

HIDDEN HISTORIES, CURRENT REALITIES: HISTORICAL CONTEXT IN ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZING

Session: A, Breakout Room #10

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For decades, environmental activism has been a key part of environmentalism in the United States and abroad. However, modern strains of environmental organizing can overlook important historical realities that have led to modern-day injustice. This project attempted to investigate opinions on historical context in modern-day organizing spaces and current barriers to conducting historical research for activism purposes. To answer this question, I conducted interviews with local Seattle activists and organizers to gain information about the role of historical context in activism. I was connected to these organizers and activists through my internship with Seattle Neighborhood Greenways, a local non-profit focused on making Seattle's streets safer and more livable for all. In my internship with Seattle Neighborhood Greenways, I researched and created a historical context that will inform ongoing community organizing. This internship gave me insight into barriers and challenges faced by organizations and movements intending to uncover histories for the purpose of informing current and future activism. My experience illustrated barriers to conducting historical research for activism, including limited accessibility of historical documents and materials as well as a general lack of historical documentation on subjects of interest. Of the activists I spoke to, all were concerned about learning and knowing the histories that create modern injustice. Additionally, all mentioned the importance of bringing awareness of historical injustice to broader audiences. These findings suggest that learning history is an essential first step towards gaining a broader historical context in activist movements.