

DRAFT Syllabus

Methodologies and Practices of Oral History

History 201OH
Winter 2009

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Course Description:

Since the 1970s, oral history has established itself as an important method of historical scholarship, practiced not only within a variety of historical fields but also within other disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. The course explores how scholars of Africa, Europe, and North America have used the methodologies of oral history to reconstruct the historical experiences of individuals, as well as the past of oral societies like those in precolonial Africa. Scholars relied on oral history to give voice to those at the margins who are frequently not represented in conventional archives: women, rural dwellers, migrant laborers, colonized people, gays and lesbians, and other disadvantaged groups. Most readings will draw on methodologies and practices developed by scholars engaged in the project of writing a “history from below,” such as the history workshop movement in Britain, or by scholars committed to feminist approaches, gay and lesbian history, as well as Africanist research. Themes include crucial debates and objectives in oral history; interviewing and designing an oral history project; insider/outsider status and other methodological challenges; oral history as advocacy and empowerment; interpreting oral source material; oral history and memory; life histories; oral history and community history; oral narratives and performance.

Requirements:

This course is organized around seminar sessions. Students are expected to do the assigned readings, come prepared to class, participate in class discussions, and write four response papers (750 words each). Papers are due in class (no later papers). In addition, groups of two students will be responsible to facilitate the discussion of two meetings. As a final assignment, each student will conduct one interview, transcribe excerpts, and provide a brief interpretation; there is also the option to write a historiographical paper (c. 3000 words) on a topic to be selected. Each response papers counts as 10% of your grade, your final assignment as 30%, and your class participation as 30%. Please note that we will have a meeting in week 11.

Readings:

Students should purchase the following books from the UCSB bookstore (some of these books are also on reserve at the Davidson Library); other readings will be available on electronic reserve (ER).

- Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, eds., *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge, 1991), hereafter *Women's Words*.
- Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy & Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Penguin, 1994).
- Stephan F. Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).
- Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1998), hereafter *OHR*
- Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, Third edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- Luise White, Stephan F. Miescher, & David William Cohen, *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), hereafter *African Words*.

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Week 1: Introductions

Week 2: Critical Developments

- P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, ch. 1, (2, 3).
- A. Hailey, "Black History, Oral History and Genealogy" (1973) *OHR*, ch. 1.
- M. Frisch, "Oral History and Hard Times: A Review Essay" (1972), *OHR*, ch. 3.
- R. J. Grele, "A Movement without Aim: Methodological and Theoretical Problems in Oral History" (1975), *OHR*, ch. 4.
- L. Passerini, "Work Ideology and Consensus Under Italian Fascism" (1979), *OHR*, ch. 5.
- A. Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different" (1981/1991), *OHR*, ch. 6
- Popular Memory Group, "Popular Memory: Theory and Politics" (1979), *OHR*, ch. 7.
- J. Sangster, "Telling our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History" (1994), *OHR*, ch. 8.
- S. B. Gluck, "What's So Special about Women? Women's Oral History," in *Frontier Reader* (ER).

Recommended:

- D. R. Wright, "Uprooting Kunta Kinte: On the Perils of Relying on Encyclopedic Informants," *History in Africa* 8 (1981), 205-217.

Week 3: Interviewing

- C. T. Morrissey, "On Oral History Interviewing" (1970), *OHR*, ch. 9.
- H. Slim and P. Thompson, "Ways of Listening" (1993), in *OHR*, ch. 10.
- J. Walmsley, "Life History Interviews with People with Learning Disabilities" (1995), *OHR*, ch. 11.
- A. Kikumura, "Family Life Histories: A Collaborative Venture" (1986), ch. 12.
- B. Bozzoli, "Interviewing the Women of Phokeng" (1991), *OHR*, ch. 13.
- N. R. White, "Marking Absences: Holocaust Testimony and History" (1994), *OHR*, ch. 15.

- K. Anderson and D. Jack, "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses," *Women's Words*, ch. 1. (also *OHR*, ch. 14).
- K. Minister, "A Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview," *Women's Words*, ch. 2.
- S. Hale, "Feminist Method, Process, and Self-Criticism: Interviewing Sudanese Women," *Women's Words*, ch. 8.
- D. Patai, "U.S. Academics and Third World Women: Is Ethical Research Possible," in *Women's Words*, ch. 9.
- P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, chs., 4, 6-8.

Week 4: Advocacy and Empowerment

- J. Bornat, "Oral History as a Social Movement" (1989), *OHR*, ch. 16.
- E. Wigginton, "Reaching across the Generations" (1988), *OHR*, ch. 17.
- K. Hirsch, "Culture and Disability" (1995), *OHR*, ch. 18.
- W. Westerman, "Central American Refugees Testimonies and Performed Life Histories in the Sanctuary Movement" (1994), *OHR*, ch. 19.
- I. Sherbakova, "The Gulag in Memory" (1992), *OHR*, ch. 19
- N. Cross and R. Barker, "The Sahel Oral History Project" (1991), *OHR*, ch. 21.
- S. Kakar, "Leprosy in India: The Intervention of Oral History" (1995), *OHR*, ch. 22.
- R. Benmayor, "Testimony, Action Research, and Empowerment: Puerto Rican Women and Popular Education," *Women's Words*, ch. 10.
- L. Mercier and M. Murphy, "Confronting the Demons of Feminist Public History: Scholarly Collaboration and Community Outreach," *Women's Words*, ch. 11.
- K. Olsen and L. Shopes, "Crossing Boundaries, Building Bridges: Doing Oral History among Working-Class Women and Men," *Women's Words*, ch. 12.
- S. B. Gluck, "Advocacy Research: Palestinian Women in Resistance," *Women's Words*, ch. 13.
- S. Nethercott and N. Leighton, "Out of the Archives and onto the Stage" (1990), *OHR*, ch. 39.

Week 5: Interpreting Memories

- T. Lummis, "Structure and Validity in Oral Evidence" (1983), *OHR*, ch. 23.
- S. Schragger, "What is Social in Oral History" (1983), *OHR*, ch. 24.
- A. Thompson, "Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia" (1990), *OHR*, ch. 25.
- P. Friedlander, "Theory, Memory and Oral History" (1975), *OHR*, ch. 26.
- K. Blee, "Evidence, Empathy and Ethics" (1993), *OHR*, ch. 28.
- G. Etter-Lewis, "Black Women's Life Stories: Reclaiming Self in Narrative Texts," in *Women's Words*, ch. 3.
- K. Borland, "'That's Not What I Said': Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research," *Women's Words*, ch. 4 (also *OHR*, ch. 27)
- M.-F. Chanfrault-Duchet, "Narrative Structures, Social Models, and Symbolic Representations in the Life Story," *Women's Words*, ch. 5.
- A. Portelli, "The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory and the Event" (1981), in Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (SUNY Press, 1991). (ER)
- Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, chs. 9 (5)

Week 6: Writing Community History: Reclaiming the Lesbian Past

E. L. Kennedy and M. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*.

E. L. Kennedy, "Telling Tales: Oral History and the Construction of pre-Stonewall Lesbian History" (1995), *OHR*, ch. 29.

N. A. Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (UC Press, 2004).

J. T. Sears, *Lonely Hearts: An Oral History of Lesbian and Gay Southern Life, 1948-68* (Westview Press, 1997)

Week 7: Oral History in Africa: Vansina and Critics

J. Vansina, "Oral Tradition and its Methodology," in *Methodology and African Prehistory*, *UNESCO General History of Africa*, vol. 1, ed. J. Ki-Zerbo, (UNESCO, 1981), 142-165. (ER)

J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), ch. 1 (esp. 27-32).

D. W. Cohen, "The Undefining of Oral Tradition," *Ethnohistory* 36, 1 (1989), 9-18. (ER)

C. A. Hamilton, "Ideology and Oral Traditions: Listening to the Voices 'From Below'," *History in Africa* 14 (1987), 67-86. (ER)

E. Tonkin, *Narrating our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), ch. 5. (ER)

D. W. Cohen et al., "Introduction," *African Words*.

B. Ogot, "The Construction of Luo Identity and History," in *African Words*, ch. 1

M. Vaughan, "Reported Speech and Other Kinds of Testimony," *African Words*, ch. 2.

E. J. Alagoa, "The Dialogue between Academic and Community History in Nigeria," *African Words*, ch. 4.

A. Ibrahim, "The Birth of the Interview: Thin and the Fat of it," *African Words*, ch. 5.

L. White, "True Stories: Narrative, Event, History, and Blood in the Lake Victoria Basin," *African Words*, ch. 13.

Week 8: Oral Narratives, Songs, and Performance in Africa

I. Hofmeyr, "*We Spend Our Years as a Tale That is Told*": *Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chieftdom* (Heinemann, 1994), ch. 1, 4, 5, 6. (ER)

E. Tonkin, *Narrating our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), ch. 2, 3, 7. (ER)

L. Vail and L. White, "The Possession of the Dispossessed: Songs as History among Tumbuka Women, " in *Power and the Praise Poem* (University of Virginia Press, 1991). (ER)

L. Fair, "Voice, Authority, and Memory: The Kiswahili Recordings of Sit binti Saadi," *African Words*, ch. 11.

K. Yankah, "Nana Ampadu, the Sung-Tale Metaphor, and Protest Discourse in Contemporary Ghana," in *African Words*, ch. 10.

K. Barber, *I Could Speak until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women, and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

- T. Hale, *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music* (IUP, 1998)
 L. White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (UC Press, 2000).

Week 9: Life Histories

Group A:

- S. F. Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana*.
 D. Patai, *Brazilian Women Speak: Contemporary Life Stories* (Rutgers University Press, 1988), introduction. (ER)

Group B:

- D. Patai, *Brazilian Women Speak: Contemporary Life Stories* (Rutgers University Press, 1988).
 S. F. Miescher, "The Life Histories of Boakye Yiadom (Akasease Kofi of Abetifi, Kwawu): Exploring the Subjectivity and 'Voices' of a Teacher-Catechist in Colonial Ghana," *African Words*, ch. 7.

Week 10: Preservation of Oral History

- J.-P. Wallot and N. Fortier, "Archival Science and Oral Sources" (1996), *OHR*, ch. 30.
 D. Sipe, "The Future of Oral History and Moving Images" (1991), *OHR*, ch. 31.
 R. Samuel, "The Perils of the Transcript" (1971), *OHR*, ch. 32.
 J. Mace, "Reminiscence as Literacy: Intersections and Creative Moments" (1995), *OHR*, ch. 33.
 M. Shostak, "'What the wind won't take away': The Genesis of *Nisa--The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman*" (1989), *OHR*, ch. 34.
 P. Read, "Presenting Voices in Different Media: Print, Radio and CD-ROM" (1994), *OHR*, ch. 35.
 K. Flick and Heather Goodall, "Angledool Stories: Aboriginal History in Hypermedia" (1996), *OHR*, ch. 36.
 A. Green, "The Exhibition that Speaks for Itself: Oral History and Museums" (1996), *OHR*, ch. 38.
 D. A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, 2nd ed. (Oxford UP, 2003), chs. 5, 6, 8 (ER).

Week 11: Presentation of Final Projects