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PRESIDENT'S LETTER





Reflections on a presidential term

By Tomás Summers Sandoval

With my term as president soon coming to an end, I find myself reflecting on the last few years of my involvement in the Oral History Association. In this, my last President's Column, I'd like to share some of

those thoughts.

I first joined Council in 2020, during the pandemic, just after we had made the pivot to an online conference. It was an uncertain time, but one that soon proved the strength and creativity of the OHA. In just two years, here is some of what we did: hosted two amazing online conferences; secured \$825,000 in National Endowment for the Humanities funds to support vital oral history projects; redesigned the OHA committee structure to meet future needs; and oversaw an unprecedented growth of our endowment. Each step we took was guided by the strategic plan our members endorsed, a dynamic commitment to respect, inclusivity, quality, sustainability and transparency.

Moving through these years as the first vice president, then president-elect, and now president, I've seen first-hand how the things the OHA accomplished relied on the talented (and dedicated!) folks running our Executive Office and our leadership team, as well as YOU, our members. The OHA is an all-volunteer organization, from our committees to our task forces to our leadership. Everything that happens in the organization is the result of the scores and scores of volunteers who give of their time, energy and expertise.

That community of volunteer oral history practitioners has made our continuing growth over this past year possible, too. We started the year transitioning our Executive Office to its new home (and team) at Baylor University. We organized the upcoming conference in Baltimore; continued work on the 2024 meeting in Cincinnati; and secured a location for 2025 and, perhaps, 2026.

We hired a new editorial team for the *Oral History Review*, the flagship journal of our field. OHA committees and task forces generated amazing things for the benefit of our members and organization, like the new document on tenure and promotion and a forthcoming survey of our membership. We started a major overhaul of the OHA website, the fruits of which you'll see in early 2024. And we continued to focus on building lively and inclusive forms of community within the OHA by sponsoring in-person meet-ups, hosting online professional events and making a special push to increase membership at historically black colleges and universities.

And at our Baltimore meeting you'll hear more about the commitment we've made to put our money where our proverbial mouths are. This fall we'll launch a major campaign to create an endowed fund to support Indigenous oral historians and Indigenous-led oral history projects within and for Indigenous communities. Be on the look-out for more information on the OHA's Indigenous Initiative.

Serving as the president of the Oral History Association has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my professional life. I want to thank you, our members, for your support over these past few years. It has made all our success possible. And a special thanks goes to those of you who volunteered to serve on our committees, task forces and—especially—on the OHA's Council. Everything we've accomplished in the past year is a testament to you.

There are exciting things in store for the OHA. I hope you'll continue to be a part of it, and to let us know how we can better serve your oral history needs in the future.



DIRECTORS' COLUMN



OHA's vibrant year of change

By Stephen Sloan

It has been quite the summer for us here at OHA Central. We have been busy planning for the upcoming annual meeting and look forward to seeing all of you at the Hyatt Regency on Baltimore's Inner Harbor, Oct. 18-21. Please make a special note to get up early on Saturday, Oct. 21 for the business meeting where we will go in-depth on the operations of the OHA.

On my trip to Baltimore in May, I was struck by how great a location we are in to access the variety of food, sites and experiences the city has to offer. The program committee has assembled a compelling program and it will be a fantastic conference!

This summer we have also been helping the *Oral History Review* transition to its next editorial team. Holly Werner-Thomas and Robert LaRose are in place as editor and copy editor, and we launched a search for a managing editor and book review editor to round out that team. Please spread the word as [applications for those positions close Sept. 15](#). We look forward to what the new team brings while we express our gratitude for the excellent work of the outgoing editorial team of Dave Caruso, Abby Perkiss and Janneken Smucker.

I also attended the International Oral History Association meeting in July hosted by the School of Social Sciences of the Getulio Vargas Foundation and the Center for Research and Documentation of Contemporary Brazilian History. The conference in Rio de Janeiro was fabulous, and it was great to see so many OHA members there discussing their work. The OHA also provided \$4,000 in scholarship assistance to enable international scholars to attend this first face-to-face IOHA meeting since 2018 in Finland. Please note the next IOHA gathering will be in summer 2025 in Kraków hosted by the Polish Oral History Association.

As we roll into the fall semester for many of you based on campuses, I'd like to remind you of the important document published this past spring, "[Guidelines for the Evaluation of Professional or Academic Oral Historians](#)." This resource can prove very useful for those experiencing promotion, tenure or other types of academic review. It offers information and assistance to reviewers, but also helps oral historians better contextualize their contributions within their organizations' or employers' rubrics for evaluation. It is a useful tool produced through many years of effort, and I encourage you to put it to work for you.

I'd also like to take a moment to thank our OHA partner members. The support and network provided through these varied groups is essential to our health as an organization. You can see the current list at the end of this newsletter. This year, we have already established a record 38 partner members with four months to go for 2023. You can find out more about our partners [here](#) and the ways in which they are contributing to the oral history community. If you'd like to become a partner member, just follow this [link](#).

While I continue to use the "I'm new here" excuse often, it has been a great year so far, and I feel we have been able to move the operations of the OHA forward in many important ways. As we work to best serve the leadership and membership of our organization, we are grateful for the many ways in which you serve and contribute alongside us.



Get ready for a big dose of oral history, Baltimore history and fun at OHA fall conference

It's too late to be an early bird, but if you have not yet registered for the Oct. 18-21 Oral History Association conference in Baltimore, now is the time to do so. **Register [here](#).**

Set for the Hyatt Regency Baltimore Inner Harbor Hotel, the conference features: more than 120 concurrent sessions, five pre-conference workshops, two plenary sessions, a keynote speaker, Baltimore history tours, book signing by OHA authors, plenty of chances to meet longtime friends and colleagues and to make new ones at informal receptions and deep dives into current issues in oral history. And if you're an early riser, there's also the annual business meeting scheduled for 6:45 a.m. on Saturday. (Breakfast will be provided, along with lots of coffee for the non-morning people.)

Conference sessions explore dozens of themes, including:

- Oral history in education, from project management to oral history in STEM and the long-term impact of classroom oral history projects
- Oral history in museums and public libraries
- Pandemic oral history
- Environmental issues, from oral history in climate negotiations to oral history of the Alaska Highway
- Military history and veterans' history
- African American oral history themes
- Interviewing dilemmas and co-interviewing
- Working conditions for oral historians
- Reproductive justice, queer theory and rural queer communities

Other intriguing conference sessions explore interviews with displaced Armenians, food service workers, auto plant retirees in Southern California, African American funeral homes and women in the bourbon industry.

The pre-conference workshops offer opportunities to learn about project planning, budget-friendly equipment and software, metadata tools and techniques for innovative uses of oral history online and with diverse communities. Learn more about the **pre-conference workshops [here](#)**. Register and pay for workshops when you submit your conference registration.

The conference registration form also allows you to sign up for one of four themed walking tours and a bus tour of Baltimore to immerse yourself in the history of this nearly 300-year-old city. Find more details about tours and other events [here](#).

And in what's likely a first for an OHA conference, the four-day event wraps up with a block party from 4-7:30 p.m. Shuttle buses will take OHA members from the Hyatt hotel to the University of Baltimore campus at Mt. Royal and Maryland Avenue to celebrate and enjoy each other's company.



EDITOR'S NOTE

The *OHA Newsletter* has instituted a regular feature on OHA volunteers who serve as the backbone of the organization, exemplifying the

energy, enthusiasm and creativity it takes to keep volunteer associations like OHA alive and growing. The following features Daisy Herrera, an active OHA volunteer who is pursuing a history Ph.D. at the University of California, Riverside. If you would like to suggest someone for this feature, please contact the editor at: ohaeditor@gmail.com.

Volunteer Spotlight:

DAISY HERRERA



How and when did you first get involved with oral history?

I was introduced to oral history by my father. He noticed I began taking interest in the family's history because I was always asking questions about his childhood and the family's lineage. His stories about Mexican Revolutionary Pancho Villa arriving to my great-great-great-grandmother's small village and his father's experience during the Bracero Program of World War II always caught my attention and curiosity.

I was then be introduced to the field of oral history during my graduate years at the California State University, Los Angeles while taking courses with Chicana/o historians Francisco Balderrama and Dionne Espinoza. I did not consider getting involved with oral history until I began interviewing folks tracing their family's lineage to key figures of the Mexican Revolution. This ultimately turned into my first paper presentation for the OHA, and I now use oral histories to fill in the archival gaps on the ethnic Mexican history of Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley.

How and when did you first get involved with the OHA?

I saw the OHA's 2016 call for papers for the conference in Long Beach, California. I was then working on my own attempting to strengthen my CV for when I would decide to apply for Ph.D. programs and gave a presentation on the Mexican Revolution's legacies through family oral histories. I featured my father's stories and those of two former co-workers, one whose stepfather was the cousin of Francisco Madero and the other whose family connected to Porfirio Diaz.

After my presentation, I came across the *Oral History Review* table where I was encouraged to write a book review for them. I did not know what that would entail, but it put me on a path toward being a competitive Ph.D. applicant with six book review publications. A few years later, I submitted an interest to join the Diversity Committee to gain volunteer experience within a scholarly organization. And the rest, as they say, is history.

What OHA activities have you been involved with? Why those particular ones?

I have written a handful of book reviews for the *OHR* and have volunteered with the Diversity Committee, the National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship and Mini-

Grant Review Committee, and I just ended my term as chair for the Emerging Crises Mini-Grant Committee.

Currently, I am part of the Program Committee for this year's conference, am working with the Equity Audit Taskforce, and will help develop and co-chair the rising Chicano/Latino Caucus of Oral Historians to strengthen our ethnic representation within the OHA.

What has been the most rewarding aspect of volunteering for OHA?

The networking component has been indescribable and important for my current studies. During my first OHA conference, no one recognized me, and I felt out of place among folks that excitedly knew and greeted each other. Within 7 years, my OHA networking circle has grown, and the conference has become my favorite to attend. The organization also introduced me to the Southwest Oral History Association where I am currently the first vice president and will be chairing the 2024 conference set to take place at the University of California, Riverside. Stay tuned for more information!

What has been most challenging about OHA volunteering?

Wanting to do it all! I wish I could continue volunteering with certain committees but needed to step down to shift my focus to other volunteering tasks.

What advice would you give to an OHA newcomer about becoming an OHA volunteer?

We broaden our circles and strengthen our networks by speaking up. Don't be afraid to approach an attendee or presenter and introduce yourself, especially if their work resonates with you. OHA attendees are very friendly and are eager to talk to folks. After all, this is the foundation of our work! Also, volunteering for a scholarly organization looks really good on a CV.

Other thoughts to share or stand-out memories from your OHA volunteer experiences?

Volunteering also takes shape in writing book reviews, and they look good on a CV!



**Sankofa:
The Samuel Proctor Oral History
Program and Stop WOKE Act**

By Ariel Urim Chung, Columbia University

In April 2022, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed Florida House Bill 7, also known as the [“Stop W.O.K.E. Act.”](#) The bill bans teaching of critical race theory, prompting educators, students and scholars to rise for academic freedom. University of Florida's [Paul Ortiz](#), OHA past president, head of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program (SPOHP) and president of United Faculty of Florida, has been part of this movement, illustrating the power of oral history with education.

On Feb. 23, [The Samuel Proctor Oral History Program](#) (SPOHP), University of Florida's oral history program, organized a Black studies teach-in, titled [Can't Ban Us](#), highlighting speeches from several professors, scholars, activists and students. The teach-in was greeted with much enthusiasm which [Kenneth Nunn](#), a legal studies professor who taught critical race theory for decades at the institution, encapsulated in his speech:

“Sankofa means history...It comes from an Akan word from Ghana that was so significant in African culture that they said, ‘We're going to make a symbol of that!...Sankofa. It's a bird that's reaching back and touching its feathers. It's a bird that's there because everybody wants...you to know just from looking at the symbol how important it is to remember your history. To remember where you came from. And that's a natural thing. That's a universal

thing...Every culture in this society knows history is important. So when we're saying we can't study African-American history or we can't study Black history, what we're saying is that a more, most fundamental principle of human reality - we're going to take that away...You can learn about queer ducks. But we're not going to allow you to learn Black history." (See the speech here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xF_u7y3Oz64 01:40:00)

The 3-hour teach-in featured participants from various fields - health, linguistics, oral history, queerness, education, law - demonstrating the definition of critical race theory (CRT). The theory scrutinizes how race is a social construct and has informed the makings of various systems. Then why has critical race theory become a sore point in DeSantis' campaign? Nunn critically points out that CRT is simply a "placeholder" for political endeavors that do not consider what the theory ought to offer in education.

"The bottom line is, these people don't know what it is, but they don't care what it is because it's a *placeholder*. It doesn't matter. It could be critical race theory today. It could be Black power tomorrow. It could be whatever... It has nothing to do with facts. It has nothing to do with learning. It has nothing to do with having the smorgasbord in the so-called marketplace of ideas for you to select from, for you to take the things that matter to you."

Banning critical race theory and soon mandating Asian American and Pacific Islanders history education further confirmed that education is DeSantis' tool to distract and fractionate solidarity efforts within the BIPOC community. It is an action that says Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) are not racialized; their histories are not affected by understanding of race as social. This move to enforce a model minority stance on AAPI enrages the AAPI community.

In the efforts to protect academic freedom in Florida, Ortiz emphasizes the importance of collective action through the connections between oral history, student activism (and [Dream Defenders](#)) and collective bargaining. This is not new to the University of Florida; history has been protected by students. The university's African American Studies program was founded as a result of continuous student activism led by Black students in 1969, according to the Report of the Presidential Task Force on African American and Native American History and the University of Florida. Black Thursday, campus-wide protests led by Black students in 1971, resulted in the creation of the Institute for Black Culture and inspired future intersectional student-led movements.

Within these student-centered organizing efforts, the SPOHP has various ongoing projects that innovatively use oral history as a medium for students to learn and communicate with corresponding communities. For example:

- [Mississippi Freedom Project](#) centers on an annual fieldwork trip through the Mississippi Delta with oral histories ranging from linguistics of African American Vernacular English, health and food rights and immigrant rights. The collection has 300 oral histories that include firsthand testimonies of civil rights activists from Freedom Summer.
- [Reanimating African American Histories of the Gulf South, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities](#), devises a reciprocal relationship between oral history and education. Using oral histories from the Joel Buchanan African American Oral History Archive, K-12 teachers create a curriculum. Additionally, the University of Florida linguistics department is creating an AI program that better transcribes oral histories with African American language features.

While DeSantis' campaign is not retiring, it evades the possibility of critical thinking of race that allows space for growth and reason. Discomfort can inform us much more than comfort about inequality in social structures. The recent teach-in, the University of Florida's past and continuous efforts by students, professors and community members makes this clear: SPOHP offers a resistant programming on how to build a future through searching oneself in history - one that is a fundamental right to any society.

For further actions, Ortiz emphasizes the importance of Black studies “due to the recent ban and horrific alteration of Black history standards in Florida. In response to student demand across the country, we developed workshop materials at SPOHP to assist students and activists in developing their own Black history teach-ins with links to SPOHP resources. The teach-in provides a confidence-building, collective activity that brings communities together.”

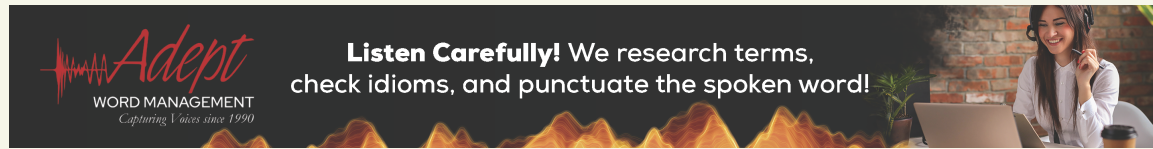


Photo by Stephen Sloan

Report from Rio de Janeiro: The 2023 International Oral History Association Conference

By Martha Norkunas, Middle Tennessee State University

The International Oral History Conference was held in Rio de Janeiro July 25-28, with 149 people from 37 countries attending. IOHA was able to fund eight scholars from six countries to attend the conference, thanks in part to a contribution from the Oral History Association.

The conference was dynamic, with topics as far ranging and internationally significant as oral histories with Ukrainian refugees fleeing into Poland to the fragility of thousands of hours of digitally preserved oral histories in archives around the world.

Each morning began with strong, hot coffee and cakes, followed by a plenary session. The plenaries combined established scholars in the field with emerging oral historians from around the world. Some questioned the impact of digital technologies on the construction of life histories (memory permeated and haunted by media representation) while others wondered what the impact of AI and ChatGPT will be.

There were panels examining the stories of workers who were laid off from what they thought would be lifetime jobs, the everyday life of Roma in Romania, Indigenous histories grappling with legacies of colonialism, women's bodies at the center of modernization and national identity, oral history during the pandemic in Brazil, Mexico and Argentina and the impact of going digital on memory and narration (the screen space and the personal interaction space are different).

The audience questioned the possibility of building an experiment of equality in oral history using technology and online tools. Others asked how the history of the present is accelerated and questioned the relationship between new audio and visual worlds to the worldwide feminist movement. Is there an Argentinian, a Mexican, a Brazilian oral history, or should oral historians be thinking intercontinentally? What impact does globalization, especially via digital technology, have on oral history and memory? How do oral historians intersect with the construction of digital memory platforms?

Participants spoke of working classes, of indigeneity, of women, of oppressed communities worldwide and of the possibilities of oral history in those communities. They wondered how their memory of the past and their stories about that past will be affected by digital technology and what dangers it poses, including the malicious alteration of audio and video online. They reflected on the problem of violence that is so deeply rooted in the daily lives of so many. Others showcased successful, community-based projects that combined oral history audio, person-to-person meetings, online exhibits and films, digital storytelling and group reunions.

One colleague suggested that IOHA become an official organization under UNESCO. There was a discussion of oral history as significant intangible cultural heritage that should be protected.

The conference also included an excursion to the Museum of Tomorrow in Rio as well as a night of dinner and dancing. There was a warm air of conviviality, thanks to the organizing committee, especially Bernardo Buargue and Vivian Fonseca.

The IOHA elected a new council. OHA member Leslie McCartney (Canadian) was elected as one of two vice presidents, and OHA member Martha Norkunas (U.S.) was elected as the North American representative to IOHA. David Beorlegui of Spain was reelected president of IOHA.

Present at the conference was OHA Executive Director Stephen Sloan and OHA member and former IOHA president Mark Cave. Many other OHA members also were present, contributing their ideas and energy to the conference's success.

The final panel was an overview of the history of the almost 27 years of IOHA, from its beginnings in 1996 with a mostly European group of oral historians to its current iteration of representatives from 10 regions of the world. Deciding to be a bilingual organization—English and Spanish—ensured that IOHA would not be Anglocentric, but instead a truly international organization. The conference has been held in Sweden, Brazil, Turkey, South Africa, Italy, Australia, Mexico, the Czech Republic, Argentina, Spain, India, Finland, Singapore (virtually, due to the pandemic) and returned to Brazil a second time in 2023. The next conference will be held in 2023 in Krakow, Poland.

IOHA welcomes all oral historians, academic and community, to its ranks. It strives to be democratic and open to participants from all regions of the globe and from all culture groups. Please consider joining IOHA, <https://www.ioha.org/join-ioha/>, as an individual and as an organization (for those of you who are part of an organization). Your membership fees assist in maintaining the website and in bringing oral historians from around the world to the international conferences. For many who are the sole oral historians in their region, the IOHA conference is an important opportunity to share ideas and friendship with supportive colleagues.



What would you like to see in the next OHA Newsletter?

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