

Oral History
AMH 4930/5930
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Department of History, University of Florida
Spring Semester, 2020
Thursdays, 11:45 to 2:45
CSE E220

This seminar is an introduction to the theory and practice of oral history. We will study the craft of oral history and explore the intellectual development of this discipline. This interdisciplinary course will study the burgeoning impact of oral history and historical memory in truth commissions, social documentaries, digital archives, public museums, web sites, national and international moments of commemoration, and other contexts. We will examine the relationship between power and memory, and the role of class, gender, and racial inequalities in shaping living histories that become enshrined as national “truths.” Students will learn to use oral history to become more effective interviewers, researchers and writers in various fields including history, education, journalism, film, radio, as well as ethnography. We will study the impact oral history has had on US, Latin American, European, and African histories and texts.

Spoken memories have constituted the foundations of histories throughout the past several millennia. As Studs Terkel observed, “People are hungry for stories. It’s part of our very being. Storytelling is a form of history, of immortality too. It goes from one generation to another.” Oral history has reemerged as a serious field of inquiry even as the written—or so-called documentary—record has been subjected to increasing skepticism. At the same time, oral interviews and testimonies have been used in recent decades to uncover stories of “ordinary people,” in the United States as well as forgotten or disappeared events. The Rosewood Hearings of 1994 in Tallahassee, Florida relied in large part on survivor’s spoken memories to chronicle the story of the massacre of African Americans in a small southern town—a story that had been purged from official state records.

In lieu of a final written project, students will conduct, transcribe and produce two professional-quality oral history interviews. These interviews will be deposited for scholarly use at the University of Florida Digital Collections at George Smathers Libraries.

Electronic Ettiquette Policy

Studies electronic devices in seminars demonstrate that students who are “wired” perform more poorly in class unless the course is explicitly designed for electronic interface.¹ Both the instructor as well as students will be giving presentations during the course of the seminar and our classroom time is too precious to waste on text-messaging, online shopping, Facebook , etc. In order to keep distractions to a minimum, there is a no laptop rule in the class. Turn off cell phones. (This includes the instructor!) No text messaging during class.

¹ Helene Hembrooke and Geri Gay, “The Laptop and the Lecture: The Effects of Multitasking in Learning Environments,” *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, vol. 15, (Fall 2003); Pam Mueller, “The Pen is Mightier Than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking,” *Psychological Science*, June 4, 2014; Anne Curzan, “Why I’m Asking You Not to Use Laptops,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 15, 2015, <http://chronicle.com/blogs/linguafranca/2014/08/25/why-im-asking-you-not-to-use-laptops/> (Accessed November 15, 2014); Dan Rockmore, “The Case for Banning Laptops in the Classroom,” *The New Yorker*, June 6, 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-case-for-banning-laptops-in-the-classroom> (Accessed November 15, 2014).

Academic Honesty:

Students are required to be honest in their coursework, may not use notes during quizzes or exams, and must properly cite all sources that they have consulted for their projects. Any act of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean of Students, and may result in failure of the assignment in question and/or the course. For University of Florida's honor code, see <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who will then provide it to the instructor:
<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

Counseling and Mental Health Resources:

Students facing difficulties completing the course or who are in need of counseling or urgent help should call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center (352-392-1575; <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/>).

Current UF Grading Policy

Review current UF Grading policy at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Electronic Copies of Syllabus:

May be found on our course Canvas site.

Resources:

The web site of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program has numerous resources and links to oral history sites: <http://www.history.ufl.edu/oral/>. You will find the resources of the Oral History Association at your fingertips at the following site: <https://www.oralhistory.org/>

COURSE FORMAT

Oral History Interview

You will complete two assigned oral history interview as well as a partial transcript, index, and **analytical introduction** of your interviews. These interview transcripts will become a permanent part of UF's archival holdings. We will borrow from the methodology presented by Valerie Yow in *Recording Oral History* to complete this project. For the **analytical introduction** to your interview transcript you will use *Remembering Jim Crow* as a model. You will present a preliminary draft of your partial transcript and analytical introduction to your colleagues during week 10. Scheduling of oral history interviews will begin in early January.

Weekly Response Papers

You will write a total of seven (6) response papers to weekly readings incorporating your analysis of the theory and practice of oral history. These papers will be 3 pages in length. Please write each paper in a narrative format. I advise that you complete most of your response papers during the first part of the class before you begin the process of interviewing, transcribing, and fine tuning your final paper. Transcribing takes time!

Leading Class Discussion:

Each student will lead a discussion on a week's worth of readings as well as an accompanying oral history web site during the semester.

Response Essays:

Students will write seven 3-page response essays on the major readings. Your essays will discuss the main arguments of the reading assignments with an emphasis on oral history methodology, interviewing techniques, and research strategies.

Canvas Site:

Most of the readings and course materials will be available on the class Canvas site which can be accessed via UF E Learning. Check on the site regularly for course announcements and updates.

Oral History Practicums:

The class will assist in documenting two historic events at the University of Florida: 1) The 50th anniversary of African American Studies during the *Looking Back & Moving Forward: The Journey Continues* February 20th symposium & anniversary celebrations; 2) The Achebe/Baldwin @40 symposium April 2-3rd. The interviews we conduct at these historic events will become a permanent part of the University of Florida Digital Collections at Smathers Libraries.

Attendance: Unexcused absences will result in automatic reduction of grade. A medical certificate is needed to excuse absence. If you miss a class you are responsible for getting notes and/or assignment instructions from one of your peers or instructor during regular office hours.

Grading: Class participation, including discussion (10%); Oral History Practicums (20%) Response Essays (30%); Interviews (20%); Final Projects (20%)

Office Hours: I will be holding office hours this semester at my office at the Oral History Program, Pugh Hall, # 245, on Mondays, 1:00 to 2:30 and Wednesdays, 2 to 3:30 pm. I am also available for meetings via appointment. My cell phone number is 831-334-0131.

Email: Check your class email account on a regular basis for reading questions and course updates.

Reading/Book List (Books available at UF Library West reserve)

Katrina Srigley, ed., *Beyond Women's Words: Feminisms and the Practice of Oral History in the Twenty-First Century*; Anna Sheftel, ed., *Oral History Off the Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice*; *Chafe, Gavins, Korstad, Ortiz, et. al., Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell About Life in the Segregated South*; Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome*; Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History, Second Edition: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*; Jeffrey Gould, *Solidarity Under Siege: The Salvadoran Labor Movement, 1970-1990*; Alessandro Portelli, *They Say in Harlan County: An Oral History*

Syllabus and Reading List

PART I: LEARNING TO LISTEN

Week of January 9; Empathy, Listening & Making History the SPOHP Way

“What is this thing called oral history?” Oral History Workshop Slideshow

Introduction of course and syllabus review

In Class Listening:

Paul Ortiz Interview with Pablo Manuel Fernandez, Former CIA & “Cuban Units” operative at the Miami-Dade Veterans Hospital, October 4, 2019.

Practice Interviews and Creative Commons Exercise

UF Segregation to Black Live Matter Symposium: “Oral History” panel:

<https://mediasite.video.ufl.edu/Mediasite/Catalog/catalogs/segregation-to-black-lives-matter-symposium>

Week of January 16: Oral History Methodologies

Topics include: social justice research methods; politics of memory; “town and gown” relationships

Reading Discussion: Marjorie L. McLellan, “Case Studies in Oral History and Community Learning,” *Oral History Review* (25 (Summer/Fall 1998), 81-112. **Canvas**

Paul Ortiz, “Tearing up the Master’s Narrative: Stetson Kennedy and Oral History,” *Oral History Review* (2014), 279-289. **Canvas**

Oxford University Press Blog: “Paul Ortiz on Oral History,” <https://blog.oup.com/2013/06/paul-ortiz-on-oral-history/>

Paul Ortiz, Omar Sanchez, Julian C. Valdivia, “Oral History of the Black Struggle: The Pursuit of Truth in the Delta,” *Against the Current*, January/February 2020 (**Canvas**)

From Segregation to Black Lives Matter Symposium Booklet (Canvas)

In Class Listening: Paul Ortiz Interview with Paul Pedro Ortiz, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress Veterans History Project

Week of January 23: Creating/Framing Oral History Research Projects

Topics include: Framing Questions; Preparation; Ethics; heritage and memories; being interviewed; analysis and interpretation of interviewing; collaboration; history and the community.

Reading Discussion: Valerie Yow, Recording Oral History, 1-187

SPOHP Style Guide

Week of January 30: Feminist Oral Histories, I

Race, class inequalities and interviewing; interpretive conflicts; indexing and release forms

Beyond Women's Words: Feminisms and the Practice of Oral History in the Twenty-First Century; Anna Sheftel, ed.,

Reading Discussion: Remembering Jim Crow

Valerie Yow, Recording Oral History, 188-219; 282-310. (indexing) 311-334; and read appendices including Legal Release Forms, interview questions, principles of the Oral History Association; IRB Review.

View and Listen: American Radio Works, Remembering Jim Crow site at:
<http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/remembering/>

Watch in class: "James Baldwin: I am Not Your Negro"

Week of February 6: Oral History in Truth and Reconciliation

Human rights and oral testimony, nation-building, and truth commissions; form and meaning of historical representation; disputed community memories vs. outside documentarians

Special Issue of Radical History Review: "Truth Commissions: State Terror, History, and Memory." (Winter 2007); Read essays by Greg Grandin, Sally Avery Bermanzohn, Paul Ortiz, and Felipe Aguero or Charles F. Walker

Reading discussion: Chafe, Gavins, Korstad, Ortiz, et. al., Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell About Life in the Segregated South;

"Truth and Reconciliation and Oral History: Elaine Truth Telling Commission, February 4, 2019
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsZjndcc7Pk>

PART II: THEORIES AND PEDAGOGY

Week of February 13: Politics of Memory

Reading Discussion: Allesandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome*;

Listen: Proctor Podcast, Jessica Lancia interview with Sallie Harrison,
<http://www.history.ufl.edu/oral/podcasts/20100203Harrison.mp3>

February 20; Oral History Practicum: Documenting 50 Years of African American History at UF

Class Meets at Smathers Libraries East #100 for UF African American Studies 50th Anniversary Symposium to assist with oral history interviews of key protagonists in the making of African American Studies at the University of Florida.

View and Listen: Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project,
<http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/interviews.htm>

View and Listen: Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission, (read selected parts of Commission summary and listen to survivor and perpetrator testimony in the statement archives, at:
<http://www.greensborotrc.org/>

(Look under “statement archives” for broadcasts of testimony)

Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Blog Spot, <http://gtrc.blogspot.com/>

Week of February 27: Story Telling and Social Theory

Working class history; paternalism; social theory and oral testimony

Reading Discussion: Jeffrey Gould, *Solidarity Under Siege: The Salvadoran Labor Movement, 1970-1990*;

Study Oral History Association web site: <http://alpha.dickinson.edu/organizations/oha/>

Listen: Proctor Podcast, Nicole Cox interview with Richard Morgan, Panama Canal Zone

FEBURARY 29-MARCH 7 SPRING BREAK

Week of March 12: Ethnography of Practice

Uncovering social movements with oral history; memory and silence; functions of time in oral history

Reading Discussion: *Oral History Off the Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice*;

Columbia Oral History Program Visiting Scholar Lecture, *Paul Ortiz*, “*Oral History in the Age of Black Lives Matter*,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DrnJPggsCy0>

Andrew Viñales, *Oral history for youth in the age of #BlackLivesMatter* <https://blog.oup.com/2016/07/oral-history-black-lives-matter/>

Study and listen: Bracero Oral History web site: <http://braceroarchive.org/>

Week of March 19: The Feminist Practice of Oral History and Pedagogical Approaches

Beyond Women’s Words: Feminisms and the Practice of Oral History in the Twenty-First Century; Anna Sheftel, ed., (Finish book)

Study and Listen: UC-Santa Cruz, “Out in the Redwoods Oral History Project” <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/oir.exhibit/index>

PART III: PRODUCING THE INTERVIEW

Interviews, transcribing, audio production

Week of March 26: Oral Histories and Oral Traditions

Reading discussion: Alessandro Portelli, They Say in Harlan County: An Oral History

Study and Listen: Student Action with Farmworkers Web Site: <http://cds.aas.duke.edu/saf/>

And: Center for Documentary Studies, <http://cds.aas.duke.edu/>

Week of April 2: Oral History Practicum II: Documenting Achebe/Baldwin Conference

Class Meets at Smathers Libraries East #100 to help document the UF James Baldwin/Chinua Achebe Conference with an emphasis on the 40th anniversary of the meeting of Baldwin and Achebe at the University of Florida: <https://africa.ufl.edu/newsandevents/achebe-baldwin-40/>

Week of April 9: Audit-Editing & Production of Interviews

Students will begin to bring transcript drafts to class to share and discuss emerging themes in their research

Study and Listen: U.S. Latina and Latino WWII Oral History Project,
<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/ww2latinos/>

Week of April 16: Getting the Word Out: Oral History in Community/Social Contexts

Students will bring analytical introductions to interviews to class and discuss major findings.

Listen: Mississippi Moments: <http://mississippimoments.libsyn.com/>

Finals Week

All oral history transcripts due Wednesday, April 22.