Special Episode 1
Crisis as Catalyst: Notes from DCDC

June 10, 2021

Transcript

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: Hello and welcome to a special episode of *Material Memory*. I'm your host, Nicole Kang Ferraiolo.

We're coming up on a year and a half of unprecedented crises. By now, nearly three and a half million people globally have died from COVID-19. The pandemic has touched all our lives in one way or another, albeit unevenly. Meanwhile, we've been grappling with police brutality and struggles for racial justice, all against the backdrop of a full-scale climate emergency caused by human activity. And that's just a partial list. So what are the roles of the cultural memory field in responding to these crises? And how do they change in different local contexts?

In this special episode, we're heading to the UK. We've partnered with Research Libraries UK, JISC, and the UK National Archives to bring you stories from the DCDC conference about how some UK-based institutions are responding to these challenges. DCDC, which stands for *Discovering Collections; Discovering Communities*, is a collaborative conference for libraries, archives, museums, and cultural organizations that will be happening virtually this year from June 28 through July 2. (And I'll add that registration is still open.)

We have three stories for you today, each centered on a different crisis we're currently facing. First up: COVID-19. A quick disclaimer before we get started that the views expressed throughout this episode represent the individual speakers and not their colleagues or institutions.

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Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: How do you document historic times when you are living through it yourself? I spoke with someone who's spent the past year collecting oral history testimonies about the UK National Health Service (or NHS) and COVID-19.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo: So, let's start by having you introduce yourself.

Angela Whitecross: OK, so my name is Angela Whitecross and I'm the co-investigator and a research associate on the NHS vices of COVID-19 project, which is based at the University of Manchester in the UK.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: Before we go any further, it may be helpful for listeners outside of the UK to get a quick primer on the NHS.

Angela Whitecross: So, in the UK, our healthcare system is state funded through taxation, and it's called the National Health Service and it was founded in 1948 by a Labour government. So our original project was called NHS 70 because it fitted with the 70th anniversary of the National Health Service. So, the health care system within the UK, it's free at the point of access. So, if I need to go to accident emergency, I can just go to accident emergency, and I don't need to pay. But the NHS is a part of our lives in ways that people don't even realize. So, it's seen as an institution, something that provides health care, but it's actually much more than that. It's where we receive health care. It's the third largest employer in the UK.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: In fact, as of 2015, the NHS was the fifth largest employer in the world, following only the US Department of Defense, the People's Liberation Army in China, Walmart, and McDonald's.

Angela Whitecross: Yeah, it's a significant employer. And we always view it as, you know, doctors and nurses or whatever, but it's actually, you know, the reach and breadth of it is beyond that. And then when you think about it in terms of communities--and particularly local hospitals, say, where there's an attachment to that hospital. So, the NHS is integral to all our lives, in ways that until I really started recording oral histories on this project and listening to them, I suppose I'd not even appreciated… the relationships that we have with the NHS and its expectations.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: In 2017, they began recording personal testimonies about the NHS.

Angela Whitecross: And the way that we did that was by recruiting volunteers in particular areas within the UK and those volunteers would be trained in oral history practice and they would actually go out and do the interviews. By working with volunteers in a kind of participatory inclusive way, we massively broadened the reach of the full project, because they're bringing with them their experience and their networks, and it actually made it a really inclusive, exciting project to be part of.

Many of the volunteers didn't actually come from the traditional backgrounds, that in another heritage setting, I might think...you know, I've worked in a literary house, you kind of attract people who like 19th century literature. This did attract people that liked the NHS, that liked people, but didn't have any previous heritage knowledge.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: The NHS at 70 project was approaching its final stages when COVID-19 hit.

Angela Whitecross: So, NHS at 70 was coming to an end last year because it was a three-year funded program. And we were just about to go on an exhibition tour around various community and hospital sites in the UK. So our second exhibition slot got canceled because of COVID and, yeah, we've never really looked back since then.

We went into national lockdown; we had a team meeting, and it was like, it was, we were all in a bit of shock. I can remember, like, you know, running back to the office to rescue things, and I have, I've got two kids and they were both like all of a sudden at home with me jumping on my head in Zoom calls and things. And then we were like, but this is also going to be an absolute watershed moment in the history of the NHS. We're working on the history of the NHS. It's also a significantly global event in which we're all players; we were all experiencing that.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: Like many of us, the NHS at 70 team knew they were living in historic times, but they weren't sure what their role should be in documenting it, so they asked their community.

Angela Whitecross: By having a broader team of volunteers and stakeholders, we were actually able to say to them, "what do you feel?" So we basically asked everyone who'd ever done an oral history interview, "Do you want to share your COVID story?" And there was about a third of people responded and said yes. So that, to us, showed that ethically, it was okay to ask people. And if they didn't want to, then they wouldn't, and our volunteers were all happy with it. And one thing working with volunteers, they're critical friends, volunteers. So they can say, "I don't think that'll work. I do think that will work. Have you thought about this?" And they were so on board with it.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: Collecting COVID-19 stories required significant changes to how they worked.

Angela Whitecross: So oral history as a method was primarily face-to-face interviews. So that kind of sound quality, the interviewee experience, and oral history relies a lot on nonverbal cues. So to actually record remotely was a complete change in oral history methodology. And we did it within about a week. So, we were quite quick off the mark. It became increasingly apparent that the telephone is fantastic. We've forgotten how to use the telephone. It's deep listening because oral history is about the voice. So actually, by removing the physical, I actually think it improves access to participating in oral history because me and you, we're talking now, we're on different sides of the Atlantic.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo: So, one of the things that you mentioned is that going remote increased the diversity of the collection in unexpected ways.

Angela Whitecross: For people participating who are maybe either patients or vulnerable, or don't want to travel or have anxiety about someone strange coming into the home. When you

think about it, the telephone improves that, kind of …. people have seemed less stressed—or not stressed, that's the wrong word—but … and they are still more than happy to share the same level of stories, the same experiences. What it's enabled us to do is, particularly with frontline NHS workers, is provide an opportunity for them to do an oral history in a time limited way, so what we've done there is we've often recorded either monthly or two weekly interviews, which only last about half an hour.

The diversity of our collection has been increased by improving access to those who can participate in oral histories.

And that's not to say that it still isn't needed face-to-face. I mentioned before, particularly we're working within Leyhill prison. We can't actually record over the phone there for various reasons. And also we can't visit there. So it's—that is maybe one example where face to face still remains significant, still remains important.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: Speaking to Angela, it became apparent that a large part of what made this rapid transition to collecting COVID stories work were the relationships they had built before the pandemic.

Angela Whitecross: So one of the key things in the NHS voices of COVID project is we have maintained relationships with previous oral history interviewees, which has enabled us to get a longitudinal knowledge and understanding of their NHS and COVID experiences, because we've got that kind of pre-COVID interview that situates them at that point in their life, but in a longer NHS history. But then by recording through COVID as well, researchers, policy makers, whatever you've got, you can see that transitional shift in their experience, which is really important. And I think it was, it was definitely having those relationships that enabled us to work on this project.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: It was those relationships that drew Angela to this line of work to begin with.

Angela Whitecross: The attraction of working on this project for me is— It's that kind of, I suppose, inclusive participatory research I like to call it? You know, people could talk about co-production and kind of that working with communities, but it's that bridge between, not just public history in which you are disseminating history, it's actually the people who are living that history and a part of that history are able to kind of produce that with you. So it kind of democratizes the process very much for me.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: Just a year into the project, we're already beginning to see these stories influence approaches to health services in the UK.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo: Can you talk a little bit about oral history as a catalyst for change in crisis?

Angela Whitecross: We have been able to use the oral history interviews and analyze what people are saying to fit with broader policy areas, and this stretches across all aspects of things. Most recently the British Academy have published a report and they included our evidence within that report. And one particular thread we're working on at the moment is with a small charity, who are called NHS Frontline. And they set up a service to provide in-kind, emotional support to NHS staff who needed psychological therapies. So, we're working with them at the moment under an NHS trust to develop an emotional literacy toolkit. And then, more broadly, our project is working with some stakeholders at the moment. So we've been working with heads of patient experience in NHS trusts. And we've been training them in oral history to record stories from staff and patients. And for them, oral history is an attractive way of doing that because it's not just a survey. By participating, they're able to contribute their experiences as a catalyst for change into, you know, what can better be done to support the emotional wellbeing of, say, NHS staff?

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: The impact of co-producing these stories extends beyond the healthcare workers.

Angela Whitecross: The NHS is very democratizing in some ways as an entry to getting people to share their story because we all have an NHS story. Things like life, and death, and illness, and health are universal, but how we experience them may be unequal. COVID has particularly shone a light on that inequality, but in terms of pivotal moments, even when we've interviewed, I don't know, really high-up senior leaders or politicians or whatever, they still have moments of loss and hurt in their NHS narrative. One of the most recent interviews, one of my colleagues did with someone he'd interviewed, again before COVID, she's called Natalie and she lives with a disability after having Guillain-Barré syndrome. And she basically was paralyzed in her twenties. And then we interviewed her again after interviewing her through COVID. And I think she said something like, yeah, by doing the interviews through COVID with the project, living as someone with a disability, these oral history interviews have allowed her to feel both seen and heard when she may have otherwise felt invisible.

And for me, I mean, it moved me to tears. It was just such a powerful kind of way of thinking, that allowing people to share and participate in oral histories around their experiences, even in these deeply traumatic times, if you give someone the agency to participate... It's been really powerful.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: You can learn more about this project by attending Angela's presentation at DCDC on June 28. She'll be speaking on the panel, "Collecting and Collaborating in Times of Crisis."

[Music]

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration:
In our next segment, we'll be talking about how one London-based curator is working to challenge institutionalized racism and ableism within her institution.

Teresa Cisneros: My name is Teresa Cisneros, I'm the daughter of Vicente Cisneros and Lucrecia Puente, both of Mexican heritage. I am a Chicana from the Mexico-Texas border. I practice from where I am from, not where I am at. That's who I am.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: Teresa is also the inclusive practice lead at the Wellcome Collection in London.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo:

For our audience members who aren't familiar with it, can you tell us a little bit about the institution?

Teresa Cisneros: The Wellcome Collection is a museum collection and archive that has both temporary exhibitions, as well as an extensive collection of objects that were created by Henry Wellcome. And Henry Wellcome was actually born in the United States. And then he came over to England and was marketing pharmaceuticals. So, he'd always been interested in objects and collecting, and he was interested in collecting global health and how it progressed through time. But what he did was—and this was in the late 19th century—he had agents collecting from around the world. So at that time, you can imagine, it's a time of empire building and he wants to be part of a certain elite gentlemanly world. The Wellcome Collection now really serves to, you know, show exhibitions, have conversations around health, science, and medicine and art.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo: So, can you tell me a little bit about your role as the inclusive practice lead?

Teresa Cisneros: It's a very odd title, but the Wellcome Collection decided in 2018 that they wanted to create a strategic direction for access, diversity, and inclusion. And part of that is they were going to create these positions—an inclusive practice lead, an access lead, and inclusive collections officer—because they were really trying to grapple with the fact that deaf, disabled, neurodivergent, and racially minoritized communities are the most excluded in the culture sector. It's honestly not just about including, but how do we work with people who come from these communities: work with them, hire them, bring their stories, but how do they become part of the center? Right now, I think there's 15 of us who were kind of focused on diversity and inclusion work. And the overall budget is several million pounds. Because we are an independent charity or private charity, we're also very well funded.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: I appreciated that she was upfront about the relative wealth of the Wellcome Collection. It's important to recognize our own privileges and how they may influence our approaches to equity and inclusion work.

Teresa Cisneros: Well, I can also tell you that in terms of our demographic, just as you said the word privilege, it just reminded me of that. I think the statistics are now at about 86 to 87% White majority, majority female, and I think about 2% to 4% declared disabilities. And I would say that there is a large proportion middle-class, as well university educated.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo: How does that compare to the demographics of the UK as a whole? And then also maybe just like the field, the GLAM sector?

Teresa Cisneros: I can tell you about London, right, because that's where we are. London has a larger, I would say I think close to 50% being of, Black and Asian and Latinx...populations, it's quite mixed in that sense. So it [the Wellcome Collection] doesn't look like London, but I would say it's closer to what the UK looks like or England rather.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: The way she approaches her work is informed by her personal experiences and background.

Teresa Cisneros: I grew up in a very different way than a lot of people that I know. I grew up with a large family of over a hundred people. We make decisions collectively. I have a philosophy—or my family does—which is if you are okay, then I am okay. So a lot of my practice centers ways of being with one another in relation to others, it's not a way of being alone. So I work quite a lot collaboratively, which means that I never work on any project on my own. There's no such thing as just one good practice. There's many practices.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: Teresa didn't come to this position from the diversity and inclusion sector.

Teresa Cisneros: I'm not a diversity worker. I don't come from that field. I actually was more of a curator. I worked for various galleries here in London, and this job came up and I just thought, I'm not so sure. But prior to this job, I did a project at a small gallery called the Showroom Gallery and it was called "Object Positions." And it was really to think about decolonial processes, cultural equity, and colonial administration. So I have a real interest in colonial administration and what that means, but also how we replicate it and the fact that we will never be out of it.

So as much as we want to decolonize and use anti-colonial practices within colonial institutions, it's almost like, it's almost an impossibility, right? So for me, I'm really interested in it as a colonial administrator. I went and received a master's in arts administration at an art school in the US, and I studied ancient philosophy. So I can't get any more of a colonial administrative [perspective] than that. I am not a White man. I am not a White woman. I am actually just on the opposite end. I am someone who comes from the border. I am Mexican—bi-cultural American, in the US—so I exist within this other kind of area, but the knowledge I have is very much a

White European education. So for me, it's to think about how can we use the logic of colonial administration on itself? How could we start reconstructing it from the inside?

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: But before she could start thinking about reconstructing the institution, she had to understand it.

Teresa Cisneros: So when I started this job, I'm coming in as inclusive practice lead. And (and I say this with a big smile), where everyone's like, “So what's your strategy? What are you going to do? And this is amazing!” And I was like, “I don't know what I'm going to do, and if I did, you should fire me because I don't know who you are.” I need to know the institution. But along with that, I need to get to know my colleagues. So I need to know why we're not inclusive. What keeps us from being inclusive. I decided I wanted to find out why, as an organization or institution, just the Wellcome Collection, why we were still so exclusively white, exclusively non-disabled, exclusively middle-class.

So we did a four-month piece of research with an external agency where, it's called person centered, designed for inclusive practices. How can we design inclusive practices for the actual staff member?

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: So the next thing she did isn’t going to be an option for every institution. Again, privilege...Though I kind of wish it were.

Teresa Cisneros: So, part of my framework for designing this was also understanding that some of my colleagues were going to feel uncomfortable at any one point because the conversations were going to be around race and disability. And so I thought, Oh, well, we've got funding. How about I bring in a therapist in the room who will do the emotional labor. We pay her, she sits in every session and then people can check in with her, you know, on one-to-one aftercare. And so that's what I did. So I had a therapist holding the space so that my colleagues who had a disability, or who were Black or Asian, they didn't have to do the work, but the White therapist did the work for the whole group.

So bringing in a therapist into the space and holding the emotional labor is about care, because I care that my colleagues are not emotionally scarred, but also that to understand that when we start these conversations around difference and privilege is also to upend someone's sense of self being. And if an organization is going to ask you to be anti-racist and anti-ableist, they need to also provide a system to support you through that process, that's more than just “attend this workshop, read this book.” It’s pointless—unless, then, through a process you can help, but then you also get taught and get called on it.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: So she tried to do just that.

Teresa Cisneros: I always wanted to do a curriculum of some sort. And so I created a framework for it. And you know, I know there's a lot of anti-racism work happening now, especially because of last year's global anti-racism protests. Of course, you know, it's coming out of the US, a particular environment—not that the UK or England, or London's very far removed from that kind of racism—it's more covert here. No one wants to talk about it. The US at least there's more dialogue and it's pushed out. So of course, there's a correlation of who is most affected by COVID, which is of course Black and Latinx families, working class people, and here it's Asian communities, as well as Afro-Caribbean and African communities. And the protests, so you've got this kind of moment for me, that was like, okay, so what are we going to do? We can't keep doing the unconscious bias training. So I put forward this anti-racism curriculum. And then my colleague, she said, why don't we do an anti-ableism one as well? So we created these two modules. And it took me a lot of lobbying. So I have to say that part of my job is to convince people to try new things, because it's hard. It's not easy to ask people to try new things, especially people who are settled into their positions.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: Part of the problem when dealing with issues of race and ability is that many people lack the language and concepts needed to talk about the problem in a meaningful way.

Teresa Cisneros: What does it mean for anti-Blackness to be part of our conversation, because people don't necessarily are even aware of it or they just think: under racism, is racism. And so I think we're just starting really to scratch that conversation. Cause for me, it's to even start educating my colleagues around what's an anti-racism practice or what does racism even look like, right? You know, everything from how we program to the language we use, to who we show on images, they're not thinking about this at all. So it's like, how do you build their vocabulary to be able to articulate other things? Unless it's pointed out to you, you keep recreating it. And you know, we could use demographics, we can use statistics, but it still doesn't do the work of actually grappling with why we do what we do and how we do it.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: In creating these models, Teresa and her colleagues hope to equip participants with these tools, along with support systems to help carry the work forward. Wellcome's inclusion team partnered with one of the founders of the Black Liberation Movement in the UK, along with a number of other anti-racism and anti-ableism activists as well as specialists in critical disability and race studies. Their goal was to create enduring cultural change not just within the institution, but also for the individuals within it.

Teresa Cisneros: I don't think we can create culture change or institutional change or address systemic oppression if there isn't behavioral change, and behavioral change is very much personal. And I guess this is what I'm trying to do with the social justice curriculum. I think gaining the trust of my colleagues … and now some of them are very ready to go on this year-long journey of learning because it's a year-long framework I've developed. It's mandatory. So the idea is we start from the talking, then we move into a different phase, which is the learning—or rather the unlearning and then the learning—and then you start applying it, and then you start

embedding it. And my goal is, how do people embody it? But you need the building blocks of knowledge to get to embodying it.

My goal I think when I entered the Wellcome Collection, was why is it that I can walk into a room and I, I can see certain things … why can't they? Because they've never had to. Why does a White individual never have to think about race? Because race is not about them; they put race on others. So I'm really interested in also getting my colleagues to develop a more reflective, critical practice. And if you start with your cohort of 15 people, as long as you're within the institution, by the end you should be meeting up on a monthly basis to look at each other's practices. When you hit a snag, these are the people you go to, you don't go to someone like me. It's like, how do I get rid of my job? And everyone takes responsibility of themselves, but they hold each other accountable in a caring way.

My end goal in the social justice curriculum is that we create it, we design it, we evaluate it, and at the end we give it away. That's the plan.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: Teresa is also using institutional policy as a lever for change.

Teresa Cisneros: So I decided to develop a piece of policy document. It started off with how can we put care practices at the center of what we do by asking people, “How do you want to be cared for when you come work with such a large institution, who holds all the financial power and the power because of who we are?” And so I worked with about, I'd say, 20 colleagues across different teams, to think about external collaborators, but along with that, through our legal contracts, because it's an agreement and, you know, we're agreeing to provide something for you.

So I think I worked with four solicitors as well. And this document finally was approved in January, took me about six, seven months. But now I'm starting to share it more widely within the organization. That's now called “Principles of Working Together.” But at the heart of it is all around inclusion: who gets included, how do people get included? But instead of us assuming what someone needs, we actually ask you what you need.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo: This sounds like you have done a lot in three years. And I have to ask, how has this been on you emotionally? Who's caring for you?

Teresa Cisneros: All my friends care for me, but I have a nine-year-old who, whose energy keeps me going, but also, I guess I've always been in a position of service. So I know how to give without thinking that I need to take back. I also know that people's racism is theirs, not mine. I don't take people's racism personal because, you know, as I say, they were never taught. I feel sorry for them.

I had colleagues who cried, White colleagues, and they said, “you know, I don't know what to do.” It's like, well, you're taking the first step. You're feeling it. You're starting to feel a sense of responsibility. When I see some tears, I never feel bad about them. And I want them to take responsibility for their tears, why they're feeling these things, what can they do?

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: Systematic racism and ableism are intractable problems, and for many people, they're deeply personal. It's one thing to write a policy, but getting individuals to enforce it is something else entirely.

Teresa Cisneros: Problem is around accountability. No one wants to hold anyone accountable because it's very difficult and people are afraid to offend people.

I think more and more institutions will want to do this work. However, I don't think everyone's really prepared to do the work, right? So it'll be more bringing in anti-racism practitioners, but fundamentally they're not going to embed it. And I think this is what I'm trying to create within the Wellcome Collection.

How do you embed a practice? How do you get people to embody it? And unless something gets designed with future embodiment and accountability, we will be here again one year, two years, three years. So this is why diversity work has been happening, you know, in England for over 20 years. And in eight national museums that we have in London, they're all directed by White people, six men and two women. You know, 20 years of diversity investment by publicly funded Arts Council of England. And we're still here. So I don't want to affect organizations. I'm more interested in affecting the individual institutions that we carry within ourselves.

For me, to be anti-racist and anti-ableist is a lifelong commitment. It's an everyday practice. It's part of my, I guess, my trying to have faith in humanity in a different way and say, this is possible. So how can I get my colleagues to also think, you know, there's a possibility?

So I'm much more interested in that one-to-one, building up from the ground up as opposed from the top down.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: Teresa and her colleagues will be hosting a facilitated conversation at DCDC on June 29, where you can learn more about the Wellcome Collection's inclusion initiatives. The session is called "Notions of Care: What does it mean to care as an archive/museum/collections professional?"

[Music]

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: Our third segment focuses on the climate crisis. For this story, we're heading to Scotland to think about what it means for a library to create a climate action plan.

Henry Roberts: So hello, I'm Henry Roberts, I'm the climate crisis intern for the National Library of Scotland, and outside of the library, I'm a climate activist with the UK Youth Climate Coalition.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo: So you've been working on the National Library of Scotland's climate action plan. Can you talk a little bit about what this initiative is?

Henry Roberts: So the climate action plan for the library is like a lot of climate action plans, in the sense that a big, big chunk of it is to do with our operations: the way we run our building, the energy, the efficiency of our operations and buildings. What makes the library's climate action plan a little bit different to, say, a private organization is that very fact: we're a library. Our function is a little bit unusual. We're not here to sell things, to make money, in that sense. We provide resources. We're a site of knowledge. If you like quantifiable targets, what our energy usage is going to be like, what is our waste policy, what kind of light bulbs we're using, that's all in there, but it's on top of all that we're talking about how are we going to use our resources to foster education and build resilience within Scotland, within communities? And specifically, how are we going to do that in a way which caters to a variety of knowledge levels?

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo: So how did the climate action plan come to be at the National Library of Scotland? How did you get involved with this?

Henry Roberts: So my personal involvement was they put out a job description, which I applied for. But how the idea of this came about is very much following what's been happening in wider society. So in 2019, Nicola Sturgeon announced a climate emergency in Scotland. We've seen, both in the UK and the US, mass protests, increasing civil society, demonstrations, demanding that governments take action on climate change. So there's been a growing pressure to respond and to basically level up and increase ambition around this topic. So I think that's very much what drove the library's thinking in creating this agenda. We're following the Scottish government climate change duties. So this is the categories of: mitigation, adaptation, sustainable development, wider influence.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: I asked Henry if he could share some examples of specific actions the library is taking.

Henry Roberts: One thing we've done already, for example, we have a really incredible map collection. And on these maps, they show the effects of coastal erosion. You don't even need words. So one of the things we've done is we put those on our websites, before and after shots, if you like, of the effects of coastal erosion in Scotland. So that's a really visual way that people can engage with the topic and they don't need to have a science degree or an advanced degree in environmental management. It's clear to see. So that's one. Another thing we're doing this year is with the moving image archive, we've created this magnificent film called “Living Proof,” and it explores Scotland's history and its relationship to industry and how that's led to the current crisis through archival films.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: They are also trying to make it easier for people to educate themselves on the climate emergency, no matter where they’re coming from.

Henry Roberts: Something I'm really keen to get off the ground later this year is essentially have on our website what we call a collection discovery. It's about essentially, almost like a reading list—if you like, a tasting menu of resources here. And again, I think there are two things I really want to get out of that. I want to get a) a reading list which caters to different knowledge levels. The second thing I really want to get out of that is covering the variety of topics. Climate change is not just about science. It's not just about the natural world. So as well as providing titles and journal articles on the science of climate change, we're also providing content which discusses how that intersects with human rights, how that intersects with racism, how that intersects with feminism, for example. We already have so much material. It's just a case of promoting it. What do we want the public to see?

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: But education is only part of the library's climate action plan.

Henry Roberts: So the library is a very large organization. There's about 250 employees, I think, across several different buildings, not just in Edinburgh, but also in Glasgow. But one of the real challenges of producing this climate action plan has been this variety of people who have to be consulted. So for example, when we're talking about the building, the operations, how the lights work, what our waste policy is, we have to engage the estates department. The people who really understand the numbers, people who really understand waste streams and how electricity works and how carbon coefficients work and not everybody has that knowledge. But then on the other hand, we have to produce a document which not only satisfies those people, but also satisfies the people in collections, the people who are acquiring all this knowledge and all these books, the people who are putting on the events, who are putting on the public programming. All these different people have to be consulted.

And so what's been really challenging for me personally, is to try to coordinate these different groups. They're not in contrast with each other, but they work in such different areas. I think people think of a library and think, Oh, well, it's just a bunch of librarians, and they all do the same thing. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo: So your job then is, if I'm understanding correctly, to coordinate with all of these different departments within the library, and then to author a cohesive document that basically everyone's willing to sign off on?

Henry Roberts: Exactly. It's that coordination role, that getting people together and making sure that everyone's had their voice heard. And crucially that once the draft of a climate action plan has been produced, everyone gets to see it and they get to add their comments and sign off on it. And I am just the young intern bringing all these people together.

It's been very difficult.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo: Yes, I can imagine. And what stage are you at right now in it?

Henry Roberts: We're on a, hopefully, a final round of consultation. So it's gone to, what's called our library leadership team. They've added a few comments and now the wider staff

consultation is happening. And hopefully people will be happy with what they see and people won't be too shocked or surprised, but we're hoping that it will be published around September time in the lead up to COP 26 happening later this year.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: COP26 is the UN's Climate Change "Conference of the Parties," which is scheduled to take place in Glasgow in November 2021. The significance of this hasn't been lost on the National Library of Scotland.

Henry Roberts: There's a real recognition at the library that COP26 is quite literally a once in a lifetime event. Not only is it really important in terms of the policy landscape. Not only is it really important in its own right; it's happening in Glasgow. The world will quite literally be looking at Scotland for two weeks. And so we really think it's of vital importance that we engage in that. And so we put in several applications and we've tried to partner up with other groups in Edinburgh, but in whatever shape we engage, I think there are two main things we want to do.

Firstly, is that during those two weeks itself, we want to make sure that in some way, we have a presence there where we can collect. That's part of our role, our role isn't just to provide materials. It's also to collect materials and because this is such a historic moment in time—not just in environmental history, but in Scottish history—we want to make sure that we're there "on the ground" if you like, collecting materials, be it from activist groups, be it from delegates, be it from government officials. We want to try and collect as many resources as we can so that we have a record of what that two weeks in Glasgow really was like.

We want to use it as an opportunity to start this dialogue, to start this discussion, again, with people who may not be interested in this topic or may not know a lot about this topic.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: Henry talks a lot about getting people to care about the climate emergency, and reaching people at all levels. It made me wonder when he himself realized how important it was to take action on the climate.

Henry Roberts: I think I was at Disneyland. I think that was the first time. I was a young nine-year-old enjoying my summer holiday with my parents in Disneyland. And I go and see a film. I think it was a Lion King sponsored film, and it was about this topic called global warming. And I'd heard of global warming. And I didn't know if it was a good thing or a bad thing. In a way it sounded like a good thing, global warming. It sounds quite nice, doesn't it? And I watched this film, which is, you know, made for children. And I was horrified. It was of course about what global warming is, its devastating effects on wildlife around the world.

It was produced by the international corporation Disney, I didn't appreciate that at the time, but, you know, I realized there was this issue. And then as I got a bit older, I became more interested in politics and I became more interested in the human side of things. And, essentially when I got older, I realized it's not just about the rainforest and the animals that live there—of course, that's of supreme importance—but it's also about us. It's about human beings, especially from the global South who have contributed the least to this crisis but are suffering its

worst effects. I realized the climate crisis is connected to so many different issues, it's connected to human rights, it's connected to racism. It is connected to money. It is connected to all these different issues. I think just more broadly, I'm a young man, I'm 24. I didn't really know anyone my age who isn't engaging in this issue. I think for people my age and crucially for people younger than me, the students who are in school now who are striking are really inspirational. It's a non-negotiable fact that this is happening and it's going to get worse and worse. And because of that, it's almost a moral imperative to work on this. It's not really been a hard decision. It's almost a decision that's been made for us that if we don't act nobody else will.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: Authoring the climate action plan for the National Library of Scotland seemed, to me at least, like a big job for a 24-year-old intern. This is critically important work. Why not give it to someone who's more established in the library field? But Henry's clearly up to the task, and the more I think about it, the more I appreciate the wisdom of having a youth activist take the lead on the Climate Action Plan.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo: I know that you're with the UK Youth Climate Coalition.

Henry Roberts: I thought it was really a moral imperative to not just read about these things, but actually to try and get involved. So I applied and thankfully got accepted into the UK Youth Climate Coalition, UK YCC. I do some zero waste theater for a theater company called The Greenhouse, trying to think of different ways of how we can start this conversation about the climate. So with UK YCC, it's about activism. It's about online demonstrations. It's about engaging with politicians and trying to influence policy at the COP, whereas things with The Greenhouse, it's about storytelling. And so it was really interesting for me with this academic background to join an activist group and to join a theater group all with a common aim, different avenues to get there, but with a common aim of increasing this discussion, increasing awareness and improving our relationship with the natural world. And that's all helped me in my work with the library.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo: I'd love to hear how your work with UK YCC actually did influence the climate action plan.

Henry Roberts: So when I applied for this role in the library, I'd been working with UK YCC for about a year, I would say. And the work with UK YCC is very climate justice focused. We talk about how to increase climate justice policies at the COP and these tightened policy negotiation spaces. It's basically all we think about on a week-to-week basis. I thought it was really important for me, therefore, to bring the language of climate justice into the climate action plan. Even if it's just by saying those words in the introduction, recognizing the intersections of climate change with these other issues because of the library's standing.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo: Are there any skills that you've learned from being at the library that have influenced your activism and approach to it?

Henry Roberts: I come in as a climate activist and I know what I want. I know what I think the end game should be. And I really want to get there as fast as I can. I was, on my first day, I was like, well, I can write the climate action plan today. I know what it should contain. Let me do it. But no. It's a large organization where people have different interests. They have different needs, and people have different timescales, and people have different budgetary restraints. There are always different conditions that you have to satisfy. And you have to check with people in order to produce this document and to create change. And what I figured out slowly in order to do that, the best thing you can do is listen. Nobody in the library disagrees that this is an issue and no one in the library doesn't think that we need to act, but people have legitimate concerns. Maybe it's about money or it's about their time or it's about the resources the library can offer. So it will be absolutely no use for me to get annoyed and get angry when I don't get my way. You have to listen to people and understand where they're coming from in order to reach an endpoint and the end point being the climate action plan. So certainly, my time at the library has taught me those people skills, those negotiation skills. How do you talk to people from different backgrounds, from different departments? How do you bring them all together and find common ground? Because that's what you need to do.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo: I would love to know more about the intergenerational conversations that are happening within the library. What has that experience been like as somebody who is 24, who's come into a nearly a hundred-year-old institution, trying to coordinate with people of all sorts of different generations, about the biggest issue of our time.

Henry Roberts: It's been interesting. [Henry laughs] I think it's very easy for me as a young person to generalize the older generation, but that's very much not fair. Some of the best advocates in the library, you know, have been the older people, who've been fighting for this long before I arrived. You know, I don't want to suggest that I'm the first person to come in and do this. Thankfully, I arrived and built on a lot of work at the library that's already been done… But it has been interesting, because I come in with this activist background and with this activist fervor, if you like, and I want to implement immediate change. And I want things to be done my way and quite, you know, purist about it. And, of course, the people who work at the library and know how the organization works probably better than I do and understand how to affect change better than I do, they sometimes have to say "Slow down. We have a process here. We have to go through the loops." So it's been frustrating, but that's part of the process.

Because again, the end goal of the climate action plan can only happen if everyone signs off on it. That means there's compromise. That means not everyone's going to be happy with everything. That means something that I want to be done today may have to be done in a few years' time. It's imperfect. But I think you have to engage with people because at the end of the day, once these actions are put in place over the next four years, it's everybody else who has to carry them on. So everyone has to be involved.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: In many ways, this project has been an exercise in listening. And through these conversations, Henry's learned a lot about libraries and the unique role they have in responding to the climate crisis.

Henry Roberts: It's funny, a lot of people would think libraries are completely disconnected to times of crisis when actually the evidence shows the complete opposite. In times of crisis, libraries are often seen as spots of resilience for communities. And what is a library? A library is a site of knowledge. A library quite literally holds and organizes and presents information to the communities they serve. That is an extremely crucial role. It's a crucial role for a democracy. It's a crucial role for a community or a city to survive. I don't know what the future's going to hold. I don't know how the climate crisis is going to unfold. All I can say is that it is going to continue. And quite frankly, it's going to get worse and worse.

But that doesn't make us powerless. And it certainly doesn't make libraries powerless. We can't stop the climate crisis. But what we can do is we can give people the tools to respond themselves. We can give people the tools to build resilience, be that in their own homes, in their workplaces. But we can also do that for wider society. We can help people realize why this is an issue, why it's so important. And if more and more citizens and communities are involved and understand—really understand—the issues, that will mean more effective and hopefully swifter change. So libraries are not powerless. They have a responsibility to act. And that's why I'm really, really glad for the climate that the National Library of Scotland is acting.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: You can learn more about Henry's work and the National Library of Scotland's climate action plan at DCDC's case studies panel on July 2 titled: "The Ethics of Crisis Response."

[Music]

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: We thought we'd close this episode by talking about the common thread through these stories: crisis as the catalyst for change. I spoke with Matthew Greenhall, deputy executive director of RLUK, or Research Libraries UK, about what to expect from the DCDC conference, where our guests will be presenting later this month.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo: Can you tell us a little bit about the DCDC conference?

Matthew Greenhall: So, the DCDC series began back in 2013 and we have always really wanted this event series to explore how archives, libraries, museums, and galleries, and members of the academic and researcher community can work together more effectively. One of the exciting things about DCDC, though, is that it's not just a conference *about* collaboration, collaboration is in its very DNA. It's a conference that comes from a collaboration between Research Libraries UK, the National Archives, here in the UK, and also JISC.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo: So can you talk a little bit about the theme of this year's conference?

Matthew Greenhall: This year's conference is looking at “catalysts for change: transforming our practices, collections and communities through times of crisis.” And as we are all aware, the world has been going through quite a major crisis in the last year or so, but this theme actually originated from before COVID-19 and it reflected our awareness archives, libraries, and museums have been at the heart of some really important conversations around things such as climate change, the migrant crisis, political and social and economic crises, and we really wanted a conference theme that would explore these to see how archives, libraries, and museums are capturing them. So how are we archiving the lived experience of the societies in which these institutions operate? How are we a part of that dialogue? So we're not just passive collectors of some of the changes occurring within society, but how are we actually part in influencing that?

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo narration: If you look at the DCDC line-up, there are so many ways speakers have sought to answer these questions. Angela, Henry, and Teresa are by no means the only participants talking about the larger topics from this episode, and there are many other themes at the conference that we didn’t have a chance to cover.

Matt mentioned that throughout these sessions, we’ll see examples of community, activism, sustainability, and resilience.

Matthew Greenhall: This conference has been against the backdrop of 12, 13 years of financial austerity within the United Kingdom, following the financial crash of 2008. Those challenges are not only still with us, but are likely to deepen. So how do we, as organizations, not only represent the communities in which we sit, not only engage and play an active part in some of these key societal challenges, but also embed resilience and sustainability within our organizations, which enable us to be flexible, to adapt to rapid change, but to do that in the long term.

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo: So are there any words that you'd like to leave with conference goers in the lead up to this year's conference?

Matthew Greenhall: This is clearly a time of very diverse and disparate challenge and crisis across a whole multitude of fields, but how that, although traumatic, also presents real opportunity. And I think you get a sense of that through the other podcast contributors, that there is a moment occurring, and it feels like there is a real opportunity now to explore what that means, what that looks like, however uncomfortable, but that this is a space where we can explore those possibilities. And importantly, we can look at how we can do these things collaboratively and not in isolation or in duplication. So I think opportunity; collaboration; crisis, yes--but crisis as a catalyst for change.

[Music]

Nicole Kang Ferraiolo: Thank you to our guests, Angela Whitecross, Teresa Cisneros, and Henry Roberts. You can learn more about their work on our website, material-memory.clir.org. Special thanks to Matthew Greenhall and the rest of the DCDC team at RLUK, JISC, and the UK National Archives for making this episode possible. You can learn more about DCDC at dcdcconference.com, where you can still register to attend June 28 through July 2, 2021.

Material Memory is a show about how the cultural memory field is responding to our changing world. If you enjoyed this episode, subscribe to our show on your preferred podcast platform. We're typically organized around theme-based seasons and our next season, hosted by my colleague Sharon Burney, will be a tour of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. While you wait, check out our previous episodes! Season 1, hosted by my colleague Joy Banks, considers endangered Indigenous language collections. Season 2, which I hosted, is all about cultural memory and the climate crisis.

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I'm your host, Nicole Kang Ferraiolo, and this is *Material Memory*.