

Report on
"Assessing the Role of Race and Power in Oral History Theory and Practice" Symposium

Prepared by Amanda Tewes, with assistance from Jessica Douglas, Shanna Farrell, Kelly Elaine Navies, Benji de la Piedra, Linda Shopes, and Holly Werner-Thomas

Prepared for the Oral History Association Annual Meeting, October 2022

Table of Contents:

[*Report Overview and Goals*](#), page 1
[*History and Structure of the Symposium*](#), page 3
[*Key Themes from the Symposium*](#), page 5
[*Suggestions for Future Practice*](#), page 6
 [*Suggestions for Interviewers*](#), page 6
 [*Suggestions for OHA and Other Leaders in the Field*](#), page 8
 [*Suggestions for Institutions and Universities*](#), page 10
 [*Suggestions for Grantmaking Organizations*](#), page 11
[*Appendix: Call for Proposals*](#), page 11

Report Overview and Goals

With support from the Oral History Association (OHA) and the Oral History Center (OHC) at UC Berkeley, a committee of practitioners spearheaded the "Assessing the Role of Race and Power in Oral History Theory and Practice" virtual symposium (hereafter "Race and Power" symposium) from June 27 to 29, 2022. This committee, which called itself the Ad Hoc Group for Transformative Oral History, included co-chairs Benji de la Piedra and Holly Werner-Thomas, as well as Jessica Douglas, Shanna Farrell, Kelly Elaine Navies, Linda Shopes, and Amanda Tewes.

The symposium brought together a wide array of participants, from longtime practitioners of oral history to newcomers from different fields, working in many different settings.¹ Specific motivations for participation accordingly varied, but overall there was a shared sense of wanting to heed the call, ignited by the international racial reckoning that followed George Floyd's murder, for a methodological realignment of interview-based project work towards more racially conscious and anti-racist practice.² While this symposium attracted an international audience

¹ This information about the variety of participants comes from both anecdotal conversations, as well as responses to the symposium evaluation. However, of 239 registrants, only 37 individuals submitted responses to the symposium evaluation. Therefore, information from those evaluations may not represent an accurate subsection of symposium participants.

² This event and other examples of racial violence have sparked conversations about more equitable and anti-racist practices in many fields, especially across the humanities; the ongoing reassessment in oral history is itself therefore part of a larger cultural phenomenon. This may also account for the interdisciplinary nature of the symposium presentations and breakout room conversations.

(including attendees from Europe, Asia, North Africa, and Australia), the majority of participants and presentations were based in the United States.

Taking seriously its stated aim of fomenting transformative oral history work, the committee also sought to create a pedagogical climate oriented towards introspective reflection in this virtual gathering. Following a series of conversations toward defining this vision, the Ad Hoc Group worked with Dr. Michelle Chatman of the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society before the symposium in order to acknowledge members' own positionality and help them better lead conversations about race and power in oral history. Committee members agreed that it was best to act as facilitators rather than gatekeepers or authority figures, and strove to meet this intention. Following poetry readings and substantive land acknowledgments, each symposium session opened with a slide of Community Agreements that Dr. Chatman had composed. These agreements were widely appreciated by symposium participants and reflected the call for proposals' request for "constructive conversation rooted in mindful awareness, good faith engagement, and emotional maturity." Throughout the three-day symposium, presenters invited participants to consider reflective prompts and apply to their own oral history practice several potential teachings about more inclusive and equitable processes and outcomes. Participants also offered their own ideas, insights, and questions. Given this emphasis on contemplative process, the true measure of this symposium's success will be the degree of transformative reflection and application that the presentations and discussions occasion in practitioners' *own* work.

However, it is important to note that the "Race and Power" symposium was just one step in a larger process of reexamining and reimagining the practice of oral history in the twenty-first century. In her remarks in the final session panel "Where Do We Go From Here?," Ad Hoc Group member and longtime oral historian Linda Shopes noted that the themes and discussions from this symposium were not necessarily new to the field of oral history. She also pointed to similar themes reverberating through contemporary oral history discourse, as evidenced in the OHA's recent adoption of social justice guidelines. However, Shopes observed that these cumulative conversations—of which the symposium was part—may signal a developing paradigm shift in thinking about oral history. Rather than marking the beginning of these conversations or providing definitive conclusions, this symposium did, in fact, occur in the midst of this transformative shift on the subjects of race and power.

The discussions that occurred during the symposium—and happening concurrently elsewhere—are important in an ongoing push to critically reexamine oral history theory and its relation to oral history practice.³ However, symposium participants, who were largely

³ There is a body of ever-changing and much-debated theory about oral history as a field that helps to shape its practice. However, the Ad Hoc Group for Transformative Oral History recognized the importance of including in this symposium oral history practitioners who may not be familiar with or strictly adhere to oral history theory. Therefore, in its calls for papers, the group promised "to keep discussion focused on practical applications of whatever theoretical and conceptual insights into race in oral history" that the symposium might "furnish."

interviewers themselves, also expressed a desire for a set of workable actions to influence their own methodology. This report is therefore not only an opportunity to review the discussions sparked by symposium papers and panelists, but also to note potential steps moving forward for the field of oral history.

This report includes three sections: a brief history of the symposium and its structure, key themes from in-depth conversations sparked by presentations in six sessions over three days and by challenges currently facing the field, and suggestions for future practice. It also includes an appendix featuring the symposium's call for proposals.

History and Structure of the Symposium

The Ad Hoc Group for Transformative Oral History traces its origins to fall 2019 and preparations for the conference panel titled "Is Oral History White?," which took place at the October 2020 OHA annual meeting. This panel—which included session organizer and moderator Linda Shopes; discussant Kelly E. Navies; and participants Jessica Douglas, Benji de la Piedra, and Holly Werner-Thomas—explored definitions and impacts of "whiteness" in the conception, implementation, context, and legacy of three past oral history projects focusing on Baltimore history. The panel also encouraged expanded consideration and further centering of the contributions of African American memory, narrative, and organizing traditions. Notably, the group presented research conducted specifically for this session, and not as part of ongoing or previous work in oral history. It was by working together over the course of a year to support members, explore evidence, and refine ideas that the group was able to achieve such an impactful conference session.

After a positive reception at OHA, the panel explored ways to continue these important conversations about race and structural racism in oral history. An essential question that the group asked was: how does a focus on race shift the fundamental ground of inquiry or reshape practitioners' understanding in fundamental ways? In addition to submitting articles to the *Oral History Review* based on their presentations, the panel—now named the Ad Hoc Group for Transformative Oral History—decided to develop a symposium to gather oral history practitioners to explore this and related questions.

Shanna Farrell and Amanda Tewes from the Oral History Center (OHC) at UC Berkeley joined the Ad Hoc Group in January 2021 to lend support from an institutional partner. Their work and the OHC's co-sponsorship of the symposium helped the Center work towards its goal to support the field of oral history. Further, they were able to apply their experience in budgeting, registration, and digital hosting from OHC's various educational offerings to the planning and implementation of the "Race and Power" symposium. Their expertise and labor contributed to the success of the symposium, as did the support of an institutional partner and fiscal agent.

In spring 2021, OHA offered financial assistance of \$5,000 acquired from the National Endowment for the Humanities through the American Rescue Plan: Humanities Grantmaking, as well as the time and expertise of staff member Faith Bagley. OHA also hosted the web content for the "Race and Power" symposium, including the call for proposals and program information.

Over the next year-and-a-half, the group developed a call for proposals, planned for symposium logistics, selected presenters, and shepherded papers through an editing process. Indeed, group members worked closely with several participants over a period of months in supporting paper development. This endeavor connected to committee members' roles as panel moderators, especially in placing presenters in conversation with one another. This level of mentorship was necessary to help develop papers, especially those still in early stages, as the group only received eighteen paper proposals and accepted fifteen of these for inclusion in symposium sessions. In the end, panel presentations proved stronger and even more energizing than the papers, as well as encouraged more flexibility in changing and updating topics.

The group wanted the symposium format to encourage dialog and community, and therefore intentionally structured the three-day event to support these goals. The resulting symposium format included six two-and-a-half hour sessions over three days. The first half of each session featured a panel with presenters and discussants who introduced projects and generated discussion of central themes, while in the second half participants split into breakout rooms for further discussion. In order, the panels were: "Renovating the Invisible Architectures of Institution-Community Relations"; "New Approaches to Place-Based Collecting and Exhibits"; "Language, Consciousness, and 'Race'"; "Getting Interpersonal"; "Oral History and Reparations"; and "Where Do We Go From Here?"

Each session was moderated by a member of the Ad Hoc Group. Moderators offered support to panelists for several months leading up to the symposium, and took responsibility for securing their particular panel's discussant. Kelly E. Navies, Benji de la Piedra, and Holly Werner-Thomas played additional roles by setting the tone at the beginning of each symposium day with land acknowledgements, poetry readings, and opening remarks, as well as summarizing conversations at the end of each day.⁴ Using technology provided by UC Berkeley and OHA, Shanna Farrell ran Zoom logistics and coordinated American Sign Language interpreters. Further, the group invited panelists and other symposium participants to facilitate discussion during breakout room sessions which followed each panel presentation, for which these individuals were compensated

⁴ Setting the tone at the beginning of each symposium day was an intentional practice complementing a mindfulness-based approach to oral history practice, which had been championed by several members of the group. Indeed, the land acknowledgments, poetry readings, and commentary reflected the cultural backgrounds and perspectives of the presenters, and signaled an emphasis on non-Western and non-White paradigms. Early plans for the symposium included a separate arts-based event; however, the group felt constrained both by budget and by the virtual nature of the event, and chose not to pursue this option.

with free symposium registration. It is largely from these breakout room discussions that this report draws its suggestions.

As the group conceived of and planned for an event during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it made the decision to adopt a virtual format through Zoom. This Zoom format was important in ensuring affordability and maximum participation, including from different time zones and countries. This also meant that participants could join as many or as few sessions as their schedules allowed, and watch session recordings after they had concluded in real time. Coupled with long breaks between the first and second sessions each day, this also meant that participants could perhaps better integrate virtual attendance with their daily lives than with an in-person conference. Further, participants employed the Zoom chat function to build on verbal conversations, as well as to share links and contact information. It is important to note that despite these advantages to hosting a virtual symposium, some participants still yearned for an in-person gathering.

Feedback from presenters and participants primarily reflected the fact that many individuals who practice oral history, especially along the ethical lines centered in the symposium, have felt isolated in their work, so they found attending the symposium to be a rewarding experience of solidarity, as well as a way to connect with a community of practitioners and to feel supported in their work. This was especially true for community practitioners and others operating outside the academy. All this prompted Benji de la Piedra to establish an opt-in directory of symposium participants for networking purposes, for which over 100 participants signed up. These connections and development of a community were some of the most promising outcomes from the three-day symposium.

Key Themes from the Symposium

While this symposium grew out of an OHA annual meeting panel investigating whiteness in oral history, the symposium call for proposals emphasized the larger implications of race and power in the field. Indeed, the call asked applicants "to interrogate broader structures and dynamics of race and racialized thinking in oral history." However, the papers and presentations, as well as participant interests, pivoted around how to address community-centered oral history work within the context of deep historical racial divides. While this was an unexpected development, it actually aided in shifting the symposium's focus to a larger question in the field of how to practice oral history in a more personally responsible and socially equitable way. Indeed, this new framework advocated for more community agency and responsive, narrator-focused oral history practice. It further acknowledged the changing role of oral historians regarding not just race and power, but also the intersections of power and gender, class, institutional support, et cetera.

This thematic adjustment certainly speaks to the ongoing paradigm shift in the field of oral history, but it may also point to the moment in which these conversations occurred. June of 2022 marked more than two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, more than two years of heightened public consciousness of racial violence in the United States, and a time in which many disciplines and institutions have grappled with their own systemic racism and approaches to equity. Yet, oral history by its nature has been redefining power and authority of narrative since its inception.

As the "Race and Power" symposium is but one point in a larger paradigm shift in the field, this report offers not definitive answers, but rather suggestions for areas of continued conversation or reflection. Two fundamental questions remain:

1. In the face of 400 years of state-sanctioned oppression, what can interviewers do to combat structural inequalities in oral history work?
2. What skills do oral history practitioners have and what tools can they employ to help bring about meaningful, systemic change to institutions and to American society more generally?

Notably, many of the conversations from this symposium were iterative. Indeed, participants in the closing session's breakout rooms referenced or continued conversations from the first session. This means that although presentation topics varied widely, this report will not distinguish between different sessions; rather, it will combine variations on conversation topics to address recurrent themes and suggestions for different actors in the oral history process. These include: interviewers, OHA and other leaders in the field, institutions and universities, and grantmaking organizations.

Suggestions for Future Practice

Suggestions for Interviewers

- 1) Unsurprisingly, many symposium conversations focused on centering communities, rather than researchers, in oral history practice. Indeed, it is imperative for practitioners to recognize and reflect on whether or not recording oral histories is what the community needs or wants at the moment. Further, equitable community involvement should include consensus about definitions and the context of oral history work. Indeed, as committee member Holly Werner-Thomas has noted, "ideally, locally-focused projects" should begin with listening sessions and partnership building, encouraging this community focus from the start. Another participant noted that in order to move toward "reparative scholarship," practitioners must first break an "extractive cycle" in oral history by adopting this focus that "decenters the product." Moving forward, practitioners should consider not just involving, but privileging communities in:

- transparent and co-creative project planning from the earliest stages, even in the grant application process
 - defining consent
 - defining rights and ownership
 - developing community archives
 - determining access to interviews and projects- including providing interview copies directly to narrators and their families
 - defining audience for the interviews or interpretive work
 - terminology- acknowledging the baggage that may accompany the basic terms of oral history practice, such as "interviewer" or "oral historian," which may cause suspicion in communities or compete with the work of established memory keepers
 - length of project or relationship- listening to communities about desired length of the project, as well as being upfront about interviewer capacity for longterm work
 - identifying meaningful repair to historical and ongoing harms, specific to community wants and needs
 - considering narrator compensation- listen to narrators and communities about appropriate methods of compensation, as money may not be the most desirable outcome
 - outlining transcription practices and outcomes- identify who gets a say when, and center what "authenticity" in transcription means to an individual narrator or a community
 - defining measures of success
 - cultivating local control
 - empowering communities to do their own oral history practice or to privilege the community-led memory work already in place
- 2) Oral history practitioners should also consider how to sustain community-based work, including:
- using expertise and connections to identify strategies for sustainability
 - advocating for sustainability with funders, within institutions like universities and libraries, and within public history organizations
 - training community members to conduct oral history interviews themselves
- 3) Moving forward, practitioners may need to commit themselves to more than just conducting a series of interviews and moving on to the next project. They may also need to prepare themselves to advocate in institutional and public spheres for the communities they document. Such advocacy work might take place vis-à-vis universities, grantmaking organizations, media organizations, and governments. It should always be guided by the wishes of the community, *not* the practitioner. "Solidarity" emerged as a key watchword of the symposium.

- 4) As part of an ongoing conversation about the role of best practices in oral history, participants reemphasized that these do not require rigid adherence, but should instead serve as guidelines for practitioners to adapt to their individual projects. Some of these accepted best practices may not be suitable, especially when centering the needs and wants of particular communities.
- 5) Symposium participants also suggested that, in a world where no two people are alike and belong to many overlapping and even contradictory communities, the idea of insider/outsider positionality might be too binary an approach to oral history practice. Indeed, one participant suggested that when considering intersubjectivity in oral history practice, the goal should not necessarily be to match a community as an insider, but to cultivate an authentic relationship as an ally. Such relationships are bound to change over time, and likely not in a linear fashion.

Suggestions for OHA and Other Leaders in the Field

- 1) Symposium conversations also identified ways in which OHA might further engage in education, advocacy, and practitioner support. Specific suggestions for this work include:
 - conference session or *Oral History Review* article considering whether—or under which circumstances—it is possible and/or desirable in this current moment to do good work across racial lines
 - conference session on archival considerations for non-archivists- many practitioners think the work is done when they pass a collection on to an archiving institution, failing to realize the work of archiving a collection
 - support- develop mechanisms for creating localized and/or thematic communities of practice
 - advocacy- continue work with organizations that promote civic engagement (i.e. Campus Compact, Imagining America, National Council on Public History); with universities to redefine the terms of faculty labor in community-based programs and projects by emphasizing process over product, especially for tenure track faculty; and with grantmakers who provide financial support for community-centered oral history work
 - publication- create a revised Community History pamphlet
 - outreach- create stronger bonds with K-12 educators who might use oral histories as primary source materials or train students to embrace the practice of oral history
 - cross-disciplinary work- continue to encourage connections to oral history practitioners in other disciplines (i.e. anthropology, ethnic studies, et cetera) in order to take stock of similar conversations around equitable oral history practices

- access- encourage practitioners to place their interview collections in a public repository not only for better access for researchers, but also for the communities themselves
- 2) OHA or other leaders in the field might also encourage more panels at OHA annual meetings or other sponsored events that include contributions from narrators and other community partners, and not just oral history practitioners or institutions.
 - 3) Significantly, symposium participants represented a great range in the number of years they have been involved in oral history. Particularly notable was that more than 1/3 of participants who responded to the symposium evaluation were newcomers to the field (0 to 2 years) and only 8 percent had been in the field 26 or more years.⁵ This suggests that OHA and its affiliates should consider:
 - sponsoring/supporting a more expansive program of basic training in oral history, especially for those coming to oral history from other disciplines
 - programming as a ways to bring newcomers and longtime practitioners into greater contact with one another
 - an OHA- or *Oral History Review*-led effort to compile an historiography of oral history practice and methodology especially aimed toward newcomers to the field
 - compiling a syllabus bank, with syllabi for everything from workshops to graduate level oral history courses
 - 4) Conversations during the symposium also addressed the role of OHA and other leaders in the field in continuing to update best practices recommendations—much as OHA has done with the recent adoption of social justice guidelines. And while participants argued best practices documents should remain guidelines, they also emphasized that accepted best practices give practitioners credible and authoritative information to cite when designing new projects and applying for grant funding. For many practitioners, such best practices help empower them to respond to institutional resistance to the community-centered values reaffirmed in this symposium.
 - a) These ongoing adaptations to best practices could include information such as multiple transcription guides to reflect various approaches needed for different settings or institutions.
 - b) Further, best practices documents would benefit from translations into languages other than English, Spanish, and Chinese so as to reach the widest possible audience of oral history practitioners, and help narrators understand what to expect from the process.
 - 5) Symposium presenters and participants also took special interest in expanding the history of the field to represent its many origins and practitioners. OHA should continue to recognize and encourage efforts to mine the history of the field for contributions of

⁵ Again, of 239 registrants, only 37 individuals submitted responses to the symposium evaluation. Therefore, this information may not represent an accurate subsection of symposium participants. Fortunately, notes from each session's breakout rooms reflect the diversity of experience and opinions about the subjects of conversation, and support these statements.

women and people of color that one participant noted would "challenge its rootedness in whiteness."

- 6) Symposium participants also expressed interest in continuing deep conversations about the intersections of oral history with topics such as gender and power, or class and power. To that end, both casual conversations and evaluation forms revealed a desire for OHA to support a regular symposium on related topics. Indeed, beyond important conversations and race and power, the symposium proved that participants are hungry for more connections to other oral history practitioners, going so far as to organize listservs and working groups. It would behoove field leaders like OHA to support these conversations by utilizing public programming committees to develop mechanisms to co-host future symposia, and bringing more diverse practitioners into the fold. One way to approach this effort is for OHA or other field leaders to develop a call or proposals and offer financial support to institutions or community groups willing to host and organize such a symposium. This might also allow for institutions with expertise in particular areas to lead the way on topics of discussion (i.e. intersections of gender and power or class and power in oral history).

Suggestions for Institutions and Universities

- 1) As committee member Holly Werner-Thomas has noted, it is not only the role of practitioners to engage with issues of race and power in oral history, but also the responsibility of institutions—including historical societies—to examine their roles in maintaining "the status quo." To that end, symposium participants highlighted the roadblocks institutions and funders place on centering community and, more broadly, the challenges to sustainability. Institutions and universities should therefore consider addressing:
 - unrealistic expectations for the timing of project "completion" associated with the end of a course, a fiscal year, et cetera
 - current definitions of success in terms of specific products/outcomes, rather than development of relationships and sustaining a practice
 - a failure to recognize and reward the labor and time involved in community work, especially in regards to junior faculty and graduate students
 - failure to provide funding for community partners, and bureaucratic hurdles in obtaining or dispersing funds to researchers or narrators/community institutions
 - encouraging student-community mentorship to enhance classroom learning
- 2) Participants also correctly identified that intersubjectivity may not exist solely between individual interviewers and narrators, but perhaps also between institutions and communities whose histories they study and whose fortunes they may have directly impacted. In doing this repair work, institutions may need to consider:
 - what repair work is actually required for particular communities (formal apologies, financial restitution, partnerships, et cetera)

- how to recognize and/or work with communities' varying organizing traditions
 - how oral history itself can play a role in this work, but should not be the only form of restitution
 - that completing IRB review is not enough to encourage scholars to think about the impact of generations' worth of studies into communities; further reflection may be necessary
 - that institutions—especially universities—have a role to play in teaching the historiography of institution-community relationships, and should encourage oral history training in a variety of fields (i.e. not just the humanities, but also medical schools, et cetera)
 - a possible post-custodial role for archiving community-led (not just practitioner- or institution-led) interviews
- 3) Participants also discussed the need for institutions (and individual interviewers) to revisit past oral history projects in order to better understand the project's original vision and how to renovate it within the context of race and power towards a notion of reparations. The "Is Oral History White?" panel from the October 2020 OHA annual meeting is one example of this endeavor.

Suggestions for Grantmaking Organizations

- 1) Similar to observations about the role of universities and institutions in oral history, symposium conversations around grantmaking organizations emphasized the need to alter expectations for the work in order to support more equitable oral history practice. Moving forward, grantmaking organizations may need to consider:
- embracing longer projects in both formal grant language and in project acceptance
 - planning for more flexibility in how recipients might use funding (i.e. compensation for narrators or community organizations, sponsoring or supporting community events, training communities to do the work themselves, et cetera)
 - flexibility in recognizing community archival practices or other ongoing memory work
 - revising current expectations for project completion, especially when community wants and needs exceed the scope of a grant reporting cycle
 - most importantly, recognizing that an archived recording may not be the most appropriate finished product

Appendix:

Call for Proposals: Assessing the Role of Race and Power in Oral History Theory and Practice

Convened by the Ad Hoc Group for Transformative Oral History Practice, in collaboration with the Oral History Association and the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley

It has been just over one year since a White police officer murdered George Floyd, sparking the largest call for racial justice in this country in a generation. Support for Black Lives Matter reached an all-time high in June 2020, with nearly 70 percent of U.S. adults holding a favorable opinion of the movement, and support spilling over to all corners of the globe. White Americans also helped take down Confederate monuments and bought books on antiracism in record numbers while corporations pledged millions of dollars to social justice organizations and causes. One year later, however, commemorations of Floyd's life and legacy asked: "What's changed since?"

We acknowledge that "Assessing the Role of Race and Power in Oral History Theory and Practice" is taking place amid revitalized demands for understanding—and changing—the systemic racism that enabled a White police officer to murder a Black citizen in daylight without seeming fear of repercussions. But it is also taking place at a time of fierce backlash to *any* understanding of the oppressive forces that enabled Floyd's murder. At the time of this writing, some state legislatures have passed laws banning the teaching of critical race theory, even as a majority of states seek to suppress the Black vote and overturn our elections. Recent events such as these are causing many to evaluate the role of structural racism and White supremacy in the arts and humanities, including the practice of oral history.

Building on an enthusiastically received panel that asked "Is Oral History White?" at the 2020 Oral History Association annual meeting, participants in that session (calling ourselves the Ad Hoc Group for Transformative Oral History Practice), in collaboration with the Oral History Association and the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley, are convening a symposium that will define, identify, analyze, assess, and imagine alternatives to conventional practices, prevailing ideologies, and institutional structures of oral history in the United States and Canada, as they pertain to historic and current forms of systemic racial discrimination. In essence, the symposium is moving beyond the question the 2020 panel asked—"Is Oral History White?"—to interrogate broader structures and dynamics of race and racialized thinking in oral history.

We are inviting proposals from oral historians and others involved in fieldwork-related interviewing practices, as well as critical race and Whiteness theorists, to submit proposals for symposium papers that pose major questions and offer precise assessments of racial constructs as a factor in all phases of oral history work: project design, research processes, financial and budgetary matters, fieldwork and community relations, interviewing, archival practices, and public presentation and interpretation of narrative materials.

The "Assessing the Role of Race and Power in Oral History Theory and Practice" symposium will take place via Zoom Webinar over a three-day period in June 2022. We expect to convene approximately thirty-five presenters, spread over six to eight sessions of two hours each. With the assistance of a moderator and/or one or more discussants, session presenters will summarize

and discuss *pre-circulated papers* posted on a conference website, which will have also been made available to registered attendees in advance of the symposium. Symposium sessions will allow time for audience questions and comments, vetted and synthesized via the Zoom Webinar "Q&A" function by the session moderator. This format will allow for especially robust and probing discussion during sessions.

This symposium should present a significant opportunity for audience members to reflect personally upon the charged subject of race in oral history in a pedagogically constructive way. Discussions of racialized experience and representations in our field will raise not only important insights but also strong emotions. We expect our audience to have a vast range of racial identities and relationships—including but not limited to Whiteness and Blackness—and varying degrees of experience reflecting upon that. We therefore plan to set shared expectations for constructive conversation rooted in mindful awareness, good faith engagement, and emotional maturity at the very beginning of the symposium and to create opportunities for small-group discussion and individually tailored self-reflection over the duration of the symposium. We hope that the symposium's virtual nature, with participants in the relative privacy and comfort of their own homes, will contribute to this aspect of the symposium experience. Above all, we plan to keep discussion focused on practical applications of whatever theoretical and conceptual insights into race in oral history our symposium may furnish.

Intended outcomes include publication of revised versions of selected conference papers in an edited volume and a white paper assessing OHA's racialized history, practices, and programs, to be developed by symposium organizers. Organizers, in cooperation with OHA's Equity Task Force and Diversity Committee, will also create and promulgate guidelines for racial equity in oral history.

Pending receipt of grant monies, we hope to provide honoraria for symposium presenters.

Proposal Information

Each proposal should include a title, an abstract of no more than 500 words, and a short biographical statement of no more than 300 words. Include your name, institutional affiliation if relevant, mailing address, email address, and phone number. The abstract must outline the research that you either have conducted or intend to conduct in support of your proposed presentation, the sources that you have consulted or will consult, and the collections in which you have conducted or will conduct research. While we anticipate that most proposals will be for a single paper, we welcome proposals for full sessions, also—to include 3-5 papers, moderator and discussant/s. We also welcome inquiries from individuals interested in serving as a session moderator or discussant to include a brief statement of interest and a short summary of work in oral history. Proposals are due November 1, 2021. (See below for more information.)

Some questions and themes we expect symposium participants may address include:

(Please note that we are open to other related questions and explorations.)

Whiteness and White Supremacy

- How should Whiteness be defined, and how do the deep structures and conventions of our practice reflect Whiteness, structural racism, and White supremacy?
- How might an interrogation of unexamined Whiteness be brought to bear on work in oral history? This might be done by assessing a past project or the curation of an existing collection or by considering the planning and implementation of a project currently under development. (Note: While we welcome case studies that audit specific projects, we would also like to see papers go beyond that.)
- How has work that has drawn upon existing collections reproduced racialized assumptions?
- What are some examples of projects that handled or represented racial dynamics, including Whiteness, in a creative, antiracist, or otherwise generative way?

Non-Western perspectives and approaches

- What has oral history learned from Indigenous, African American and other perspectives and approaches that fall outside the dominant Western paradigm?
- What patterns do we see in our own work that can be traced to BIPOC origins and models? What do these BIPOC origins and models have to teach us about the pitfalls of Whiteness and White Supremacy?
- How might specific insights, both theoretical and methodological, generated by the field of Critical Race Studies, help guide practical approaches to oral history?
- How and in what circumstances has oral history operated against the grain of prevailing racial assumptions?
- What can oral historians learn about power dynamics and reflexivity from research in the field of trauma studies?

Invisible Architecture

- How have the institutional and organizational structures underlying work in oral history been racialized? How has the way oral history has been funded and otherwise supported contributed to unintentional racial bias? How has the "history from below" approach perpetuated these biases? And how do White interviewers themselves perpetuate bias?

- Over its fifty-plus year history, how has the work of the Oral History Association been racialized or reflective of broader patterns of White supremacy? In what ways and to what effect has the association functioned as a gatekeeper for oral history and oral historians, including some practitioners, practices, and work, excluding others, through its various products and programs such as the Principles and Best Practices, annual meeting, and publication of the *Oral History Review*? How has the association addressed racial issues over time, to what effect?
- When and where is it appropriate for oral historians to think beyond our individual projects and consider the role of the institutions we work for in order to tackle structural racism?

Oral history and current events

- How are oral historians and the institutions and organizations with which we are affiliated responding to the current political moment? How might we respond more effectively?
- Oral history is by its nature a civic enterprise and a medium for public engagement. How can oral history mobilize anti-racist constituencies, create dialogue around difficult issues, and/or influence public opinion or policy?
- What are the limits of oral history in combating structural racism?