

CHEMICAL CORRIDOR

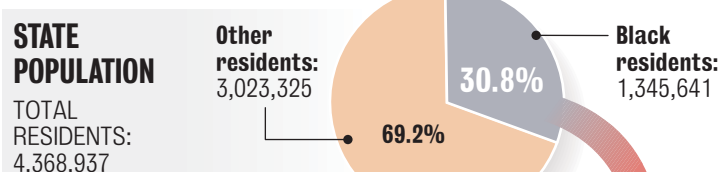
A 171-mile long, 6-mile wide stretch of the Mississippi River between Baton Rouge and New Orleans is ground zero in the national debate over environmental justice. One-third of Louisiana's black residents live in an area that comprises just 3.6 percent of the state. They are descendants of the plantations that once lined the river and now live next door to refineries, chemical plants and waste dumps in one of the most heavily polluted areas of the country.

- KEY**
- One of top 10 polluters in corridor
 - Plant releasing more than 1,000,000 pounds of pollutants per year
 - Plant releasing 100,000-1,000,000 pounds of pollutants per year
 - Plant releasing 10,000-100,000 pounds of pollutants per year
 - Mississippi River industrial corridor (6-mile-wide zone)
 - Cities/communities involved in environmental justice disputes
 - Other cities
 - River, lakes or other bodies of water
 - Wetlands/swamps

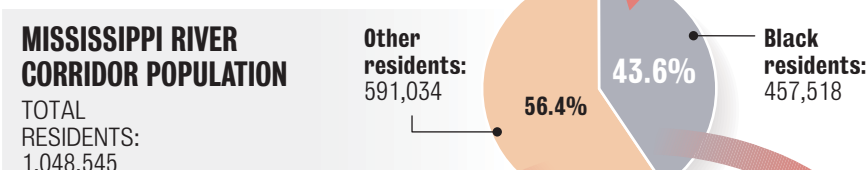
1 DEFINING THE ISSUE

The environmental justice debate often boils down to a battle over statistics. While many studies show a national pattern of poor and minority communities near polluting sites, the nation's geographic diversity and the variety of pollution sources make it hard to draw firm conclusions. There are stronger patterns on the regional level. They seem clearest along the chemical corridor of Louisiana. In one study, here's how the Environmental Protection Agency analyzed how black people bear more than their share of pollution:

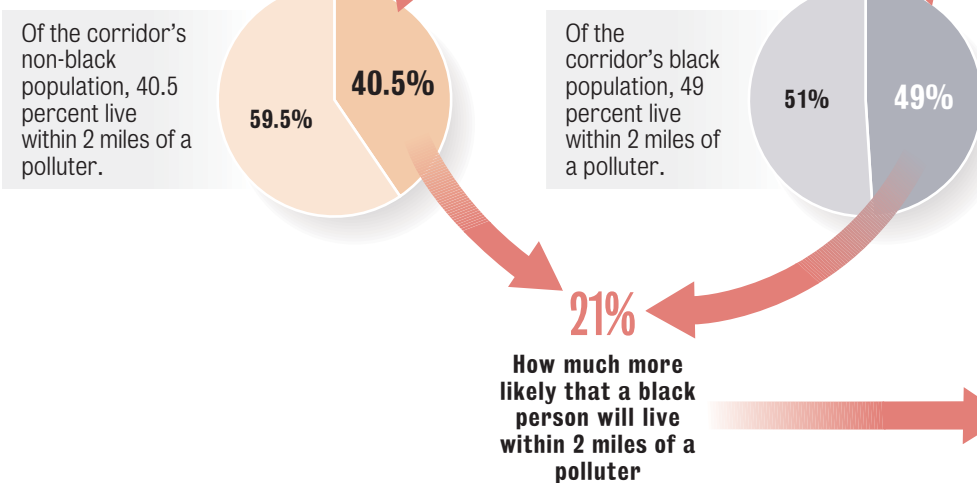
Although the state's population is less than one-third black . . .



. . . A greater percentage of the residents of the 6-mile-wide industrial corridor are African-American.



Although more whites than blacks live in the corridor, fewer whites live close to plants.



HOTSPOTS ALONG THE CORRIDOR

A look at other historic communities and cities along the Mississippi River involved in environmental justice disputes.

A ALSEN

The African-American community is surrounded by industrial sites. It was zoned for industrial use in the 1950s and became a dumping ground for industrial waste. In the 1980s, community groups formed to fight the Rollins Environmental Services hazardous waste incinerator. A class-action lawsuit forced some changes at the incinerator, and another suit blocked a proposal to burn PCBs. Rollins shut down in 1997. Recently, residents have been fighting two dumps and a proposed expansion of the Exxon plastics plant.

B MORRISONVILLE

Dow Chemical Co., fearing liability from a potential accident, bought out this tiny community that lay along its fence line in Plaquemine and relocated residents. Morrisonville was founded in the 1870s by residents of the Australia Plantation, but the arrival of the enormous Dow plant in the 1950s changed the area profoundly. Today, residents can visit a cemetery that remains on the land.



C ST. GABRIEL

Supplemental Fuels Inc. of Nashville, Tenn., wanted to build a plant to blend hazardous industrial waste with diesel fuel to make fuel for cement kilns. DEQ reversed a preliminary decision to approve the plant on the grounds that other sites had not been adequately considered after the EPA said it would investigate a 1993 civil rights complaint.

D WALLACE

The St. John the Baptist Parish Council rezoned an area near a small African-American community from residential to industrial when Formosa Plastics Corp. of Taiwan wanted to build an \$800 million rayon plant. Complaints by community groups and activists helped drag out the regulatory process, and the plant was put on hold after the EPA required the company to do an extensive environmental impact study.

E MT. AIRY

Over the protests of residents, the St. John the Baptist Parish Council voted in 1989 to rezone land for heavy industrial use after Aristech Chemical Co. of Pennsylvania bought 420 acres for a phenol plant. Residents filed suit to reverse the decision, but Aristech was bought by the Mitsubishi Corp. and plans were put on hold before the suit could proceed.

F AGRICULTURE STREET

A neighborhood for lower-income residents was built atop what once was the biggest landfill in New Orleans. Many residents got sick with ailments ranging from rashes to cancer, though there's no conclusive link to the dump. EPA declared Agriculture Street a Superfund site in 1994. Residents say a \$20 million cleanup is inadequate and demand that the government move them.

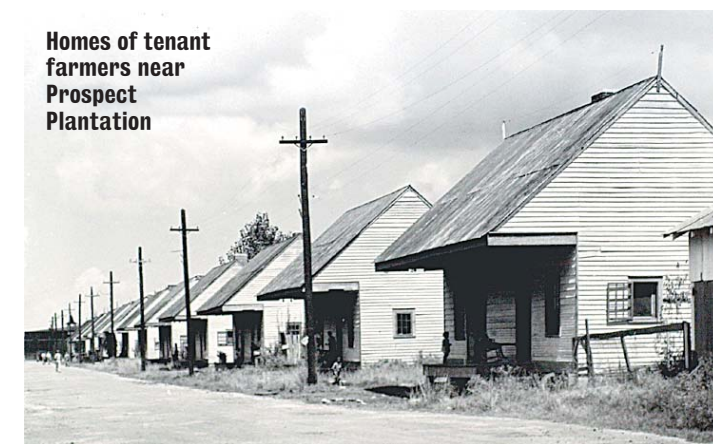
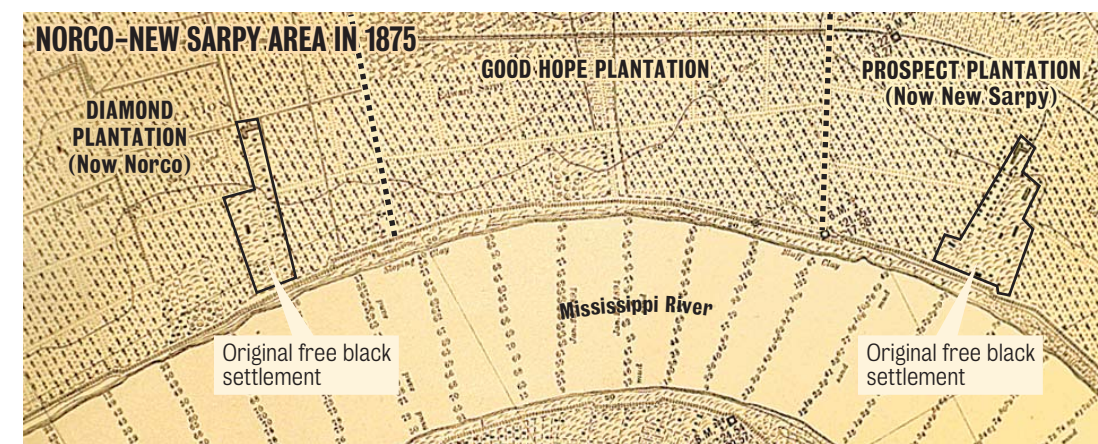
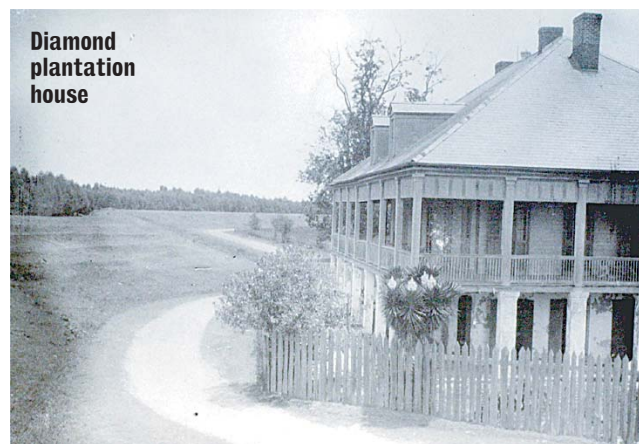


G OAKVILLE

The Plaquemines Parish community was founded by freed slaves from the nearby Live Oak Plantation and sits next to a waste dump/recycling center/pipe supplier. DEQ has cited the dump dozens of times for violations including polluted runoff and violating a buffer zone rule. But the agency has never enforced its rules and recently cut a deal to put the site back in compliance with no input from residents.

2 REALITY ON THE GROUND The original black settlements . . .

A 5.7-mile stretch of the Mississippi River at Norco starkly illustrates environmental justice conflicts. Where cane fields once stood are now four giant petrochemical plants, practically surrounding the black hamlets founded after slavery. Those communities are now demanding relief from the burdens of industrialization. Some middle-class housing has been built as well, but it is nearly all white. And residents of those areas are far more likely to have the jobs in the plants that serve as trade-offs for living with pollution.



Historical photos and map: courtesy of the Historic New Orleans Collection

. . . are now dwarfed by a giant chemical complex

THE ORIGINAL DIAMOND PLANTATION SETTLEMENT

The area remains today much as it was after the Civil War: black and poor.

TOTAL NUMBER OF RESIDENTS: 632



- Only 6.9 percent of residents 16 and older have industry-related jobs.
- 58.8 percent of black residents have a household income of \$15,000 or less, compared to zero percent of white residents.

NEWCOMERS

An influx of white residents moved in as industries were built. Unlike their African-American neighbors, most chose to move next to the plants, and nearly a quarter have relatively well-paying factory jobs.

TOTAL NUMBER OF RESIDENTS: 2,501



- 23.7 percent of residents 16 and older have industry-related jobs.
- 76.6 percent of white residents have a household income of \$15,000 or more, compared to zero percent of black residents.

3 NOT REPEATING THE PAST

Shintech Corp. came to Convent with an enticing offer. It would build an ultramodern \$700 million polyvinyl chloride plant that would provide hundreds of jobs. What would have been a sure thing just a decade earlier suddenly became the focus of a national political battle. Residents of two small black communities, aided by environmentalists, said "enough." After months of legal, political and bureaucratic maneuvering, Shintech packed up and left. It is building a smaller version of the plant upriver in a less populated area near Plaquemine.



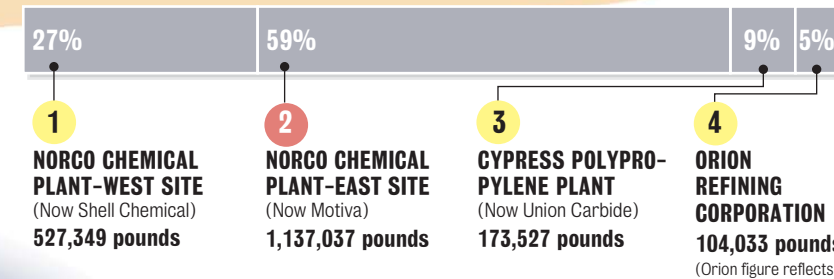
Staff graphic by Daniel Swenson

Aerial photo montage by Thom Scott

Sources: EPA, DEQ, U.S. Census Bureau, staff research

THE BREAKDOWN OF NORCO'S POLLUTION

TOTAL CHEMICALS RELEASED BY ALL FOUR PLANTS, 1998: 1,941,946 POUNDS



THE MISSISSIPPI CORRIDOR'S TOP TEN POLLUTERS

Facility	Pounds
PCS Nitrogen Fertilizer Geismar	32,246,589
Cytec Industries Inc. Westwego	20,901,955
IMC-Agrico St. James	12,592,973
Monsanto-Luling	9,932,830
Rubicon Inc. Geismar	9,373,776
CF Industries Inc. Donaldsonville	5,690,760
Exxon Co. USA Baton Rouge	5,166,745
Witco Corp. Killona	5,096,650
Borden Chemicals Geismar	4,094,787
Triad Nitrogen Inc Donaldsonville	3,419,745

1997 data

Total pollutants released into the air, land and water by facilities in the chemical corridor:

91.3 million pounds

1995 data