

ORAL HISTORY

From wax cylinders to reel-to-reel to digital video, recording technologies expanded the historical profession dramatically during the twentieth century. And the trend is continuing into the twenty-first!

We will read some classics, such as Barbara Myerhoff’s Number Our Days and Alessandro Portelli’s Death of Luigi Trastulli, as well as scholarly pieces aimed at working historians. This course centers on methodology—students will learn about ‘best practices’ in the field and will work toward creating an interview record that can be housed in an archive and accessed by other researchers. All students will use digital video in the semester, but interviewees may choose an audio format. NOTE: ***Neither audio nor video recordings of interviewees may be posted on youtube nor any other internet space unless that posting is done by the person interviewed or their family members. Please also NOTE: ***Each person interviewed maintains rights to the interview material unless she or he explicitly donates those rights to an archive.

Interviewees’ privacy and intellectual property rights will be respected by all seminar participants.

Assignments:

Do a set of interviews with a person (or various) over 70, and interpret that interview in the context of scholarly writing by others. Completing our course work means:

1) that you submit a paper (15 pages) or create an equivalent multi-media project that engages methodological and interpretative questions raised in class, and

2) that you do the following (schedule on our canvas site):

- P1) Contact an archive for the donation of the interviews, so that they are preserved.
- P2) Share a practice video clip of you reading an introduction to the project and a “permission to record” script.
- P3) Prepare an interview-specific bibliography, and a formal contact letter.
- P4) Share with the class a prepared “interview map” and (optional) an a/v album-archive to carry to interview.
- P5) Do at least one recorded interview of about 90 min each & create a backed-up copy.
- P6) Arrange for a meeting to deliver the material and (hopefully) do some follow-up interviewing.
- P7) Upload video/audio clips, with some portions transcribed, to a password-protected media.sas folder.
- P8) Present your work, including digitized clips, in class.
- P9) Deliver a copy of the recorded interview to the person recorded and ask them to consider donation to archive.
- P10) Upload to our canvas site (along with final project), documentation recording check-off dates for above steps

Grading:

Pre-class postings (10 submissions worth 5 pts each)	40pts
Rubric --Thoughtfulness and analytical skill (3 pts), Submitted on time (1pt), Proofread (1pt).	
Final project, measured by timely completion of steps involved (5pts each for P1-P10):	30pts
Final project, measured by professor’s assessment of scholarly quality:	30pts
Rubric as follows:	
10 points clear argumentation, whether explicit or implicit within the structure of your project	
10 points skill in analyzing recorded material	
5 points quality of methodological reflection	
5 points grammar, syntax, careful editing, clarity of writing	

Books:

Davis and Kennedy	Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold
DeBlasio et. al.	Catching Stories: a Practical Guide to doing Oral History.
Portelli,	Death of Luigi Trastulli.
Myerhoff	Number Our Days.
Menchú/Burgos.	I, Rigoberta Menchu.
Abrams	Oral History Theory

- 9/11 Introduction to the course. During class we will look at the website maintained by the Oral History in the Digital Age project <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/> and have some preliminary discussion about legal issues.
- 9/18 Class includes hands-on work (we will walk to mmets at 2:30), as well as discussion of DeBlasio et. al., chs 1, 3-5, 8, 9. Please post an agenda for discussion with specific examples from the readings, (1st posting).
- 9/25 We will discuss Anderson and Jack, “Learning to Listen,” and Blee, “Evidence, Empathy, and Ethics: Lessons from Oral histories with the Klan.” (2nd posting). **Note: we will walk to Weigle at 2:30
- 10/2 Passerini, “Memories of Self,” and Portelli, Ch. 1, 4-7, (3rd posting).
- 10/9 Number Our Days, with “Surviving Stories” (4th posting, and P1 due).
- 10/16 Assignment is to prepare an initial bibliography that responds to who you will be interviewing. P2-3 due.

** Please also post 2 oral history links (to people speaking in audio/video recordings or to transcripts).

Examples of the kind of thing I am looking for:

- <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.52555/#vhp:clip> (Lib. of Congress veterans' project)
- <http://www.densho.org/archive/default.asp> (An archive focused on Japanese-Americans experiences in the USA in 20th C.)
- <http://www.visionaryproject.org/> (Focuses on African-American experiences, includes John Hope Franklin interview)
- <http://outhistory.org/exhibits/show/philadelphia-lgbt-interviews> (Philly LGBTQ archive, part of <http://lgbtqdigitalcollaboratory.org/oral-history-hub/>)
- <http://www.mediaburn.org/Video-Preview.128.0.html?&uid=5113> (Studs Terkel)

- 10/23 Discussion of Davis and Kennedy. Presentation of “interview map,” contact letter, bibliography, and a/v materials. (7th posting and P4).
- 10/30 Excerpts from Menchú and from social scientists responding to Stoll controversy. (6th posting).
- 11/6 Interpreting memories: Essays by Field and Borland, also Thompson et. al., extracts (8th posting).
- 11/13 (9th posting).
- 11/20 Oral History’s challenges to existing theoretical frames. Abrams, chapters. (10th posting). P5-6 due.
- 11/27 No reading assigned. Discussion of interviewing experiences.
- 12/4 No reading assigned. Students prepare interview clips, with transcriptions. P7, P8, and P9 due.
- 12/11 Student presentations of final projects. P10 due.