

## Week Five Reading Guide: Climate Change

This week's readings feature climate activism, the most important current focus of the environmental movement. We read and view a speech by a respected scientist who describes rather reluctantly becoming an activist. We will hear from one of the student leaders of the Fossil Free protest that took place at MIT in the 2015–16 academic year. And we will obtain interesting insights on climate activism from two psychologists and a political scientist.

### October 7, 2019

#### **Hansen, J. 2012, "Why I must speak out about climate change," [Ted Talk](#), 17min**

James Hansen is an atmospheric scientist who for more than 30 years directed the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies in New York City. His 1981 predictions of the global warming and climate change effects caused by increases in atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> have proven remarkably accurate. Starting in 2004, he began speaking out in a way that irked many people, especially those in government. His TED Talk provides a fuller account.

What is Hansen's motivation for speaking out? What are his goals? He ends his Ted talk with an urgent plea to the listener. How would you answer him if he made his plea to you in person now? Why has his activism not succeeded to the extent he wanted? Are there hopeful signs of change in 2019?

#### **Hansen, J. E. 2007, "Political Interference with Government Climate Change Science," Testimony to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, United States House of Representatives, 19 March;**

[http://www.columbia.edu/~jeh1/2007/Testimony\\_20070319.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/~jeh1/2007/Testimony_20070319.pdf)

Hansen's testimony would be shocking if it were not so relevant today; perhaps every concern he expresses is worse in 2019 than it was in 2007.

What can you infer about Hansen's core values from his testimony? Why is he taking the unusual step of testifying not just about science, but about the functioning of government and the legal framework of the US Constitution? Does that lessen his authority? Do you think he learned from the successes and challenges faced by previous science activists such as Jon Beckwith, Rachel Carson, and Randall Forsberg? How is his approach similar to and different from theirs?

#### **Beckwith, J. 2002, *Making Genes, Making Waves: A Social Activist in Science* (Harvard University Press), Chapter 6.**

In what ways do the late 1960s and early 1970s described by Beckwith seem similar to today? How are they different? What privileges did Beckwith have that helped him to blend science and activism?

What role did Science for the People play in Beckwith's life during this period? He writes, "many of the negative consequences of scientific and technological developments could be traced to questions of class and economics." What contemporary examples can you cite?

Beckwith has a deep need to pursue both science and social activism, yet he does not expect the same of others, including his students. Why not?

**October 9, 2019**

**Hoggett, P., and Randall, R. 2018, “Engaging with Climate Change: Comparing the Cultures of Science and Activism,” *Environmental Values* 27, 223–243; <https://doi.org/10.3197/096327118X15217309300813>**

This article studies the responses of climate scientists and activists to the stress and anxiety of trying to create change. The source of their stress is the inner and outer conflicts arising from their recognition of the threat of climate change. The authors speculated that the different social and organizational structures in which scientists and activists work would lead to differences in their stress management. They found something rather different.

The authors found that the six scientists they interviewed—none of whom appear to be activists like Beckwith, Forsberg, or Hansen—were shaped by a culture of objectivism and the denial of emotions that left them vulnerable when conflicts arise. The scientists lacked emotional resilience. By contrast, the ten activists interviewed recognized the power of emotions and had developed some resilience through relationships, self-care, and the agency of activism itself. Activists build emotional management into their work, for example, by holding debriefing meetings after protests. In diversity work, these are sometimes called “the meeting after the meeting” or a counterspace, defined as a communal gathering where one’s identity is affirmed and mutual support against oppression is provided.

What resonates with you in this article? What settings create stress in your life? Is your reaction more like that of the scientists or the activists? What can we do at MIT to create a healthier environment? Figure 1 of the article might provide a useful framing for your answer.

What do you think Jon Beckwith, Rachel Carson, or James Hansen might say in response to the article?

**Hadden, J. 2014, “Explaining Variation in Transnational Climate Change Activism: The Role of Inter-Movement Spillover,” *Global Environmental Politics* 14.2, 7–25; [https://doi.org/10.1162/GLEP\\_a\\_00225](https://doi.org/10.1162/GLEP_a_00225)**

This article, written by a political scientist, offers a helpful foil to better understand the role of science activism. Hadden describes the strategy, tactics, and impact of radical activists who challenge not only environmental injustice but other injustices based on class, race, gender, and other factors. These activists influence both institutions in power and organizations attempting to change these institutions using scientists working within them. In other words, the radicals influence the moderates. (I question the author describing Greenpeace as working primarily within the realm of scientific expertise and insider-lobbying activities.)

Hadden seeks to understand why the 2009 UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen (known as COP 15) had so much greater activism than any such conference before or after. She finds that the social movement was changed by ideas and people coming from broader social justice movements. Specifically, activists from other fields came together to form the Climate Justice Network (CJN), whose environmental justice paradigm drew heavily on ideas of class, race, and gender justice.

What is Hadden's "political process explanation" for why COP15 was so unusual? Contrast the movement strategy quoted on the bottom of p. 16 with the *Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms Race*. How did the CJN accommodate the concerns of environmental, indigenous, and Southern groups?

Hadden notes that "Political process theorists argue that protests should escalate via a process of radicalization as institutions reduce access to civil society." Why? Can you give examples of this?

On p. 20 she gives an insightful discussion of why mainstream environmental NGOs (which include many science activists within them) did not radicalize. Summarize the reasons. She also points out the continuing "movement spillover" to the Occupy movement in 2011. Is Antifa a contemporary example?

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