# Hidden Histories, Current Realities

## Barriers to Gaining Historical Context in Environmental Organizing

**Context**
- Environmental injustice is one of the biggest issues facing the modern environmental movement.
- Modern examples of environmental injustice are deeply informed by legacies of systemic harm.
- Understanding the origins of these systemic harms is key to undoing them.
- Thus, effective environmental justice organizing must be informed by historical context - which can be hard to access.

**Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is environmental injustice?</th>
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<tr>
<td>A concept that explains how low income and minority communities are often the most exposed to environmental harm and hazard.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the value of historical context in organizing?</td>
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<td>What kind of barriers prevent activist movements from learning relevant histories?</td>
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**Interview Takeaways**

Interviews with local activists revealed two key things about the value of historical context in organizing:

- Sharing knowledge of historical injustice is essential in organizing spaces i.e., Fig 1 which details historical redlining in greater Seattle.
- It's important to bring past injustice into conversation with present inequity in Seattle and beyond.

**Observed Barriers to Understanding Histories**

Experiences conducting historical research for SNG revealed that main barriers to creating historical context include:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Lack of access to documents and materials</th>
<th>Difficulty of connecting to experts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenge of finding time to commit to research</td>
<td>Lack of documentation in areas of interest</td>
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**Results**

**Broader Significance**

- Environmental injustice is a product of historical injustice, therefore understanding the historical context of an issue allows for potential recompense.
- Environmental injustice has wide reaching implications i.e., historical redlining and negative impact on quality of urban ecosystems, that require immediate action.

**Internship & Methods**

- This summer I interned with Seattle Neighborhood Greenways (SNG).
- I conducted historical research and created a historical context deliverable to inform organizing in Rainier Beach.
- My methods included interviewing local activists and drawing from my own experience researching historical context.

**Recommendations**

**Local Scale**
- Expansion of access to historical documents in city archives.
- Expanded access to University of Washington library services beyond students and faculty.

**National Scale**
- Intentional commitment of time and resources on part of non-profits and movements to explore and uncover relevant histories.

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