest was based on maternalistic rhetoric, the female members of the LCHA wished to avoid any association with the feminist “anti-family” movement, and instead used “conservative arguments centered on heterosexual reproduction” to advance their argument for permanent, state-aided relocation.<sup>35</sup> After the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released a health study on the ‘chromosomal breakage’ found within many residents’ genes that could result in “an increased risk of miscarriages, stillbirths, and birth defects,” uproar from the community quickly drew national media attention to their protests.<sup>36</sup> Gibbs demanded answers: what if the women “get pregnant and risk the possibility that the fetus will be damaged before

they even know they are pregnant, and then they will have to wait several weeks before they can move?"<sup>37</sup> Perceiving the refusal of the public health department to relocate all couples desiring pregnancy as a means to deny them the right to become mothers, Gibbs went as far as accusing the Department of Health of "[playing] with people's lives" and "practicing birth control."<sup>38</sup> Gibbs prompted the tragic stories of Love Canal to be released to the public, one highlighting the woman who confided her decision not to have children and "choosing a barren future," another of a pregnant woman frantically asking "What's going to happen to my baby?"<sup>39</sup> By publicizing concerns of threats to the traditional 'nuclear' family within the Love Canal neighborhood, the "thousands of letters of support" proved that the maternalistic rhetoric of the LCHA was an effective means of grabbing the nation's attention and support.

Despite their rejection of the feminist label, LCHA activists still borrowed from certain aspects of the movement while leading their own. With a firm belief that "their voices should carry equal political weight to men's," Gibbs frequently argued that their "rights as citizens and taxpayers...entitled them to a certain amount of action and attention from the government."<sup>40</sup> According to Blum, their rejection of feminism and their subsequent activism eventually "yielded a sense of empowerment and, ironically, roles outside of the home."<sup>41</sup>

Regardless of their feminist intentions or not, the members of the LCHA eventually succeeded in their quest for relocation. While they may not have associated their activist actions with the feminist movement of the 1970s, their use of maternalistic rhetoric "provided a safe [and effective] avenue for activism in a society that saw women as second-class citizens whose proper place lay in the home."<sup>42</sup> Whether or not their tactics "reinforced subordinate roles" for women, or "provided a safe avenue for activism in a society that saw women as second-class citizens," what cannot be denied is the effectiveness of their strategy.<sup>43</sup> Their maternalistic

activism expanded their domestic authority to community one, reframing family life as a gendered community issue. In doing so, they were able to appeal to the public through their use of “conservative arguments...demanding the protection of the nuclear family,” while still making “demands...[that] showed the progressive influence of postwar social movements.”<sup>44</sup> Even after the Love Canal tragedy was resolved, the actions of Lois Gibbs and the women of the LCHA sparked a revolution across the country, encouraging other blighted communities to fight for their right for clean air and water.

### **Race and Class**

As the publicity surrounding the disaster educated the nation on the dangers of toxic waste, the largely women-led environmental protest served as a ‘pivotal’ point for promoting women’s leadership and challenging traditional gender roles.<sup>45</sup> Typically, credit for the successful relocation of affected families is often given to Lois Gibbs, the crisis’s most well-known face and the President of the Love Canal Homeowners Association (LCHA). However, the prominence of white women’s voices like Gibbs tended to drown out those of the African American women living in the nearby Griffon Manor federal housing project. Though they are often overlooked or forgotten, the black women of Griffon Manor shared many similarities with those of the LCHA, demanding governmental assistance for relocation in order to protect their families and children.

Although the presence of pervasive segregation throughout the Love Canal community had created a geographic divide between the white and black populations, the groups’ overarching goals were largely the same: demand government-funded relocation to an area safe from the toxic dump site’s effects.<sup>46</sup> However, disagreements stemming from differences in race and class quickly proved that successful collaboration between the two groups would be nigh

impossible, leaving the black women of Griffon Manor to fight for relocation in the face of racism, white ignorance, and stereotypical attitudes about African Americans on their own.<sup>47</sup>

Even before the environmental protest began, racial tensions in the Niagara Falls neighborhood ran high. Combined with racism, differences in economic and social class had led to the creation of a segregated community, with white residents living primarily in the LaSalle suburbs and black residents concentrated in and around the Griffon Manor federal housing project.<sup>48</sup> Predominantly employed by the local chemical industry, working-class whites who were willing to work in hazardous conditions were paid significantly higher wages than other typical factory workers, which allowed them to invest in the “small two-and three-bedroom starter houses” common to the area.<sup>49</sup> Living in their white-picket-fence suburban neighborhood, many working-class whites viewed the investment into their homes as a “significant financial investment” and source of pride, providing explanation for their desperate attempt to protect their property values in the face of the Love Canal Tragedy, as well as their dismissal of the property-less renters as deserving of relocation aid from the federal government.<sup>50</sup>

As the environmental protest went under way, one of the greatest sources of racial tension between the homeowners and renters was due to the whites’ ignorance of those living on welfare and in public housing units.<sup>51</sup> Growing up in the overwhelmingly white communities of Grand Island, both Gibbs and Cerrillo admitted having “little to no experience with the black community” due to a lifetime of “lack of exposure to blacks as friends or neighbors.”<sup>52</sup> From this ignorance often stemmed hatred and fear, leading whites to avoid the Highland Avenue area, believing that “somebody would kill your ass” if you strayed into the community alone.<sup>53</sup> Quite reflective of common white working-class views at the time, Cerrillo was quoted as saying, “my father...said they rape and pillage. That’s all they’re good for...And I’m sorry to say that.”<sup>54</sup>

These acts of blatant racism were not restricted to the LaSalle suburban community, however, and extended into the bureaucracy as well. After Gibbs began to consider proposing a collaboration with the LCHA to the Griffon Manor residents, she was approached by bureaucrat Mike Cuddy, who warned her that “you shouldn’t be messing with them” and pulled out “all the files on the African Americans, histories of crimes that they committed and were found guilty of” in an attempt to convince her that a partnership with Griffon Manor would only result in failure.<sup>55</sup>

Isolated as the two communities were from each other, misunderstandings quickly arose over the nature of the renter’s financial situation. When they found out that the renters were also requesting compensation, LCHA expressed confusion and ignorance, asking “if they want to move, why don’t they? Welfare pays to move them.”<sup>56</sup> To the white homeowners, the black residents of Griffon Manor seemed to be a “less permanent” group than themselves, free to move away from the area whenever they wished.<sup>57</sup> Many white males in the area took the accusations a step further, claiming, “we’re owners, and we came first, we invested our money in real estate and we should come first.”<sup>58</sup>

Because of their ignorance, men like Thomas Heisner allowed their misunderstandings to transform into acts of blatant racism. Aiming to further marginalize renters by demanding “property-tax relief and [emphasizing] mortgage boycotts,” Heisner’s followers vehemently opposed the LCHA when Gibbs’s organization contemplated including “inclusive language into the organization’s bylaws.”<sup>59</sup> According to Blum, “the consistent references to the rights of taxpayers constituted a veiled attempt to limit the rights and benefits of those African Americans surviving on welfare in Griffon Manor.”<sup>60</sup>

Scholar Valerie Kaalund recognized this behavior as a means to marginalize the minority community. Consisting primarily of single black mothers living on welfare, the Griffon Manor community was an easy target – as it was “perceived as being inhabited by inferior ... economically disadvantaged people who [did] not have much social, political, or economic capital,” their grievances could be easily dampened and ignored.<sup>61</sup> Whether an act of conscious of racism or not, Blum claimed that the white homeowners’ behavior likely stemmed from a desire to “ensure that their families’ needs were given priority” over those of the renters.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, it was relatively easy for white homeowners to try and “exclude renters from [the] benefits” the LCHA was working towards.<sup>63</sup>

However, despite their constant accusations against the renters, what the neighborhood residents did not know was this: although they did not own property, moving out of the Love Canal area was just as difficult for the black renters as it was for the white homeowners, albeit for different reasons. The Griffon Manor residents primarily belonged to households headed by single mothers, reflective of the 99% of other black families across the country on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (A.F.D.C).<sup>64</sup> Although Patrick Moynihan, author of the report “*The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*,” blamed blacks’ “self-perpetuating cycle of poverty and despair” on the “absence of stable, male-headed households and the preponderance of female-headed, single-parent families,” welfare rights activist Johnnie Tillmon revealed the government’s role in creating black households headed by single mothers.<sup>65</sup> Rather than accuse the “pathological matriarchal situation” of being the harbinger of the ‘culture of poverty,’ Tillmon suggested that the government’s poverty reduction strategies were to blame instead.<sup>66</sup>

While Moynihan saw the absence of black fathers and nuclear families as the primary agents for the perpetuation, Tillmon argued that “in half the states there really can’t be men

around because A.F.D.C. says if there is an “able-bodied” man around, then you can’t be on welfare.”<sup>67</sup> She stated, “if the kids are going to eat, and the man can’t get a job, then he’s got to go. So his kids can eat.”<sup>68</sup> Black men’s’ absence from the home, therefore, was not endemic to those living the “ghetto life,” but instead a result of institutionalized sexism and racism.<sup>69</sup> As black women’s pay was so low that even those “working full time still [fell] below the poverty line,” the A.F.D.C. ensured that even those with full-time employment would continue to “feed the cycle of family breakdown, criminality, and continued want.”<sup>70</sup>

For these reasons, very few of the tenants had the ability to “just pick up and move.”<sup>71</sup> Additionally, renters who were dependent on federal aid “needed special government-issued certificates to gain access to safe, subsidized housing,” which were “repeatedly delayed” over the near decade-long protest.<sup>72</sup> Without government assistance, trying to move from the housing projects on their own would have resulted in the loss of basic necessities like food and water.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, although LCHA leaders like Gibbs eventually recognized and tried to remedy the organization’s exclusion of the Griffon Manor residents, the renters reacted strongly and negatively to their ostracism from the creation of the Love Canal *Homeowners* Association, the main avenue for Love Canal citizens to demand relocation by the federal government.

Looking back on their decision to emphasize home ownership in the LCHA’s title, Lois Gibbs was quoted, saying, “we were stupid...we had to call ourselves something...and then we were stuck with it.”<sup>74</sup> Although Gibbs and other leaders of the LCHA worked to diffuse the racial tension which had arisen from the creation of their organization, the early resentment from the renters proved hard to overcome, as they felt that the association “failed to represent them or take their interests to heart.”<sup>75</sup> And indeed, William Abrams Sr., president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) chapter in Niagara Falls, stated

that although white homeowners were beginning to be relocated by government officials, black citizens were being told “they [were] no longer in danger from the chemicals...buried in the Love Canal,” even though they suffered from the same health effects as the homeowners.<sup>76</sup>

Racial tensions between the two groups spiked dramatically after remedial construction efforts were approved by the LCHA, a decision which would allow the Federal Disaster Assistance Agency to seal off home sump pumps and build trenches to transport toxic wastes into the sewers and away from peoples’ homes. However, before the LCHA had decided to allow these construction efforts to take place, they had first bargained for the evacuation of homeowners living closest to the toxic dump site. Although Griffon Manor residents were suffering from the same extreme health issues as the homeowners, their pleas for relocation were ignored by the federal government and the LCHA alike. In retaliation, the Griffon Manor residents formed their own organization, the Concerned Love Canal Renters Association (CLCRA), and sued to halt the remedial construction efforts, as they refused to “stand with homeowners on the matter.”<sup>77</sup> The CLCRA also chose to reach out to the NAACP, who helped provide financial support and drew attention to the racial inequality present in the relocation efforts.

In the minds of CLCRA members and Griffon Manor residents such as Elene Thornton, their organization “promoted an inclusive view of who should receive environmental benefits,” using “environmental activism as a way to combat their subordinate status in society” and receive compensation from the government.<sup>78</sup> Lois Gibbs, however, recalled feeling an acute sense of betrayal after learning that the renters had created their own separate organization and began working in direct opposition to the LCHA. In her memoir, titled “Love Canal: My Story,” she expressed confusion over why Cora Hoffman, one of the CLCRA leaders, would rather

“organize a separate black group instead of helping us work together.”<sup>79</sup> However, after the divisive lawsuit took place, “tensions lessened between blacks and whites after ... stemming from the realization that they shared similar goals and needs.”<sup>80</sup>

To this day, African American communities are still exposed to high levels of pollution, due to what sociologist Cynthia Hamilton has identified as “racialized urban development.”<sup>81</sup> The effects of such racial disparity are evident in the statistics – according to the American Lung Association, “asthma attack prevalence rates among African Americans are 32 percent higher than the rates in whites.”<sup>82</sup> And although Lois Gibbs was quoted to have “immediately regretted” the exclusivity of their organization’s name and actions, the instance served as one of many that highlighted the organization’s ignorance concerning differences of race and class.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the disparities and conflicts that existed between the women of the LCHA and the CLCRA, something of permanence came out of their protesting efforts. Eventually, both groups succeeded in their endeavors, as all of the 900 families in the area “had moved and received some financial restitution for their loss of health and property.”<sup>83</sup> After the events of the disaster were publicized, widespread public outrage pressured the federal government to take action. In the year 1980, the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), or ‘Superfund,’ was created, which ensured that the EPA was given sufficient funds to clean up contaminated sites and permanently reduce health risks across the country.<sup>84</sup>

Now a full-time environmental activist, Gibbs can only express regret that the LCHA and CLCRA never collaborated, as she believes that they could have achieved relocation much more quickly and efficiently. Despite Gibbs’s assumptions on the matter, that might not have been the

case. For the white homeowners of the LCHA, their use of maternalistic rhetoric helped them to successfully argue for relocation. In the public's mind, the white women of Love Canal were simply defending their families from an environmental disaster, which was interpreted to be self-sacrificing and altruistic. For the black mothers living in the Griffon Manor federal housing unit, however, the discourse that the LCHA had created was much harder for them to access and implement.

As most of the Griffon Manor residents belonged to a female-headed household, their families were already perceived as being deficient by the public – they were not “whole.” In addition, because they failed to fit within the traditional “nuclear” family model, they were automatically unable to make many of the same maternalistic and conservative arguments that the LCHA did. Instead, they had to seek justice, fighting for relocation in the face of institutionalized racism and classism. Rather than being viewed as courageous or righteous, the public instead deemed them self-absorbed. Without assistance from the NAACP, such accusations could have effectively prevented the CLCRA members from obtaining relocation aid from the federal government.

Though the environmental disaster sparked widespread awareness about the effects of hazardous wastes on communities, it also highlighted the institutional and racialized oppression that can arise from such events as well. During the decade-long protest, the needs of the La Salle community were continuously prioritized over those of the Griffon Manor federal housing project, even though both groups shared the common goal of gaining federally funded relocation. While Gibbs's wish that the LCHA and the CLCRA had had the foresight to collaborate was admirable, it is evident that her definition of “working together” does not sufficiently address the race and class differences that divided the two groups. For future environmental protests, much

can be learned from the Love Canal Disaster – it is important to not only acknowledge that poorer communities are more susceptible to exposure to environmental disasters, but that they also lack much of the economic and social power that is required to fight back against such incidences. Only through the intersectionality of gender, race, and class could the LCHA and CLCRA have united and produced the “incredible [power base]” that Gibbs so desired.<sup>85</sup>

- 
- <sup>1</sup> The History Channel, “Love Canal” (YouTube, 2015).
- <sup>2</sup> Nancy Unger, *Beyond Nature’s Housekeepers: American Women in Environmental History* (Oxford University Press, 2012) 190.
- <sup>3</sup> Unger, *Beyond Nature’s Housekeepers*, 190.
- <sup>4</sup> Unger, *Beyond Nature’s Housekeepers*, 190.
- <sup>5</sup> Unger, *Beyond Nature’s Housekeepers*, 190.
- <sup>6</sup> “The Love Canal Disaster: Toxic Waste in the Neighborhood,” *The New York Times*. 2013 (RetroReport).
- <sup>7</sup> The History Channel, “Love Canal” (YouTube: 14 Apr. 2015).
- <sup>8</sup> Unger, *Beyond Nature’s Housekeepers*, 191.
- <sup>9</sup> Elizabeth D. Blum, *Love Canal Revisited: Race, Class, and Gender in Environmental Activism* (University Press of Kansas, 2008) 32.
- <sup>10</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 51.
- <sup>11</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 51.
- <sup>12</sup> Unger, *Beyond Nature’s Housekeepers*, 193.
- <sup>13</sup> Unger, *Beyond Nature’s Housekeepers*, 192.
- <sup>14</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 53.
- <sup>15</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 51.
- <sup>16</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 51.
- <sup>17</sup> Unger, *Beyond Nature’s Housekeepers*, 192.
- <sup>18</sup> Unger, *Beyond Nature’s Housekeepers*, 192.
- <sup>19</sup> Unger, *Beyond Nature’s Housekeepers*, 192.
- <sup>20</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 192.
- <sup>21</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 192.
- <sup>22</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 54.
- <sup>23</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 54.
- <sup>24</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 54.
- <sup>25</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 54.
- <sup>26</sup> Amy M. Hay, “Recipe for Disaster: Motherhood and Citizenship at Love Canal,” *Journal of Women’s History* 21.1 (Spring 2009), 112.
- <sup>27</sup> Unger, *Beyond Nature’s Housekeepers*, 152.
- <sup>28</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 37.
- <sup>29</sup> Unger, *Beyond Nature’s Housekeepers*, 85.
- <sup>30</sup> Unger, *Beyond Nature’s Housekeepers*, 191.
- <sup>31</sup> Rich Newman, *Making Environmental Politics: Women and Love Canal Activism* (*Women’s Studies Quarterly: Earthwork*, 2001) 72.
- <sup>32</sup> Hay, “Recipe for Disaster,” 116.
- <sup>33</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 48.
- <sup>34</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 48.
- <sup>35</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 33.
- Hay, “Recipe for Disaster,” 118.
- <sup>36</sup> Hay, “Recipe for Disaster,” 114.
- <sup>37</sup> Hay, “Recipe for Disaster,” 115.
- <sup>38</sup> Hay, “Recipe for Disaster,” 115.
- <sup>39</sup> Hay, “Recipe for Disaster,” 114.

- 
- <sup>40</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 48.
- <sup>41</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 48.
- <sup>42</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 32.
- <sup>43</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 32.
- <sup>44</sup> Hay, "Recipe for Disaster," 127.
- <sup>45</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 63.
- <sup>46</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 66.
- <sup>47</sup> Unger, *Beyond Nature's Housekeepers*, 193.
- <sup>48</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 66.
- <sup>49</sup> Hay, "Recipe for Disaster," 113.
- <sup>50</sup> Hay, "Recipe for Disaster," 113.
- Unger, *Beyond Nature's Housekeepers*, 191.
- <sup>51</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 69.
- <sup>52</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 68.
- <sup>53</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 66.
- <sup>54</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 68.
- <sup>55</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 68.
- <sup>56</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 69.
- <sup>57</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 67.
- <sup>58</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 68.
- <sup>59</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 68.
- <sup>60</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 51.
- <sup>61</sup> Valerie Kaalund, *Witness to Truth: Black Women Heeding the Call for Environmental Justice* (ResearchGate, 2004) 84.
- <sup>62</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 70.
- <sup>63</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 70.
- <sup>64</sup> Johnnie Tillmon, "Welfare as a Women's Issue" (1972) 335.
- <sup>65</sup> Bruce J. Schulman, "Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism: A Brief Biography With Documents" (Bedford/St. Martins, 2007) 124.
- <sup>66</sup> Schulman, "Lyndon N. Johnson and American Liberalism," 124.
- Tillmon, "Welfare as a Women's Issue," 337.
- <sup>67</sup> Tillmon, "Welfare as a Women's Issue," 336.
- <sup>68</sup> Tillmon, "Welfare as a Women's Issue," 336.
- <sup>69</sup> Schulman, "Lyndon N. Johnson and American Liberalism," 124.
- <sup>70</sup> Schulman, "Lyndon N. Johnson and American Liberalism," 123.
- <sup>71</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 51-69.
- <sup>72</sup> Unger, *Beyond Nature's Housekeepers*, 194.
- <sup>73</sup> Unger, *Beyond Nature's Housekeepers*, 194.
- <sup>74</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 71.
- <sup>75</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 70.
- <sup>76</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 74.
- <sup>77</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 76.
- <sup>78</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 141.
- <sup>79</sup> Lois Marie Gibbs, *Love Canal: My Story* (State University of New York Press, 1982) 58.
- <sup>80</sup> Blum, *Love Canal Revisited*, 82.

---

<sup>81</sup> Julie Sze, “Children’s Urban Environmental Health Activism” (New Perspectives on Environmental Justice: Gender, Sexuality, and Activism, Rutgers University Press 2004) 181.

<sup>82</sup> Sze, “Children’s Urban Environmental Health Activism,” 181.

<sup>83</sup> Unger, *Beyond Nature’s Housekeepers*, 196.

<sup>84</sup> Environmental Protection Agency.

<sup>85</sup> Gibbs, *Love Canal: My Story*, 67.