

Slow Violence, Double Binds, and Archival Workers' Climate Advocacy

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Abstract

Real-life examples of climate response under material constraints capture the risks facing archives, records, and archival workers amid environmental change, and the factors that complicate climate action. In this talk, I'll share select findings and implications of my research on how climate, environment, and ecology shape archival workers' experiences, practices, and perspectives on the future, including their norms and expectations for making change. The core argument is that forms of slow violence – Rob Nixon's term for harm that “occurs gradually and out of sight” – produce unresolvable double binds, which catalyze archival workers into a community of climate advocates. Among other motivations, this research comes out of a commitment to workers' inquiry as a mode of critical archival studies: developing forms of inquiry from the basis of archival workers' knowledge of our material conditions, and considering the practice of inquiry to be an element in organizing workers and building strategy.

About the author

Amy Wickner is a digital archivist and researcher living, working, and studying on traditional Piscataway land in the Potomac River watershed. Their recently completed dissertation (which you'll hear about today) was about the impacts of climate and environment on archival work, and the many ways archival workers have responded.