WARREN COUNTY, NC
PAST AND PRESENT

"A Story of Community Involvement and Empowerment"

Thinking Outside the Box:

Innovative Approaches to Community Involvement

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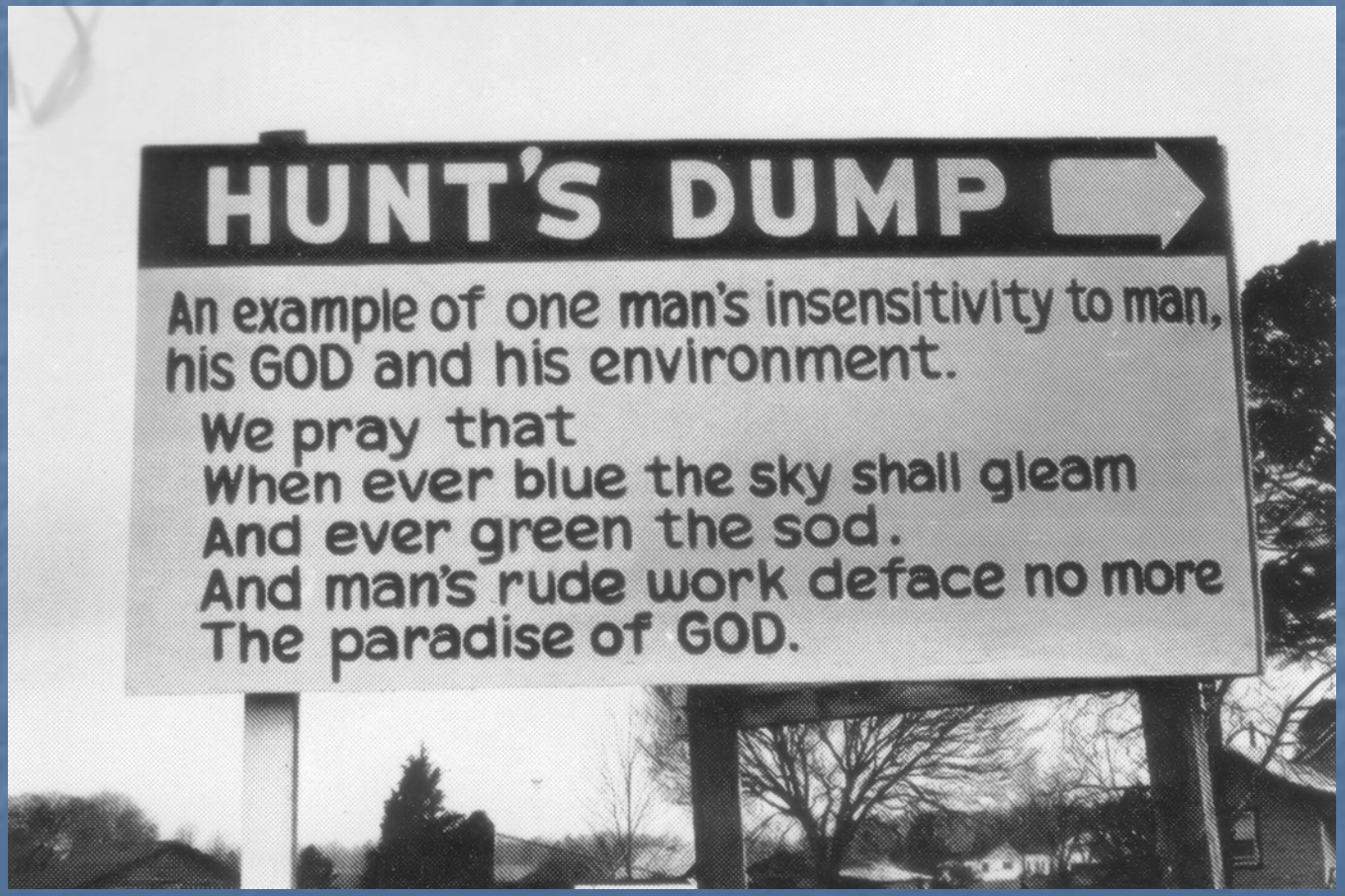
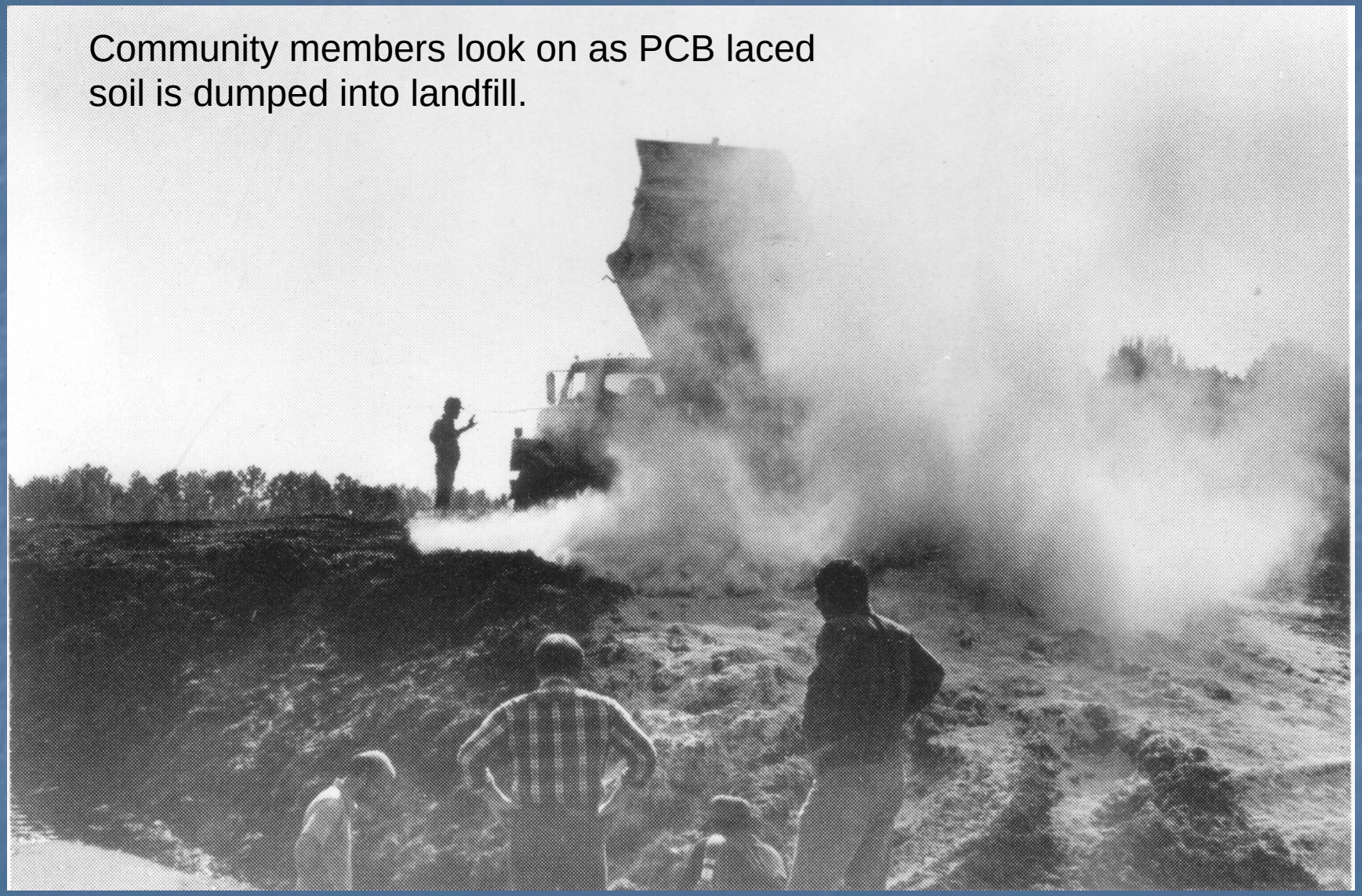
Warren County, N.C.

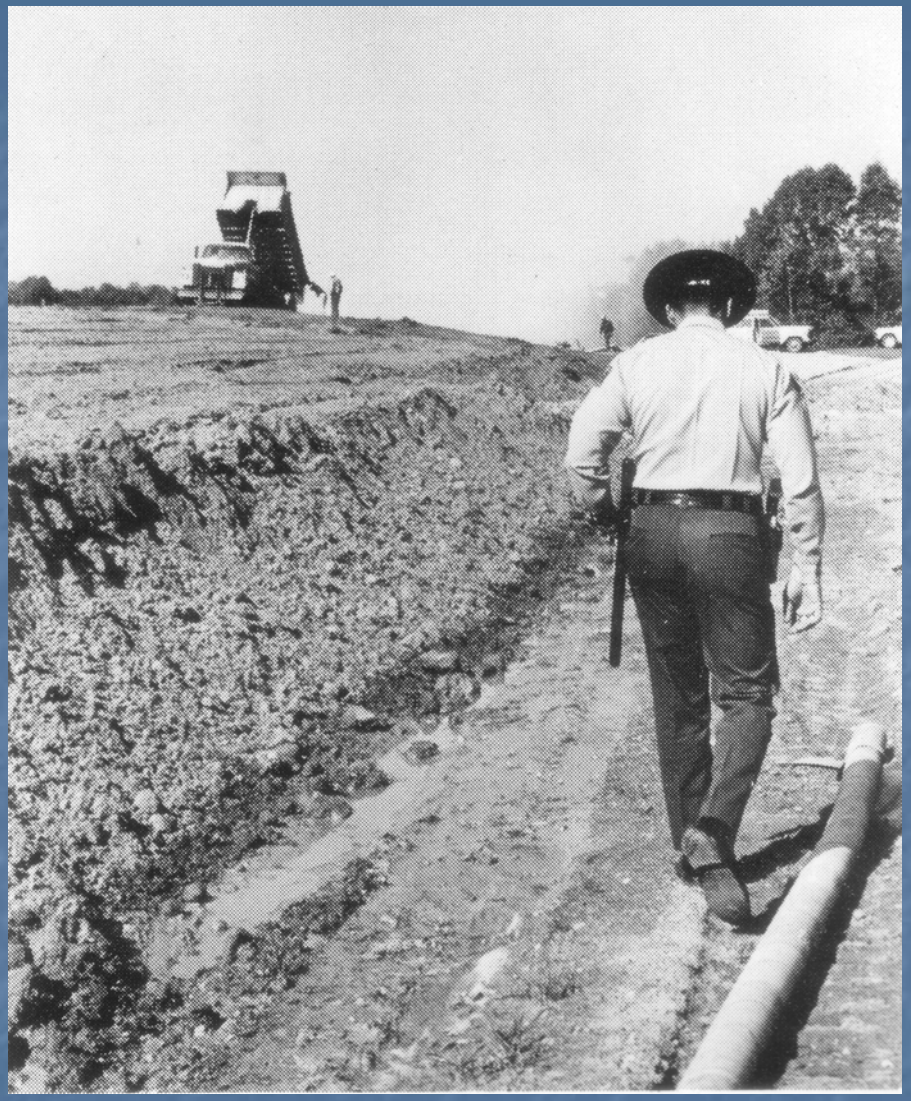
1978 The story begins . . .





Community members look on as PCB laced soil is dumped into landfill.

- N.C. Highway Patrolman oversees the construction of the Warren County PCB Landfill



- *30,000 gallons of highly toxic PCB-laced oil dumped along 240 miles of NC roadsides in 14 counties*

- *State officials selected the 84% Black community of Afton in Warren County, North Carolina which was one of the state's poorest counties with the highest concentration of African Americans (although none had been sprayed on Warren County roads) to be the final burial site for over 40,000 cubic yards of soil contaminated with PCB's (polychlorinated biphenyl's).*

- *The community argued that Warren County was selected by the state because the county was 65% Black, poor and politically powerless.*

- *Over 1,000 of the counties approximately 15,000 residents attended the state's required public meeting to voice their objections to the PCB Landfill and to the state's request to EPA for the following waivers:*
- *Elimination of the requirement for at least 50 ft. between landfill and groundwater (Warren County Site was 7 ft.)*
- *Elimination of artificial liner – soil compaction would be sufficient*
- *Elimination of an underliner and leachate collection.*
- *Citizens formed a citizens' group—"The Warren County Citizens Concerned With PCB's*

- *Voter Registration was conducted at all community meetings that were held almost on a weekly basis. As a result, political empowerment was achieved. For the first time in history African Americans community leaders were elected to control local boards and also for the first time a community activist was elected to the N.C. House of Representatives*

- *Citizen Group held meetings with both the Governor of North Carolina and EPA Officials expressing their concerns that the site would not be safe*

- *EPA granted the State of NC all three of its waiver requests which cleared the way for construction of the PCB Landfill.*

- *The Citizen group convinced the County Board of Commissioner to file a federal law suit which sought a preliminary injunction against the construction of the landfill*
- *The court granted the injunction*
- *The State was directed by the Court to complete a full environmental impact statement*
- *The State decided to proposed a new design which included a liner and leachate collections*

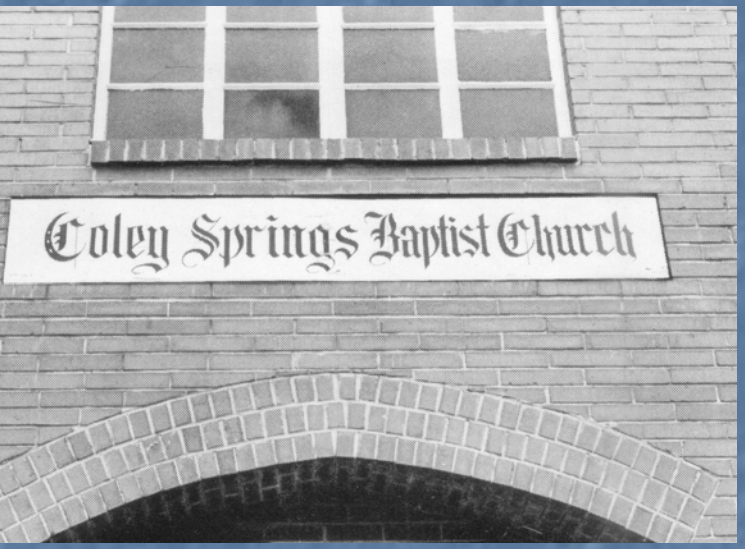
- *County government officials, over the objections of the Citizen Group, accepted an out-of-court settlement with the state of North Carolina wherein the State deeded to the County 120 acres of the 150 acre site in exchange for a withdrawal of the lawsuit*

- *Two other law suits were filed and subsequently dismissed by the courts*

- *North Carolina completed construction of the PCB landfill and began trucking the 240,000 cubic yards of PCB laced soil*

1982 – THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT IS BORN . . .

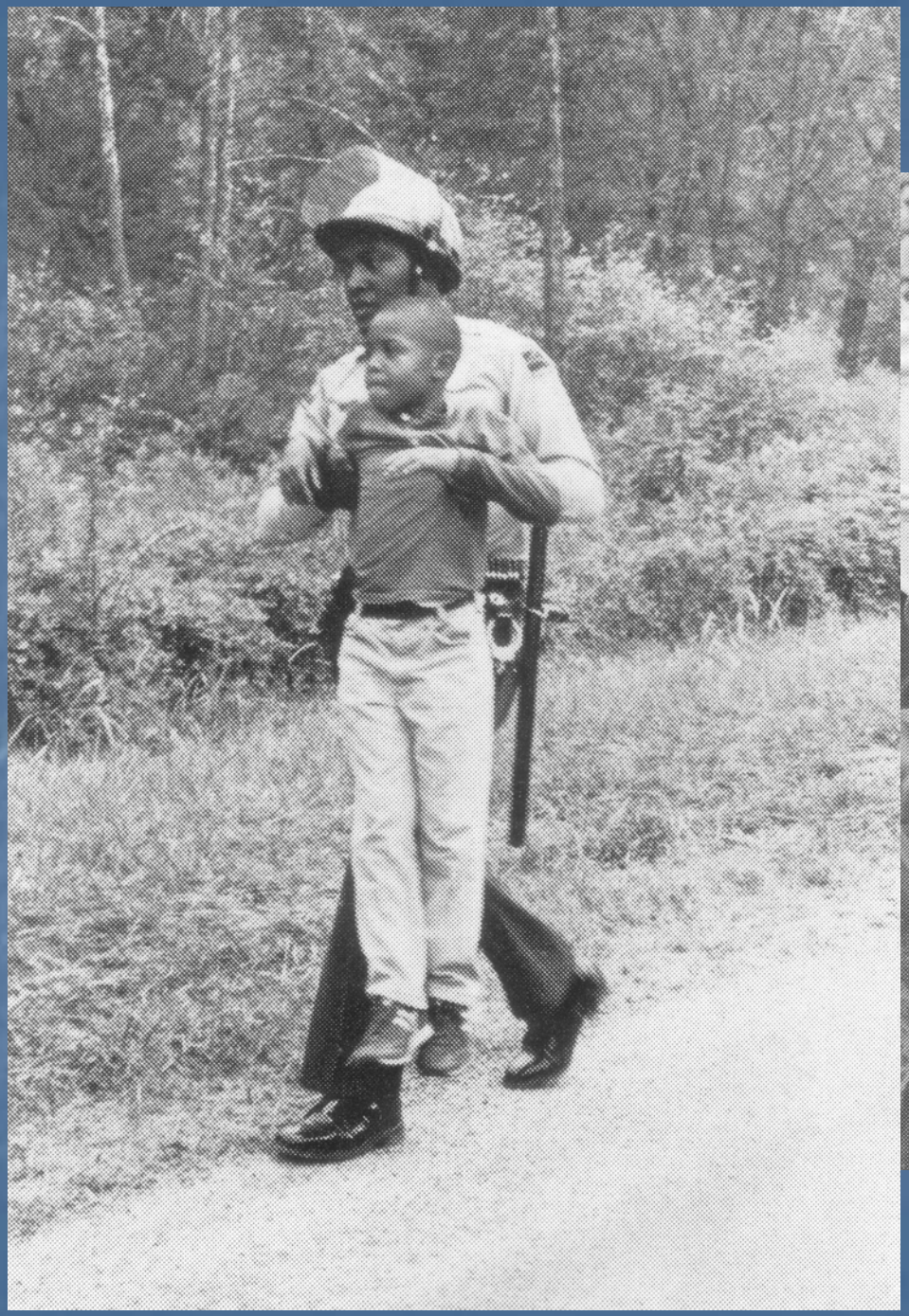
- *Protests along with Voter Registration drives were held every day with hundreds gathering at the Coley Springs Baptist Church*

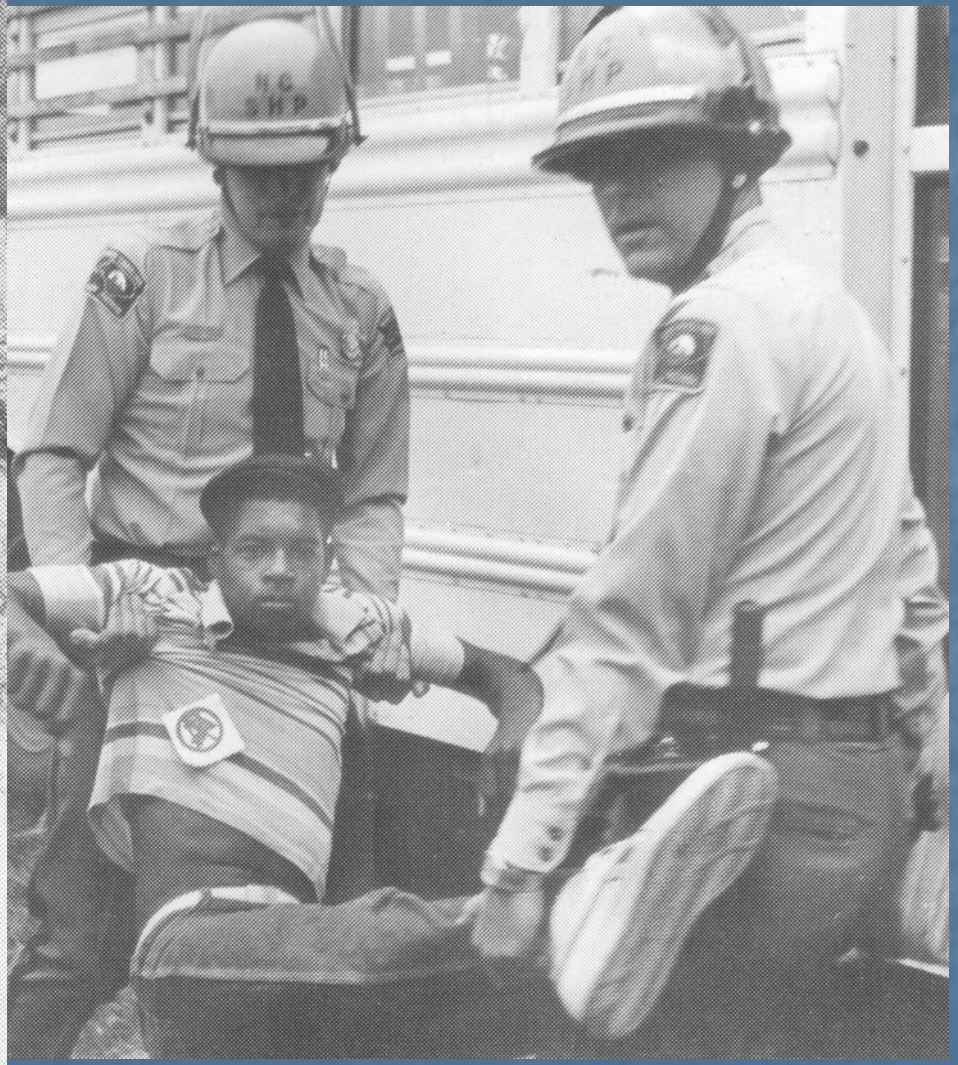


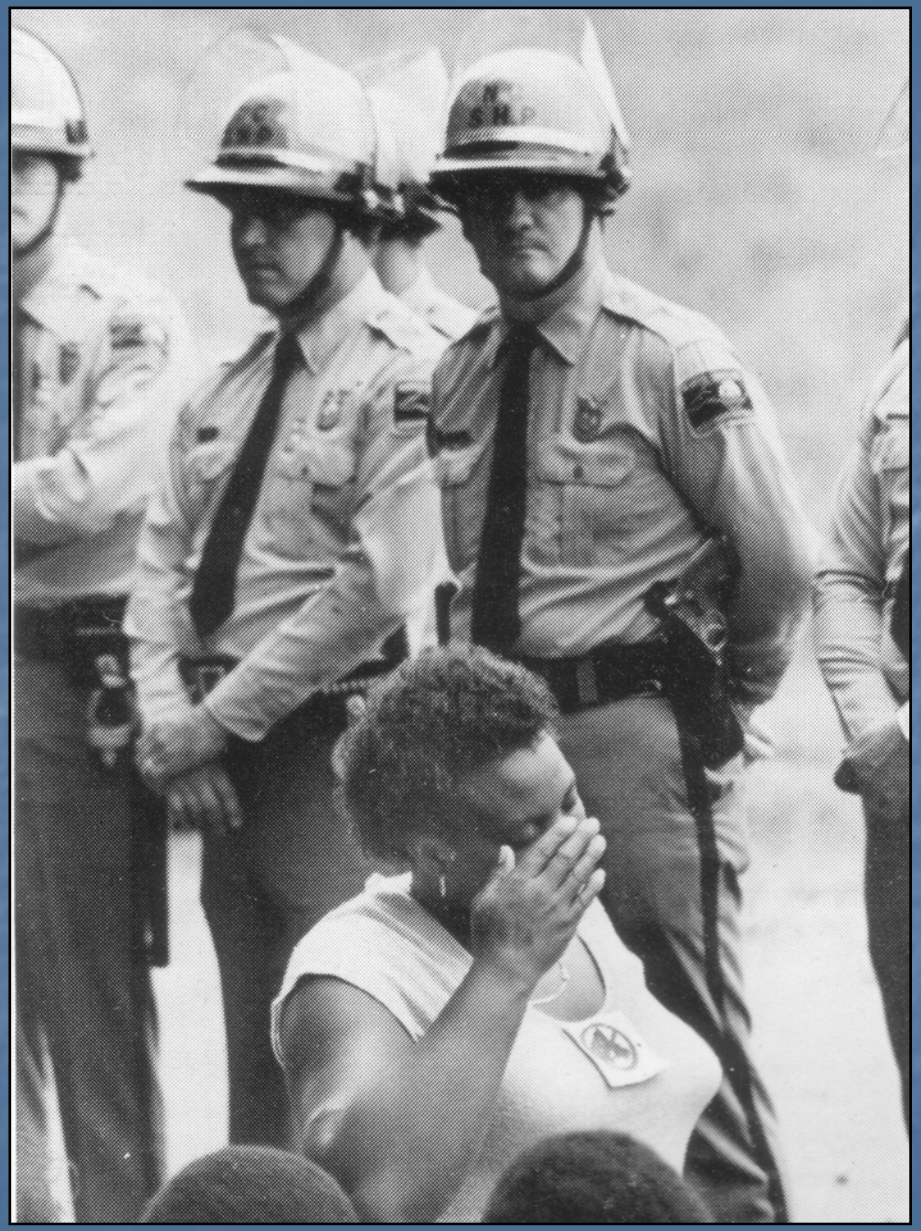
- *Nationally known community, civil rights and environmental leaders joined the protests*

Rev. Leon White; Mrs. and Dr. Joseph Lowery, president of the SCLC; Walter Fauntroy, a congressional delegate; Ken Ferruccio; and Dr. James Green lead a march on September 27, 1982.

- ***523 arrests forced a promise to detoxify the site when technology became "feasible"***







1993 The Story Continues . . .

- *Citizens learn that approximately 1.5 million gallons of water was trapped in the Warren County PCB Landfill*
- *State officials proposed to remove the contaminated water, but the citizens said "NO" and this time the State of NC listened!*
- *NC Governor appointed a Joint Community/State Working Group made up of a majority of community members recommended by the community and state officials*

- *The Working Group were charged the with the tasks of providing a response to the water problem as well as deciding the future of the PCB Landfill*

- *The Working Group held open bi-monthly meetings in Warren County and provided updates to the community through monthly newsletters that was put in schools, local businesses, churches, public buildings and libraries*

- *The Group, after working through many trust and credibility issues with state officials, agreed to recommend to the governor to decontaminate (Cleanup) the PCB Landfill on site*

- *The Working Group was then charged with the task of recommending a technology for the cleanup*
- *Proposals were made to remove the contaminated soil from Warren County, but citizens rejected these proposals citing their concern for the principles of Environmental Justice*
- *The Working Group after looking at many technologies recommended an EPA approved technology called Based Catalyzed Decomposition (BCD)*
- *A Bill was introduced by the State Representative from Warren County to detoxify the PCB Landfill using the BCD technology and funds were appropriated for the cleanup*

AUGUST 13, 2003

WARREN COUNTY
PCB LANDFILL

2003 The Conclusion . . .

- *The detoxification of the PCB Landfill was completed ten times cleaner than the federal standards*
- *The community was equally involved in every decision from the selection of technology to selecting contractors for the cleanup*
- *Challenges of trust and credibility between community members and state officials were met though mutual respect for each other and joint decision making*

- *A community working jointly with a state that dumped on it produced a model for community empowerment and involvement*

- *The Warren County PCB Landfill site was rededicated to the Environmental Justice Movement and the county government officials have agreed with the community to turn the former PCB Landfill site into a park and recreation facility*

LESSONS LEARNED . . .

- *Community empowerment leads to greater community involvement*
- *Empowerment and involvement create opportunities for genuine partnerships*
- *Empowerment, involvement and genuine partnerships offers the opportunity for mutual respect and equal decision making*
- *Mutual respect and equality in decision making can help overcome challenges of trust and credibility*

POLITICS MATTERS!