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The Development of Oral History in the United States: the evolution toward interdisciplinary

Abstract
This article discusses the development of oral history in the United States and how this has led the field to becoming interdisciplinary in interesting and useful ways. It traces its origins in the 17th century and explains its establishment as *method* (oral data collection), a *subfield of history* (oral historiography) and a *resource* for teachers, communities, and researchers of all kinds (oral history). The author describes the practical applications of oral history in other fields such as anthropology, education/ teaching, ethnic studies/ethnohistory/American studies, folklore, gerontology, legal studies, literary history, media studies and media production, and women and gender studies. A review of oral history guides is also given. The article ends with an update on how oral historians are coping with the new, anti-intellectual orientation of President Trump and his right-wing agenda.

Keywords: Oral History. USA. Oral Data Collection. History-Telling.

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O Desenvolvimento da história oral nos Estados Unidos: a evolução rumo à interdisciplinaridade

Resumo
Este artigo discute o desenvolvimento da história oral nos Estados Unidos e como isto levou o campo a se tornar interdisciplinar em modos interessantes e úteis. Traça as suas origens no século XVII e explica o seu estabelecimento como um *método* (coleta de dados orais), um *subcampo da história* (historiografia oral) e um *recurso* para professores, comunidades e pesquisadores de todos os tipos (história oral). O autor descreve as suas aplicações práticas em outros campos, como a antropologia, a educação/ensino, os estudos étnicos/etno-históricos/americanos, o folclore, a gerontologia, o direito, a história literária, os estudos e a produção de mídia e os estudos das mulheres e de gênero. Os manuais de história oral também são discutidos neste artigo, que termina com uma atualização sobre como os historiadores orais estão enfrentando a nova e anti-intelectual postura do Presidente Trump e a sua agenda de direita. Esse fato é realmente novo: aparecerá no próximo mês na *Oral History Newsletter* da Associação de História Oral.

Palavras-chave: História Oral. EUA. Coleta de Dados Orais. Contação de história.

Some trace the origins of oral history in North America to the Spanish missions in California, and in particular to a missionary known as Sahagun. In the 17th century, he sent the native Californianos further south into Mexico, to find the roots of their travel north to California. There are a few records of this project.

To skip ahead to the establishment of oral history as a method, not yet a field, in 1948 Columbia University opened a program to document the past of the elites who built great industries and institutions. Berkeley and UCLA begin programs a few years later. These first interviews were only with prominent individuals. And because the format for

the interviews was print, the initial tape recordings were either reused or destroyed. Today, we cannot hear the voices of those from 75 years ago. Technology has changed a great deal since then; and so has our approach to keeping archives that accept and treasure sound.

The first generation of professional oral historians, led by pioneering figures such as Allan Nevins and Louis Starr, conceived of oral history as a means to collect otherwise unwritten recollections of prominent individuals for future historians, for research, and as a tool for orally based biography.

A second generation, coming of age in the mid-1960s after the basic archives had been established, built upon this earlier work, by expanding the purposes of collectors and collections.[1] This group viewed oral history as more than a way to capture the accounts of important people for scholars; rather, it employed oral history techniques to describe and empower the non-literate and the historically disenfranchised. Throughout the 1970s, many collectors of oral history used their research to document and promote community cohesion and ethnic diversity. In this period, oral history built a name for itself and a grassroots constituency based on efforts by educators, feminists, and activists as well as local, ethnic, and regional history campaigns. While collectors in the first generation continued to direct the principal archives, they found the younger group of social educators virtually beating on their doors to broaden the scope of collections beyond so-called elite interviews.

In the 1980s, a third generation emerged. Students and scholars learned the craft of oral historiography in an era removed from both the conservative 1950s and the socially radical 1960s. The principal oral history archives in the United States had set high standards for the maintenance and development of collections. New technologies such as computerized research aids and personal computers made professional oral history collections more capital-intensive. Many of the smaller, volunteer-oriented groups passed their first flush of collecting and considered how to

[1] Perhaps the classic example of this period is Paul Thompson's *Voices of the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), excerpted in the first edition of this work.

focus and put their work to use. In this decade, the emergence of younger, academically trained oral historians raised issues of amateurism vs. professionalism (for the number of full-time posts in oral history is small, possibly as few as 500 in the United States).

Prior to the 1980s, the process of generating oral history was considered uncomplicated, with interviewers presumed to have recorded, from a neutral stance, whatever material of historical use they could glean for the good of the future. History would emerge at some later time, when writers and scholars used these oral sources. This notion was challenged by more theoretically oriented researchers such as Ronald Grele, Paul Thompson, Alessandro Portelli, and others) who speculated that interviews-and their *construction-themselves* represent history: compiled within a historical frame negotiated by the interviewer and the narrator, within contemporary trends, within certain definable conventions of language and cultural interaction.[2] Now a debate emerged in the profession over the purpose of oral history: was it intended to be (1) a set of primary source documents or (2) a process for constructing history from oral sources?

Drawing upon a wealth of previous collecting experience, oral historians of this generation asked introspective, process-oriented questions of their colleagues. What is the effect, they wondered, of reducing a multilayered communication event (rich with gesture and intonation) to a printed page or a magnetic tape-what elements are lost or changed? What time period does such an interview represent: the time investigated or the time of the interview?

In similar fashion, the 1980s became the decade of the public program in the oral history profession. Museums increasingly incorporated oral materials into exhibits to add voices to the presentation of research and artifacts. Museologists turned to oral history as a central methodological procedure.[3] Libraries reached

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[2] Examples of this trend include Barbara Allen, "Texture and Textuality in Orally Communicated History," *International Journal of Oral History* 6, (June 1985), pp. 92-103; David Hanige, *Oral Historiography* (London: Longman, 1982); Charles Briggs, "Historical Discourse," *Competence in Performance* (Philadelphia, Penn.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988); and Richard Baumann and Charles Briggs, "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990), pp. 54-88.

[3] See both the 1983 panel on "Oral History in Museum Work," at the 1983 Conference of the Canadian Oral History Association and a retrospective article in the British journal *Oral History,* and Gareth Griffiths,

out beyond the stacks to establish educational programs with schools and community groups: some made the transition from depositories to collection centers generating new materials. Arts, humanities, and historical commissions funded projects involving public use of previously collected interviews: broadcasts, drama, multimedia exhibits, and popular publications of a broad range.

Oral history developed practical applications in administration and policy matters. The most prominent uses included historic preservation, land-use claims, litigation, environmental-cultural impact statements, and institutional and business history.

In the gradual shift within the historical profession from presenting facts as received wisdom to presenting theoretical analyses as specific to a given time and place and society, oral history has played a vital role. The generational distinctions mentioned above are more pronounced on this issue than on others. The young scholar may feel empowered by the deconstruction of history-making into a landscape of self-interest and subjectivism (and even by a rhetoric so internally referential that recent post-graduates have an edge over their elders in understanding it). On the other hand, a reaction may be setting in: as one senior oral historian commented after attending the 1993 International Conference on Oral History, in Siena/Lucca, Italy, "I hate subjectivism. That's not what I went into history to study."

In the last two dozen years, a fourth generation of oral historians has emerged, many trained in post-graduate institutions, alongside the most sophisticated procedural guides. These are the children of the 1990s and 2000s, for whom smart phones, video cameras, and computers are second-nature, unthreatening, technologies; for whom the media presentation of recollection and reminiscence may seem more natural than the written. The print culture of their grandparents has become a worldwide techno culture based on new forms of aural information (music videos, advertising jingles, broadcast narratives), causing some to wonder if the bland cultural formulae of pop music, television, and net video will overwhelm our history-seeking, identity-building instinct.

"Museums and the Practice of Oral History" 17 (Autumn 1989), pp. 49-53. The Society of American Archivists' meetings throughout the 1980s also held panels on oral history.

This new generation of oral historians, including your own, has been influenced by postmodernist critical movements, which have spilled over from literary theory into disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and history.

Today, oral history faces intellectual challenges posed by cultural critics who assert a previously unimagined complexity to its fundamental process, the recorded recollections of historically and culturally significant events or trends. The audience-centered model of presenting history has prompted a more process-oriented reading of history and culture.[4] As a consequence, oral history has experienced a surge of interest in subjectivity and in nontraditional sources.[5]

Since history is today widely viewed as a culture-specific construct, with the historian only as important as the (present and future) audience who reads him or her (and whose organization of facts and sources is idiosyncratic) - what, exactly, do we tum to history and oral history for? The answer may lie in its past.

Oral history in the 2000s was characterized by a rising interest in interdisciplinarity. In folklore, linguistics, and ethnomusicology-to name just a few fields-oral history interviewing has long been a staple. In the last decades, however, as the fieldwork process of oral history has generated its own scholarly literature, more professors of these disciplines incorporate oral history practice into post-graduate programs. They are sending their students to the nearest oral history center or institute for specific methodological training to balance the content-area training from their home disciplines. As oral history becomes central to post-graduate and public history programs, its greatest effect may be its interdisciplinary applications.

The discussion which follows briefly surveys the interdisciplinarity of oral history, which my volume, *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, was designed to stimulate. No such reading of a field can pretend to be more than suggestive; yet there may be value in charting the common ground of those relying on oral data collection and analysis. Each field relies on oral testimony collected in a particular manner; each uses

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[4] For an overview of postmodernism in cultural criticism, see George Lipsitz, "Popular Culture, Cultural Theory, and American Studies," *American Quarterly* 42 (December 1990), pp. 615-36.

[5] See the discussion in the introduction to Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, eds., *The Myths We Live By* (London, New York: Routledge, 1990).

that information in a unique fashion, according to disciplinary focus-yet each shares the difficulties and advantages in working with oral sources.

Anthropology:

At the meeting of anthropology and oral history, we find ethnographers using overlapping research techniques with historians, though seeking different data. Perhaps the principal difference is that the anthropologist records interviews not for historical fact but rather to learn the structure and variety of a society or culture, as manifested by a representative individual's world view, cultural traits, and traditions. Thus, the ethnographic interview provides insights into individuals not as historical eyewitnesses but as culture- or tradition-bearers. As Sidney Mintz suggests, the ethnographer using oral history concentrates on intensive work with informants, rather than on documentary or survey data.[6] Such interviewing does not deemphasize individual uniqueness or personality, so much as it situates how individuality manifests itself in the systematic context of sociocultural forces.

Culture-seeking interviews were once considered to be transparent-a set of facts revealed to an interviewer by an interviewee, a text compiled without reference to the linguistic, cultural, gender, and performance factors in the interaction between narrator and interviewer. Yet in recent years, as attention has shifted from the content of the interview to the linguistic interaction which takes place there, and on to the functioning of humans' narrative instinct, both anthropologists and oral historians have explored the narrator-interviewer relationship reflexively.

One illustration of this crossing is a special issue of the *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, exploring the intersections of biography, oral history, and life history.[7] Instead of monolithic notions of culture, anthropologists working with oral sources are turning their attention to pluralistic models, including how interviewees

[6] Ethnography is not the only branch of anthropology interested in oral history; see, for example, the articles on ethnoarcheology and oral history in the *International journal of Oral History* 20 (November 1983).

[7] "The Afterlife of the Life History," Margaret Blackman, ed., *journal of Narrative and Life History,* II: 1 (Winter 1992).

(and groups) maintain traditions in changing societies.[8] Some classic anthropologists such as Jan Vansina and Ruth Finnegan, are particularly concerned with oral tradition, as opposed to oral history: how narratives told either as history or as literature are affected by the presence (or absence) of a particular audience and performance context. Thus ethnographers have come to respect history-telling as a culture-bearing activity, subject to specific rules in a specific culture.

Education/Teaching

As the authors of a comprehensive guide on oral history for educators commented, oral history in the classroom bridges the gap between curriculum and community: "It brings history home by linking the world of textbook and classroom with the face-to-face social world of the student's home community."[9]

Oral history has served both as a means to preserve the contemporary history of education as a discipline and as a teaching strategy in social studies. Projects may record the history of instruction in a given field.[10] Others may focus on teaching, providing effective lesson plans for using oral history in the classroom.[11]

Oral history works as a gateway to the rich cultural resources outside classrooms and textbooks. Teachers have found student interviewing to be an effective way for motivating learning in general, and community-based learning in particular. Oral

[8] See the commentaries in the "Historia Y Etnologia" issue of *Historia Y Fuente Oral* (no. 9,1993), which in 1996 changed its title to include anthropology and folklore.

[9] Barry Lanman and George Mahaffy, *Oral History in the Secondmy School* (Los Angeles: Oral History Association Pamphlet Series, 1988); Thad Sitton, George Mehaffy, and O. L. Davis, eds., *Oral History: A Guide for Teachers* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1983).

[10] Another example is found in Allan Wieder, "Oral History and Questions of Interaction for Educational Historians," *International Journal of Oral History* 9 (june 1988), pp. 131-39.

[11] Elliot Wigginton, *The Foxfire Book* (and its ten subsequent editions) (New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972, et al.); Don Cavallini, "Oral/Aural History: In and Out of the Classroom," *Social Studies* 70 (May 1979), pp. 112-17; James Hoopes, *Oral History: An Introduction for Students* (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); John Neuenschwander, *Oral History as a Teaching Approach* (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1975).

history offers students a way to situate themselves in the history of their educational community.[12]

Beyond lessons in autobiography, biography, and validation techniques of history, teachers at the secondary and post-secondary levels use oral history to collect and study our aural landscape: the sounds which once surrounded us-the freight trains' moan, the streetcars' clang. (Teachers and historians alike some-times ignore the historical context of sounds, smells, and sights, which may carry information as essential to the historical record as the words oral historians customarily preserve.)

Ethnic Studies/Ethnohistory/American Studies

Oral historians have long understood the value of oral testimony in creating a sense of community cohesion and of continuity across generations. This is particularly true for minority and ethnic groups as historically disenfranchised as African Americans, prohibited by law during slavery even to learn to read and write; or as Latin Americans in the southwestern United States, previously forbidden by law to speak their native language in schools. When such communities are denied the right to read and write-or to speak their native languages-scholars inevitably tum to oral history to reconstruct this history.

"Oral history is not only a tool or a method," Gary Okihiro writes in this vol-ume, "it also is a theory of history which maintains that the common folk and the dispossessed have a history and that this history must be written."

In this way, the second generation of oral historian-activists used oral sources to right an imbalance in historical records, which have favored the literate and the formally educated over those whose culture has not left written records. In

[12] William Cutler, "Oral History: Its Nature and Uses for Educational History," *History of Education Quarterly* 22 (Summer 1971), pp. 184-99.

recent years, the study of intergenerational transmission has grown in importance to historians working from oral sources.[13]

Some oral historians working in ethnic history have enlarged research projects in the academy to use oral history techniques "to make history more accessible to its participants."[14] This orally based ethnic history has found a public via community history plays and radio programs based upon interviews.[15]

The field of American studies-the interdisciplinary approach to American cultural and intellectual life-has in recent years broadened its portfolio to include ethnically diverse sources. Scholars have pioneered new ways of reading oral testimony-in the case of Lawrence Levine's *Black Culture, Black Consciousness,* the Federal Writers' Project slave narratives-to balance minority and majority views.[16]

Folklore

Folklorists and ethnomusicologists collecting traditions (oral and otherwise) have long gathered historical and biographical context via oral history. Folklorists have made significant contributions to the methodology of oral history (see the discussion of oral history manuals, below), while membership rolls in oral history associations often cross with those in folklore societies. Sometimes the two fields hold joint conferences.

[13] One of the five strands of the 1993 International Conference on Oral History was devoted to intergenerational history; see the proceedings of the VIII International Conference, Siena/Lucca, Italy, pp. 1061-1143.

[14] Laurie Serikaku, "Oral History in Ethnic Communities: Widening Focus," *Oral History Review* 17 (Spring 1989), p. 73; c. H. Bailey, "Precious Blood: Encountering Inter-Ethnic Issues in Oral History Research, Reconstruction, and Representation," *Oral History Review* 18 (Fall 1990), pp. 61-108.

[15] One such project is "Writing the Southwest," an oral history radio documentary series funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and state humanities endowments of Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico, broadcast nationally in 1995-96 and produced at the University of New Mexico, Department of English; David Dunaway and Sara Spurgeon, *Writing the Southwest* (New York, N.Y.: Plume, 1995).

[16] Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture, Black Consciousness* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1980). In American Studies, Michael Frisch has used his editorship of the *Oral History Review* to promote the interchange between ethnic studies and oral history; see the theme issue on Puerto Rican Women, *Oral History Review* 16 (Fall 1988).

One explanation for these crossings is the oral nature of many of the traditions recorded by folklorists. Methods for collecting oral lore and oral history overlap, though the former tends to be more spontaneous in collecting approach. Richard Dorson points out the different weights which folklorists and oral historians assign to factors in the formulation of a text: the historical profession has traditionally ignored the role of performance, narrative, and audience, preferring to focus on factual content. One folklorist, in defining. the narrative genre of the "life story"-as opposed to the life history, or the oral biography-asserts that the primary interest of the folklorist is *not* the historical accuracy of life narratives, but rather the formulaic way in which they are expressed. And represent motifs and tale-types of tradition.[17]

Gerontology

Prior to the 1980s, gerontologists were more inclined to study oral history than oral historians were to study gerontology. Therapists have long realized that the elderly are especially suitable for (and receive particular benefits from) oral history interviews.[18] Gerontologists have used oral history techniques with success in taking medical histories, for example.[19]

For these studies, many researchers use what Robert Butler calls the life review, a counseling technique for aging individuals who experience disassociation and depression.[20] Some researchers suggest that such therapeutic reminiscence has multiple functions: informative, evaluative, and, negatively, obsessive.[21] As the population of the

[17] Jeff Todd Titon, 'The Life Story," *journal of American Folklore* 93 (Summer 1980), pp. 276-92. See also David Braid, "Personal Narrative and Experiential Meaning," *Journal of American Folklore* 109 (Winter 1996), pp. 5-30.

[18] An excellent bibliography of nonmedical applications of oral history is found in Paul Thompson, Catharine Itzin, and Michael Abendston, I *Don't Feel Old: The Experience of Later Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). See also Carl Ryant, "Comment: Oral History and Gerontology," *Gerontologist* 21 (February 1981), pp. 104-5; Robert Menninger, "Psychological Factors in Oral History Interviewing," *Oral History Review* (1975), pp. 68-75.

[19] R. and S. Harris, 'Therapeutic Uses of Oral History Techniques in Medicine," *International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 12 (1980), pp. 27-34.

[20] Robert Butler, "The Life Review: An Unrecognized Bonanza," *International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 12 (1980), pp. 35-38.20.

[21] Marianne Lo Gerfo, "Three Ways of Reminiscence in Theory and Practice," *International journal of Aging and Human Development* 12 (1980), pp. 35-38; Barbara Meyerhoff, "Life History as Integration: An Essay on an Experiential Model," *Gerontologist* 15 (1975), pp. 541-43.

western world ages, researchers will experience increased pressure to understand how our memory and history-telling instinct is affected by our aging; and oral historians, with their experience in eliciting narratives, will play an expanded role in gerontology. In the United Kingdom, oral history researchers are formulating a relationship between reminiscence among the elderly and the emergence of a social movement for the nights of the elderly.[22]

Legal Studies

The testimonies of oral history are often inadmissible in courts of law under the "hearsay" rule of evidence: one can testify only on what one has seen or experienced rather than on what one has heard someone say. Nevertheless, in the last 15 years, oral history has entered into both litigation and the precedents which form the basis for legal decisions.[23] Just as anthropologists and archaeologists are increasingly involved in initial canvasses of sites for commercial development, so oral historians increasingly survey and testify on the oral tradition and oral history surrounding land and water tenure. (One difficulty here is the problem of obtaining "expert witness" status for oral historians.)

Another application of oral history to legal history is the way in which law firms and legal history societies are turning to oral historians to document the history of their firm or branch of law, or the lives of outstanding jurists. Similarly, the complex of legal issues surrounding the creation, copyright, and "fair use" of an interview requires oral historians to pay progressively more attention to legal precedents.[24]

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[22] Joanna Bomat, "Oral History as a Social Movement" (and other articles in this special issue on aging), *Oral History* 17 (Autumn 1989).

[23] Alessandro Portelli, "Oral Testimony, the Law, and the Making of History," *History Workshop journal* 20 (Autumn 1985) pp. 5-35.

[24] See, in particular. John Neuenschwander, *Oral History and the Law* (Los Angeles, Calif.: Oral History Association, Pamphlet Series, 1987, 1993). Neuenschwander may be the only oral history professor who Simultaneously sits as a judge.

Literary History

For as long as there have been writers-indeed, *before* there were writers in the times when literature was exclusively oral-people have conducted interviews to document the literary process and its context. Oral history has influenced literary studies in primarily two categories: biography, both oral and written; and literary history, where interviews document the activities of the literary profession and publishing (as well as the work of specific writers).

Literary history or biography compiled primarily from oral sources differs significantly from that constructed primarily from written sources.[25] One inter-disciplinary quarterly which examined this trend is *Biography.*[26] An orally sourced biography requires a researcher to evaluate the reliability and validity of his or her narrators, as does any book based on written sources. Yet the oral biographer may have certain advantages: interview sessions may expose new documents, letters, and photographs; interviews cover a full range of sources, not just those from the period of public activity (since the historical sources themselves are available for cross-examination); and the testimonies are depositories of living language with distinctive and exact phrasings.[27]

In 1990, the U.S. Oral History Association held its first panel on "oral literary history," that is, documenting via recorded interviews the literary culture of a period. This panel discussed everything from oral narratives of Vietnam survivors to the negotiation of a historical time frame between the interviewer and the interviewee.[28]

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[25] For an example of how oral history informs literary studies, see Alessandro Portelli, "Absalom, Absalom!: Oral History and Literature," in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1991), and Stephen Arkin, 'The Literary Interview as Form," *International Journal of Oral Histo1Y* 4 (February 1983), pp. 12-18.

[26] See David Mitchell, "Living Documents: Oral History and Biography," *Biography 3* (1980), pp. 283-96; and David K. Dunaway, "Oral Biography and Memory," *Biography* 14 (Summer 1991), pp. 256-66.

[27] David Mitchell, "Oral History and the Biography of Public Figures," *Canadian Oral His- tory Association journal* 6 (1983), pp. 33-37; David K. Dunaway, "Method and Theory in the Oral Biography," *Oral History* 20 (Autumn 1992), pp. 40-44.

[28] Theories of narrativity, examining how history becomes configured into story, become important elements in current dialogues on the effect of performance on story-telling. See the review-essay "Storytelling as Experience," *Oral History Review* 22 (Winter 1995), pp. 87-91, and Simon Featherstone, "Narrative Form of Oral History," *Oral History* 19 (Autumn 1991), pp. 59-62.

Oral literary history possesses certain key characteristics: (1) it focuses on works of contemporary literature where the researcher interactively probes the author's sources, creative process, and revisions, as well as his or her networks of influence; (2) works of interest to oral literary historians tend to be language-centered and concerned with the sociolinguistic dimension of the literary text; (3) oral literary historians are inclined to explore historical and social contexts to literature, as opposed to critics who view the text as internally referential, to the exclusion of the world outside; (4) texts studied via oral literary history reflect the fundamentally collaborative process of an interviewer and a narrator.

As George Held wrote in a review-essay on collections of interviews with contemporary writers, "the resulting harvest of critical and biographical information [gathered via interview] has become a subspecies of oral history."[29] Unfortunately, many such collections are not prepared by trained oral historians, which has often resulted in a blurring of the distinction between lived experience and created experience, the latter being a writer's stock-in-trade. Still, ranging from the early interviews on publishing in the Columbia University archives to those in Britain's National Sound Archives, the oral history branch of literary history is a growing and popular area of research. As new literary formats emerge, such as podcasts, audio-books and "v-logs" (videotaped oral memoirs, illustrated with photographs and ephemera), their narrative voice will surely be influenced by the model of oral history.[30]

Media Studies and Media Production

For more than three-quarters of a century, since the dawn of radio broadcasting, producers have explored historical subjects in both documentary and fiction formats. In radio, television, and film, producers have sought to raise popular historical consciousness, to broadcast "to the man [and woman] in the street" in order to develop "historical mindedness," as a National Advisory Council on Radio and Education

[29] George Held, "The Voice of the Writer Is Heard in the Land," *Oral History Review* 17 (Spring 1979), pp. 129; see also a review-essay by Maurice Maryanow, "Why Interview Writers," *International Journal of Oral History* 9 (February 1988), pp. 43-52.
[30] Theresa Watkins, "A Video Letters Exchange," *Oral History* 20 (1992), pp. 45-46.

suggested more than 60 years ago. Today, electronic and mass media are leading outlets for publicizing oral history's findings. Documentarians on radio and television-particularly on the sparsely funded public networks-are discovering the riches available in oral history archives. Local broadcasters are airing oral history interviews to fulfill their public-service obligations. Oral testimony has even been incorporated into full-length Hollywood feature films, such as *Reds and Zelig*.

In recent years, oral history organizations have held panels to promote an interchange of technical and artistic skills between media producers and oral historians. This collaboration has not been uncomplicated. Training in broadcasting and learning in content areas of the humanities are generally separated in post-secondary and

post-graduate education. The result of this mismatch leaves media producers with an acute knowledge of their medium's grammar but often without any knowledge of its potential content; and it leaves oral historians comfortable with their subject while lacking a plan for the use of their materials beyond archiving them.

In terms of the history of broadcasting, interviews at the Columbia University's oral history program covered the early, pioneering days of broadcasting in the United States; similarly in Canada, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has sponsored oral history interviews of its early staff.[31]

A separate trend has been a new, analytical treatment of broadcasting and oral history, including its representational strategies, its methodological implications, and its aesthetic. Typical of this approach was the 1993 conference of the Oral History Society in Britain, "Broadcasting and Oral History," which debated how documentaries based upon oral history represent (or possibly stereotype) regions and ethnicities. Documentarians discussed how their genre has been changed by including oral sources-and how today's historical sources anticipate media uses in their testimony. Researchers debated the implications of selection and editing procedures, including ethical and privacy issues affecting interviewees.

[31] See the comments of Dennis Duffy and others, pp. 49-61, and Jean Bruce, "Women in the CBC" *Canadian Oral History journal* 5 (1982), pp. 7-18. For more recent examples of the role of history in broadcasting, see the articles on news-gathering in the *Oral History Review* 21 (Spring 1993).

Sociology And Community Studies

At issue in exploring how oral history is applied internationally is the way academic disciplines are defined differently in different countries. Much modem oral history research in Britain and Germany, for example, takes place as sociology or European ethnology, the study of everyday life, (which includes what North Americans call social anthropology)[32] British sociologists are often involved in what psychologists call "depth interviewing," involving a deep, multilayered process of recounting individual experience. In Britain, this discipline includes more life history interviewing than in the United States, where sociologists conducting interviews are more apt to apply Robert Merton's notion of the "fixed-focus" interview, treating individual narrators as significant only as representatives of groups and subcultures. Thus American sociologists tend to receive training in survey-research methods and conduct "oral sociology" via structured questionnaires.

Oral history in the United States is more closely tied to the community history model.[33] Here, the localistic orientation of sociology tends toward the qualitative side of the profession, where individual experiences count as much as the statistical aggregate.[34] Recent arrivals at the juncture of sociology and oral history, such as the Institute of Sociology at the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, tend to favor this combined life-history, life-story approach to inductive research in sociology.

Women and Gender Studies

A pioneer essay in women's studies and oral history was "What's So Special About Women? Women's Oral History," by Sherna Gluck. Those interested in combining women's studies and oral history already confront questions which Gluck's essay raises:

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[32] Lucy Fischer, "Sociological Life History: Methodological Incongruence," *International journal of Oral History* 20 (February 1983), pp. 29-40.

[33] For examples, see Michael Frisch, 'Town into City," A *Shared Authority* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1990), pp. 191-201, and Rickie Burman, "Oral History and Community History in the Work of Manchester Studies," *International journal of Oral History* 5 (lune 1984), pp.114-24.

[34] Typical of this perspective is Ingrid Scobie, "Family and Community History through Oral History," *Public Historian* 1 (Summer 1979).

who is the appropriate interviewer for oral history projects on women-someone of the same gender? the same age? the same class? Are interviewing projects which dramatize and perhaps glorify women's domestic achievements perpetuating stereotypes of women's work?

As in the case of ethnic studies, oral historians interested in women's studies are harvesting recollections of groups and classes of people largely disenfranchised from the historical records.[35] "Historians attempted to offer modem women heroines and role models, characters in a single 'herstory' long ignored," Susan Strasser commented. "[Yet] housewives remained 'hidden from history' .... This 'history from the bottom up' produced articles in professional journals and local history projects. It used a variety of unconventional techniques to tell the tale of everyday life in the past.[36]

Where the majority of women are from working-class backgrounds, in which formal education was not a traditional priority, much of the data collected orally occurs in an anecdotal, narrative framework of autobiographies and memoirs.[37] Gluck and others have synthesized feminist concerns from fields related to oral history, such as gender-based styles in language, collaboration, and authority.[38]

Oral History Guides

Another way to examine how oral history has developed over the last 50 years to explore the variety and substance of its methodological guides. Perhaps the first and most widely used guide to oral history practice was Willa K. Baum's *Oral History for the Local Historical Society,* which first appeared in 1966.[39] Previously, guides to fieldwork in interviewing were either drawn from sociology or from folklore, notably the 1964 work, *A*

[35] One early symposium on the oral history of women is found in the *Canadian Oral History Associationjoumal6* (1983), pp. 7-20.
[36] Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York, N.Y.: Pantheon, 1982), p. xii.
[37] These reminiscences are often grouped by topic, such as women during wartime or women and settlement patterns, to cite but two articles in *Oral History* 19 (Autumn 1991).
[38] Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai, eds., *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991). This book has a comprehensive bibliography on oral history and gender studies.
[39] Willa K. Baum, *Oral History for the Local Histol1cai Society* (Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1967), 2d ed., 1974.

Guide for Fieldworkers in Folklore.[40] Whereas Goldstein's work relies heavily on anthropology, including sections on rapport, observation, and collecting, Baum reached out to a nonprofessional audience, taking up such practical issues as preinterviewing and local history research and influencing other guides of this period.[41] In 1974, William Moss's *Oral History Program Manual* approached oral history from an archivist's perspective, including sections on curating and conserving oral history collections. The publication of these two volumes documented the increasing popularity of oral history, particularly among those referred to above as the second generation of oral historians.[42] By this period, oral history guides were beginning to shift focus from how to make tape recordings and conduct interviews, in favor of exploring issues in collecting and circulating transcripts.

These and other, later, manuals and guides chart an increasingly reflexive dimension to oral history practice, in which the oral historian catalogues his or her background and ideology, as well as the performance and sociolinguistic context of the interview.[43]

Today, as meetings of the International Oral History Association have shown, oral history offers an entire world of opportunity. Today this world is challenged in several ways by incorporating emergent technologies- such as the Internet, plus computer-aided storage, processing, and retrieval. Oral historians have responded by finding ways of applying technology to create an international exchange of methods, approaches, and theory. If oral tradition is a river, at times flowing underground, tapped by successive generations, then oral history is its tributary, recycling history into story and sending story bubbling up into history by expanding the interdisciplinary boundaries of the field.

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[40] Kenneth Goldstein, *A Guide for Fieldworkers* in *Folklore* (Hatborough, Penn.: Folklore Associates of the American Folklore Society, 1964).

[41] Gary Shumway and William Hartley, *An Oral History Primer* (Fullerton, Calif.: California State University, 1973). For a bibliography of early writings on oral history, see Gary Shumway, *Oral History in the United States: A Directory* (New York, NY.: Oral History Association, 1971).

[42] The concerns of oral historians interested in prominent figures such as politicians were reflected in Anthony Seldon and Joanna Papausch, *By Word of Mouth: Elite Oral Histories* (London: Methuen, 1983).

[43]Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1994) and Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (New York, NY.: Twayne, 1995).

Thus we see that oral historians have accepted that what they do is simultaneously a *method* (oral data collection), a *subfield of history* (oral historiography) and a *resource* for teachers, communities, and researchers of all kinds (oral history).

In summary, here are current issues as oral history faces one of its most challenging moments—The prospect of defunding (via elimination of research funds) by the elimination of the National Endowments of Art and of History; and the elimination of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, parent to all public and community broadcasting in radio and television.

These are the top targets of America's right-wing politicians. The cost of these institutions is less than that of a single new boat for the Navy or a single new fighter for the Air Force. Yet between them, these three institutions stimulate and promote and distribute information of all our cultures and unfake news. Wiping them away, though unlikely to succeed entirely, is simply a pathway to ignorance and tyranny. So however it comes, whatever form resistance takes, and however successful that resistance will be, it is necessary for the future of history and oral history in the United States.

America's presidential election created a great deal of heat in its academic circles. The debate is not a schism; building support for the current administration among the faculty remains a tough sell. General opinion seems to be that the new President's boorishness, lack of empathy, and contradictory statements are hard to follow or accept. Rather the issue becomes how academics will respond; and at the 2017 meetings of the Oral History Association, this was the major discussion.

Plenary sessions addressed the election's daunting consequences for historians—unsurprisingly, as the current budget calls for elimination of the National Endowments for the Humanities and Arts—the largest funders of many attending--and zeroes out public broadcasting--which academics listen to and watch more than any other source of information. I found three directions offered: as researchers, bystanders, or activists. All have their advocates.

The development of new research agendas centered on how new policies affect the daily lives of the 99%, after emerging cuts to medical and social welfare. Those collecting the history of Indians, Hispanics, and African-Americans urged new research on

the effects of reducing benefits and aid for addiction. This was pro-active Oral History. Applying academic training to these topics could really help communities.

A minority saw researchers as bystanders, asking but not presupposing. There is an importance to neutrality. Some argued for mutual understanding among opposing viewpoints. Instead of disregarding the views of the President's supporters, the goal should be to interview and analyze them. This calls into question the historians? own biases and how to negotiate them: should they interject their individual political leanings into their research? Should they explain their beliefs before, after, or during interviewing? Inevitably, one's orientation and prejudices find a way into one's research. But how much should one take a stand, while interviewing those with whom we disagree?

The majority, however, clearly favored confrontation as activists. Scholars called for active resistance, at least intellectually, and for collecting historical narratives to create new origin stories of how we got to now. Cuts in budgets were to be resisted; “Resistance" is the new byword for many American researchers. (Whether this will last, and what happen when the screws tighten when research grants demand political loyalty, is yet unclear.)

This confrontational attitude was summarized by the keynote speaker, Harvard professor and *New Yorker* writer Jill Lepore: "People are so grumpy, what with petty tyrants and such. Alternate histories, particularly dystopias, reflect their societies' radical pessimism. According to Lepore, this is ours: The Internet did not stitch us together. Economic growth has led to a widening economic inequality and a looming environmental crisis. Democracy appears to be yielding to authoritarianism.

"Dystopia used to be a fiction of resistance, she concluded; it's become a fiction of submission, the fiction of an untrusting, lonely, and sullen twenty-first century, the fiction of fake news and Infowars, the fiction of helplessness and hopelessness… A story about ruin can be beautiful. Wreckage is romantic. But a politics of ruin is doomed.”

There's a need for a debate on the best way for historians to respond to the new challenges of increasing inequality and organized racism and prejudice--that much seems clear.

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