Navajo Water Crisis

Foreword

This zine is meant to educate the average white American. For more information on the history of this crisis, it is best to go directly to Navajo sources.

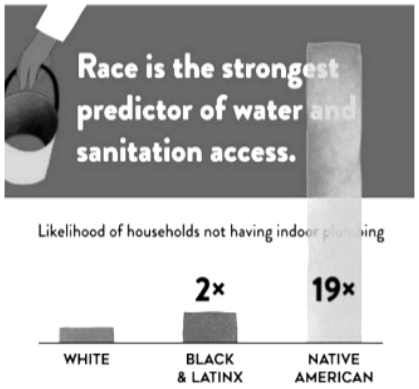
Introduction

The Navajo Nation is a Native American reservation that spans areas of Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico. It is currently the largest federally recognized Native American tribe in the United States. 165,000 people live on the Navajo Nation as of 2020, (NCAI Policy Research Center, 2021) and 30-40% of those people don't have access to running water. (The Democratic staff of the House Commitee on Natural Resources, 2016)

Socioeconomics

Native Americans have suffered from the effects of colonization and lack of federal policies for as long as the white man has existed in North America. Race is often the strongest predictor of water and sanitation access, as demonstrated by the fact that Native Americans are 19 times more likely than White Americans to live without running water and indoor plumbing in their household. This number rises significantly when talking about the Navajo Nation, where it is 67 times more likely for residents to live without these necessities. (Tanana, Combs, & Hoss, 2021)
Not to mention the cost of water per acre-foot is much higher in the Navajo Nation, being $43,000 USD compared to $600 USD of the average American family. (Tanana, Combs, & Hoss, 2021)

While the treaties signed with the Tribes by the US government should guarantee access to safe and accessible drinking water, this is not the case. The Navajo Nation is one of the highest concentration areas of Native Americans, and they need more water. (U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2018)



Geography

The land of the Navajo Nation reservation is divided by the Lukachukai Mountains on the New Mexico-Arizona border. Around two-thirds of the land is located to the west, and one-third of lands is on the west. In the middle of the reservation is the region of Black Mesa, at approximately 2,000m elevation. The Lukachukai mountains are 3,000 m high at the crest, and receive most of the rainfall in the reservation, while Black Mesa gets the second most. In the lowlands of the reservation, which are much more arid, annual precipitation totals average from 100-150mm. Less arid uplands regions, such as Black mesa and the Lukachukai Mountains receive an annual average of 250-300mm of precipitation, just about double the lowlands regions. The lowlands are the hottest and driest regions, at around 1200m elevation. (Redsteer, Kelly, Francis, & Block, 2010) Adding on to this, there was a drought in the Navajo Nation region from the years of 1999-2009, which the community is still recovering from, almost two decades later. (Redsteer, Kelly, Francis, & Block, 2010) A separate problem of water pollution arises when considering Uranium and Arsenic poisoning. The Navajo Nation has over a century long legacy of hard rock mining. Contamination of water supplies from Uranium and Arsenic pose serious health risks due to the lack of proper water infrastructure. (Ingram, Jones, Credo, & Rock, 2020)

Conclusion

Socioeconomic factors, linked to race, force Navajo Nation residents to practice unsanitary health maintenance. They have less access to water, and the water they can get costs more. The physical enviornment makes it hard to use rainwater as a source for hydration, and natural waterways are often polluted with toxic chemicals. Culturally, these Navajo citizens value water, and know just how much it matters in life, and yet they are the ones denied access in a clean and healthy manner. The US Government has failed to address this issue in any meaningful way.

Sources

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