



## Teaching a people's history: The Zinn Education Project

By Deborah Menkart, Executive Director, Teaching for Change

In late 2007, a former Boston University student of Howard Zinn's was inspired by watching *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train* to help bring Zinn's work to a new generation of students. So he contacted Howard, who put him in touch with two nonprofit organizations, Rethinking Schools and Teaching for Change, organizations I work for.

Together in 2008 we launched the Zinn Education Project and distributed 4,000 free packets of resources for teaching a people's history to teachers and educators across the United States. In December of 2009 we launched a website with more than 75 free downloadable teaching activities.

The Zinn Education Project's goal is to introduce students to a more accurate, complex, and engaging understanding of American history than is found in tradi-

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## Using video in oral history—learning from one woman's experiences

By Joanna Hay, Independent Filmmaker

To video or not to video, that is the question.

Oral historians continue to discuss the use of video – its benefits and its pitfalls. There are significant additional costs and technical challenges with video, and oral historians are justifiably cautious about recommending video for projects.

Everybody has seen the disastrous results of some video recordings: the floating head, poor composition and poor sound and light. But there are also the quality projects where the image adds a valuable dimension to the oral history interview.

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**OHA ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
SAVE THE DATE : OCTOBER 27-31, 2010**

**Times of Crisis, Times of Change  
Human Stories on the Edge of Transformation**

SHERATON HOTEL DOWNTOWN • ATLANTA, GA • [WWW.ORALHISTORY.ORG](http://WWW.ORALHISTORY.ORG)

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## *From the president*

# OHA embraces new initiatives

I write this column having just returned from the biennial conference of the International Oral History Association (IOHA), this year held in Prague, the beautiful and historic capital of the Czech Republic. Many OHA members attended and presented, joining some 400 oral historians from all over the world. It is always exciting to get a sense of how deep is the shared interest, yet how diverse the practice, focus and uses of oral history in such different contexts.

Beyond the different situational demands of collecting, archiving and accessing oral histories, the challenges of engaging memory have always struck me as involving quite distinct tensions—complementary for the most part but often contradictory as well—in contexts around the world. Such contrasts have deepened and broadened in the international world of oral history today, yet issues and concerns have also become more shared across a globalizing world, linked by increasingly accessible information and communication technologies (the vaunted digital divide being more easily transcended globally, it would seem, than the land-line, postal and archival-access divide.)

Both tendencies were very evident in the intense discussions at IOHA Prague. Striking, for instance, was the extent to which in many countries relatively recent political shifts following profound trauma, genocide and repression shape the impulse to pursue oral history, the collections it produces and the conditions under which these are accessed and used. Issues of confidentiality, protection of at-risk subjects and access are elsewhere front-burner issues of great public moment, rather than the more bounded, complex Institutional Review Board-related concerns they are in the United States. Similarly, oral history plays a major role in lively archival debates about “re-use of qualitative data,” debates barely visible at all in this form in the U.S.

Given such contrasts, all the more striking in Prague was a consensus on how profoundly digitization and digital dissemination are shaping the fundamental form and definitions of oral history, especially in bringing the recordings themselves to the center of practice at every point along a spectrum from archive to research to community and public use. Here, it seems, we all find ourselves stepping into unknown territory, but together.

Prague thus underscored how exciting is the current moment in oral history, seen as a shared yet richly differentiated practice around the world. There is indeed much to talk about, a dialogue sure to be extended significantly in the extremely exciting program OHA President-Elect Rina Benmayor (herself a former president of IOHA as well!) and her colleagues have put together for our Atlanta meeting this fall. And it is not too soon for OHA members to start thinking about participation in the next IOHA meeting, now slated for Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 2012.

The ferment in oral history is evident as well in OHA organizational matters that have occupied my attention as president, in ways likely to have a visible impact on the field beyond the organization as such. My last column mentioned

the IMLS-sponsored “Oral History in the Digital Age” project in which OHA leaders are key participants—well underway now. The next milestone will be a national conference in November aiming to refine clarified distillation of current directions and best-practices guidelines covering the full spectrum of oral history practice, from collection to curating to dissemination.

I also discussed in that last column a process for ongoing refinement of the OHA Principles and Best Practices statements adopted at our 2009 Louisville meeting. By the time this Newsletter appears, this will have taken form through what I hope is a lively online dialogue via the OHA Social Network on our website, in a special group established for this purpose. This will feed into a special session arranged for Atlanta to discuss concrete proposals for refinements and changes.

Such use of the network is part of a broader effort to “seed” opportunities for sustained discussion of a range of issues on our site—leveraging innovative capacities that, to date, have been disappointingly underutilized. I’m hoping that with just a bit of momentum, our [www.oralhistory.org](http://www.oralhistory.org) site will become a resource visited far more often and far more intensively.

Finally, **Newsletter** readers may also be aware that with **Oral History Review** Editor Kim Porter nearing the end of her second three-year term and a highly successful editorship, we have launched a search for the next editor and editorial base for the OHR. This regularizes a rotation that has in the past produced editorships either too long to be healthy (my own was 10 years+) or too short to be productive. The high quality of the current journal is a real testimony to Kim’s service, especially given that she also had to oversee the complex transition to our new publisher, Oxford University Press.

With that relationship now stabilized and healthy, OHR is poised to unfold as a 21st century journal, especially in multimedia publication capacities of such obvious relevance to a journal of record for oral history. It’s an exciting moment, and I encourage anyone interested in giving it shape and direction to consider the “RFP” announcement carefully and to begin developing an OHR candidacy. The search will be conducted intensively during the fall, hopefully aimed at a decision and announcement by early 2011 for an editorship that would begin, after a transitional year, at the start of 2012.

See you in Atlanta, I hope, where after the opening “Three Presidents” event Wednesday evening and the rich meeting that follows, it will be my honor to pass on the presidency, and the space for the next **Newsletter**’s column, to my successor, Rina Benmayor.



*OHA president, Michael Frisch*

# Bracero oral history project recognized as outstanding

A collaborative effort to document the history of the Bracero Program, under which millions of Mexican guest workers came to the United States from the 1940s to 1960s, received the National Council on Public History's Outstanding Public History Project Award for projects completed in 2008-09.

The Bracero History Archive, available online at [www.braceroarchive.org](http://www.braceroarchive.org), shared the recognition with the Nevada Test Site Oral History Project at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, which was featured in the Spring 2010 OHA Newsletter. They were recognized in March at the NCPH's annual meeting.

The Bracero History Archive is a bilingual, online collection of more than 3,159 items, including 635 oral histories, created jointly by the Center for History and New Media, George Mason University, the Smithsonian National

Museum of American History, Brown University and the Institute of Oral History at the University of Texas at El Paso. The project was funded by a \$349,781 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

In addition to the oral histories, the online archive includes 1,949 images and 501 documents, representing a comprehensive effort to document the experiences of some of the millions of Mexican men who were authorized to come to the United States to work primarily in short-term agricultural jobs. Many remained after the terms of their labor contracts ended. The project provides a fascinating perspective for the contemporary political debates on immigration and related discussions of creating a new guest worker program.

The original Bracero Program was created by presidential order in 1942 when farm owners argued that World War II

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## OHA SEEKS FREELANCE WRITER FOR TEACHING ORAL HISTORY PAMPHLET

The Oral History Association is accepting applications for a freelance writer to write a substantial pamphlet (up to 100 pages in length) on teaching oral history at the post-secondary level (i.e., to undergraduate and graduate students).

This pamphlet will be published by the OHA as part of its pamphlet series, which offers basic and useful information about many aspects of conducting, interpreting, processing and publishing oral history interviews and managing oral history programs and projects. For more information on the pamphlet series, see <http://www.oralhistory.org/publications/pamphlet-series>.

The format and content of the pamphlet will be determined largely by the author, but the author will work closely with the OHA publications committee, which is overseeing this project. At a minimum, the pamphlet should guide users in teaching three core components of an oral history course:

1. The nature of the oral history process and of oral history evidence, including theoretical developments in the field,
2. How to conduct oral history interviews (the method of the field) and
3. The interpretation or analysis and uses or applications of oral history.

The intended audience is post-secondary teachers. Ideally, the pamphlet would be interdisciplinary in scope and useful to teachers in a variety of fields, including (but not limited to) history, anthropology, folklore, ethnic studies, library science and archival studies. Likewise, the pamphlet should provide guidance to those teaching courses entirely devoted to oral history and those teaching courses in which oral history is a section or module of the course. Online and web components or companions to the pamphlet are encouraged.

Prospective applicants should have professional experience in teaching oral history at the post-secondary level and should be

familiar with the OHA Evaluation Guidelines for doing oral history (see [http://www.oralhistory.org/do-oral-history-evaluation-guidelines](http://www.oralhistory.org/do-oral-history/oral-history-evaluation-guidelines)).



The pamphlet length is negotiable, but should not exceed 25,000 words or roughly 100 pages. Payment of \$2,000 will be made upon acceptance of the completed manuscript. The deadline for applications is **Oct. 1, 2010** with the expectation that a contract will be issued to the writer by Nov. 15, 2010. The deadline for delivery of the manuscript is May 15, 2011.

To apply, please submit the following by **Oct. 1, 2010**:

- Curriculum vitae or resume, including publication credits
- Writing sample relevant to oral history
- A chapter outline and narrative description of the proposed pamphlet

### Send applications to:

Kathy Nasstrom  
Chair, Oral History Association Publications Committee  
Department of History  
University of San Francisco  
2130 Fulton St.  
San Francisco, CA 94117-1080

E-mailed applications are acceptable. Send to [nasstromk@usfca.edu](mailto:nasstromk@usfca.edu) (Microsoft Word attachments only, please.)

For more information, contact Kathy Nasstrom, 415-422-6074, or [nasstromk@usfca.edu](mailto:nasstromk@usfca.edu)

# 2010 OHA CONFERENCE THEME: "TIMES OF CRISIS, TIMES OF CHANGE:"

**OHA ANNUAL MEETING • OCTOBER 27-31**  
SHERATON DOWNTOWN • ATLANTA, GEORGIA

By *Rina Benmayor, Vice President/President-Elect*  
*David Reichard and Tomás Summers Sandoval, Program Co-Chairs*  
*Cliff Kubn and Hermina Glass Avery, Local Arrangements Co-Chairs*

In less than three months, we will come together in Atlanta for the 2010 Oral History Association annual meeting. The program, full schedule of sessions, and online registration information are now posted on the OHA website: [www.oralhistory.org](http://www.oralhistory.org). Take a look and start making plans. Be sure to book your transportation and accommodations early, as there will be several large conferences in Atlanta during the same dates, Oct. 27-31.

Atlanta is a perfect place to explore how oral histories can lend inspiration, spark debate and give perspective as we work to understand the complex meanings of crisis, change and transformation. It is an historic city defined by a vibrant and sometimes contested history of activism for civil and human rights. It is also a city that has been transformed by waves of rural to

urban migration, new immigration, urbanization and changes in the global economy, all of which have produced crisis, real or imagined, in local communities.

The program has been designed to reflect upon the past and to connect these lessons toward a more equitable and humane future. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the birth of the Atlanta Student Movement and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). These pivotal events in the black freedom struggle will be commemorated and explored in the **SATURDAY evening keynote panel of SNCC founders, Constance Curry, Lonnie King, Bernard LaFayette, Jr. and Judy Richardson.**, who will share their "Stories of Transformation: Reflections on the Atlanta Student Movement and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee."



*Judy Richardson*

## PLENARY SESSIONS

This year will feature three plenary sessions.

**THURSDAY's** plenary, "**Overcoming Katrina: Race Class and Hurricane Katrina**" commemorates the fifth anniversary with reflections by scholars and oral historians who conducted extensive research in the aftermath of the disaster.

On **FRIDAY** afternoon, "**A Nation of Immigrants: Human Rights, Labor Rights and Migration Politics in the 21st Century**" turns our gaze toward the struggle for meaningful solutions to what is becoming a human tragedy.

**SATURDAY's** plenary, "**Reclaiming our Stories: A Conversation with Organizers of LGBT Community-Based Oral History Projects,**" discusses the challenges and complexities of oral history work in LGBT communities.

## SPECIAL EVENTS



*The 198 String Band*

The program combines film clips from **Soul of a People**, a documentary on the Federal Writers' Project, and a live performance of songs and images of the **Depression and New Deal Era** by "**The 198 String Band**" (which includes our very own **OHA President Mike Frisch**) and a panel discussion including legendary folklorist and social activist, **Stetson Kennedy**.



*Brother Blue*

**THURSDAY** evening's **PRESIDENTIAL RECEPTION** will take place at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum and will include a special memorial tribute to our beloved late colleague, **Brother Blue**. The reception also includes a visit to the Carter museum, which offers interesting applications of creative technologies for historical installations.

**WEDNESDAY** evening's special event, "**Times of Crisis, Times of Change: Voices from the Great Depression,**" lends historical dimension to the conference theme. The program

combines film

At the **FRIDAY** lunch, award-winning journalist **Maria Hinojosa** will give the **lunch keynote: "Creating Trust and Opening Doors: One Journalist's Story,"** reflecting on the methodological, emotional and moral dimensions of gathering and representing stories in times of crisis and change.

The Atlanta meeting launches **two new programmatic features: a presidential panel and a book spotlight series.** The presidential panel signals one panel culled from the call for papers that particularly addresses the conference theme. This year, it is: "**SNCC and the African American Freedom Struggle: Using Oral History to Reshape the Narrative of the Freedom Movement,**" scheduled for **FRIDAY** morning.

**The second new feature is a book spotlight series,** highlighting some of the most vibrant examples of oral history books published in 2010, and giving us an opportunity to discuss and explore the works with the authors.

**Titles include:** *Freedom on the Border: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky* (K'Meyer and Fosl); *Speaking History: Oral Histories of the American Past, 1865-Present* (Armitage and Mercier); *Voices from the Gulag* (Geith and Jolluck); *Singing Out: An Oral History of America's Folk Music Revival* (Dunaway and Beer); *The Tuskegee Airmen of World War II* (Moye); *Overcoming Katrina: African American Voices from the Crescent City and Beyond* (Penner and Ferdinand); *Gendered Citizenships: Transnational Perspectives on Knowledge Production, Political Activism, and Culture* (Caldwell et. al.); *They Say in Harlan County* (Portelli); and the new edition of the *Oxford Handbook on Oral History* (Ritchie et. al.).

The customary authors' table and collective **book signings** will also be held.



*Maria Hinojosa*

# HUMAN VOICES ON THE EDGE OF TRANSFORMATION" • ATLANTA, GA

## WORKSHOPS

WEDNESDAY and SATURDAY morning offer an assortment of workshops, including the latest in hands-on practice in digital technologies, preservation, pedagogy, community projects and ethics and the law.

Several no-fee workshops are also scheduled throughout the conference, along with roundtable discussions, exhibitions, film screenings and a community showcase of oral history projects in and around Atlanta.

## TOURS

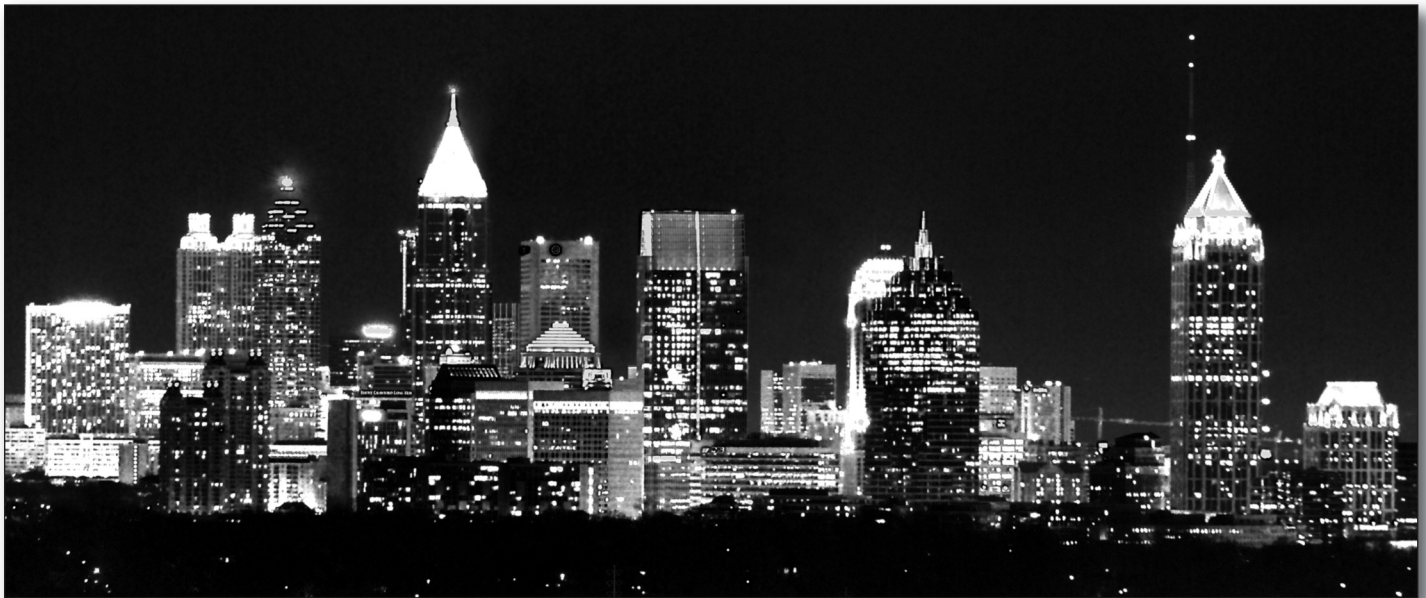
Finally, drawing on Atlanta's rich past, present and future, the local arrangements committee has planned **three tours for SATURDAY afternoon**:

- 1) **Civil Rights/Human Rights**, which includes visits to places along the historic Auburn Avenue and the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site, and the NAMES Project Foundation, home to the AIDS Memorial Quilt;
- 2) **El Nuevo New South**, a visit to two bustling commercial centers for Atlanta's new Mexican, Central American, Asian and South Asian communities; and
- 3) **The Atlanta BeltLine**, a tour of a model urban redevelopment project that includes transit, parks and trails, neighborhood preservation and revitalization, mixed-use development, affordable housing, public art and an arboretum.



*Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site*

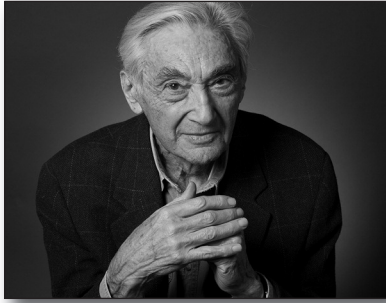
THE PROGRAM IS PACKED AND EXCITING, AND WE LOOK FORWARD TO SHARING IT WITH YOU IN ATLANTA!



## OHA THANKS CONFERENCE SPONSORS

A variety of organizations and educational institutions have generously provided support for the 2010 Oral History Association conference in Atlanta, and we offer them our thanks. Supporters include:

- Georgia Humanities Council
- National Center for Civil and Human Rights
- Instituto de México, Atlanta
- Georgia State University, Department of African-American Studies
- Georgia State University, Department of History
- Georgia Tech Living History Program
- Georgia Institute of Technology, School of History, Technology, and Society
- Kennesaw State University, Center for the Study of the Civil War Era
- Kennesaw State University, Department of History, Public History Program and Shaw Chair in History
- Emory University, Department of History
- Emory University, James Weldon Johnson Institute
- Emory University, Transforming Community Project
- Oxford University Press
- Palgrave MacMillan
- Eric Boehm Group
- Baylor University, Institute for Oral History



Howard Zinn, 1922-2010

people, women, people of color and organized social movements in shaping history. Students learn that history is made not by a few heroic individuals, but instead by people's choices and actions, thereby also learning that their own choices and actions matter.

We believe that through taking a more engaging and more honest look at the past, we can help equip students with the analytical tools to make sense of—and improve—the world today.

We start with the commonly taught stories in U.S. history, providing background information for teachers and hands-on activities for students. Through these lessons students don't just learn about participatory democracy, they get practice in critical analysis, decision making, negotiation, public speaking, defending their opinion and more.

This is a dramatic contrast to the textbook version of history. As one of the contributors to the [zinnedproject.org](http://zinnedproject.org) site, Ray Raphael, explains: "In textbooks students learn that a handful of celebrated personalities make things happen, the rest only tag along; a few write the scripts, the rest just deliver their lines. This turns history on its head. In reality, so-called leaders emerge from the people—they gain influence by expressing views that others espouse.

"In the telling of history, however, the genesis of leadership is easily forgotten. Textbook authors and popular history writers fail to portray the great mass of humanity as active players, agents on their own behalf. Supposedly, only leaders

tional textbooks and curricula, where the empowering potential of studying U.S. history is often lost in a textbook-driven trivial pursuit of names and dates.

The teaching activities and resources on the Zinn Education Project website emphasize the role of working

function as agents of history. They provide the motive force; without them, nothing would happen."

Raphael takes the American Revolution, taught in every elementary school in the U.S, as a case in point: "The famous Founders, we are told, made the American Revolution. ...If we teach our students that a few special people forged American freedom, we misrepresent, and even contradict, the spirit of the American Revolution. Our country owes its existence to the political activities of groups of dedicated patriots who acted in concert. Throughout the rebellious colonies, citizens organized themselves into an array of local committees, congresses and militia units that unseated British authority and assumed the reins of government. These revolutionary efforts could serve as models for the collective, political participation of ordinary citizens.

"Stories that focus on these models would confirm the original meaning of American patriotism: Government must be based on the will of the people. They would also show some of the dangers inherent in majoritarian democracy: the suppression of dissent and the use of jingoism to mobilize support and secure power. They would reflect what really happened, and they would reveal rather than conceal the dynamics of political struggle."

But even the most recent textbooks leave out this history. The Zinn Education Project teaching activities bring to life the more dynamic, accurate and complex history of the United States. A key component of many of the lessons are the firsthand accounts of history—diaries, speeches, letters and oral histories.

In addition to using oral histories in the teaching activities, some of the lessons engage students in deepening their understanding of key historical events by interviewing family and community members.

It is our hope that the Zinn Education Project website can be a place where many teachers share their stories and learn ways to bring more people's history into the classroom. It would be a fitting tribute to Howard Zinn, who died Jan. 27, 2010, but whose legacy lives on. ❖

## Using video in oral history

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In this article, I would like to talk about my experiences doing video oral histories. Since video technology is increasingly affordable and accessible, it is rapidly gaining acceptance for oral histories. I came to the oral history arena as a video producer. I've been producing video since the early 1990s. In those days I hired a production company that shot in Beta and edited from 1" videotape using a huge linear editing system. By 2000, I had gone digital. I had a Canon XL1 mini-digital video camera, and I was shooting my own footage for my own productions.

At about that time I met Doug Boyd, who then worked at the Kentucky Oral History Commission, and to whom I went for audio advice. With DV Mac computers and Final Cut Pro just hitting the market at affordable prices, I ventured into the digital editing realm. Following, there were many long days (and nights) of digital video editing when I cursed Doug Boyd's name for his complicity in encouraging me to enter this digital world after yet another one of my inadequate 5400 rpm

firewire hard drives had died, overloaded with too much video data. But I prevailed and overcame those early digital technology obstacles.

Much later, in 2006, I went to the Kentucky Oral History Commission with a proposal to do my first oral history project on Frankfort's historic Grand Theatre. The proposal received grant funding and I began doing interviews inside the theatre using video. Concurrently, as I was collecting these interviews, I took the Community Scholars training through the Kentucky Folklife Program. This training was invaluable. I learned the requirements for structuring the interview, including the simple task of a unified introduction (date, who, where, subject, etc.). I realized the importance of having a microphone on both the interviewer and the interviewee. And we practiced techniques for developing and asking good interview questions.

Since then, my video oral history projects have included the Buffalo Trace Distillery Oral History Project in conjunction



*The Grand Theatre, Frankfort Kentucky, after it closed in the mid 1960s.*

with the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky and the Cello Collection interviews in conjunction with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). Each of these projects has had a different set of sound, composition and lighting challenges.

In his book *Doing Oral History*, Donald Ritchie asks, “Considering all the expense and problems involved, is videotaping worth the effort?” The new Best Practices for Oral History Guidelines recently released by the Oral History Association emphasize the voice, suggesting that images be captured as appropriate: “Oral historians should use the best digital recording equipment within their means to reproduce the narrator’s voice accurately and if appropriate, other sounds as well as visual images.

So, to video or not to video?

It still depends on the project, the subject, the location and the technical expertise available. When I began working on “Stories from the Balcony” about the Grand Theatre in Frankfort, Ky., I knew that the visuals of the old theatre were really important, and I had the technical skills to videotape the interviews. In addition, I was lucky enough to have access to the rich oral history resources available here in Kentucky. So, for this project, video was a must.

The Grand Theatre was a vaudeville house from 1911 to 1941, a B-movie theater that showed a lot of cowboy movies from 1941 to 1966, and then a succession of downtown businesses until a nonprofit group, Save The Grand Theatre Inc., purchased the building and has since renovated it and opened it as Frankfort’s first Center for the Arts.

As a movie theater in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, the Grand played a particularly important, but controversial, role in the cultural life of Frankfort. For most of those decades it was the only place that African Americans could go to see a movie, and they were relegated to the balcony, while white movie-goers sat on the main level.

By 2006, all of Frankfort was talking about the old Grand Theatre because of the news of the restoration. Everyone had a really interesting story to tell. The Grand Theatre seemed to hold a lore of its own. I had a unique window of opportunity in which to capture oral histories connected to the theater since the balcony had been shut off and virtually untouched for nearly 40 years. The seats were gone, but old Milk Duds candy

wrappers were still lying on the balcony risers. In the basement, old movie posters were molding on the floor. The main level had changed, but the balcony was frozen in time.

Once the first few interviews were scheduled, I began planning out the details. I decided to do the interview in two parts: First, I would capture the person’s reaction as they looked around the theater for the first time in more than 40 years. Secondly, I would do a sit-down interview. When each person arrived, we chatted for a moment, laughing and setting a relaxed tone. I explained that I was going to clip a cordless microphone on them and that a videographer was going to follow us as we looked around the theater. The cordless microphone was connected to a Sony Z1U HD camera that had an on-board video light.

Then, the discovery began. Most people remembered how the theater used to have two entrances from the street. Blacks would buy their tickets on the right side of the box office and go in the door that led straight to a staircase and the balcony. Whites would buy their tickets on the left and go through the double doors into the main lobby. I showed everyone the main level of the theater first. It wasn’t really recognizable from its days as a theater. Business offices and cubicles had been built and the sloped theater floor had been filled in and leveled. Interviewees who were black they said they’d never been downstairs anyway. For the whites, they remembered sitting downstairs, and a few of them remembered going to the balcony with their black housekeepers when they were children.

Going up the stairs to the balcony with anyone who was African American was an exciting experience. This is where the light bulbs suddenly started popping. Memories came flooding back and the camera captured it. This strong reaction continued all along the hallway and into the theater balcony where they remembered where they sat, who they were there with, what they saw. The walk-around part of the interview usually took about 30 minutes and then we changed gears and moved to the sit-down interview.

Before the person arrived, I had arranged the interview set, positioning the Canon XL1 camera on a tripod and setting up the shot. I had someone sit in the chair while I worked on the lighting and the framing. The microphones and the mixer had been thoroughly tested, batteries charged and ready to go. We just had to switch the cordless microphone receiver from the Sony camera over to the Canon XL1, leaving the lavalier microphone on the person, and I put a lavalier microphone on myself. We then settled in for interviews that usually lasted between 30 minutes and an hour and a half.

For those sit-down interviews, I normally ran the camera and



*Sheila Mason from “Stories from the Balcony” at The Grand Theatre, Frankfort, Ky., 2006.*

## Using video in oral history

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the sound and as well as conducted the interviews. However, that has its challenges. If you can get someone who knows what they're doing to run the camera and monitor the sound levels, that would be ideal. You must continually check your shot. People will adjust themselves as the interview progresses. You'll look at your viewfinder and find that the person has tilted halfway out of the shot or sunk down in the chair.



*Bernard Greenhouse, founding cellist of the Beaux Arts Trio, with his Stradivarius cello. Cape Cod, 2009.*

I separate the two voices onto two audio channels for greater control in post-production. Lavalier microphones work well but can cause problems. Clothing, jewelry and body movements can create a rustling or clinking sound. I always wear a headset during the interview so I can listen for these kinds of sounds or other distracting noises like fans, motors or people next door. If there is a disruptive technical issue, I pause the interview, fix the problem and then continue.

I tried quite a few different setups for the sit-down interviews. Some worked better than others. I always want evidence of the location in the shot. For instance, on the wall of the balcony, even though the seats were gone, you could see where someone had painted around the arms of the seats. The pipe railings also established the location. I was the happiest with the balcony setup when the person could look to his or her right and glance up the rows into the balcony or look left toward the screen. You could see the memories appearing across their faces.

But I didn't end up doing all of the interviews in the balcony. There were some problems: it was dirty and dusty and it looked really dreary, although the added lighting made the footage valuable enough. I had to run long extension cords, and as winter set in it was really cold up there. I did some of the interviews downstairs with the 1940s stenciled motifs as a background. But as the winter deepened, I moved the interviews into the lobby, which was warm. The lobby has a colorful historic wall that looked great as a background. It was from the theater's first incarnation as a vaudeville house, which added another dimension to the story.

My ultimate goal is still to create a one-hour documentary out of "Stories from the Balcony," but in the meantime, interview clips and a short historical film will be put online. The project has received support from the Kentucky Oral History Commission, the Grand Theatre and the Kentucky Foundation for Women, encouraging my continued work on this project. Meanwhile, the full collection is archived at the Kentucky Historical Society, a repository that is able to handle various video formats.

If you are planning to do video interviews, think beyond the camera. And unless you do a lot of video work, get a videographer to assist you. You can get such great consumer camcorders

these days but what really counts are the extras—good audio and good lighting. You'll need a professional tripod with a floating head. And, like any recording equipment, really KNOW your camera. Is your viewfinder accurate? Know your VU meters so you can be sure your sound is not peaking or too low and study video lighting diagrams online.

Ask yourself, why are you doing the interview in the location you have selected? What will the location tell the viewer about the individual and the topic of discussion? Will it add or detract from the history? Can you compose a good shot within the confines of the space and how will you light the person and the room? Harsh shadows or washed out light are distracting. Really take time with the composition of your shot—check for balance, texture and color and adjust background objects as needed.

Each project will have a different set of challenges. But all interviews must have excellent sound. Choose your microphones carefully. For instance, if your narrator is a musician or needs to demonstrate an activity, you will have to consider how movement will affect the sound and whether you'll need a supplemental microphone for the instrument or other activity.

In my recent video interview with Bernard Greenhouse, who plays a beautiful Stradivarius cello, I used an additional condenser microphone dedicated to the cello, and I was careful to pin the lavalier away from the neck of the cello. With the Greenhouse interview all we planned to achieve was a video oral history interview with the 93-year-old cellist, shot at his house on Cape Cod. But what we got was three days of interviews, students, cello lessons and boxes of precious letters, photos and memorabilia from his stellar career. This project is an example of the dimension that video can add, because out of the material shot over those days I have made a beautiful short film. The University of North Carolina at Greensboro will add this film to its cello music collection, use it in presentations and put on its website.

I love working with video on these oral history projects and here are my technical priorities as I do my planning: 1) excellent sound for both interviewer and interviewee, 2) good lighting on the narrator and in the room, 3) a meaningful setting, 4) a well-composed shot and 5) a reference shot of the narrator, the interviewer and the camera to establish place and circumstance.

Be sure to work closely with a repository in your area that has the capacity to archive your video formats. Video is notoriously fragile and the resulting digital file sizes are too large for some repositories to handle, especially with the proliferation of High Definition footage.

The foundation of all oral histories is the story. And the way oral historians are capturing the stories is changing. If well done, a video oral history can not only document the story but shed additional light on the story through facial expressions, hand gestures and a physical response to the setting itself, creating additional uses beyond the archive.

As a filmmaker and video producer, using video is a natural for me. For many others, collecting high quality video interviews is doable, even though it is not suitable for all projects. With technical experience, by drawing from professional oral history resources in your area and using best practices, video can tell a great story. ❖

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Joanna Hay is a filmmaker, oral history videographer and arts consultant.



# In Remembrance...

## Tribute to Joan Morrison

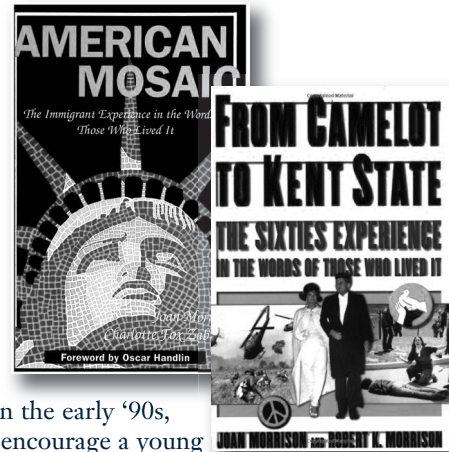
By Carole Garibaldi Rogers

Joan Morrison, author of two classic collections of oral histories, died Feb. 18, 2010, at the age of 87. We had been friends and professional colleagues for more than 30 years. Joan, with co-author Charlotte Fox Zabusky, wrote *American Mosaic: The Immigrant Experience in the Words of Those Who Lived It*, and with her son, Robert K. Morrison, wrote *From Camelot to Kent State: The Sixties Experience in the Words of Those Who Lived It*.

For Joan, oral history was always focused on the narrators. She followed in the footsteps of two men she considered her mentors—Studs Terkel, from her hometown of Chicago, and Ronald Blythe, the English author of *Akenfield*, whom she came to know as a friend.

She brought to her work a probing curiosity and a gentle demeanor that allowed her to ask the important questions, no matter how sensitive. She expected answers and usually got them, as her two collections attest. Co-author Robert says his mother believed: “People will tell you amazing things. You just have to ask.”

Joan received her undergraduate degree in anthropology from the University of Chicago and became a freelance journalist, writing for a variety of publications over the years from *Mademoiselle* to *The New York Times*. When she combined her journalistic skills with her interviewing talents, the memorable result was nuanced oral history that captured depth in her narrators but also the wider world in which they moved.



Joan had another quality I much admired: she honored the trust people had placed in her and was committed to sharing their stories. I remember one meeting, sometime in the early '90s, when she wanted to encourage a young writer. She arrived with a thick folder containing the more than two dozen rejection letters she had received before finding a publisher for *American Mosaic*. She couldn't give up, she said, when the immigrants in her oral histories, who had endured so much, had trusted her with their stories.

She was right to persevere. In 1980, the year it was published, *American Mosaic* was named a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year. A series of dramatic readings, excerpted from the immigrants' oral histories and presented at Ellis Island and other locations around the country culminated in a performance at the White House, which Joan was thrilled to attend. She continued to lecture and do readings from both books at colleges, libraries and community centers until a month before she died. ❖

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Carole Garibaldi Rogers, an independent oral historian and member of the Oral History Association for nearly two decades, is the author of **Poverty, Chastity and Change: Lives of Contemporary American Nuns**. First published in 1996, a second edition of the oral history collection will be published next year by Oxford University Press.

## Bracero oral history project

continued from page 3

was creating a labor shortage for which they needed temporary low-wage workers. An estimated 4.6 million Mexicans came to the United States under the guest worker program.

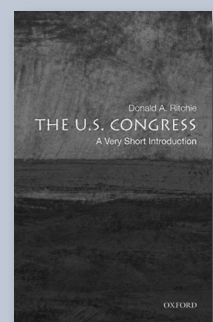
The migrant worker program theoretically contained safeguards for domestic workers assuring that the Mexican workers would be hired only in cases of domestic labor shortages and that the braceros would be guaranteed a minimum wage, adequate housing and decent meals, among other requirements. But the rules were often ignored.

The Bracero History Archive includes a section of particular interest to teachers, and notes that the material lends itself to the study of many different subjects, including immigration, history, geography, economics and world cultures. Materials for teachers include lessons for using the photographs, documents and oral histories on the website to trace the lives of the braceros as well as the legislative history of the program. ❖

## Donald A. Ritchie's newest book published

U.S. Senate Historian and past OHA president Donald A. Ritchie is the author of *The U.S. Congress: A Very Short Introduction*, the latest in Oxford University Press' *Very Short Introductions* series, which now numbers more than 250 titles.

Ritchie's book, published in June, reflects his 30 years' experience on Capital Hill, and is regarded as a must-read for anyone interested in understanding the basics of how Congress really works. ❖



# State & Regional News

## Oral historians document SNCC reunion at Shaw University

By Seth Kotch, Southern Oral History Program

On Easter Sunday in 1960, students from across the South gathered at Shaw University in Raleigh, N.C., to create a temporary organization to harness the energy of the sit-in movement that began in February. They gave it a name, in part as an incentive to keep in touch once they headed home: the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

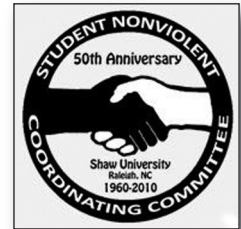
As the name suggests, the organization was intended at first only to coordinate the various efforts of various players in the movement. Instead, SNCC became one of the most influential and effective civil rights organizations of the 1960s, penetrating deep into the segregated South.

Fifty years later, many of those involved with SNCC gathered again at Shaw at an event that was equal parts academic conference, celebration, reunion and planning session for the next social revolution. It was a remarkable gathering of some of the most thoughtful and courageous leaders in the civil rights movement, who have never stopped debating their goals and their identities.

A combined team of oral historians from the Southern Oral History Program and Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies captured some of those goals and identities and explored how they have changed over the course of 50 years.

We set up shop on the Shaw campus—next to Harry Belafonte's film crew—and conducted video and audio oral history interviews with 17 SNCC civil rights movement veterans, including: CORE as well as SNCC workers, one man who went undercover among white anti-integrationists, some of the first SNCC volunteers, those who connected their civil rights work to the women's movement, and historian Taylor Branch on his own movement experiences and motivations.

Researchers at the Southern Oral History Program and Duke's documentary studies center are still embroiled in the complex job of processing these video and audio files, but we will soon be able to share them online through our university library catalogs at our newly revamped website, [www.sohp.org](http://www.sohp.org). ❖



## Hawaiian book collects oral histories

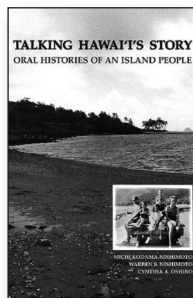
The Center for Oral History and the Center for Biographical Research at the University of Hawaii at Manoa recently published *Talking Hawai'i's Story: Oral Histories of an Island People*, an anthology of 29 oral history interviews from the center's collections.

The book was edited by Michi Kodama-Nishimoto, Warren Nishimoto and Cynthia Oshiro.

The social and cultural history documented in the book includes the sights and sounds of territorial Waikiki, the sense of community in various Hawaii locations and the experiences of a German national interned by the military government after Pearl Harbor.

Actors performed readings from the oral histories at a program introducing the book last fall.

For more information about the book, contact the Center for Oral History at: [wnishimo@hawaii.edu](mailto:wnishimo@hawaii.edu) or 808-956-6259. The book is available from the University of Hawaii Press at [www.uhpress.hawaii.edu](http://www.uhpress.hawaii.edu). ❖



## Northwest Oral History Association meeting set for November

The Northwest Oral History Association will join the 63rd Annual Pacific Northwest History Conference Nov. 3-5 in Spokane, Wash. This year's theme is "Game Changers and History Makers: Women in the Pacific Northwest."

The program is intended to commemorate the centennial of women's suffrage in Washington and explore women's influence of women in the Pacific Northwest in various arenas.

Historians, museum professionals, teachers, archivists, historic preservationists, community activists and history buffs are all welcome.

NOHA will hold its annual meeting during the conference and will sponsor a workshop on basic oral history skills.

For more information, contact Shanna Stevenson, program committee co-chair, at the Washington State Historical Society. She can be reached at: [sstevenson@wshs.wa.gov](mailto:sstevenson@wshs.wa.gov) or at 360-586-0170. ❖

**The OHA newsletter welcomes your contributions of state and regional news.**

## Wisconsin Oral History Day focuses on Jewish life

By Troy Reeves, University of Wisconsin-Madison

The third annual Wisconsin Oral History Day, sponsored by the University of Wisconsin-Madison, continued its goal of bringing oral history to Wisconsin communities with its March 28-29 oral history program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Golda Meir Library and the Jewish Museum Milwaukee.

A Sunday panel session, Works Concluded and in Progress: Jewish Oral History in Wisconsin, was hosted by Jewish Museum Milwaukee and included: moderator Jonathan Pollack, a Madison Area Technical College history instructor; Jewish Museum Milwaukee director Kathie Bernstein; Leon Cohen from the Wisconsin Small Jewish Communities History Project; Matt Blessing from Marquette University, and Troy Reeves of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The next day, March 29, featured a morning workshop, Oral History and the One-Person Shop, presented by Julia Stringfellow, archivist at Lawrence University. J. Todd Moye, associate professor of history and public history at North Texas University, presented a keynote talk about his book, *Freedom Flyers*, about the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II. History professor Stephen Kercher from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh commented on Moye's presentation and discussed his own recent work, The Black Thursday Oral History Project.

About 60 people, including academic historians, archivists, librarians, public historians, professional oral historians, undergraduates and graduate students, radio producers and the interested history buffs, attended the Wisconsin Oral History Day activities. ❖

## Michigan Oral History Association plans workshop

The Michigan Oral History Association has scheduled an oral history workshop on Sept. 11 in partnership with the Harbor Springs History Museum in Harbor Springs, Mich. The workshop will be at the museum's Anton Library on Main Street. For more information, contact Geneva Wiskemann at [gwiskemann@arq.net](mailto:gwiskemann@arq.net) or contact the museum at [info.harborspringhistory.org](http://info.harborspringhistory.org). ❖

## Baltimore arts organization interviews black tennis players

African-American tennis players in Baltimore were once separated by Jim Crow laws from white players in the city's public parks. Harriet Lynn, producer and artistic director of Heritage Theatre Artists' Consortium in Baltimore, is telling their stories by conducting oral history interviews with some of those black tennis pioneers.

Their efforts were part of the growth of junior and adult tennis opportunities in the early civil rights movement.

The arts consortium is planning to showcase some of their stories at a program marking the 150th anniversary of Baltimore's Druid Hill Park, scheduled for October.

For more information, contact Lynn at [hlynn@umbc.edu](mailto:hlynn@umbc.edu). ❖

## LSU uses podcasts to share oral history interviews

The T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History at Louisiana State University offers Web users a potpourri of interviews from its extensive collection in the form of podcasts available at <http://oralhistory.blogs.lib.lsu.edu>.

The selection offers interview excerpts on a wide array of topics. Recent podcasts focus on aspects of LSU's sesquicentennial, including traditional campus stories and LSU buildings.

One podcast titled "All of a Sudden All These Dames Show Up: Coeducation and Desegregation" explores the role of women in changing the demographics at LSU, including excerpts from oral histories of some of the first women who lived in Smith Hall in the 1930s and, 30 years later, some of the first African-American women to live on campus.

Earlier podcasts introduce the range of subjects in the LSU oral history collection, including interviews with a Vietnam War helicopter pilot, a 115-year-old woman who recalls slavery in Louisiana and a tobacco farmer.

A podcast titled "When Boys Began to Leave" highlights what Louisianians did in World War II, including excerpts from interviews with a highly decorated Marine Corps general, a man who helped liberate a concentration camp, a man who witnessed the aftermath of the atomic bomb and a Japanese POW survivor.

In another episode, titled "We Watched Everything Wash Away: Storms, Floods and Levee Breaks," listeners can hear firsthand accounts of disasters dating from a 1927 flood and Hurricanes Audrey and Betsy.

For more information about the LSU podcasts, contact Jennifer Abraham, director of the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History at the LSU Libraries Special Collections. She can be reached at: [jabrah1@lsu.edu](mailto:jabrah1@lsu.edu) or 225-578-7439. ❖



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## News & Notes ...

### Australian group to focus on communities of memory

The Oral History Association of Australia invites proposals for workshops, panels and individual presentations at its biennial conference, set for Sept. 30 to Oct. 2, 2011 in Melbourne. The conference theme is Communities of Memory, and sub-themes will focus on activist communities, war memories, generational communities, ethical issues, new technologies and memory work in creative and fictional writing, among others.

For more information, contact the conference organizers at: [ohaa2011@gmail.com](mailto:ohaa2011@gmail.com) or visit the conference website at <http://sites.google.com/site/communitiesofmemory/home>.

The deadline for proposals is **Oct. 31**.

### Mile High City to be OHA's next host

After enjoying all that the 2010 OHA conference in Atlanta has to offer, be sure to mark your calendar for the 2011 OHA meeting in Denver, Oct. 12-16 at the Denver Renaissance Hotel. Look for program details and calls for papers in the next **OHA Newsletter**.

### Yale University oral historian retires

Vivian Perlis, founder and director of Yale University's Oral History of American Music and award-winning author of numerous publications about 20th century American composers, has stepped down. She will be succeeded by Libby Van Cleve, who has been associate director of OHAM since 2000.

Perlis, now a senior research scholar at the Yale School of Music, planted the seeds for the OHAM in 1968 when, as a reference librarian at Yale's Music Library, she began interviewing people who had known and worked with composer Charles Ives. Those interviews grew into an award-winning book, *Charles Ives Remembered*, and set the stage for OHAM, a center for systematically using oral history interviews to document composers' work. OHAM's collection now includes more than 2,000 interviews with more than 900 people.

In addition to continuing her work as a consultant and lecturer in American music, Perlis also will continue as vice president of the Aaron Copland Fund for Music and the Charles Ives Society.

Visit [www.oralhistory.org](http://www.oralhistory.org) for more information