



Archives and Climate Justice Teach-in Module

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This module was created for the [Archives and Climate Change Teach In](#) action a solidarity effort for the 2019 Global Climate Strike, Teach In coordinators are encouraged to review the [facilitation guide](#) & the [design a teaching module guide](#).

Introduction

Environmental justice is an interdisciplinary concept that spans multiple subjects from environmental science to sociology to geography to political activism. Environmental justice argues that often those marginalized in society are forced to live in degraded and compromised environments while those with power have access to more resources and better living conditions. As such, environmental justice is tied up with anti-racism, anti-colonialism, Indigenous rights movements, and so forth as much as it is tied up in traditional fights against state and capital. Climate justice is an extension of environmental justice, arguing that climate change will disproportionately affect the most marginalized, and the conditions for climate change cannot be slowed and mitigated until core social issues related to environmental justice are also fought for and won.

As archivists, we are tied up in the national and global systems that contribute to the current climate collapse. Many of our institutions are allied with or work in the service of state and capital. What can we, as individuals, professionals, and communities, do to bend archivy towards a more equitable, just, and habitable world before it is too late?

Learning objectives

- Introduce the concept of and facilitate discussion about environmental justice and the archivist's role within it

- Provide frameworks and models for discussing complex subjects such as environmental justice and climate change
- Brainstorm concrete, specific actions one could use to work towards environmental justice
- Help others to network for future discussion and/or collaborative projects

Time

45 minutes to 2 hours*

* The format of a teach-in is designed to be flexible, so the facilitator should feel free to carry on the discussion as long as needed (or is available). However, a minimum of 45 minutes is suggested in order to provide time and space for a meaningful conversation.

Intended Audience

This module is primarily intended for archival workers and students. However, materials and discussion can easily be adapted to include other information workers/students such as library and museum workers.

Materials

The following materials are readings for attendees to read beforehand and discuss. While it is expected for attendees to read before the teach-in, the facilitator should provide a brief summary of the pieces to help include those who did not have the chance to do so. Each piece has several bullet points that are suggested (but not required) quotes and issues to summarize before discussion.

Samantha R. Winn, “Dying Well in the Anthropocene: On the End of Archivists” in “Libraries and Archives in the Anthropocene,” eds. Eira Tansey and Rob Montoya. Special issue, *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 2, no 3 (2019).

<https://journals.litwinbooks.com/index.php/jclis/article/view/107>

- “Archivists may understand the Anthropocene as a progressive condition which will unavoidably and irreversibly change archival work. By intentionally contemplating the ‘death’ of archives as we know them, we create opportunities

to evaluate the present dysfunction(s) of institutional archives, develop adaptation strategies to mediate the more immediate and violent consequences of climate change, and imagine what new practices might emerge from the fertile substrate we leave behind. Craps articulates mourning itself as a transformative act, acknowledging humanity's finitude without making excuses for destructive behavior or nihilism" (5).

- "The burden of archivists in the Anthropocene is not merely to adopt strategies of disaster risk-reduction and climate change adaptation, nor is it solely to mitigate resource extraction and limit the violence which cultural heritage work inflicts upon the Earth and its systems. The Anthropocene represents a progressive and possibly terminal illness for the contemporary discipline of archives. Archival workers have both an ethical imperative and a functional exigency to develop practices which do not require infinite exploitable resources" (12).

Jarrett M. Drake, "Liberatory Archives: Towards Belonging and Believing (Part 1). [medium.com](https://medium.com/on-archivy/liberatory-archives-towards-belonging-and-believing-part-1-d26aaeb0edd1). October 22, 2016. <https://medium.com/on-archivy/liberatory-archives-towards-belonging-and-believing-part-1-d26aaeb0edd1>

Jarrett M. Drake, "Liberatory Archives: Towards Belonging and Believing (Part 2). [medium.com](https://medium.com/on-archivy/liberatory-archives-towards-belonging-and-believing-part-2-6f56c754eb17). October 22, 2016. <https://medium.com/on-archivy/liberatory-archives-towards-belonging-and-believing-part-2-6f56c754eb17>

- Drake quotes Paul Gilroy: "Now we don't fix that problem [of memory and abolition] by shunting one great man off the stage and wheeling another one on; or, a great woman in the form of Nanny. We don't **fix it**. We have to do some damage to that idea of history."
- What are some aspects of our history, as a profession and as a culture, that we must, as Drake says, "do *damage* to oppressive ideas and not simply tinker with them"?

Julian Brave NoiseCat, "In the fight for climate justice, indigenous people set the path — and lead the way," *The Guardian* (January 19, 2017). <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/19/fight-climate-justice-indigenous-people-lead-the-way>

- Julian NoiseCat writes, “Before the frightening might of the ascendant right wing, which aligns capital and state against people and planet, many are ripe for despair and poised for retreat. But the indigenous movement is pointing the way forward. That way consists of forming alliances, building community and taking direct action. It is initiated by people on the ground where the environment is under threat, and it builds into a global call to action.”

These four articles are chosen together to create some context about climate change and environmental justice in both the archival and broader contexts:

- Samantha Winn’s article deals with the existential threat climate change poses for not just humanity but the archival profession in particular (and both are obviously intertwined).
- Jarrett Drake’s address discusses how justice and liberation intersects with archives as a profession.
- Julian NoiseCat’s article is from a non-archivist, Indigenous perspective and discusses how those who are most marginalized are at the forefront of the fight for environmental and climate justice. It discusses some concrete ways others can help in that struggle.

If facilitators wish to add more readings, this is certainly an option. However, keep in mind the time constraints available for participants. The readings are not meant to be comprehensive, but a springboard for further discussion. Providing a further reading list for participants can be a good way to balance the need to respect participants’ time and the desire by participants for more information and resources. For some initial further reading tying climate change to the archival profession, see also:

Benjamin Goldman (2018), “It’s Not Easy Being Green(e): Digital Preservation in the Age of Climate Change,” *Archival Values: Essays in Honor of Mark Greene*, 274-295.

Mazurczyk et al (2018), “American Archives and Climate Change: Risks and Adaptation,” *Climate Risk Management*, 20:111-125.

Eira Tansey (2015), "Archival Adaptation to Climate Change," *Sustainability: Science, Practice, and Policy* 11(2):45-56.

There is also a syllabus created by Project_ARCC (Archivists Responding to Climate Change) with a plethora of resources for the facilitator to check for more information on climate change in general: <https://projectarcc.org/climate-change-syllabus/>

How to lead this exercise

Teach-ins are designed to be unstructured learning opportunities that flip the traditional education paradigm on its head. Similar to an un-conference, these types of events are designed to be open-ended, less about syllabus and more about spontaneous discussion and learning. Rather than an expert imparting knowledge, the teach-in is designed to be a place where a community gathers together to discuss topics in a democratic, open fashion. While there should be facilitators/moderators in order to keep the space safe and open for everyone, and while there can be experts willing to provide knowledge, everyone involved must understand that everyone's voices are valid and equal.

The purpose of this specific teach-in is to make explicit connections between archival theory and practice and the current conditions that allow climate change to continue unmitigated. Discussion should focus on concrete things individuals can do to start conversations and affect change in their immediate, local communities and workplaces, not building grand solutions, agendas, or theories. Discussion should also focus on building networks, links, relationships, and communities outside of the teach-in (and, ultimately, outside of the profession itself).

While teach-ins are designed to be unstructured, some specific helpful guidelines are as follows:

To open a teach-in, lay down the ground rules in a firm and clear fashion. Having clear expectations made known to everyone from the beginning will help mediate possible future conflicts as the discussion progresses. While a formal code of conduct is not necessary for a teach-in, having one in mind will help immensely in heading off possible problems in the future. At the very least, make it clear what is and is not generally

expected and considered reasonable for the discussion. As a facilitator, it is important to allow people to speak their mind and opinions in a safe space, but this does not mean allowing demeaning comments, unconstructive criticism, slurs and/or hate speech, or other types of speech that will make the space unsafe for others. Especially pay attention to power dynamics; you may have to make extra effort to provide safety and a platform for the most marginalized at (what may feel like) the expense of groups with the most power. For more information with concrete case studies and models for responding to inappropriate behavior and enforcing codes of conduct, see “How to Respond to Code of Conduct Reports” in the resources below.

Introduce the readings chosen to help guide, inform, and facilitate discussion. Provide a brief summary of each as well as their main points for the audience. Keep in mind that some in the audience may struggle with the more academic language in some of the articles, so explaining the ideas in simple, colloquial language is always appreciated.

Expressions of despair, grief, or pain can be difficult to facilitate but are important in the discussion about environmental justice and climate change. Keep in mind that these are not abstract, theoretical concepts but immediate, pressing issues that impact peoples’ lives today. As such, allowing such expressions of pain can be productive and healing when handled correctly. It also helps ground the discussion by introducing the real, material stakes involved with the issues. Do not shy away from, shame, rush, or otherwise shut down such expressions but rather give people the space to grieve and hurt; the other objectives of community and relationship-building go hand in hand with others’ needs for expressing pain.

The purpose of the teach-in is not to find the best way universally applied to all archivists everywhere in tackling climate change but to provide a space for discussion that has not really existed before. As the old adage goes in the archives profession, “It depends.” Keep in mind that people come from different standpoints and have different backgrounds, both personally and professionally. For example, the strategies available for an archivist working in a community archives will be different than the strategies available for an archivist working in a government or corporate archives. They will have different stakeholders, resources, and legal/organizational frameworks available. This can come in the form of collaboration, coordinating different types of strategies, the

pooling of resources, etc., but will look different every single time depending on the participants' circumstances. The goal of the facilitator should be to help the community discuss the problem in productive ways and provide itself a multiplicity of possible answers and strategies to try out rather than finding the one, single, "correct" strategy.

For resources on how to lead a teach-in, the following can help in understanding better the purpose of the event and provide strategies in facilitating discussion.

Robin Zander, "How to Run an Un-Conference," [medium.com](https://medium.com/responsive-org/how-to-run-an-un-conference-92e7cf089831), May 17, 2017.
<https://medium.com/responsive-org/how-to-run-an-un-conference-92e7cf089831>

Valerie Aurora, "How to Respond to Code of Conduct Reports,"
<https://frameshiftconsulting.com/code-of-conduct-book/>

Popular Education for Movement Building Guide:
<https://projectsouth.org/product/popular-education-for-movement-building-vol-ii/>

Racial Equity Tools Compiled Resources:
<http://www.racialequitytools.org/act/strategies/training-and-popular-education>

Zinn Education Project: <https://www.zinnproject.org/campaigns/teach-climate-justice>

Zinn Education Project Teaching Climate Justice:
<https://www.zinnedproject.org/campaigns/teach-climate-justice>

Source

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