



ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

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OHA joins statement decrying anti-Asian violence

The Oral History Association has joined with more than three dozen members of the American Council of Learned Societies in a public statement decrying anti-Asian violence.

The statement came in the wake of the March 16 shootings at three Atlanta-area spas in which eight people were killed, six of whom were women of Asian descent.

The ACLS statement says in part:

“We find ourselves in a moment where, for good reason, we and many other Americans have been and continue to be focused intently on anti-Black racism. But we are reminded by the horrific events in Georgia this week and increased acts of violence over this past year linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, of the deep prejudices affecting Asians in this country. These and other attacks against the Asian-American community represent the latest chapter in our history of xenophobia, which tends to flare during times of crisis.

“As an organization invested in supporting and advancing the study of what it means to be human, we believe the humanities and social sciences provide essential learning needed to unlock understanding of our historical pasts, good and bad, and help cultivate knowledgeable empathy for all of us in the present and the future.

“ACLS is committed to elevating perspectives on the human experience that have traditionally been marginalized or ignored. Our work and practices are firmly grounded in values led by inclusive excellence and

anti-racism.”

See the complete ACLS statement here: <https://acls.org/ACLS-News/ACLS-News/March-2021/ACLS-Statement-Condemning-Anti-Asian-Violence>

The OHA also published a list of resources related to racial injustice against Asian and Pacific Islander communities, which you can find here: <https://www.oralhistory.org/>



President's Column



Co-Executive Directors' Report

Samuel Proctor Oral History Program's pandemic project documents disparities along with narrators' struggles and hopes

By Adolfo Romero
University of Florida

Editor's Note: Many oral historians and oral history programs throughout the past year embarked on a wide variety of oral history projects to document the COVID-19 pandemic, an unprecedented opportunity to capture history in the making. If you would like to share your project's experiences, please contact the Newsletter editor at ohaeditor@gmail.com.

Here is a look at a University of Florida project that switched gears within weeks of the pandemic's emergence to document conditions as they evolved.

In the first week of March 2020, the University of Florida's Samuel Proctor Oral History Program (SPOHP) suspended in-person interviews due to health concerns connected to COVID-19. At the same time SPOHP initiated an oral history project to document the COVID-19 pandemic and the health care disparities that the crisis illuminated in society.

In the Pandemic Oral History Project, SPOHP has sought out narrators including agricultural workers, health care professionals, custodians, teachers and other essential workers grappling with COVID-19 on the frontlines. The Pandemic Oral History Project explores the impact of COVID-19 on working class families, students and the elderly, among others. Interviews have been conducted in English or Spanish.

One of our narrators, Dr. Jeanne-Marie Stacciarini of UFL's College of Nursing, explores the factors that exacerbate the risks of COVID-19, which include socio-economic status, race, sexual identity, cultural difference, and language.

The people interviewed underscore how systemic racism and class inequalities have exacerbated COVID-19's impact on communities of color throughout the hemisphere. For example, in Brazil, Stacciarini explains how lack of basic sanitation and COVID-19 conditions have impacted Brazilian favela communities. In the favelas, water is scarce, and housing is constricted and overcrowded, which makes it challenging to fight the spread of COVID-19.

Other narrators examine the struggles of the marginalized yet essential farm workers before and after the pandemic hit the United States. Stacciarini describes issues that they faced during the early months of the pandemic, such as the lack of basic hygiene and personal protective equipment (PPE) in their work environment. Stacciarini enumerates the factors that prevent this segment of the population from promoting safe protocols: namely, cultural differences and lack of health care professionals in remote, rural areas of Florida who speak Spanish and Creole.

In another interview, Sueliana Davila, a Certified Nurse Assistant

(CNA), works at an assisted living home and explains how language barriers and a lack of minority workers shape the patients' lives. Frances Rodriguez, a health care professional, discusses the difficulty in understanding non-English speaking patients, who only speak Creole or Spanish. In the early days of the pandemic health care workers relive the shortages of life-saving medications such as insulin. Additionally, ordinary objects in medical spaces, like gloves, masks, disposable gowns, thermometers, respirators and test kits, became scarce resources.

The narrators reflect how the world is filled with anxiety and insecurity about what the future holds, accompanied by resilience.

For example, one marketing lawyer explains how firms have had to learn new ways to adapt by helping people during the pandemic. It has been challenging to help clients who have closed their businesses by enrolling in the federal Paycheck Protection programs.

One of our health care professionals fears returning home after work, knowing they might expose family members to the disease, like older adults who live in the same household and have high-risk comorbidities.

Our narrators discuss how COVID-19 disproportionately affects people of color. They discuss the challenges of informing family members about the death of their loved ones due to COVID-19 and trauma that accompanies it. The pandemic also disproportionately affects students, causing fear of returning to school, especially for those who reside in rural areas and have no access to technology. These students also lack internet connections and/or computers. COVID-19 has limited access to gyms and other recreational facilities, exacerbating mental health issues and limiting exercise and socialization.

At the end of each interview, our interviewees share advice for society and for listeners. They ask that we learn to appreciate each other more, focus more on personal mental health, work within the communities, help those in need, support each other and be in solidarity with one another. One of our narrators tells a new generation of college graduates and young people to not be disheartened, as they have the ideals and power to create a better and safer world.

From its early beginnings, the Pandemic Oral History Project has been a collaborative effort involving oral historians, health care professionals, labor organizers and many others. In late March 2020, SPOHP began working with UCLA's Latino Policy & Politics Initiative to develop an interview guide that provides interviewers with the tools to connect health care disparities, struggles for economic justice and immigration rights.

Subsequently, SPOHP also joined forces with Maggie Rivas Rodriguez

and the University of Texas's *Voces Oral History Project* as well as SPOHP alumni in the southeast to gather, preserve and promote histories of the pandemic with an eye to impacting equity in public and health policies in the Deep South.

For more information about how to get involved with the Pandemic Oral History Project, contact adolforomero@ufl.edu. You could also learn about how the Farmworker Association of Florida is assisting communities during the COVID-19 pandemic by visiting <https://floridafarmworkers.org/resources/>

National Parks podcasts win media excellence award

Under the leadership of longtime OHA member Lu Ann Jones, the National Park Service History Office, has received the Excellence in New Media Award from the Society for History in the Federal Government.

The eight-part podcast series titled "A Sense of Place: Stories of Stewardship from the National Park Service," draws from interviews with a wide array of NPS employees on a wide array of topics, from designing park maps and brochures to safety and law enforcement in the parks as well as evolving parks interpretation, conservation and employment trends.

The award citation noted that oral history projects conducted by federal history offices often envision only an audience internal to the agency or to future scholars and researchers.

The citation noted that "A Sense of Place," on the other hand, "offers an innovative approach to utilizing oral histories to tell stories that are accessible to the public. Through a combination of narration and selected extracts from agency oral histories, the NPS history office created podcasts that are both informational and engaging."

Check out the NPS stories here: <https://www.nps.gov/podcasts/sense-of-place.htm>

If your old clothes bring back

memories...

Is there a pair of bell-bottoms hiding in the back of your closet? Maybe keeping company with a peasant dress or a wide-lapel blazer or an awesome jersey Diane von Furstenburg wrap dress that, ahem, doesn't quite fit any more?

If you have '70s fashion refugees in your closet—or are re-wearing them because they're making a comeback—you might want to check out a project underway at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute.

Curatorial Fellow Alexis Romano is on the lookout for women willing to give oral testimonies of their experience of life and fashion during the 1970s in the U.S. and with professionals who worked in the fashion industry then. Respondents will be asked to reflect on memories of their wardrobes, the act of dressing, engagement with fashion culture and personal history.

The interviews are part of Romano's research for a writing project, "Dialectics of Making and Wearing: Exploring Sportswear, Image and Women in the 1970s," which reappraises women's visual and material experience of dress during the 1970s. For more information, visit <https://www.alexisromanoprojects.com/dialectics>.

One-on-one interviews can be conducted remotely and can take place in one or more sessions of an hour. If you are interested in taking part, email Alexis.Romano@metmuseum.org listing your age and a few words about your fashion story.

For oral historians who love mystery novels

By Donald Ritchie

Oral history has worked its way into just about every literary genre, including murder mysteries.

In Ian Rankin's latest novel, "A Song for Dark Times" (2020), a researcher conducting oral histories about a World War II prisoner-of-war camp in Scotland disappears. Inspector John Rebus suspects that he was "bringing the past back to life, dusting off a few ugly truths some people

might have wanted kept hidden.”

Will the interviews left behind solve the case?



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Co-Executive Directors Report

By Kristine McCusker
April 2021

Curated highlights from the 2020 Oral History Association conference are now available on the organization's website. This was funded by a National Endowment for the Humanities CARES Act grant that allowed us to host our conference virtually. Thanks to Faith Bagley and Anna Kaplan for their stellar work on the grant. Don't forget that this fall's conference October will again be virtual, but we look forward to seeing everyone face-to-face in Los Angeles in 2022.

We've been working with the new Development Task Force, shepherded by Stephen Sloan, to grow and mature on our fundraising abilities. We are pleased to see significant increases already in the endowment to ensure a firm financial foundation for OHA's work. We have also been integrating our new treasurer, Troy Reeves, more firmly into the Executive Office and into the organization's finances so he can be a good steward of the organization's resources.

Council meetings have been keeping the Executive Office busy. Like our conference, which has gone virtual, Council has also conducted our midwinter meetings virtually through February, March and April, planning for the OHA's future. Meeting minutes will be posted soon for the membership to read.

We continue to appreciate the trust that the organization has put in us and it is an honor to promote oral history and the Oral History Association.

President's Column

By Dan Kerr
April 2021

The Oral History Association is committed to following through on our core values, and I would like to focus on two of them (see our [Strategic Plan](#) for the other three):

Sustainability. We steward our field and organization to ensure that our work is valued and accessible.

Transparency. We ensure transparent and participatory management of our association, accountable to all individuals and communities we serve.

In late February 2020, the OHA Council held an in-person midwinter meeting over a period of several days in Baltimore, Maryland. During the meeting, we heard news reports of the first known COVID-19 death at that time in the United States. We had little understanding what was in store for us. More than a year later, we will shortly be wrapping up a series of virtual bi-weekly "midwinter" meetings. While we have accomplished quite a bit, much has been lost in terms of the personal relationships, connection, and late-night conversations that have played a critical role in advancing the OHA to where we are today.

Nonetheless, we have addressed our core business, approving our annual budget and reviewing committee reports, and we have also been forward looking as we continue to engage in rethinking our organizational structure to further our recently passed strategic plan.

We decided to invest \$20,000 this year in initiatives that can help us achieve the goals laid out in the plan. Following three years of surpluses, including a surplus of \$44,000 from 2020, Council approved the transfer of all but one year of operating expenses from our savings accounts to our endowment accounts. As a result, OHA transferred \$66,000 to our endowment, which now has over \$670,000 in it. To put things in perspective, OHA ended 2012 with \$220,000 in our endowment. We are in a substantially more secure position as a result of the financial stewardship that has come from our recent executive offices and elected leadership.

When thinking about our annual budget, I find it useful to think of our three major areas of income and expenses: Membership/Executive Office, Annual Meeting and Oral History Review.

A hugely important source of income that serves as the backbone for the OHA comes from our individual and partnership memberships (\$61k). These dues largely support our executive office, which includes \$56k for the office and approximately \$27k for other administrative expenses. Much of the work of the executive office goes to support the annual meeting. Taking that into account, the actual cost of the annual meeting is far greater than what our budgeted cost is (\$50k). We expect to earn \$56k from conference registration and sponsorships.

The other huge source of revenue as well as significant area of expense is the *Oral History Review*, which importantly is owned by the Oral History Association. The *OHR* brings in approximately \$67k in revenue and costs us \$42k. That surplus supports the executive office as it plans the annual meeting, which is critical to generating scholarships for the field and content for the journal's pages. There are other sources of revenues and other costs, but these are the big ones.

None of that income nor those expenses are terribly stable. We know our financial contribution to the next executive office will have to increase in order to make our transition successful (possibly by \$20k). We are currently in a position where we can risk that because we can responsibly draw approximately \$25k from our endowment given its size and the guidelines set out in our bylaws and standing resolutions. That does not, however, leave us with a lot of room to invest in our core values that seek to make our field more equitable, inclusive and meaningful. In order to address our core values, we need to grow.

Basically, we need to expand our annual income by \$20,000 per year if we are going to use our endowment income to promote programs rather than operations. While all of our committees have important contributions to make towards this growth, the two that are most directly critical are the Membership Committee, chaired by Catherine Mayfield, and our newly constituted Development Taskforce, chaired by Stephen Sloan.

A growth in our membership numbers by 15%, not counting a parallel growth that would occur with conference registrations, could raise an additional \$10k. Our relatively underdeveloped approach to development is currently raising approximately \$10k per year, which supports scholarships and awards.

We believe that having a more robust strategy that focuses on annual giving campaigns, life memberships, planned giving, grants and corporate donations could easily double what we are currently doing. Lastly, given the growth of our endowment over the last decade, we are in a position to have a successful campaign to reach an endowment of \$1 million, which would double the amount we are able to draw from it annually to invest in our priorities.

As we embark on an effort over the next two years to put OHA in a more sustainable position, please consider investing in our field with your own contributions. We are the ones who have dedicated our lives to the practice of oral history, and we know why our field is so critically important.

