

Unit 3: Power



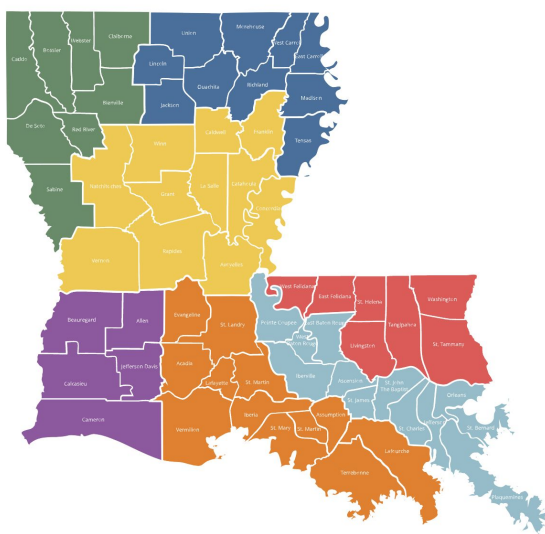
The people who live in places impacted by human-made decisions have the power to speak out against environmental injustice.

Even though the case studies from this unit can be implemented on their own, it is recommended that at least one activity from Unit 1 and/or Unit 2 be completed prior to beginning one of these case studies.

Note: Each case study consists of a variety of resources - videos, newspaper articles, scholarly journal articles, scientific papers, etc. You do not need to use all of the resources included to complete the case study. There is a recommended reading assignment included that selects one or two sources from the list provided. The primary sources included in this curriculum are presented in their entirety, which may make some of them lengthy. At the teacher's discretion, you may choose to read only a section of a selected resource to allow for whatever time constraints are present in the context of your classroom.

Each case study seeks to answer the following essential questions:

- Who is affected and how? Are they affected differently than other people?
- What is occurring in the environment that is causing this? What data do we need to understand?
- Who is in control of this situation? Who is making decisions and how?
- What power do the people most affected have? What actions were taken to address this problem?
- What are other actions we could take to solve problems like this? Are there solutions that would more equitably address this problem?
- How can I put what I've learned into action in my own life? What problems can I solve in my community?



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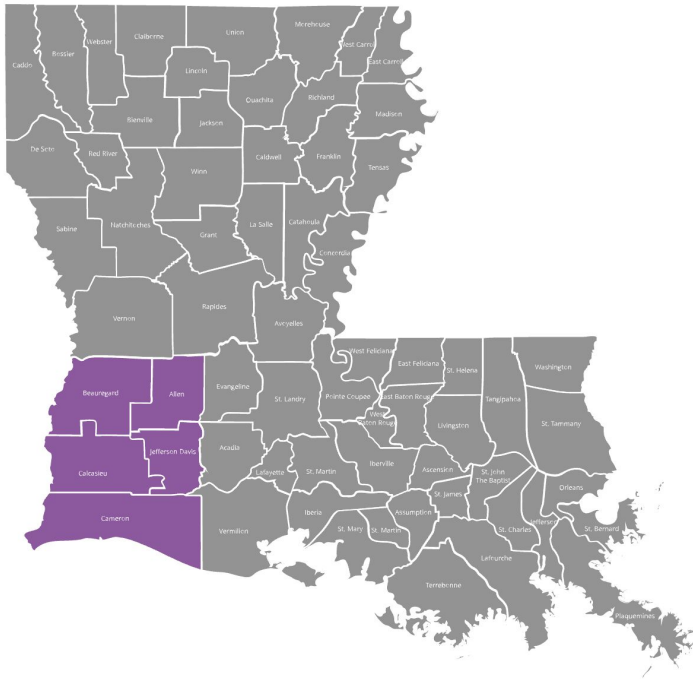
The following case study are selected from LEAN's way of separating the state into regions.

Case Study Community	Region
Alsen/ St. Irma Lee	Region 6 (Pointe Coupee, East Baton Rouge, West Baton Rouge, Iberville, Ascension, St. James, St. John the Baptist, St. Charles, Jefferson, Orleans, St. Bernard, Plaquemines)
Colfax (The Rock)	Region 3 (Vernon, Natchitoches, Winn, Grant, Rapides, Cladwell, La Salle, Avoyelles, Catahoula, Franklin, Concordia)
Grand Bois	Region 5 (Evangeline, St. Landy, Acadia, Lafayette, Vermillion, St. Martin, Iberia, St. Mary, Assumption, Terrebonne, Lafourche)
Homer	Region 1 (Caddo, Bossier, Webster, Claiborne, De Soto, Bienville, Red River, Sabine)
Mossville	Region 4 (Beauregard, Allen, Jefferson Davis, Calcasieu, Cameron)
St. Joseph	Region 2 (Lincoln, Union, Jackson, Ouachita, Morehouse, Richland, West Carroll, East Carroll, Madison, Tensas)
Mandeville	Region 7 (East Feliciana, Livingston, St. Helena, St. Tammany, Tangipahoa, Washington, West Feliciana)

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Mossville



LEAN Region 4

Southwest Louisiana is the birthplace of Zydeco music and home to a variety of landscapes. Here, you can hike the 180-mile long Creole Nature Trail, or enjoy beaches bordering the Gulf of Mexico. This region includes:

- Allen Parish
- Beauregard Parish
- Calcasieu Parish
- Cameron Parish
- Jefferson Davis Parish

About Mossville:

Founded by Jim Moss, a freed enslaved person, who bought land on the Houston River near Lake Charles, Louisiana. The historic African-American community exists in close proximity to several major industrial facilities, perhaps most significantly the nearby Condea Vista chemical plant. In 1998 Condea Vista bought out 206 homes in Mossville. Condea Vista was later purchased by SASOL which announced in 2011 a plan to expand the facility. As part of the expansion plan, SASOL included a voluntary property purchase program for the remaining residents. LEAN's Wilma Subra has been a technical support system for the residents of Mossville for decades as they navigate concerns over permits, emissions, health impacts, and most recently, the voluntary property purchase program offered by Sasol. Many residents took advantage of the voluntary program and relocated away from Mossville. The community of West Lake on the eastern side of the facility has also been subject to relocation efforts.

Standards:

English
Social Studies
Science

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Resource	Description
Mossville's End Source	A 2016 article from Chemical & Engineering News about Sasol's buyout and relocation of the Mossville community.
The Mossville Story Source	A timeline of the Mossville community from settlement to exodus, from the Chemical & Engineering News article.
Excerpt from Poison in the Air Source	A ProPublica investigation into the compounds effects of air pollution caused by living in close proximity to several chemical plants. It is encouraged that you also access the website to see the dynamic graphics.
The Most Detailed Map of Cancer-Causing Industrial Air Pollution in the U.S.	Interactive map produced by ProPublica that accompanies the Poison in the Air investigative reporting.
'Startling': EPA head pledges action for vanishing Black community of Mossville Source	2021 article from The Baton Rouge Advocate profiling the head of the EPA's visit to Mossville's remaining residents.
How a Chemical Company Created a Ghost Town Overlooked	Vice documentary about Mossville. Length, 19:47.

Extended Reading Activity:

Read and analyze *The Mossville Story*, Excerpt from *Poison in the Air*, and *'Startling': EPA head pledges action for vanishing Black community of Mossville*. Then discuss and answer the essential questions for this unit. Answers will vary to the questions, however students should be able to grasp the basic power dynamics of the situation.

(Expansion) This can be transformed into a larger activity by reading the previously listed texts, as well as accessing *The Most Detailed Map of Cancer-Causing Industrial Air Pollution in the U.S.*, and discuss and answer the essential questions.

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Essential Questions

1. Who is affected and how?

2. Are they affected differently from other people?

3. What is occurring in the environment that is causing this?

4. What data do we need to understand?

5. Who is in control of this situation?

6. Who is making decisions and how?

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Essential Questions (cont.)

7. What power do the people most affected have?

8. What actions were taken to address this problem?

9. What are other actions we could take to solve problems like this?

10. Are there solutions that would more equitably address this problem?

11. How can I put what I've learned into action in my own life?

12. What problems can I solve in my community?

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Mossville's End

As Sasol's huge petrochemical project lifts Southwest Louisiana, an environmental justice community dissolves in its shadow.

By Rick Mullin

March 21, 2016| A version of this story appeared in Volume 94, Issue 12

In Brief

Mossville, a town settled by freed slaves as early as the 1790s, maintained its sense of community through the Jim Crow era but is now succumbing to the encroachment of industry in the Lack Charles region of Southwest Louisiana. Sasol, the South African firm building an ethylene cracker on the edge of town and planning an even larger gas-to-liquids fuel facility next to it, has offered residents a buyout, and most have taken it. Although Sasol is applauded for bringing jobs and a record level of economic support to the region, the company finds itself managing a landmark community's dissolution.

Blessed by light rush hour traffic through Baton Rouge on a Thursday morning, I arrive 20 minutes early for an interview with Michael Hayes, vice president of public affairs for Sasol U.S. Mega Projects at the South African chemical firm's offices in Westlake, La. This gives me more than enough time for a tour of the small town that is likely to dominate out discussion. I proceed across the tracks.

It has been a long drive from New Orleans mostly along Route 10, a highway elevated for long stretches over swamp water. Crossing the bridge after Lake Charles, however, the landscape is suddenly dominated by refineries and petrochemical plants. I move through the outskirts of Westlake, driving one of the few passenger cars in a line of construction vehicles until I reach Old Spanish Trail, a road running away from the factories but parallel to a construction site. It becomes the main street through Mossville.

The prospect on both sides of the road is bleak. A handful of houses, some obviously abandoned, are interspersed with concrete slabs where others have been razed. Thin clusters of bare trees can be seen behind the buildings still standing. Past these, dust clouds rise around heavy machinery tearing at the earth.

I pass the Miracle Deliverance Holiness Church. A chain stretches across its gravel driveway. Further along, I see the first people on my drive through Mossville – a young woman sitting on the steps of a trailer home with a baby on her knee. I turn around and head back to Westlake, noticing on this pass that a 1950s-vintage school building now houses Sasol business offices.

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By all accounts, Mossville is dying. Settled by freed slaves as early as the 1790s, it was one of the first black communities in the U.S., and unincorporated town famous for a sense of community and self-sufficiency that carried it through the Jim Crow era. But, in recent decades, Mossville has been less successful standing up to the steady encroachment of heavy industry.

Now it would appear that Mossville's final demise is at hand. Seeking to take advantage of low-cost natural gas extracted from shale, Sasol has embarked on a huge expansion of its Louisiana facility that will run right up to the town line. Well over half of its residents have opted to accept a buyout from the company and abandon Mossville.

Turning onto Houston River Road and into the parking lot of Sasol's new administration offices in Westlake, I pass groups of construction workers on lunch break walking along the dusty roadside. And again I hear Hayes's voice on the telephone the day before: "You aren't going to write that tired old Mossville story again, are you?"

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Hayes, who is Sasol's main community liaison, has endured plenty of coverage of Mossville's demise. The Times-Picayune of New Orleans ran a feature describing the dissolution of the town through the buyout. PBS's "Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly" did the same in an online feature. Mother Jones hit hard with the headline "A Massive Chemical Plant Is Poised to Wipe This Louisiana Town off the Map."

The buyout has since run its course. Last month, a handful of residents who refused the deal petitioned Sasol to revisit its calculus for determining the value of their homes, hoping for higher offers. On the weekend I'm in town, a staunch holdout who owns property located in Sasol's construction area is packing to leave, having finally agreed to a price.

A tall Texan who has worked in the industry for 40 years, 35 at the Sasol site, Hayes is palpably frustrated during our hour-long meeting. He enumerates a slate of Sasol initiatives to foster economic development in Southwest Louisiana—none of which have been covered in the national press—as the company begins work on the largest investment in the region's history: a \$9 billion ethylene cracker already under construction and an even more expensive gas-to-liquids fuel facility that is currently on hold.

The project is making waves in a state ranked number two for chemical production after Texas. Chemical manufacturing is a \$68 billion industry in Louisiana that accounts for 23,000 direct jobs and more than 126,000 jobs in related industries.

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The 1,200 jobs Sasol says its latest expansion will bring to the region are a boon in themselves. Sasol also has spent \$4 million over the past three years to fund a regional impact study, cosponsor a small business resource guide, bankroll a scholarship fund for students at technical colleges in Lake Charles and Westlake, and fund an oral history project on Mossville at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge.

Sasol's Voluntary Property Purchase Program, or VPPP, under which it offers to buy residents' property in Mossville, is a much larger investment that could run into as high as tens of millions of dollars.

As of February, more than 80% of property owners eligible for the program have agreed to have their homes appraised. Sasol has made 773 offers on parcels and has so far closed 432 purchases.

Accurate population figures are difficult to come by, but Mossville was thought to have 1,000 residents in 2012. It is estimated that there are currently fewer than 250 people living in the town.

Sasol, which came to town when it acquired Condea Vista in 2001, recognized that its expansion project would require support. "This region does not have a community growth and development plan," Hayes says. "It certainly didn't have a plan that comprehended an addition of this number of workers. This has been a static economy for 20 years."

The company has tried to persuade other firms operating in the region to participate in programs it is funding but with little success. "They have not insisted that they have a place at the table," Hayes says dryly.

Local authorities and community organization leaders agree that Sasol's economic and community support is unprecedented in a region that is host to more than a dozen multinational corporations. Critics note that the company has received a 10-year exemption on local property taxes and other incentives. But Hayes replies that all new projects in the region have received the same tax breaks since the 1970s.

He says the firm is eligible for a \$115 million grant from the state, "but it requires us to reach certain targets and milestones, which we will find a challenge to achieve." Sasol, he says, has self-funded the VPPP and will not be reimbursed by the state.

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TWO WORLDS

The harshest criticism of Sasol centers on its relations with Mossville, where community outreach is drastically different than in Westlake to the east. “Westlake is an incorporated community with good leadership,” Hayes says. “The focus is on schools, jobs, and business development. They as an organized community have a very different focus than the disparate community in Mossville.”

Whereas Sasol maintains a dialogue with the Westlake City Council and the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury, the county-level government, it has had to liaise with individual citizens and community organizations in Mossville. The company talked to local ministers. It met with members of a citizens’ group called Mossville Environmental Action Now, or MEAN, and it invited community members to meetings at the Rigmaiden Recreation Center, at which it detailed its plans and asked what people wanted.

The town’s primary concern was expressed clearly. “They asked for the opportunity to move,” Hayes says. “There were five stars next to that one.” The second most important concern was protecting the Morning Star Cemetery, one of two old church cemeteries in town. Its church has already been torn down.

It’s hard to dispute Hayes’s characterization of Mossville as a community without focus as residents and churches leave town in what amounts to a second exodus. A previous property buyout resulted from a 1998 citizens’ class-action suit brought when ethylene dichloride from a Vista plant was found to have contaminated groundwater in the town. That plant was sold by Vista prior to Sasol’s purchase of the company. Hurricane Rita in 2005 was another blow .

And there are long-standing health concerns. The U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry, for example, tested residents in 1998 and found high levels of dioxin. But the current epoch is defined by Sasol’s buyout offer and the divide that has arisen between those residents who have accepted it and those who claim it is inadequate.

Kim Cusimano, a senior public and government affairs specialist at Sasol, pushes a 40-page handbook across the table. It outlines the deal that Sasol is offering everybody in town under the VPPP.

The company will pay the appraised value of a home or \$100,000, whichever is higher, plus 60% of the appraised value as the basic purchase price. Thus, a homeowner whose property is appraised at \$70,000 would receive \$142,000. The owner of a home assessed at \$150,000 would receive \$240,000. Each seller is eligible for a \$1,000 early sign-on bonus and can receive more than \$20,000 for expenses.

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Cusimano and Hayes explain that homeowners are required to get multiple appraisals based on properties comparable to their homes in nearby towns such as Carlyss, Sulphur, and Moss Bluff. Appraisals are impossible in Mossville as there have been no recent home sales. They also emphasize that no one is being forced to sell their home.

Hayes says Sasol studied other industry buyouts, notably Shell's 2002 buyout of a black community called Diamond in Norco, La., in devising the VPPP formula. He claims that it's the most generous voluntary buyout plan in history. "Anyone who says the process is not fair and undervalues the house either hasn't read the program or is misrepresenting the program," he says.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Mimi Hayes (no relation to Michael) is waiting for me in the vestibule of the Westlake Multipurpose Building on Friday morning. She has invited members of the Sasol Community Advisory Panel, or CAP, which she heads, to meet with me. A man in a bright pink shirt strides up and vigorously shakes my hand. Mimi introduces her husband, W. C. "Skeeter" Hayes, a Westlake councilman and member of the CAP.

Waiting for the others to arrive, Mimi and Skeeter give me a little background on the CAP and community relations with Sasol.

"The industry always had a black eye in this area," Skeeter says. "People thought they were just in it for the money and all that. But they've turned around and started getting good public relations people. Over the 20 years I have been on the panel, the credibility of industry has started to rise." The CAP, he says, has played a big part.

CAPs are common in communities that border chemical plants, especially large ones. The government doesn't require companies to convene CAPs, but they are closely associated with Responsible Care, an environmental management and safety protocol followed by members of the American Chemistry Council, a trade association.

Sasol's panel is typical, as Mimi and Skeeter describe it. It is a one-company CAP, not unusual in communities that host multiple large chemical companies. It has a rotating membership of community leaders and residents from Westlake, Lake Charles, and Mossville. Meetings, which are attended by Sasol executives, usually including Michael Hayes, are held for the purpose of bringing community concerns to the company and passing along information about operations at the plant.

Some CAPs have a reputation for confrontational exchanges, but this does not appear to be the case in Westlake. Mimi credits the CAP for maintaining a line of communication that "corrects misconceptions" before things get out of hand, "because rumors have a tendency of growing."

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We move into the meeting room and are joined by Jacqueline Green, executive director of the Calcasieu Council on Aging in Lake Charles, and LaSalle “Coach” Williams, the former principal of Mossville High School.

Green, a descendent of the Rigmaiden family, among the earliest Mossville settlers, was born and grew up in the town. She recently opted for the Sasol buyout and moved to Carlyss. Williams is interested in taking a buyout but is not satisfied with the money that Sasol has offered. Green’s term on the CAP ended in 2014. Williams is a former Conoco CAP member.

Green explains that the Sasol deal appealed to many families in town, especially ones in which the younger generation had moved elsewhere. Her organization has spent a lot of time connecting elderly residents with distant family members, helping them navigate the home sale process, and explaining the many costs involved in relocation.

Sasol has been extremely helpful, she says. “They covered every base and were ready to answer any questions that we had,” she says. “They set up an office in our community open five days a week. I felt the process went really smooth.”

Still, it was painful. Green describes the difficulty of convincing her mother to leave and in seeing the family’s four homes razed to concrete slabs.

Green, who is 45 years old, describes a loss of community due to generational changes that might be felt in black communities anywhere in America. “We try to educate them,” she says, “but many millennials, as they’re called, are disengaged from their heritage, black history, and the battle and the fight and the courage that it took to have our own self-sustaining community.”

Other changes are unique to Mossville. The Vista groundwater contamination marked a turning point, she says, causing 206 homes, or nearly half the town, to be vacated.

“That was the first phase of cutting our community in half. It took out almost all the Lincoln Heights and Bel Air subdivisions. My grandparents owned a store there.”

Green acknowledges that the community had developed steadily with an industry that provided jobs. She says Sasol’s project represents growth and opportunity for the region, even as it depletes her hometown.

“I am excited about the workforce development and the jobs,” she says. “But by the same token, when I get off of work some days, my car still wants to drive home. That’s home. It is heartbreaking. But I knew there would come a day when we would have to go.”

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Williams's perspective goes back twice as far as Green's. "My daddy owned a wood yard," he recalls. "Back in those days they sold a lot of firewood. He showed me how to use a saw. I was behind that saw many days growing up."

He also spent a lot of time in a school bus riding between Mossville and Lake Charles because black children were not allowed to attend high school in Westlake. When Mossville got its own high school in the 1950s, black students living in Westlake were bused to school there. Williams attended McNeese State University on the GI Bill after serving in the Korean War. He went on to become head coach at Mossville High School and eventually principal.

Williams, who has a street named after him in town, is not as sanguine about improvements in community-industry relations as Skeeter Hayes is. Attitudes toward industry have changed, Williams notes, as residents who worked at the local plants became more knowledgeable about the health risks. And he agrees with Green that the Vista contamination hit hard.

"Vista was unfair to the people of Mossville," Williams says. "A lot of people went for that buyout, but what they didn't realize was that when they moved out it would cost them more to start over again."

He notes that the buyout led to the rise of MEAN, a political force centered on convincing industry to relocate the entire town.

Williams, like many others in Mossville, was heavily impacted by Hurricane Rita. We drive to his property after the meeting, where he shows me the stump of a huge tree that fell on his home. He received a loan from a state hurricane relief program with which he rebuilt the five-bedroom split-level.

"I had an opportunity in the second round to put a lot into the house that I didn't have the first time, and I was thinking this is going to be the last time for me," he says. "Then here comes Sasol."

One of the first residents to sign on for a purchase offer from Sasol, Williams found a property in Carlyss that appeared suitable. But it turned out to have termites. "Sasol looked at what I had, they came back to the table, but it still isn't enough to get me to move. They've got me on hold, I guess."

HEAVEN ON EARTH

On Green's recommendation, I stop for lunch at Heaven on Earth BBQ & Seafood, a small building on Prater Road. The restaurant, across the street from a trailer that serves as the headquarters for MEAN, is one of the few structures remaining on a major street

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arching off Old Spanish Trail. It is the only commercial enterprise I will see in Mossville on my visit.

There are development plans for the sparsely wooded acreage behind the restaurant, however. A Utah company intends to construct a “man camp,” temporary housing for hundreds of workers, many of whom will likely be deployed at Sasol and at an ethylene plant that Axiall and Lotte Chemical are planning for south of town.

The barbecued brisket lives up to the establishment’s name. I try to enjoy it in the five minutes I have to eat, watching “The Price Is Right,” which happens to be on the television in the corner—a surreal touch. A text message arrives from Wilma Subra saying she is in town and will meet me at the Rigmaiden Recreation Center.

Subra is an environmental consultant based two hours away in New Iberia, La. She began tracking industrial emissions and their impact on communities at the Gulf South Research Institute in the 1970s and has since formed her own consultancy, working with residents in towns like Mossville across North America. She is well-regarded by industry and environmental activists alike. But she’s made a few enemies. There are regular break-in attempts at her office, and it was shot at once while she was inside.

Mossville has been a regular destination for Subra since the 1970s. “There are 14 industrial facilities surrounding this community,” she explained earlier over the phone. “These are petroleum refineries, vinyl chloride manufacturers, a coal-fired power plant, and a lot of chemical companies.”

The facilities, which proliferated as part of the war effort in the 1940s, were clustered around an estuary on a shipping channel off the Gulf of Mexico. “The African American community had a lot of property around them,” she said. Trucking and rail systems were developed, extending northwest from the shipping channel. “So the expansion didn’t happen in the white neighborhoods. It happened more in the black neighborhoods—over many decades.”

According to Subra, public concern about the health effects of living near these industries ramped up in the mid-1980s after the Bhopal disaster and the Environmental Protection Agency’s establishment of the Toxics Release Inventory, which tracks industrial chemical releases to air, water, and land. “We had been told for years that it was only steam coming out of all those stacks,” she said. “But we were able to receive the first TRI report, and it gave us data every year. We would see the trends. It was data we had never had access to.”

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HOLDOUTS

I find Subra in her car in the parking lot, leafing through a folder of notes. She hops out, and we make our way to the door of the center where we are met by local residents Larry Allison and Delma Bennett. Delma's wife, Christine, joins us inside as does Allison's neighbor, Ronald Carrier. Allison, the Bennetts, and Carrier have refused Sasol's buyout offer. As such, they are a distinct minority in Mossville.

Carrier, 61, who owns a three-bedroom home not far from Williams, sought a Sasol buyout, but the total offered by the company, he says, is far less than he would need to relocate to a comparable three-bedroom home and lot. That's especially true, he says, given the higher taxes and land prices he would pay in one of the surrounding communities.

"Once they announced this program," Carrier says, "the property outside the city limits went up from \$8,000 to \$9,000 per acre to \$30,000 to \$35,000. If I were to buy my two-and-three-quarter acres back, I'd have nothing for a house."

Allison, who is 66 and retired, is in the same boat. He moved to Mossville in 1976 and built his four-bedroom home while working for local industry.

"We are not down on people making progress," he says. "We know that most of our families were raised on people working at the chemical plants." He feels, however, that Sasol's plan was implemented without adequate input from residents. "They say the preachers and everybody else said it's okay to sell Mossville, but nobody came up here and said anything to us."

Like Williams, Carrier and Allison emphasize that families on a fixed income feel stuck as their neighbors board up and eventually tear down—Sasol offers funds for razing homes, but the homeowner is responsible for the demolition. "We are at that age where we can't afford to make a financial mistake," says Carrier, who retired early because of a back injury sustained in a derrick accident. "We can't go to work and work our way back up out of it."

The Bennetts now live in Lake Charles but still own a home in Mossville where family members reside. Delma says that if Sasol offered him an amount that would allow him to replace his property in an affordable town nearby, "I'd be alright."

"But your wife wouldn't," says Christine, who voices another perspective that is heard around Mossville. "There is not enough money that Sasol can pay to cover the hurt, the pain, and the suffering they are putting us through."

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Christine points to the health effects suffered over decades. “Nobody said that the plants didn’t provide a good living for the people. But no one, ever, until Wilma came around, let us know about the chemicals the people in the plants are dealing with and how it was destroying lives.”

As we head out to visit the homes of Allison, Carrier, and the Bennetts, Subra gives me a copy of a health effects study she prepared for Mossville in 2009. Of the 69 individuals surveyed, 57% considered themselves sick. The report identified 11 chemicals that are associated with conditions including skin rashes, shortness of breath, memory loss, and dizziness and are regularly detected in elevated concentrations in the ambient air of Mossville.

The Bennetts show us their family’s house, which is behind the Mount Zion Baptist Church cemetery. Delma checks his mailbox, which is often empty. Delivery is now sporadic. “Water bill,” he calls to Christine.

Further on East Burton Street, the west end of Old Spanish Trail, Carrier takes us behind his Acadian style home to see his property, which stretches back into winter gray forest. Two of his grandsons play with a boomerang behind a structure Carrier has built in the yard. “The man cave,” he says. There is a game of dominoes going on inside. Allison, a regular visitor to the man cave, says it’s busy virtually around the clock, except on Sundays.

My last stop of the day is the Morning Star Cemetery. Subra, riding with me, thinks she remembers the turnoff, which is just before Old Spanish Trail comes to the railroad tracks on the edge of industrial activity and construction. I tentatively pull into an uneven dirt and gravel driveway. “Yes,” she says. “There’s the bridge.”

Sasol, after what Subra describes as a fight, has agreed to keep the cemetery intact and to maintain public access. The company recently replaced the bridge over a swale that must be crossed to get to the graves. The grounds appear, on one side, to be poorly maintained, with several toppled stones dated from the mid-19th century and a lot of overgrowth. On the other side are new graves. It is still an active cemetery.

On our way out, we slip slowly between two police cruisers parked in the driveway at the edge of Old Spanish Trail. “The shift must be ending at the plants,” Subra says.

Subra will be back. A depleted MEAN, with her assistance, is now engaging Sasol in a bid for a better deal for the remaining homeowners. The group met with Michael Hayes and lawyers for the company at the end of January to discuss the VPPP. Sasol has agreed to a follow-up meeting where residents hope to get some concessions on the purchase plan.

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Their chances are slim. Hayes notes that the VPPP is fundamentally different from standard real estate dealings that allow for price negotiation. He reminds me that the buyouts are voluntary and offered at the homeowners' request. If Sasol were negotiating, he says, it would not agree to pay as much as it is offering under the VPPP.

"We told them at that meeting that we are a company that is suffering major cash flow constraints because of the price of oil and the impact on our operations in South Africa," he says, "that we are under tremendous cost pressure because of the cost of this project and the need to bring it in on time."

Indeed, in an earnings statement issued earlier this month, Sasol stated that "cost control" is a primary concern on the Westlake project, given economic uncertainties. The company also announced it will delay the opening of some of the derivative units in the new complex. Nonetheless, Hayes has promised to bring the group's request to Sasol management.

"LOSSVILLE"

On Saturday, Stacey Ryan is packing to leave Mossville. He has agreed to a buyout after a long battle with Sasol that culminated in a lawsuit he brought against the company.

The building Ryan is leaving is a trailer that he set on family property in 2010. It is in the neighborhood affected by the Vista groundwater contamination, a lone dwelling in an area not covered by the Sasol buyout, though it is surrounded by Sasol construction.

Having grown up on the property, Ryan was determined to hold on to it, fulfilling a promise to his parents, both of whom died of cancer, that he would fight for the community.

"I was like a flea on a dog," he says. "I was told by my own district representative that I would be a casualty of war, that I would be just swept aside because I am holding up progress."

Ryan, who had begun growing vegetables and raising chickens and other animals, as families traditionally have done in Mossville, dealt with a series of setbacks, beginning with vandals destroying his well and Calcasieu Parish refusing to run a water line to the house. The municipal sewer system that served his trailer was damaged by construction work. Power to the lot was cut off before he arrived. He imported water, dug a septic system, and ran a generator.

Despite repeated insults—among the things stolen from his property were solar panels and a horse—Ryan held on.

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Although Hayes claims that Ryan came to Sasol looking for a buyout shortly after setting up on the property and has been vying for one ever since, Ryan says he is selling now only because a sibling who is part-owner of the property agreed to a deal with Sasol.

Ryan is moving in with a friend on the west end of Mossville, Haki Kazi (formerly Marvin D.) Vincent. I had met Vincent on Friday when he was walking to attend a meeting with Hayes. Wearing a jacket with a Lion of Judah patch and a red, gold, and green knit cap, Vincent, 81, introduced himself as the “gatekeeper” for the Vincent family, who were among the original Mossville settlers.

Vincent grew up in Washington, D.C., where his family also owns property, and was a general in the Black Panther Party in the 1960s. He spent time in Mossville as a child, however, and moved back in the 1970s. His activist fervor shifted to environmental justice as he became active in MEAN, he says.

Vincent claims to hold a land patent signed by President Grover Cleveland—typical of documents held by freed slaves in the 1800s under the Homestead Act—establishing that land settled and owned by his family, approximately 160 acres, cannot be sold. But it can be leased, Vincent says, and he wants to negotiate a 100-year lease with Sasol.

“Lossville,” he says of his hometown. “It’s like they have cleared all the trees. Nothing but dirt. It’s like they paved paradise and put up a parking lot.”

Vincent tars all the companies in the Westlake area with the same brush, contending that development over the years has purposely been at the expense of the black community. He said as much in 1999 as part of a delegation at a World Court hearing in Geneva sponsored by MEAN and its supporters.

“We went to bring charges against the government and the surrounding industry,” he says. As for the corporations that have developed in the Westlake area, “they are worse than capitalists. They are imperialists.”

Vincent’s level of activism is high by Mossville standards. But his convictions regarding racial injustice reflect an undercurrent in sentiment. It’s pervasive enough for Sasol to include the following in a document titled “Myths and Facts about Sasol and Mossville”:

Myth: Sasol’s approach in Mossville is rooted in racism against African Americans and the apartheid past of Sasol’s home country, South Africa.

Unit 3: Power



Fact: That accusation and that comparison are false, offensive, and not constructive to productive dialogue.

Hayes says he has met with Vincent several times and is aware of his desire to lease the land. “Our attorneys believe that that property can be sold,” he says.

Hayes does not count Mossville as a loss and says the company has no plan to build on the property of those who choose not to take a buyout.

“The last time I spoke with Coach Williams,” he says, “he talked about how he loves the location, having a pool in the backyard where he can play with his grandchildren, how he likes how the house is set up. At the end of hearing him talk, it’s like, ‘Coach, you have your dream home. Why would you want to move?’”

Hayes says a new road is planned that will connect homeowners including Williams, Carrier, and Allison to the north end of Calcasieu Parish. Once the road is complete, he contends, property values on either side will increase. “When the dump trucks stop running,” Hayes says, referring to the current construction traffic, “they will be back in the country, and it will be quiet again.”

The next wave of development is already on the drawing board, however, with Axiall and Lotte building to the south. And residents are concerned about the social impact of hundreds of transient workers moving into the man camp on Prater Road. Still, Hayes insists that current residents of Mossville can look forward to a future.

“If you want to stay, you are welcome to stay,” he says. “Recognize there will be a Mossville at the end of the process. What it looks like, what the texture of the community is, can’t be predicted.”

Allison, for one, is not optimistic. “How is it going to be worth anything?” he says of his depleted neighborhood. “Everything ain’t alright.”

Works Cited

Mullin, R. (2016, March 21). Mossville’s End. Retrieved from Chemical & Engineering News: <https://cen.acs.org/articles/94/i12/Mossvilles-end.html>

Unit 3: Power



The Mossville Story

1790 – 1800

SETTLERS

Freed slaves build homes near an estuary west of Lake Charles, La.

1855

FIRST WAVE

Sawmills are built on the Calcasieu River, establishing an industry that thrived into the 1920s.

1905

SECOND WAVE

Herman Frasch discovers a sulfur extraction process and begins mining in what is now Sulphur, La., the town just west of what is now Mossville.

1912

MOSSVILLE

Choate's Prairie, named for the wild boars native to the estuary, is renamed Mossville when the Moss family donates land for a post office.

1926

BIG DIG

The ship channel is completed, linking the Port of Lake Charles to Sabine Lake and the Gulf of Mexico.

1939

FIRST IN

Mathieson Alkali Works build a large chemical facility.

1940 – 1950

THIRD WAVE

To support the war effort, large refineries are built by Conoco and Cities Service followed by a series of large chemical facilities.

1995

EXODUS I

Condea Vista confirms groundwater contamination in Mossville, leading to a class-action lawsuit and voluntary buyout in 1998.

Unit 3: Power



1998

HEALTH RISK

U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry samples blood from Mossville residents, finding a high level of dioxin, a chemical associated with cancer and diabetes.

2012

EXODUS II

Sasol announces it will build an ethylene plant and a gas-to-liquids fuel facility. It offers Mossville residents a voluntary buyout.

Source

Mullin, R. (2016, March 21). Mossville's End. Retrieved from Chemical & Engineering News: <https://cen.acs.org/articles/94/i12/Mossvilles-end.html>

Unit 3: Power



Mossville: English Standards

Grade 8	Grade 9-10	Grade 11-12
<p>CCSS-RI.1-8 Cite the relevant textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</p> <p>CCSS-RI.2-8 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.</p> <p>CCSS-RI.6-8 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.</p>	<p>CCSS-RI.1-9.10 Cite relevant and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</p> <p>CC-RI.2-9.10 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.</p> <p>CCSS-RI.6-9.10 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.</p> <p>CCSS-RI.7-9.10 Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.</p>	<p>CCS-RI.1-11.12 Cite strong, thorough, and relevant textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.</p> <p>CC-RI.2-11.12 Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.</p> <p>CCSS-RI.6-11.12 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is considered particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the student interpretation of power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.</p> <p>CCSS-RI.7-11.12 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.</p>

Unit 3: Power

Mossville: Social Studies Standards



Grade 8

8.4

Use geographic representations and historical data to analyze events and developments in U.S. history from 1877 to 2008, including environmental, cultural, economic, and political characteristics and changes.

8.8a

Analyze factors that contributed to and effects of the growth of the industrial economy, including capitalism and growth of free markets, mass production, agricultural advancements, the government's laissez-faire economic policy, and the rise of corporations.

8.12f

Explain how various factors affected Louisiana's economy during the early twentieth century, including booms in the timber, oil, and gas industries.

Civics	United States History	World History	World Geography
<p>C.5 Use geographic representations, demographic data, and geospatial representations to analyze civic issues and government processes.</p> <p>C.13f Explain ways in which competition, free enterprise, and government regulation influence what is produced and allocated in an economy, including national and global consequences.</p>	<p>US.4 Use geographic representations and demographic data to analyze environmental, cultural, economic and political characteristics and changes.</p> <p>US.11a Describe how the physical geography of the United States affected industrial growth and trade.</p>	<p>WH.3 Use geographic representations and demographic data to analyze environmental, cultural, economic and political characteristics and changes.</p> <p>WH.20 Describe the causes of trade, commerce, and industrialization and how they affected governments and societies from 1300 to 2010</p> <p>WH.22 Analyze trends of increasing economic interdependence and interconnectedness in world history from 1300 to 2010.</p> <p>WH.24 Analyze the effect that humans have had on the environment in terms of resources, migration patterns, and global environmental issues.</p>	<p>WG.6a Explain the spatial patterns of industrial production and development.</p> <p>WG.6e Explain how economic interdependence and globalization affect countries and their populations.</p> <p>WG.6f Analyze the historical and contemporary economic influence that Louisiana has on other parts of the United States and on the broader world.</p> <p>WG.8a Analyze effects of human settlement patterns and land use on the natural environment.</p> <p>WG.8c Analyze causes and effects of local, national, regional, and global environmental issues</p>

Unit 3: Power



Mossville: Science Standards

Grade 8	Earth Science	Life Science	Environmental Science
8-MS-ESS3-3 Apply scientific principles to design a method for monitoring and minimizing human impact on the environment.	HS-ESS3-4 Evaluate or refine a technological solution that reduces impacts of human activities on natural systems.	HS-LS2-7 Design, evaluate, and refine a solution for reducing the impacts of human activities on the environment and biodiversity.	HS-ESS3-4 Evaluate or refine a technological solution that reduces impacts of human activities on natural systems.

