

University of Texas at Arlington

**MavMatrix**

---

2022 Fall Honors Capstone Projects

Honors College

---

1-1-2022

# SUPPORTING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP DYNAMICS OF RESIDENTS IN INFORMAL SUBDIVISIONS

Jose Perez Vela

Follow this and additional works at: [https://mavmatrix.uta.edu/honors\\_fall2022](https://mavmatrix.uta.edu/honors_fall2022)

---

## Recommended Citation

Perez Vela, Jose, "SUPPORTING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP DYNAMICS OF RESIDENTS IN INFORMAL SUBDIVISIONS" (2022). *2022 Fall Honors Capstone Projects*. 4. [https://mavmatrix.uta.edu/honors\\_fall2022/4](https://mavmatrix.uta.edu/honors_fall2022/4)

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College at MavMatrix. It has been accepted for inclusion in 2022 Fall Honors Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of MavMatrix. For more information, please contact [leah.mccurdy@uta.edu](mailto:leah.mccurdy@uta.edu), [erica.rousseau@uta.edu](mailto:erica.rousseau@uta.edu), [vanessa.garrett@uta.edu](mailto:vanessa.garrett@uta.edu).

Copyright © by Jose David Perez Vela 2022

All Rights Reserved

SUPPORTING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE:  
TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP  
DYNAMICS OF RESIDENTS IN  
INFORMAL SUBDIVISIONS

by

JOSE DAVID PEREZ VELA

Presented to the Faculty of the Honors College of  
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

HONORS BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

May 2023

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Words cannot describe my gratitude to the two mentors that kickstarted my research endeavors, Dr. Ariadna Reyes-Sanchez and Dr. Ericka Roland, for their extended patience and insightful feedback. I am also grateful for the graduate students I collaborated with and learned from along this journey. This project would not have been possible without my advisor, Dr. Rebekah Chojnacki, who encouraged me to believe in myself and continue my research aspirations. Special thanks to the McNair Scholars Program at the University of Texas at Arlington for funding this research, but most importantly, for unleashing my potential as a scholar and professional in the field.

I extend my gratitude to the librarians at the University of Texas at Arlington for helping me source scholars' work for my literature review and to the Writing Center for all the editing and brainstorming sessions. A huge thanks to all the smiling faces of staff and students during all the sleepless nights at the library.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge my friends for the laughs that kept me smiling and for believing in me, even when I had difficulty doing so. A loud "I love you" to my beautiful girlfriend for staying up with me all those nights and reminding me to eat, sleep, and take care of myself. As a first-generation student of low-income Hispanic parents, this project is dedicated to all those years of hard work to grant their children a life full of prosperity. *Esta es para mis padres. Los amo con todo mi corazón.*

November 18, 2022

## ABSTRACT

### SUPPORTING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP DYNAMICS OF RESIDENTS IN INFORMAL SUBDIVISIONS

Jose David Perez Vela, B.S. Interdisciplinary Studies

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2022

Faculty Mentors: Ariadna Reyes-Sanchez and Ericka Roland

Residents in low-income informal subdivisions are commonly abandoned by neoliberal municipalities that avoid the financial costs of providing access to essential services, exposing them to environmental and climate injustices. Community leadership is critical for communities of color living in low-income informal subdivisions to develop resiliency against environmental injustices that absent governments have intensified. Fieldwork in Floral Farms and a Freedmen Settlement in Southeast Dallas County were used to document the leadership of each community. Historical accuracy was strengthened through interviews with residents in tandem with participatory mapping techniques and historical archives collected from county data. Community relationships developed

through the interviews guided research findings and exposed the opportunities community leaders offer informal subdivisions in resisting environmental injustices. This study shows that the Freedmen Settlement faces high poverty levels and lives without access to clean water or basic infrastructure. Successful examples, like how Floral Farms came together to clear the dumping that harmed their neighborhood, provide communities of color a chance to confront systemic failures that endanger their health and well-being. By filling in for absent political leaders and inviting everyone to the table, community activism offers low-income communities of color a compelling adaptation strategy for addressing precarity and environmental injustices.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |      |
|---|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....   | iii  |
| ABSTRACT.....   | iv   |
| LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....  | viii |
| LIST OF TABLES .....  | x    |
| Chapter   |      |
| 1. INTRODUCTION .....   | 1    |
| 1.1 Problem Statement.....  | 1    |
| 1.2 Purpose of Study.....   | 2    |
| 2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....  | 4    |
| 2.1 Climate Change Findings and Environmental Justice History ..... | 4    |
| 2.2 Community Leadership and its Opportunities .....                | 7    |
| 2.3 Informal Settlements and Just Sustainability.....               | 10   |
| 2.4 Model Environmental Justice Cases .....                         | 11   |
| 3. METHODOLOGY .....  | 13   |
| 3.1 Recruitment.....  | 13   |
| 3.2 Data Collection .....   | 14   |
| 3.3 Data Analysis .....   | 15   |
| 3.4 Credibility and Trustworthiness.....                            | 16   |
| 4. FINDINGS.....  | 18   |
| 4.1 A Freedmen Settlement in Southeast Dallas County.....           | 18   |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 4.1.1 History of the Resilient Community .....                  | 18 |
| 4.1.2 A Cry for Help: Injustice and Residents’ Priorities ..... | 23 |
| 4.1.3 The Community Today: Signs of Resiliency.....             | 31 |
| 4.2 Floral Farms: The Model Community .....                     | 34 |
| 4.2.1 History of the Community: A Strike on the Community.....  | 34 |
| 4.2.2 Demanding Justice .....                                   | 36 |
| 4.2.3 The Award-Winning Park Concept Design .....               | 39 |
| 5. DISCUSSION.....  | 42 |
| 6. CONCLUSION.....  | 47 |
| Appendix  |    |
| A. IRB APPROVAL.....  | 51 |
| REFERENCES .....  | 55 |
| BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION.....                                   | 60 |



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

| Figure  | Page |
|---|------|
| 4.1 Fully installed SOURCE Hydropanels in a resident’s backyard, bringing potable drinking water straight to their kitchens through minor plumbing Note: Perez Vela, J. (n.d.).....   | 23   |
| 4.2 In July 2022, Firefighters are surprised upon arrival to the community when they realize there are no fire hydrants in place for them to connect to put out the fire Note: Anonymous Resident (n.d.) .....  | 24   |
| 4.3 The Community Baptist church hosting a food donation event for the Freedmen Settlement. Vehicles seen in the parking lot belong mainly to outside residents taking advantage of the free food Note: Perez Vela, J. (n.d.).....                              | 28   |
| 4.4 Floodplain notice signage reminding residents of FEMA’s regulations for housing improvements Note: Perez Vela, J. (n.d.) .....  | 29   |
| 4.5 The old community center that used to host community gathering events. It currently sits abandoned on the inside due to its poor building conditions but hosts bar-b-que events and other social gatherings on the outside Note: Perez Vela, J. (n.d.)..... | 32   |
| 4.6 Before his passing, the Reverend tried to establish a community garden for the town to share, but it did not meet his expectations without his leadership to facilitate its establishment Note: Perez Vela, J. (n.d.).....                                  | 33   |
| 4.7 Marsha Jackson stands in front of the 60-foot and 100,000-ton Shingle Mountain compromising residents’ health (Wilonsky, 2018).....   | 35   |
| 4.8 The “Neighborhood Self-Defense Project” was created to help Floral Farms develop a neighborhood plan; it was launched by ICP, DAR, and SSR (Neighbors United: Community Partners, January 24).....  | 38   |

|      |   |    |
|------|---|----|
| 4.9  | Residents, their children, and their extended families gather at the first community engagement event for the park design with HKS Architects. (Neighbors United: Community Partners, 2022).....  | 40 |
| 4.10 | The entrance to the park concept design by HKS Architects, an inclusive and neighborhood-led design between the firm, Neighbors United/ <i>Vecinos Unidos</i> , and residents and their families. (Neighbors United: Community Partners, 2021)..... | 41 |

## LIST OF TABLES

| Table |  | Page |
|-------|--|------|
| 3.1   | The research questions that drove this study .....                             | 15   |
| 5.1   | A comparative analysis of the leadership components<br>in each community ..... | 45   |

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Problem Statement

Although faced with infrastructure and services inequity, residents of informal settlements, especially in Latin American cities, have incorporated grassroots leadership and community organizing forms. Often known as slums, informal settlements refer to communities that lack basic infrastructure and services (UN-Habitat, 2003). The UN-Habitat (2003) reported the world's definition of basic needs as food and job security, safe and affordable housing with tenure security, access to clean water and basic sanitation infrastructure, healthcare and education, a clean environment, and a responsive, just, and honest government. Informal settlements matter for sustainable development because residents in these communities often suffer from environmental injustices, such as exposure to water and air pollution (Samper, 2020). Recent research in the U.S. has revealed informal settlements along the U.S.-Mexico border and nearing major U.S. cities (Durst, 2018). Theoretically, community-based leadership, a culturally relevant type of grassroots leadership, is meant to bring residents of informal settlements together for a better chance of resisting any injustices, such as poverty or extreme climate change, set to undermine their health or well-being. For example, municipalities in Texas often avoid the financial responsibility of assisting informal subdivisions, stripping the privilege of formal leadership and governmental representation.

Nevertheless, grassroots leadership has optimized the gap where formal (governmental/traditional) jurisdiction would be otherwise, as exemplified by informal communities in Latin America. My research aims to understand how community leadership emerges in informal communities in North Texas, which may serve to resist injustices. This research will also aid in developing solutions, like community organizing skills, for community-based organizations to interact better with local governments, churches, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other leaders to make out of these institutions' assistance. This research was conducted in collaboration with Dr. Reyes and her team's fieldwork study to understand the living conditions of residents in informal communities in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex.

### 1.2 Purpose of Study

The relationship between community leaders and the environmental injustices experienced by residents in informal communities is a theory gap, especially in the context of US cities (Drivdal, 2018). Nevertheless, community leadership may improve the living conditions of informal settlements because of its community engagement and involvement in the development process. For instance, women in an informal settlement in the Dominican Republic formed an organization called "*Mujeres Unidas*" to support sustainable projects, such as a vermicomposting project that helps reduce pollution and produce organic compost for the community to sell (Sletto et al., 2019). Unfortunately, community-based leadership in the US is limited by city officials who often disregard or poorly understand the injustices faced by these communities. This research seeks to understand better the dynamics that trigger the environmental injustices residents face in informal subdivisions associated with community leadership. Also, this research will better

understand the leadership that residents in informal communities have developed to adapt to their living conditions. Community leadership could be crucial to realizing an aid package for these informal residents. This research will contribute to the field of social sustainability by gathering holistic data on the living conditions of informal subdivisions from the perspective of informal residents in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. While research exists for informal settlements in the Global South, understanding the dynamics of these subdivisions in the Global North is just as essential and can serve as a reference for other informal areas in the United States (Alkon et al., 2013).

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to municipalities avoiding the responsibility of providing services to informal subdivisions, marginalized residents commonly experience environmental injustices and are left to deal with them independently. Low-income and minorities are disproportionately exposed to pollution and unhealthy communities; marginalized populations are rendered vulnerable to the environmental dangers of the changing climate (Haines et al., 2006; National Academy of Sciences, 2020). This research seeks to understand how community leadership may serve as a tool for residents to organize themselves to face and resist environmental injustices posed primarily by absent governmental leaders and the pressing environmental dangers of global climate change.

#### 2.1 Climate Change Findings and Environmental Justice History

To many, climate change is still up for debate despite the years of research and science that have exhausted the disasters that global climate change brings to humanity (Haines et al., 2006). Studies have highlighted humans as the catalyst of the Earth's changing climate and, beyond nature, acting as the primary contributors to disturbances in the natural carbon cycle (National Academy of Sciences, 2020). To name just a few: rising temperatures in our atmosphere and ocean acidification affect the world's food resource supply, exponential habitat shifts due to rising sea levels, and changing global climate patterns displace communities experiencing natural disasters they have never had to prepare for (Haines et al., 2006; National Academy of Sciences, 2020).

The drastic shifts in the world's climate disproportionately affect nations and communities at different paces, specifically those least contributing to the atmospheric changes, summoning crowds demanding calls for action (National Academy of Sciences, 2020). It is of utmost concern today because the rate of change is exponential compared to historical changes in the world's climate (National Academy of Sciences, 2020). Haines et al. (2006) have focused research on the environmental health impacts on the global population, especially the most vulnerable, and public health concerns in tandem with the changing climate. Their studies show that low-income populations are the most vulnerable to the side effects of climate change, with high-income populations not far off (Haines et al., 2006). Adapting to climate change will heavily rely on the decisions leaders make and mitigation strategies implemented to improve the world's carbon emissions from fossil fuels (Haines et al., 2006). Without the support of world leaders, adverse public health effects should be expected, including heat-related illnesses and deaths, air pollution-related health effects, infectious disease sprawl, and malnutrition (Haines et al., 2006). Research expresses the importance of acting as soon as possible by implementing climate change mitigation strategies to minimize the adverse effects on communities worldwide, especially vulnerable communities in poverty (Haines et al., 2006). Changes need to happen globally to protect the most vulnerable, including people along the poverty line and minority populations.

Environmental justice activism has contributed significantly to the progressive movement in society's acceptance of climate change. While there are many ways to define environmental justice, Agyeman and Evans (2003) use the Commonwealth of Massachusetts's 2002 definition of environmental justice policy, which defends the term



as the right of all people to a clean and healthy environment with equal protection and meaningful involvement from all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, or cultural backgrounds (Bullard et al., 2008). Environmental justice seeks to ensure that all residents, despite their race and income status, have fair and equal access to environmental goods, such as healthy communities (Adegun, 2017; Agyeman & Evans, 2003). Bullard (2000) presents environmental justice, in terms of racism, with no geographic boundaries; it is a social justice issue targeting middle to low-income groups, the working class, and people of color; it goes beyond only affecting low-income people (Bullard & Wright, 1993).

Throughout history, unraveling cases have brought attention to the environmental justice movement. The term started with the awareness of environmental racism. Both are used to illustrate systemic failures that have resulted from long-unaddressed institutional discrimination, to represent all people equally, and have since evolved into a fight for justice for all (Bullard et al., 2008). As Bullard (2000) describes, activists are demanding similar actions to those demanded during the civil rights era, which is of concern considering the changes in modern society. Not to derail from recent progress, environmental justice has become a “hot” topic all around the nation; environmental justice leaders have shaken the grounds with their activist efforts, courses and curricula designed to educate, train, and devote to the environmental justice movement have made their way into nearly every university for more people to join the fight, and administrative decisions and federal leaders have swayed their decisions based on the environmental justice movement, including those at the White House.

Although not recognized as environmental justice then, Martin Luther King Jr. arguably showcased one of the earliest forms of environmental justice on his mission to

Memphis in 1968, where he demanded justice for the Black garbage workers on strike for equal pay and better work conditions (Bullard & Johnson, 2000). The class action lawsuit, *Bean v. Southwestern Waste Management, Inc.*, of 1979 in a predominately African American county in North Carolina, is considered a landmark environmental justice case before officially kicking off as a national movement with the 1982 study, *Siting of Hazardous Waste Landfills and Their Correlation with Racial and Economic Status of Surrounding Communities*, that blocked a polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) landfill from developing in a community of color (Bullard & Johnson, 2000). Similar studies followed the protests, like the *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States* study by the Commission for Racial Justice in 1987, which found race as a revealing locator for waste facility locations (Bullard & Johnson, 2000). What began with local grassroots activism against toxins later evolved into an interdisciplinary and inclusive approach to social justice, which led to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1970 under the Bush administration, the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) in 1993 under the Clinton administration, and the Environmental Justice Executive Order 12898 of 1994 by President Clinton. To solidify the movement, the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit of 1991 brought forth 17 “principles of environmental justice,” which has empowered environmental justice organizations and caught local and federal governmental attention across the United States (Bullard & Johnson, 2000; Bullard et al., 2008).

## 2.2 Community Leadership and its Opportunities

The persistent challenge of mitigating the adversities felt by low-income communities from climate change is convincing world leaders to view the world from a

socially just point of view. Specifically difficult is integrating unbiased decisions with the polarized beliefs on climate change as a human-caused catastrophe in the United States, where the acceptance of global climate change is as politically divided among the elite and public (McCright & Dunlap, 2011). A promising start is educating everyone on the projected impacts of climate change, especially networks of community leaders representing low-income people (Keys et al., 2014; McCright & Dunlap, 2011). To reach long-term resiliency, bridging the gap between polarizing political and scientific beliefs is crucial to transition into a society willing to accept systemic failures and open to interdisciplinary initiatives (Bullard et al., 2008; McCright & Dunlap, 2011). It is crucial that community leaders feel empowered to resist the environmental adversities they face and hold their government representatives accountable for the lives they handicap by avoiding their responsibilities. Studies show the value of informal leadership and express the knowledge these leaders have of local understandings, elaborate networks, ability to mobilize their communities, and the fluidity of their positions within the community, which can prove effective for local and federal leaders to identify essential adaptation techniques towards climate change and environmental injustices burdening low-income communities of color (Drivdal, 2016; Keys et al., 2014). Drivdal (2016) summarizes the concerns for informal leadership, mainly to be arguments over resources and hierarchal power within the community. Since it is unclear who does what within the community, internal power struggles are expected, which could be balanced through external leadership development assistance.

Agyeman and Evans (2003) recommend relational and inclusive leadership forms via just sustainability development, the idea that urban planners should include residents

in the planning process, regardless of their backgrounds. Just sustainability emerges when sustainability and environmental justice are equally considered in the planning process by empowering more resilient communities and putting people at the center of development procedures (Agyeman & Evans, 2003). Reaching just sustainability requires policy decision-makers to prioritize social, economic, and ecological concerns to avoid imposing disproportionate socio-economic and environmental injustices on impoverished people (Agyeman & Evans, 2003). Grineski (2006) would add that regulations and legal frameworks should follow community empowerment for low-income minority communities to establish representation and social resiliency.

Environmental justice and community development enable vulnerable communities by focusing on developing frameworks to combat inequitable decisions posed by uninvolved governmental leaders (Bullard & Johnson, 2000). For example, community gardens are essential to developing trust, cooperation, resiliency, and egalitarian decision-making in low-income communities of color (Bailey et al., 2017). The *Clean Air Alternative Coalition v. United States Department of Transportation* case models a community gathering to prevent an urban development decision from degrading their environmental health (Bullard & Johnson, 2000). Supreme Court cases have since exposed urban policy decisions that have historically favored high-income populations by imposing higher costs on those nearing poverty (Bullard & Johnson, 2000). Mounting research sparks the interest of national grassroots activism and local and federal government attention, pressing formal leaders to act upon the social and environmental health concerns of low-income communities of color (Bullard et al., 2008). The trouble with the environmental protection legal framework is deep-rooted with systemic failure to equally

distribute enforcement across socio-economic differences (Bullard & Johnson, 2000). However, community leadership is a promising adaptation solution to unequal distribution of political power and disproportionate exposure to environmental and social injustices (Bullard & Johnson, 2000).

### 2.3 Informal Settlements and Just Sustainability

Most research on informality and community leadership takes place in the cities of the Global South, where populations wrestle with short-term solutions to environmental adversities, like unhealthy living conditions and government-supported evictions (Ahmed & Meenar, 2018). A report by the United Nations Human Settlements Program (2003) described the living conditions of informal residency as intolerable, with high poverty rates and socioeconomic distress. These communities are often outside of governmental jurisdiction and lack the networks necessary to bridge informal and formal leadership, which would help to move forward in the environmental justice movement (Alkon et al., 2013; Francis & Firestone, 2011; Grineski, 2006; Keys et al., 2014). The informal settlement in Cape Town and Dhaka, South Africa, see community leadership as an equitable and inclusive practice where residents' broad needs influence urban development instead of misleading governments taking the lead (Ahmed & Meenar, 2018; Drivdal, 2016). In Johannesburg, South Africa, for example, Adegun (2017) found that community empowerment and inclusivity are essential to just sustainability development, a holistic type of development that merges ecological, environmental, and social justice issues (Agyeman & Evans, 2003). Finally, the informal subdivisions of Dar es Salaam in Sub-Saharan Africa exemplify the power of just sustainability practices, where the involvement

of everyone in the community resulted in necessary water infrastructure improvements (Dakyaga et al., 2020).

#### 2.4 Model Environmental Justice Cases

Previous research details the presence of leadership in low-income informal communities worldwide. In the Global South, Montero (2004) revealed the Venezuelan distrust, unfulfilled promises from governments, and careful decision-making tactics of community leaders in low-income subdivisions and highlighted the variety of conflicts that arise from informal hierarchy due to the imposed pressures leaders face. Sletto et al. (2019) examined the Dominican Republic, where community-organized participatory planning frameworks proved promising for developing sustainable urban water management in Los Platanitos, Santo Domingo. In summary, the Global South has promised effective resiliency adaptation through community development techniques, such as empowering communities by inviting everyone to the drawing board and allowing network exchanges between government leaders to expand political representation.

In the Global North, Alkon et al. (2013) have prioritized research to support that of the Global South; they have explored the resonance of the environmental justice frame through environmental justice leaders in low-income communities of color in California's Central Valley. A frame is essential to any movement as it enables efficient communication and clarity of ideologies for actors to follow (Alkon et al., 2013). After researching four communities, Alkon et al. (2013) found that developing an efficient movement frame is just as essential as streaming equitable understanding across the board. The way they put it: the terminology used to describe environmental justice is not equally received by everyone; for example, the term "environmental justice" might be better understood by an

advocate but not so much by a low-income resident of the marginalized population (Alkon et al., 2013). In other words, it is critical for the environmental justice movement to keep an open invitation for anyone to sit at the table; doing so takes clarity and inclusivity in the language used to avoid externalities. Furthermore, the researchers recommend that advocates identify their affiliation with the environmental justice movement to build relationships with policymakers, planners, and formal representatives hosting the ability to enact changes (Alkon et al., 2013).

The Flint, Michigan, water crisis environmental justice victory showcased the potential of community leaders as an essential tool for communities of color resisting environmental injustices by governments. Krings et al. (2018) studied the predominantly African American community's case with a keen focus on the self-help organizing efforts of the community. Their efforts longed to correct their government's misinformed public spending decisions, which developed environmental concerns for their health and well-being after drawing water from the Flint River for 18 months (Krings et al., 2018). The community collaborated with grassroots organizations, external leaders, and news coverage experts after realizing their city officials constantly ignored their complaints (Krings et al., 2018). National coverage of the case inspired systemic corrections via federal and state funding, yet the community's trust in the institutions involved is not expected to be restored (Krings et al., 2018). However, Flint's story can provoke marginalized residents elsewhere to stand up to the systemic failures of their governments in confronting similar threats to their environmental rights, such as potable water (Krings et al., 2018).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

To understand the communal perspectives of the residents in informal subdivisions, a literature review of existing research was performed in tandem with interviewing residents from Floral Farms and a Freedmen Settlement in Southeast Dallas County. Residents and founders of the community revealed their origin story and how the leadership has consolidated the community despite the absence of formal leadership. The interviews and surveys aided in understanding the leadership keeping these communities together while maintaining trust with the citizenry. This study builds on the broad research led by the principal investigator (PI), Dr. Ariadna Reyes-Sanchez on “*Sustainability and Community Infrastructure in Informal Communities in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex.*” Assistance and collaboration were extended from this study to the larger project for the collection of some surveys and interviews. This study followed all Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved guidelines from Protocol #2022-0160.2 (Appendix A).

#### 3.1 Recruitment

IRB approval only allowed for interviews with English-speaking or Spanish-speaking residents 18 years or older. Before pursuing residents with interview inquiries, the research team attended community gatherings to develop trust with the residents. Attending community gatherings led by activists and residents helped the research team prepare purposeful questions for the latter interviews, initiate a networking registry, and create a research approach to fit each community’s unique situation and audience. During



the meetings, residents brought awareness of other residents in the community that have exhausted their resistance efforts towards the environmental injustices they undergo in the community. The connections made during the community gatherings led to the first set of interviews, and attendees' interest was piqued due to the team's attendance.

The rest of the interviews were set up by approaching residents during community walkthroughs and knocking on residents' doors. We found that forty lots in the community have residential structures occupied by residents. Of the forty-three lots in the Freedmen Settlement, only twenty-three are permanently occupied, of which fourteen families were interviewed. It is important to note that the sense of community among the citizenry played a significant role in the recruitment for interviews because they recommended neighbors that would be open to participating in the study.

### 3.2 Data Collection

Qualitative research methods, such as semi-structured interviews were used to conduct this study. A bilingual approach was conducted to prepare English and Spanish interviews that empowered the participation of English-speaking and Spanish-speaking residents in the community. This study uses questions that were asked to understand the characteristics of community leadership.

Upon consenting to the study, interviews were set up with five residents, each lasting between forty-five minutes and an hour. The interviews followed a semi-structured series of leadership and environmental justice questions that allowed for more natural conversations with rich, qualitative data. Notes were taken by hand during all five interviews and documented digitally; Spanish interviews were translated and reviewed by multiple researchers on the team to ensure accuracy and quality. Handwritten journal notes

taken while conversing around the community and during interviews captured observations and critical takeaways from residents. They were later scanned for digitalization of records. Photographs were taken during walkthroughs of the community and while interviewing participants to document environmental injustices. All data were stored following IRB-approved protocols.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Fieldwork days were summarized at the end of each visit, where each researcher provided their main observations and takeaways for that day. Reflections were later analyzed with the data collected from interviews, walkthroughs, and observations. Team meetings were held to help manage and organize all findings. The interviews and surveys from this study respond to the questions in the table below (Table 3.1).

| Research Question (RQ)   | Methods  | Data Sources       |
|--|--|--------------------|
| (Main RQ) What is the relationship between community leadership, organizing, and environmental justice capacities? | Visits to the community and interviews with residents, community-based organizations, churches, and NGOs involved in the assistance of residents in informal the communities | Community meetings |
| (RQ 1) What does community leadership look like in the community?  | Visits to the community and interviews with residents  |                    |
| (RQ 2) Are there community-based organizations?  |  | Community meetings |
| (RQ 3) How do these community organizations support environmental justice?   | Interviews with residents, community-based organizations, churches, and NGOs   |                    |

Table 3.1: The research questions that drove this study

All handwritten notes collected from interviews and field day reflections were digitized; additionally, Spanish notes and surveys were translated by the PI and Spanish-speaking researchers on the team and were examined thoroughly for quality assurance. The transcribed and translated files were qualitatively analyzed to develop a matrix to help assess how the leadership in each community would compare. Quotes from residents were coded to help understand the environmental justice issues, community leadership, and organizing efforts mentioned in each interview.

Documents and reports published online about the communities were collected and analyzed to develop a database for each community. Internet research was informed by the visits and conversations with residents. Quotes were extracted from the published documentation and digitally coded to allow for a comparative analysis of each community's database. The Floral Farms database relied mainly on internet-based research and was supported with field visits. The Freedmen Settlement database was densely populated with both internet-based information and intensified by the five main interviews analyzed in this study. The document-supported online research findings prepared the team to compare the successful community-led organization of Floral Farms and the leadership desert of the Freedmen Settlement in Southeast Dallas County.

### 3.4 Credibility and Trustworthiness

To secure credibility in this study, interviews were conducted in groups, each researcher taking notes. After every visit to the community, research notes were summarized to highlight the main takeaways from the interviews and observations made that day as reflection audio recordings. All interviews were conducted with an unbiased questionnaire to secure residents' raw responses clear of contamination from previous

sources. Interviews and reflection notes were cross-referenced with publicized articles, interviews, and stories from different years and varying sources; this data triangulation strengthened resident credibility and data accuracy for the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### 4.1 A Freedmen Settlement in Southeast Dallas County

##### *4.1.1 History of the Resilient Community*

In early June 2022, one of the prominent activists of the town facilitated a public town hall meeting to address concerned residents and develop a planning chair. This meeting served as an introduction to the community's history, leaders, and residents. Attending the gathering was crucial to developing the first connections later used for interviews and surveys. In attendance were a couple of testimonies from the community, local activists, and representatives from five non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Key takeaways from the town hall meeting: the community has started developing a form of community planning; the community heavily relies on external assistance, like activists, organizations, and new technologies; the community's former pastor knew how to empower and move residents to meet and put the town on the government's radar; the community has many leaders ready to help in any way they can.

The town hall gathering offered a detailed timeline of the community, with insight into the town's establishment and critical events that have shaped the community. The community was established in 1878 as a Freedmen Settlement in Southeast Dallas County and has been home to generations of cultural history for formerly enslaved people to start new lives. Since its establishment, residents have relied on self-dug wells for water. Because the community is an unincorporated area in the county, it has not benefitted from

the same water, sanitation, storm drainage, electric, or transportation infrastructure as its neighboring cities (Pemberton, 2022). Why not? – the question most asked by residents. To make matters worse, the only water sources in the community were contaminated in the 1980s, forcing residents to purchase their water from grocery stores and water-filling stations miles from their homes in nearby cities.

According to neighbors, the community demographic has stayed consistent with predominately Black residents (Pemberton, 2022) and, more recently, home to Latinx and White residents. Residents confirmed that mainly low-income African Americans and Hispanics make up the community, with an income of about \$720 a month. It is “often called the poorest community in Dallas” (West, 1985). According to residents, affordability and cultural connections to the land are some of the main attractions to the community, as they put it - “I don’t have to worry about neighbors,” “trees, I love trees,” “this here makes me feel more free,” “I needed a place, and I could afford it.” Over decades, the population has dropped from 460 in 1970 to about 88 residents in 2010 (Pemberton, 2022). “Oh, this place was full,” exclaimed one of the residents when asked what the community was like, “it don’t look like nothin’ until you get in it.” Years of government promises falling through have encouraged the town to lose trust in the government, leaving only memories of what the community was once like.

In 1985, county commissioner John Wiley Price attempted to bring water to the community, but Dallas County shut down his efforts. Every city that has considered annexing this Freedmen Settlement has backed out after calculating the cost of granting potable water and sewage to the community, which is said to be about \$6.5 million, according to the Texas Water Development Board (Ibanga, 2021; Williams, 2020). A

common excuse from county officials is that insurance would not cover flood damages after the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) officially designated the community into the Trinity River Flood Plain Area in 2003. Instead, the county opted for the FEMA's relocation assistance (buyout) program in 2005. Pemberton (2022) found that 36 families were relocated; residents say that out of 150 homes bought out, 149 were demolished. Contrary to public records and considering Dallas County received \$400,000 in grants to help the community, residents only received \$350 for their homes (Pemberton, 2022), which would not sustain families afterward. Older homes not destroyed have been grandfathered in but are still not eligible for home improvements. Commissioner Price, who previously attempted to bring water to the community, voted in favor of the decision to demolish homes and relocate families rather than move forward with the cost of installing water and sewage infrastructure in the community and has repeated, "it's wasteful for the government to spend millions on such a small number of people. The county should instead pursue ways to entice them to leave for places with running water," Commissioner John Wiley Price, who has been in office since 1985 (Martin, 2016). Savali's article about the community on The Root (2016) stated that Price's 2014 indictment pointed to bribery and corruption charges; WFAA.com said Price was "accused of taking more than \$900,000 in bribes from mostly technology firms seeking Dallas County contracts, which leaves the community wondering whether the county commissioner is expecting the community to be displaced so technology firms can take over. Residents and activists have argued, "if [the community] only had two people, they still have the same right to have water as Dallas that has 5 million people, right? So their lives don't matter 'cause it's only two of 'em?" Unfortunately, as Pemberton (2022) found,

Dallas County is not legally obligated to provide services to unincorporated neighborhoods, like the Freedmen Settlement. Although the county does have the Department of Unincorporated Area Services (DUAS), its website clarifies that providing access to clean water is not one of its intentions (Pemberton, 2022).

It is worth noting that any government-led “attempts” at bringing water to the community have concluded in favor of relocating residents to a “better” area. However, their discussions fail to consider the decades of history, emotions, and memories tied to these lands. Despite the living conditions outsiders might rule unworthy, residents in the community would not change it for anything. “I don’t have to live here. I live here because I want to. I’m not giving it away. And after I’m gone, I hope my kids don’t,” said a resident.

In 2013, residents expressed appreciation for the arrival of a new reverend to the Baptist church. Most activism, hope, and empowerment were due to the reverend’s platform and persistence in bringing water to the community. Unfortunately, the pastor passed away in a house fire in February 2019, but not without leaving a legacy behind and years of activism that paved the way for residents, leaving a trail of hope that one day might bring water to the town. The reverend’s years of collaboration with organizations and activism brought local and federal attention to the community. The period between 2013 and 2019 witnessed the involvement of Area Director Allen Lambright, State Director Paco Valentin, Grow North Texas, the Texas Rural Water Association (TRWA), EPA, Texas Commission of Environmental Quality (TCEQ), North Texas Food Bank (NTFB), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. No other leader in the community’s history has spurred as much movement with officials as this beloved reverend. On the contrary, government officials have consistently ignored the cries of the residents; the pastor has been the only



one to live in the community, listen to the community, and dedicate an activist platform for neighbors to voice their concerns and demand action from their county representatives.

Activity after the reverend's passing has moved much slower than during his presence. However, his efforts are admirable and have served as a reference for leaders looking for ways to assist the Freedmen Settlement. Between 2020 and 2021, the community has been a hot topic among scholars, universities, and organizations. Residents have starred in multiple short-film documentaries, campaign films, and a handful of news articles. In 2022, the community began committing to gatherings, town hall meetings, establishing a planning committee, and recruiting help from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) looking to improve the living conditions of residents without breaking the regulations imposing residents from upgrading their homes. Most notable is the installation of four Hydropanel drinking water systems at four homes in June. The organization, SOURCE, vowed to do its part by installing panels that provide a clean, renewable water source to residents by trapping condensation in box-like units. In favorable weather, the Hydropanels (Figure 4.1) can provide 2-5 liters of water, which is about the recommended water intake for a grown adult; the average household size in the community, however, is more than one adult, often between two and three adults.



Figure 4.1: Fully installed SOURCE Hydropanels in a resident's backyard, bringing potable drinking water straight to their kitchens through minor plumbing. Note: Perez Vela, J. (n.d.)

#### *4.1.2 A Cry for Help: Injustice and Residents' Priorities*

With precarious housing units, difficulty sourcing essential human necessities (like water), extreme climate change effects, and government regulations preventing the community from upgrading their living conditions, it is difficult to miss the environmental injustices in this Freedmen Settlement. As previously stated, residents have never had access to clean, potable water, only 15 miles from one of the nation's most prosperous and developed cities. No water infrastructure means the community has no reliable water

source to use in emergencies, which even the fire marshals were shocked to discover when dispatched to put out a fire in the community (Figure 4.2). Likewise, Dallas County residents are often surprised to find out there is a town without running water just a short drive from their home, “I had zero idea about people living without running water” (Rivas & Keomoungkhoun, 2021).



Figure 4.2: In July 2022, Firefighters are surprised upon arrival to the community when they realize there are no fire hydrants in place for them to connect to put out the fire. Note: Anonymous Resident (n.d.)

The wastewater treatment plant that neighbors the community was established in the 1960s (Pemberton, 2022). Residents report noxious smells traced to the plant and blame its establishment for the contamination of their wells only 20 years later (Wilman, 2017). “The water and wells are fine, but not when you throw in gravel mining, hog filth, human filth, broken septic tanks, sewage from the wastewater plant,” (West, 1985) a resident emphasized, saying that the community can only rely on the wells so much before testing its limits.

In its existence, the community continues without this critical human necessity, water (among others), despite the involvement of FEMA and Dallas County officials. The most progress in bringing water to the community was seen during the reverend's presence between 2013 and 2019. Since his passing, Dallas County has not commented on the community nor attempted to express concern or hope for the community. "We're too weak, too poor, and too [Black] for folks to care. Water still bad, hogs still bad, smells still bad, gravel trucks still run you off the road. [The community] ain't even on the map. I believe nothing of what I hear and only half of what I see, you hear me?" exclaimed a resident (West, 1985). It is common for residents to comment on absent government officials. "He dun' stood in that council for so many years...das the man downtown...they don't know what John Wiley Price doin'. He is no good...an' I tell anybody that. We'll neva' have [water] 'till he in office. Why? I don't know," claims a resident, then continues, "What they tryna' do is force us out. They want this land...thought about putting [an] airport, then college and houses...we don't want that." (Lanez, 2021)

In contrasting high-income communities around Dallas, city officials offer to listen to residents' desires, but that is not the case in the Freedmen Settlement. "So, the slumbering bureaucracy had for a moment awakened and cast a half-opened eye toward [the Freedmen Settlement] before closing it again. That nothing had changed did not surprise," wrote Richard West (1985). What stopped the County from pursuing a solution for the residents was the financial burden and responsibility of committing to the community, but isn't that the purpose of a city? "Councilman Jerry Rucker suggested annexing the land, but City Manager Charles Anderson said the city hadn't even extended such services to land already annexed and would be reluctant to take on additional

obligations,” exclaimed West (1985). Why should a community of human beings be considered an “additional obligation”? It is not socially just to see residents as a financial responsibility when they simply ask for representation, empowerment, and basic human necessities everyone around them enjoys daily.

Residents are tired of living like this, “humans should not have to live this way,” said a resident (Rivas & Keomoungkhoun, 2021). The community has long expressed their concerns with the activist who put together the town hall meeting, using her as a representative for the community now that the pastor is no longer with them to be their voice. Media coverage and this study’s outreach have all captured the same injustices as those printed in the town hall meeting handout; the problems highlighted at the town hall meeting were access to water, the flood plain designation, land ownership, home improvements, sanitation services, food access, energy justice, health, crime, and general community infrastructure improvements.

For years, the community has relied on water bottle donation events with dozens of organizations and residents from neighboring cities that have learned about the town’s unique situation. Otherwise, residents make multiple trips out of the community to meet their water necessities; a resident said, “fill jugs and bring it back...and that’s what they’re stored in inside the house until [they] use it. [They have] to go back and forth a lot, and it [costs them] a lot of gas.” In addition, the community combats food insecurity by receiving assistance from the Baptist church through food donation events every Saturday (Figure 4.3). “The church over on [the other side of the neighborhood], they have a food basket every Saturday,” said a resident during her interview, “You can go over and get food supplies.” However, nearby cities have found out about the food donation events; outside

families have begun lining their vehicles in the mornings, often leaving residents of the Freedmen Settlement without food to take home that week (Wilman, 2017). "It's hard feeding three people and keeping up with rent...so, it's really hard. I don't think a lot of people realize how much we're struggling down here. We're poverty-stricken. We depend on churches and stuff like that to give us food so that we can make it through the month," commented a resident during interviews. The donation events confirmed the current reliability of the community on external assistance, like the Baptist church, to adapt to their living conditions.



Figure 4.3: The Community Baptist church hosting a food donation event for the Freedmen Settlement. Vehicles seen in the parking lot belong mainly to outside residents taking advantage of the free food. Note: Perez Vela, J. (n.d.)

Despite existing for decades, “none of the homes have been repaired in at least 15 years, largely out of concerns about violating federal flood regulations” (Martin, 2016). The FEMA flood regulations placed on the community prevent residents from upgrading their housing units without Dallas County approval (Figure 4.4). Still, residents have found it extremely difficult to receive support. “These people aren’t even allowed to paint their houses. They’re not allowed to fix their roof. They’re not allowed to do anything on their

own property” (Williams, 2020). Residents have owned these lands for generations yet cannot fix them as necessary.



Figure 4.4: Floodplain notice signage reminding residents of FEMA’s regulations for housing improvements. Note: Perez Vela, J. (n.d.)

Considering the lands were established as freedmen’s lands, residents today are limited by the regulations working against their freedom rights on their property. Interviews with residents revealed that Dallas County is slowly taking ownership of lots around the community. “I think what usually happens in a case like that is people do not – they fail to pay [their] property taxes after so many years. So then the county, it belongs to the county. And people can actually go to the county and probably pay those taxes, update



them and then take over [those properties],” said a resident before adding, “I’ve had individuals, couple of individuals, and I’ve had real estate agents send me mail. They want to give you basically the bottom dollar.” The main issue with the county taking ownership of the lands is not that they are legally winning custody (in most cases), but that “they’re abandoned...[they] just buy them, but they won’t sell them” back to locals, explains a resident. It raises doubt about what the county is holding onto these lands for. What clientele is the county looking to take ownership of these ancestral lands, and what intentions do they have with the grounds? “What I think they are trying to do is just to get everybody to sell out so they could come in here and build townhomes and then put in sewer and water and all that. Because, Beltline, all around Dallas, Beltline is a business street,” claims a resident. Every interview had a similar answer: the county is waiting for the lands to make more revenue before implementing water and sewage infrastructure upgrades.

In addition to housing improvement regulations and missing water infrastructure, the community has “no streetlights or waste disposal services” (Williams, 2020); instead, dilapidated roads and missing street signage. According to the community activist that organized the town hall meeting, a county official promised the community a trash pick-up service, but nothing has followed through. In the meantime, residents have no choice but to burn their trash, compromising their air quality and health, not to mention the risk of starting a fire that cannot be put out as quickly compared to neighboring cities with proper water infrastructure. After learning about county officials’ negligence in helping the community, it is hard to believe Dallas County that displacing residents would solve all the injustices served to the residents of this Freedmen Settlement.

#### *4.1.3 The Community Today: Signs of Resiliency*

It is worth noting that although there is much coverage of the community's living conditions, residents realize there is not enough being done from within the community to encourage officials to make significant moves, "the people who live here would rather have water. There isn't enough people." Other accounts agree that "since [the reverend's] death, there's been little movement in getting running water to the community" (Rivas & Keomoungkhoun, 2021). Because the pastor had done so much for the community, residents felt like they had lost their voice and hope in bringing water to the town. "No one else comes. No one else cares," claim residents.

However, an activist supported by a climate justice organization that organized the town hall meeting in June sparked hope for everyone, aspiring to generate community organizations to find solutions for the primary concerns. For three years, the activist has visited the community nearly daily, and her determination is starting to rub off on the residents, slowly empowering the community to keep reminding officials to deliver on their promises. It would help if residents could safely use the old community center to gather; unfortunately, the regulations prohibiting housing improvements inhibit the community from designating it as the center for everyone to feel invited to the planning table because of its dilapidated conditions (Figure 4.5). Nevertheless, residents have adapted by relocating social gatherings and community meetings to a neighbor's home instead. This study witnessed the formation of the community's planning committee. "Yeah, they really are trying to put together something. That was why that meeting was in place today. They're trying to pull together more and become – pull them together, so they become one word, so they can become one entity to deal with," said an optimistic resident.



Figure 4.5: The old community center that used to host community gathering events. It currently sits abandoned on the inside due to its poor building conditions but hosts bar-b-que events and other social gatherings on the outside.  
Note: Perez Vela, J. (n.d.)

Social movements require energy, resiliency, and a set of priorities; this community is nothing shy of them. The town’s sense of community is an encouraging reminder to fight for their rights to a safe, healthy environment and the lands they call home. "I'm here to stay," many insisted during interviews. Residents in the community understand they all live in the same conditions, so they do their best to help each other out. “Everybody was poor. We aren’t rich. We were poor, but we didn’t realize how poor we was because we

were happy. It's something being poor, but we had food. And when one family didn't have it, another family had it, and they gave it to us. So, we just took care of each other," (Martinez & Smith, 2020) said a resident as they reminisced on their childhood. "*Podemos ayudarnos primeramente entre nosotros, para que la gente que venga, diga 'ah mira que bueno se está poniendo bien.' Si nos juntamos somos los únicos dueños de aquí, vamos a conocer la casa de al lado...cuidarme la espalda el otro y así cuidarnos entre todos, nada nos cuesta hacer bendición para nosotros mismos*" ("We can help each other first so that people who come say 'ah look how good it is getting better.' If we get together, we are the only owners here; we will know the house next door...take care of the other's back and thus take care of each other, it does not cost us anything to do a blessing for ourselves"), explained a resident; he expressed interest in cultivating a community garden for his neighbors if everyone is willing to share and respect the process. The pastor shared the same interest in starting a community garden to fight the food insecurity of residents, but it never kicked off as expected before his passing (Figure 4.6).



Figure 4.6: Before his passing, the Reverend tried to establish a community garden for the town to share, but it did not meet his expectations without his leadership to facilitate its establishment. Note: Perez Vela, J. (n.d.)

Looking forward, residents have expressed significant interest in keeping the harmony and peace that has persisted in the community for decades. Possible solutions include starting a community center, improving the conditions of the old community center, consistently meeting among the citizenry, persistently demanding county representatives to deliver on their promises, actively inviting and recruiting help from outside organizations to the planning meetings, and openly adapting to the best practical technologies ready to provide temporary solutions to some of the community's primary concerns.

## 4.2 Floral Farms: The Model Community

### *4.2.1 History of the Community: A Strike on the Community*

Only eleven minutes South of Downtown Dallas and fifteen minutes from the Freedmen Settlement, the community of Floral Farms stands victorious and proud of its story. Unlike the Freedmen Settlement in Southeast Dallas County, this community was annexed to the City of Dallas in the 1950s (Goodman, 2021) with access to all the necessities missing in the Freedmen Settlement, like potable water, electricity, and sewage. In Mayo's paper, they state that Floral Farms sits on a floodplain (2022). Matt Goodman confirms that the City of Dallas decided to purchase homes from the 100+ families in the community in the 1970s instead of installing flood protection (2021). Because of the floodplain, residents were denied building permits from the city, which did not allow residents to make any improvements to their properties (Goodman, 2021), like in the Freedmen Settlement. Over time, the decisions began to isolate neighbors. Still, the community's social roots persisted, which was challenged years later by a shingle recycling company.

In January 2018, Blue Star Recycling started dumping and illegally grinding shingles in the community right behind residents' backyards (Jazeera, 2021). Marsha Jackson, noticing a growing pile of ground shingles from her backyard, tried warning the City of Dallas about the injustice before it became a grave health concern for the community. After being ignored by city officials and adverse exposure to pollution from the growing mountain of shingles, Marsha Jackson started to organize a grassroots social movement in Floral Farms. The platform included the dense Latinx population and every resident, regardless of age, and sought to take the place of absent city officials to bring awareness to the malevolent actions of Blue Star Recycling. Nevertheless, over a year of dumping later, the White-owned business had made money off the negligence of the City of Dallas (Jazeera, 2021). Sooner than later, the dumping grounds could be seen from a distance after it had grown into a 100,000+ ton mountain (Figure 4.7), which gave it the infamous name of "Shingle Mountain" (Goodman, 2021; Jazeera, 2021).



Figure 4.7: Marsha Jackson stands in front of the 60-foot and 100,000-ton Shingle Mountain compromising residents' health (Wilonsky, 2018).

What could have been avoided if the City of Dallas had listened to the community's cries for help became an environmental justice issue that seized the headlines. Residents provided testimony on the environmental health damages that accompanied the mountain. Marsha Jackson's doctors, for example, prescribed 12 pills a day after she started coughing up black smut, clearing her throat often, and developing itchiness, stinging, and burning in the throat from "fiberglass going down [her] throat" (Jazeera, 2021). Pastor Michael Waters commented on the environmental health effects of Shingle Mountain, "[it is like] giving people a death sentence, not providing them an opportunity even to breathe fresh air." By the time officials listened to Marsha Jackson's cries, the community had already felt the wrath of the recycling company. Dumping stopped in 2019 after the community demanded that the City of Dallas force the company to clean up after itself. City officials revealed that their hands were tied behind their backs because the shingle recycling company swiftly filed for bankruptcy, meaning the company was not legally obligated to clean up. Instead, the responsibility would lie on the City of Dallas, and for years, the city claimed there was no funding to justify the cost of cleaning up Blue Star Recycling's Shingle Mountain. So, the bilingual, diverse, and inclusive grassroots leadership initiated by Marsha Jackson took matters into their own hands to remove the mountain and restore the community's peace and health.

#### *4.2.2 Demanding Justice*

The community insisted on rewriting their story; they "organized to bring national attention to the crisis and move the mountain" (Neighbors United: Community Partners, 2022). The movement quickly caught wind in the community because residents were tired of falling sick. They coordinated, hoping to restore fresh air and harmony among neighbors

and families. Residents believed it would set the stage for “equitable neighborhood-led planning across Dallas...because it’s the right thing to do” (Neighbors United: Community Partners, 2022).

Marsha Jackson facilitated a neighborhood-led organization called Neighbors United/*Vecinos Unidos* that would quickly attract NGOs to the community. Social justice organizations, Downwinders at Risk (DAR), Southern Sector Rising (SSR), and the Inclusive Communities Project (ICP) joined Marsha Jackson’s campaign to hold the City of Dallas responsible for the racist zoning laws that allowed the recycling company’s abusive behavior (Neighbors United: Community Partners, 2022, January 24). The bilingual campaign invited Spanish-speaking families to the stage and offered a voice to residents of all ages. With help from organizations and funding from the Communities Foundation of Texas, residents banded and created the “Neighborhood Self-Defense Project” (Figure 4.8), which led to the creation of a neighborhood plan (Neighbors United: Community Partners, 2022, January 24).





Figure 4.8: The “Neighborhood Self-Defense Project” was created to help Floral Farms develop a neighborhood plan; it was launched by ICP, DAR, and SSR (Neighbors United: Community Partners, January 24).

The plan realized two neighborhood visioning sessions, surveying, parcel analysis, and interviews to fully incorporate residents’ aspirations for Floral Farms (Neighbors United: Community Partners, 2022, January 24). Months later, reviews from residents, business owners, and local officials were used to create a final draft of the Floral Farms Neighborhood Plan, presented to residents in November 2020 (Neighbors United: Community Partners, 2022, January 24). Years of advocating and planning would pay off when cleanup finally began in December 2020, proving that community grassroots organizations and planning efforts can result in environmental justice reforms at a local level.

After realizing that elections would take place shortly after the city started joining the meetings, Marsha Jackson grew awareness of election candidates, “I do think it’s strange that the elected officials are up to reelection, and all of a sudden they’re pushing this,” she said in an interview (Jazeera, 2021). Ignored when she tried to warn the City of Dallas about the illegal dumping in the community in 2018, Jackson kept a close eye on officials after they suddenly started listening to residents. Because of this, she partnered with Evelyn Mayo to understand the racist zoning laws that could encourage another Shingle Mountain in the neighborhood. “Cities concentrate things they don’t want to see, whether that’s Black and Brown people or poor people, with uses that they don’t want to see, such as industry. You would never see this mixture of uses in a White neighborhood in Dallas,” said Evelyn (Jazeera, 2021). Together, they are demanding that the city adopt a neighborhood plan to rezone Floral Farms into a residential area rather than its current industrial zoning (Jazeera, 2021). Marsha Jackson exclaims that the community is not looking for financial compensation for the city’s negligence, “I hate to see anybody go through this, what we’re going through right now. Three years is too long. I want people to understand environmental justice, environmental pollutant – it is a slow killer and does kill.” (Jazeera, 2021). She hopes that other communities can benefit from the movement she developed in Floral Farms with the coalition of neighbors and local organizations.

#### *4.2.3 The Award-Winning Park Concept Design*

In 2021, the City of Dallas offered the possibility of transforming what once plagued the community into a fruitful park for everyone to rejoice in. After the City of Dallas announced the potential park site, Neighbors United/*Vecinos Unidos* quickly began reaching out to their partners and stakeholders to start working on a park design.

(Neighbors United: Community Partners, 2022, January 24). The HKS, Inc. architecture company volunteered to develop a design for the community in partnership with Neighbors United/*Vecinos Unidos* in February 2021. Socially distanced virtual meetings and three in-person community engagement sessions (Figure 4.9) directed the park design that won the Greater Dallas Planning Council “Dream Award” in November 2021 (Neighbors United: Community Partners, 2022).



Figure 4.9: Residents, their children, and their extended families gather at the first community engagement event for the park design with HKS Architects. (Neighbors United: Community Partners, 2022).

Today, residents continue to advocate for the remediation of the old Shingle Mountain site following the contamination of over 100,000 shingles. To replace the abandoned site, the community would like to see the park design concept by HKS Architects (Figure 4.10) become a reality in their neighborhood. The park would feature

soccer fields, shading, bikeways and trails, seating, and a community garden for residents to enjoy in harmony with their children and generations to come. (Neighbors United: Community Partners, 2021). Upon construction, the park would serve as a memoir of the time a community was able to organize at the grassroots level to overcome systemic environmental injustices.



Figure 4.10: The entrance to the park concept design by HKS Architects, an inclusive and neighborhood-led design between the firm, Neighbors United/*Vecinos Unidos*, and residents and their families. (Neighbors United: Community Partners, 2021).

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

This study contributes to a better understanding of how community leadership contributes to the capacities of low-income communities to better resist environmental injustices. The main research questions that led this research (Table 3.1) revealed the reliability of residents in informal subdivisions: what does community leadership look like in the community, are there community-based organizations, and how do these community organizations support environmental justice? Results suggested that leadership is a reoccurring topic in both communities. Floral Farms proved to be a triumphant environmental justice story that persisted despite the absence of city officials. The Freedmen Settlement expressed interest in starting a leadership committee to aid in their combat against environmental injustices that city officials have ignored since its establishment. This study revealed whom residents trust to advocate for better living conditions in their communities and what strategies are followed when developing a communal development structure. Findings present promising resiliency strategies for environmental justice for informal subdivisions advocating environmentally just living conditions and access to necessities, like potable water.

Results show that the Freedmen Settlement possesses an inclusive sense of community among themselves and the faces they recognize – this does not include outsiders or newcomers they have difficulty trusting. Residents here rely on external assistance, such as activists, local churches, and philanthropic organizations. However, this

community serves as an opportunity for community-based grassroots organizations to empower residents to confront environmental injustices challenging their living conditions. Local organizations and activists have committed to educating residents on how developing a planning committee can help them resist the environmental injustices ignored mainly by absent governmental leaders. McCright and Dunlap's (2011) recommendations confirm that education plays a significant role in preparing networks of community leaders to assist with the development of community organizations. A planning committee would be an appropriate starting point for the Freedmen Settlement but should consider the involvement of everyone in the community, the African American and Latinx populations alike, as Agyeman and Evans (2003) expressed in their writings on just sustainability development. The community should adopt interdisciplinary initiatives and be prepared to face systemic failures to develop a resilient organizational foundation, as Bullard et al. (2008) and McCright and Dunlap (2011) suggest.

Activism in the Freedmen Settlement has fallen short since the absence of the former reverend that shook the local government and shined a beacon of hope on the community. Based on the community's history, church involvement can play a significant role in uniting neighbors. Without the reverend, residents have felt distrust towards Dallas County commissioners and other officials who have repeatedly determined that the predominately Black and Brown community is better off leaving behind their culturally relevant properties than becoming an "additional obligation" to cities considering annexing the town. Montero (2004) realized that hesitation arises from informal leadership and grassroots organization, but that does not suggest it will always turn out this way for informal communities. As Bullard and Johnson (2000) pointed out, Martin Luther King

Jr.'s early environmentalist actions as a pastor and activist prove that a reverend could be the missing element in the Freedmen Settlement's environmental justice capacities.

On the other hand, the incorporated community of Floral Farms has vocal residents and a rigid community-led planning system that helped clean Shingle Mountain and developed a new park design to replace the toxic grounds abandoned by a White-owned shingle recycling business. Floral Farms is a model community that overcame environmental injustices through community planning and involvement techniques that challenged the local regulations and legal frameworks that failed to support the community; this led to community representation and social resiliency, as Grineski (2006) suggested. The predominately Hispanic community showcased a Black resident leader that facilitated an inclusive planning process with neighbors of all ages and backgrounds. With the help of local social activists and organizations, Marsha Jackson accomplished a collaborative neighborhood plan by ensuring language access and age inclusivity for the whole family. As Alkon et al. (2013) and Sletto et al. (2019) suggested in the Global South, Jackson's platform gave every resident a voice in the decision-making process, which is often not the case in traditional urban development, as exemplified in the Freedmen Settlement.

The findings in Table 5.1 visually compare each community's leadership components most relevant to the primary research questions (Table 3.1). Floral Farms possesses every component observed as opposed to the Freedmen Settlement, so the community is well prepared to resist environmental injustices and hold absent governmental leaders responsible. The table suggests that the Freedmen Settlement is starting to take similar actions that successfully propelled Floral Farms into the inclusive and vocal community it is today. For example, residents are beginning to show interest in

developing a planning committee, which was the beginning of the inclusive activism platform in Floral Farms that eventually convinced city officials to take responsibility for the Shingle Mountain cleanup. The driving force that can be seen in both communities is residents' desire to stay connected to their neighbors and keep the lands they call home. The next hurdle Floral Farms overcame was to demand the support of its local government. The table shows that the Freedmen Settlement has not received government support. However, things could change as local organizations start to bring attention to the community and empower residents to keep challenging local officials.

| Leadership Component                    | Freedmen Settlement | Floral Farms |
|---|---------------------|--------------|
| Community-based Grassroots Organization |                     | ✓            |
| Biracial Leadership                     |                     | ✓            |
| Access to City Services                 |                     | ✓            |
| City Incorporation                      |                     | ✓            |
| Age Inclusivity                         |                     | ✓            |
| Local Activism Recruitment              | ✓                   | ✓            |
| Sense of Community                      | ✓                   | ✓            |
| Government Support                      |                     | ✓            |
| Desire to Keep their Property           | ✓                   | ✓            |
| Aspiration to Upgrade Living Conditions | ✓                   | ✓            |
| Reverend Presence                       |                     | ✓            |
| External/Local/Church Assistance        | ✓                   | ✓            |
| Community-led Planning Committee        | ✓                   | ✓            |
| Bilingual Participatory Planning        |                     | ✓            |

Table 5.1: A comparative analysis of the leadership components in each community

This study's interviews and surveys with residents of the unincorporated Freedmen Settlement proved that residents are en route to developing an adequate foundation for a



planning committee. A sense of belonging, an optimistic mind, and a little support from external leadership, organizations, and supporters is the start of a substantial and long-enduring community; both communities demonstrate those three essential components. The difference between the two is that Floral Farms established a welcoming planning process that invited everyone in the community. Although the Freedmen Settlement has adapted without the support of Dallas County, residents could learn from Floral Farms' approach to confront collectively environmental injustices posed by absent officials to improve their living conditions.

While previous research has focused on stories from the Global South, the results in this study demonstrate that the Global North also holds essential strategies that informal subdivisions could apply to their environmental justice advocacy. This study supports previous findings from Drivdal (2014) and Keys et al. (2016) that found a positive relationship between grassroots leaders mobilizing neighbors to resist environmental adversities. To solidify credibility, results could be cross-referenced with additional publications and open records from Dallas County. The number of residents interviewed limited the scope of this study; the comparative analysis between the unincorporated Freedmen Settlement and Floral Farms would be better informed if both communities were unincorporated areas. Regardless, the findings answered the research questions proposed for this study and contributed to the field's understanding of grassroots activism and leadership organizing in informal subdivisions of low-income and minority residents.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

The communities studied in this research have experienced (or are currently experiencing) environmental injustices at the hands of local officials that have repeatedly ignored their calls for action. The environmental justice movement is a massive undertaking for any community, but especially for those less fortunate, like the residents of the Freedmen Settlement in Southeast Dallas County and Floral Farms. Systemic regulations and zoning laws have disproportionately let down low-income communities of color. Adaptation and resiliency start at the heart of these Black and Brown residents. Still, the physical fatigue of standing up to absent governments is consistently ignored in the formal planning process. This study has highlighted the systemic failures of traditional urban planning by illustrating the reality residents conform to in the backyards of a highly developed metroplex. By delving into the community and developing meaningful discussions with residents, this study proved that a modern planning process should consider the aspirations of residents and invite everyone to the drawing board, adults, children, people of color, men and women, and extended families alike. Communities of color should invite neighbors to organize a planning committee or other forms of grassroots community development. This study realized the power of resident-led activism, planning, organization, and collaboration with local activists and social justice organizations. Floral Farms is showcased as a model community that has overcome environmental injustices by uniting residents and educating everyone with the help of local social justice organizations

to demand change in its community. The Freedmen Settlement proved to be a promising candidate for a similarly successful story to take the stage as a resilient community as residents start at grassroots community-based leadership development and adopt diverse planning techniques with local assistance. While one community may serve as a model to other low-income communities of color in the Global North, the other actively exemplifies the opportunities community leadership offer to the environmental justice movement.

One of the relationships in question was determining the dynamics that trigger environmental injustices in informal subdivisions. This study revealed that government-led initiatives often avoid the financial costs of realizing an aid package for informal subdivisions experiencing adverse environmental harms. In both communities, local officials ignored residents' inquiries and resorted to relocation packages to avoid “additional [financial] obligations” rather than equip residents with resiliency and adaptation techniques. Systemic flaws incorporated with traditional urban development inhibit informal residents from participating in the planning process, often exposing communities to system-supported environmental injustices. This study found community leadership to be an effective and viable route for informal subdivisions to adapt to the systemic flaws that have imposed adverse environmental dangers in their neighborhoods. When local government systems fail to listen to low-income residents of color, community-based organizing tactics may be used to bring awareness to environmental injustices. Resident-led planning initiatives should adopt an inclusive and diverse system that welcomes input from all corners of the neighborhood. In doing so, informal subdivisions develop strength and resiliency to cater to their environmental justice capacities.

The two communities researched in this study suggest that community-based leadership organizations can be the key for communities of color looking for a change in their neighborhoods. Despite their promising results, community-based organizations also carry implications to be aware of. In this study, the Freedmen Settlement struggles to commit to the consistency and community initiative that would evolve into a community-based organization. This shows that grassroots organizations require much attention, consistency, and equal effort across the table from all participants. The lack of a community-based organization in the Freedmen Settlement precludes residents from sharing their concerns and collaborating on viable solutions, isolating neighbors from sharing resiliency and adaptation techniques. Without unity, county officials easily overlook residents of the Freedmen Settlement, making it challenging for residents to voice their concerns with local organizations ready to assist. On the other hand, Floral Farms is an example of how partnerships between community leaders and local organizations can empower the community to collaborate on reducing their exposure to pollution and other environmental injustices. Although the mountain of shingles that plagued their community has been removed, residents are united and collectively recovering from the health impacts of Shingle Mountain. The resiliency residents have developed through community leadership has prepared them to confront the health effects left over after their environmental justice efforts. As they continue to advocate for a park to replace the toxic lands where Shingle Mountain once stood, leaders in the community are better prepared to prevent systemic failures and absent governmental leaders from allowing environmental injustices to pile in their community again. Both stories suggest that low-income communities of color should rely on community leaders and local organizations to educate

and empower residents on how to challenge environmental injustices from the grassroots to the governmental level and hold their local representatives accountable.

With more time, further studies should dig deeper into the social sustainability realm and analyze more leadership components that informal subdivisions may need to overcome environmental injustices. For example, future studies could research the role of race and culture in the environmental justice movement to better inform communities of color of helpful resiliency tactics. Racial discrimination did not play a significant role in this research. However, it is wise to consider how racial discrimination in a biracial community could hinder community-based organizations and discourage community-led initiatives. Likewise, language barriers should be considered in future studies as it was a reoccurring theme in this research. Age and generational gaps were found in both communities, but more studies should be conducted to determine their role in community leadership and environmental justice. Another helpful study could determine the most practical leadership styles that suit informal subdivisions and low-income communities of color. All future studies should be localized to cater their approach specific to residents' history and their needs. This study revealed that community leadership is a promising avenue for empowering environmental justice in low-income communities of color. Nonetheless, more studies should be conducted to solidify the capacities of community leaders and community-based organizations in the environmental justice movement.

APPENDIX A  
IRB APPROVAL

## IRB Protocol Review Form

### Protocol Review # 2022-0160.2 : Modification Review

Sustainability and Community Infrastructure in Informal Communities in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex

[Original Protocol](#) | [Review List](#) | [History](#)

**Creator Information**  
Ariadna Reyes-Sanchez  
Assistant Professor, Landscape Architecture  
ariadna.reyesanchez@uta.edu

#### To Be Completed by IRB Staff

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| <b>Status</b>           | Approved On May 05, 2022   |
| <b>Anniversary Date</b> | May 05   |
| <b>Review Type</b>      | Minimal Risk   |
| <b>Category</b>         | <input type="radio"/> Federally Funded <input checked="" type="radio"/> Non Federally Funded<br><input type="radio"/> FDA Regulated <input checked="" type="radio"/> Non-FDA Regulated<br><input type="radio"/> Clinical Trial <input checked="" type="radio"/> Non-Clinical Trial |



### 1. Study Identification

IRB #: 2022-0160.2

Protocol Title: Sustainability and Community Infrastructure in Informal Communities in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex

Principal Investigator:

Ariadna Reyes-Sanchez  
Assistant Professor, Landscape Architecture  
ariadna.reyesanchez@uta.edu

### 2. Informed Consent

Will this modification require a change to the informed Consent Document or Assent? N/A

If YES, attach a copy of the revised informed consent/assent for approval. If NO, please continue to use your existing approved consent / assent.

### 3. Check any other issue or document(s) that were revised

- Protocol/Project narrative/procedures/methods (describe in lay language the nature of this modification and rationale for the change. Itemize revisions resulting from this amendment)
- Change Protocol Title
- Add / delete project staff (members of the research team). For each person ADDED, list their responsibilities AND their qualifications in this text box. In Section 4 below (Protocol Personnel), add / delete individuals to ensure your personnel list is up to date.
- Change in project status from last continuing review.
- Change in subject participation.
- Change in funding status and/or source.
- Other (list document and new version date please).

PI and personnel will compensate research participants with a 30 US Dollar-gift certificate after completing surveys or interviews. To that end, PI obtained approval for a BA exception. This allows PI to compensate her participants with a 30-dollar gift certificate without asking them to complete any form and disclose their personal information. //

#### 4. Protocol Personnel

##### UT Arlington Protocol Personnel

| Investigator Information  | Investigator Role      | Investigator Type | Training Information |
|---|------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Ariadna Reyes-Sanchez</b><br>Assistant Professor, Landscape Architecture<br>ariadna_reyes@uta.edu                    | Principal Investigator | Faculty           |                      |
| <b>Joshua Newton</b><br>Graduate Teaching Assistant I, Landscape Architecture<br>joshn02@uta.edu   (817) 272-2801       | Protocol Personnel     | Faculty           |                      |
| <b>Anna Laura Harmjanz</b><br>Tutor, University Tutorial & Support Institution<br>annaharmjanz@uta.edu   (817) 272-2817 | Protocol Personnel     | Student           |                      |
| <b>Elham Hesari</b><br>ehh397@uta.edu   | Protocol Personnel     | Student           |                      |
| <b>Jose Perez</b><br>Student Assistant, Student Success Programs<br>jose.perez@uta.edu   (817) 272-3213                 | Protocol Personnel     | Student           |                      |

#### 5. Risk to Participants

a. Does this modification change the risk to participants? *N/A*

b. Indicate how new information will be communicated to currently enrolled participants. If this is not considered necessary, please provide explanation



#### 7. Form Attachments

##### Uploaded Documents

| Form                                    | File Name   |
|---|---|
| BA Exception Approval UTA               | bae_request - 20220502T151854ariadna.pdf                          |
| UTA Research Proposal                   | UTA Primary Research Application_May4.docx                        |
| Int_Consent                             | Consent Form for Interviews_May4.docx                             |
| Survey_Consent                          | Consent Form for Surveys_May1.docx                                |
| Spanish_Int_Consent                     | Spanish_Consent Form for Interviews_May 1.docx                    |
| Spanish_Survey_Consent                  | Spanish_Consent Form for Surveys_May4.docx                        |
| Stamped ICD - Spanish Consent           | Stamped ICD 2022-0160.2 - Spanish.pdf                             |
| Stamped ICD - Spanish Interview Consent | Stamped ICD 2022-0160.2 - Spanish_Consent Form for Interviews.pdf |
| Stamped ICD - English Interview         | Stamped ICD 2022-0160.2 - Consent Form for Interviews.pdf         |
| Stamped ICD - English Survey            | Stamped ICD 2022-0160.2 - Consent Form for Surveys.pdf            |



## Comments

Note : Comments are not seen by the IRB until the protocol is submitted

[Lisa Alvarez](#)  
Research Support Spec III, Office Of Research Administration  
[lisa.alvarez@uta.edu](mailto:lisa.alvarez@uta.edu)

IRB Coordinator

Thu, May 5th 2022, 12:16 pm  
(7 months ago)

The IRB team reviewed and approved the modification request for this non-federally funded, non-FDA regulated protocol in accordance with the UTA IRB Internal Operating Procedures.

The modifications are minimal risk and do not change the study risk level.

The approved modifications are limited to:

-Added \$30 compensation for study subjects for completion of survey or interview; IRB main form and consent forms updated to reflect change

HSP training is up to date for all personnel.

This comment is available to **Public**

[Lisa Alvarez](#)  
Research Support Spec III, Office Of Research Administration  
[lisa.alvarez@uta.edu](mailto:lisa.alvarez@uta.edu)

IRB Coordinator

Thu, May 5th 2022, 10:29 am  
(7 months ago)

Thank you for your submission. A review of your modification is now ready.

Please submit the following clarifications and revisions for further review:

IRB application

#24 – Benefits – please remove reference to compensation, it is not considered a benefit.

All consent forms

Possible Benefits section - please remove reference to compensation, it is not considered a benefit.

Other note:

There are a number of other attachments included in this mod that do not have any changes. Only include those attachments that have changes or are relevant to this modification. Please delete all others.

Thank you,

IRB Team

This comment is available to **Public**

## REFERENCES

- Adegun, O. B. (2017). Exploring just sustainability in re-blocking intervention in a Johannesburg informal settlement. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 53(5), 782–796.
- Agyeman, J., & Evans, T. (2003). Toward just sustainability in urban communities: Building equity rights with sustainable solutions. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 590(1), 35–53.
- Ahmed, S., & Meenar, M. (2018). Just sustainability in the global south: A case study of the megacity of Dhaka. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 34(4), 401–424.
- Alkon, A. H., Cortez, M., & Sze, J. (2013). What is in a name? language, framing and environmental justice activism in California's Central Valley. *Local Environment*, 18(10), 1167–1183.
- Bailey, S., Hendrick, A., & Palmer, M. (2017). Eco-Social Work in Action: A Place for Community Gardens. *Australian Social Work*, 71(1), 98–110.
- Bullard, R. D. (2000). Preface. In *Dumping in dixie race, class, and Environmental Quality* (pp. xiii-xviii). preface, Westview Press. Bullard, R. D., & Johnson, G. S. (2000). Environmentalism and public policy: Environmental justice: Grassroots activism and its impact on public policy decision making. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(3), 555–578.

- Bullard, R. D., & Wright, B. H. (1993). Environmental Justice for All: Community Perspectives on Health and Research. *Toxicology and Industrial Health*, 9(5), 821–841.
- Bullard, R. D., Mohai, P., Saha, R., & Wright, B. (2008). *Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty: Why Race Still Matter After All of These Years*.
- Dakyaga, F., Ahmed, A., & Sillim, M. L. (2020). Governing ourselves for sustainability: Everyday ingenuities in the governance of water infrastructure in the informal settlements of Dar es salaam. *Urban Forum*, 32(1), 111–129.
- Davis, L. F., & Ramírez-Andreotta, M. D. (2021). Participatory research for environmental justice: A critical interpretive synthesis. *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 129(2), 026001.
- Drivdal, L. (2016). Community leadership in urban informal neighbourhoods: Micro-politics and micro-administration in informal settlements in Cape Town. *Urban Forum*, 27(3), 275–295.
- Durst, N. J. (2018). Informal and ubiquitous: *colonias*, premature subdivisions and other unplanned suburbs on America’s Urban Fringe. *Urban Studies*, 56(4), 722–740.
- Francis, R., & Firestone, L. (2011, May). *Implementing the Human Right to Water in California’s Central Valley: Building a Democratic Voice Through Community Engagement in Water Policy Decision Making*. CWC Publication. Retrieved May 20, 2022
- Goodman, M. (2021, October 25). *Hope Comes to Floral Farms: Visions of a Park Where Shingle Mountain Once Stood*. D Magazine. Retrieved November 7, 2022

- Grineski, S. E. (2006). Local struggles for environmental justice: Activating knowledge for change. *Journal of Poverty*, 10(3), 25–49.
- Haines, A., Kovats, R. S., Campbell-Lendrum, D., & Corvalan, C. (2006). Climate change and human health: Impacts, vulnerability and Public Health. *Public Health*, 120(7), 585–596.
- Ibanga, I. (2021, February 11). *This Texas town Hasn't Had Running Water in its 142 Year History*. YouTube. Retrieved November 10, 2022
- Jazeera, A. (2021, February 18). *In Texas, These Residents are Dying to Breathe Clean Air*. YouTube. Retrieved November 17
- Keys, N., Thomsen, D. C., & Smith, T. F. (2014). Adaptive capacity and climate change: The role of Community Opinion Leaders. *Local Environment*, 21(4), 432–450.
- Krings, A., Kornberg, D., & Lane, E. (2018). Organizing Under Austerity: How Residents' Concerns Became the Flint Water Crisis. *Critical Sociology*, 45(4-5), 583–597.
- Lanez, H. (2021, August 9). *[Freedmen Settlement] 2021 expose of John Wiley price*. YouTube. Retrieved November 10
- Martin, N. (2016, April 27). *[This Freedmen Settlement] doesn't need Dallas County to fund water lines, lawyer says, but obstacles remain*. Dallas News. Retrieved November 10, 2022
- Martinez, I., & Smith, K. (2020, January 27). *[Freedmen Settlement]*. YouTube. Retrieved November 10, 2022

- Mayo, E. (2022, May 5). *How an Environmental Crisis Catalyzed Community-Led Planning to Address Racial Inequities: A Case Study of Shingle Mountain, in Southern Dallas*. Handle Proxy. Retrieved November 17, 2022
- McCright, A. M., & Dunlap, R. E. (2011). The Politicization of Climate Change and Polarization in the American Public's Views of Global Warming, 2001–2010. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 52(2), 155–194.
- Milman, O. (2017, November 23). *'America's dirty little secret': The Texas town that has been without running water for decades*. The Guardian. Retrieved November 7, 2022
- Montero, M. (2004). Community Leaders: Beyond Duty and Above Self-Contentedness. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*, 27(1), 39–52.
- National Academy of Sciences. (2020). *Climate Change: Evidence and Causes: Update 2020*.
- Neighbors United: Community Partners. (2021, October 25). *Concept Design*. Park for Floral Farms. Retrieved November 7, 2022
- Neighbors United: Community Partners. (2022). *Park for Floral Farms*. Retrieved November 7, 2022
- Neighbors United: Community Partners. (2022, January 24). *A Long Time Coming: The History of Floral Farms' Advocacy*. Park for Floral Farms. Retrieved November 7, 2022

- Pemberton, D. A. (2022). Come Hell or No Water: The Story of [a Freedmen Settlement] and the Unincorporated Community Fight for Public Services. *UCLA Journal of Environmental Law and Policy*, 40(1).
- Rivas, M., & Keomoungkhoun, N. (2021, June 4). *Curious Texas: Why doesn't [this Freedmen Settlement] have running water?* Dallas News. Retrieved November 10, 2022
- Samper, J. (2020, October 19). *How informal settlements (slums) will reshape the world* | Jota Samper | TEDxCU. YouTube. Retrieved April 17, 2022
- Savali, K. W. (2016, December 14). *[Freedmen Settlement], Texas: A small community denied water for over 30 years fights back.* The Root. Retrieved November 10, 2022
- Sletto, B., Tabory, S., & Strickler, K. (2019). Sustainable Urban Water Management and integrated development in informal settlements: The contested politics of co-production in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. *Global Environmental Change*, 54, 195–202.
- UN-Habitat. (2003). *The challenge of slums: Global report on human settlements, 2003.* Earthscan Publications.
- West, R. (1985, September 1). *The Lost Community of [this Freedmen Settlement].* D Magazine. Retrieved November 10, 2022
- Williams, E. (2020, June 19). *[Freedmen Settlement] Ep 4.* YouTube. Retrieved November 10, 2022
- Wilonsky, R. (2018, December 13). *'it's unacceptable': Why a Dallas woman lives next to mountains of ground-up shingles.* Dallas News. Retrieved November 17, 2022.

## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Jose David Perez Vela is a fourth-year Honors College student at the University of Texas at Arlington concentrating on environmental and sustainability studies, urban affairs and public administration, and leadership studies. Jose prepares to be the first in his family to walk the stage and receive his Honors Bachelor of Science within a year of finishing his Capstone thesis project. His current position in the field is with Chartwells Higher Education, where he develops professional working experience as the Sustainability Intern for Maverick Dining, creating outreach media, educating students and colleagues about the environment, and introducing sustainable initiatives for his team and campus to adopt. He is interested in many fields – mainly food sustainability during his undergrad career, but also: sustainability management, advising and consulting, environmental public policy, nonprofit, and more creative fields such as user experience (UX) and product management. Post-undergrad, Jose would like to continue his work on environmental justice, explore the tech industry, and further his studies as a graduate student. In the meantime, he plans to complete certificates in UX design and geographic information systems (GIS).