

AMCV2652
Community Documentary and Storytelling
Fall 2010

Course information:

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Office hours: Tuesday, 2-4; Wednesday, 10-12, and by appointment

This class investigates a variety of means for documenting, presenting, and exploring community history, stories, and memory. It has three primary purposes: to prepare students with oral history interviewing skills that are crucial for the examination of the history and memory of communities; to introduce a range of disciplinary and professional approaches to collecting, interpreting, and presenting first-person narratives; and to consider ways that audio, visual, and documentary sources can be used to tell the story of a community's past, particularly stories of communities rendered invisible in traditional historical texts. Students will conduct oral history interviews and archival research, and prepare documentary projects related to the Fox Point neighborhood, including the Wickenden Street business district and nearby India Point Park.

The Fox Point Oral History Project began 3 years ago and, to date, students have collected about 60 interviews with former and current residents of the area. This year, students in AMCV2652 will have the opportunity to conduct their own interviews, to review materials collected previously, and to think about the future of this oral history project. Among the questions that the class will consider are: what is the connection between the historical record and the remembered past? How do people and groups use memories and narratives about their past to form a sense of community? How reliable are these memories and does reliability matter? How do people mobilize and manipulate accounts of the past for purposes of community building, historic preservation, and economic development? How can collaboration open new stories and new possibilities to engage audiences? And how should researchers and documentarians balance their obligation to scholarly rigor with their commitment to the communities that they investigate?

The class will be divided into three parts. In Part 1, we will consider the practices of oral history and documentary studies, engaging some of the theoretical, interpretive, ethical, and practical debates confronted by scholars and practitioners from a range of disciplines and institutional settings. Part 2 focuses on hands-on instruction to prepare students to conduct life history interviews and to edit and prepare them for preservation and use. As part of their involvement in documentary, students will consider issues related to community projects, especially project design and management. In Part 3 students will work with their classmates and community members to develop documentary projects and programs, possibly including audio-based walking tours, web sites, and other displays.

Requirements: This is a collaborative, project-driven class. As such, it will demand time and attention in ways that differ from many other university classes. Primarily, oral history and documentary studies are social pursuits that entail the development of

personal and professional relationships between interviewers (you), interviewees, and the community groups that facilitate your work. The parties involved in these relationships will have expectations of you in addition to those of your instructor. They expect that you will act in a sensitive, responsible and courteous manner; and that your work will contribute to the production of materials that will benefit current and future researchers and community members. As a student in this class, you must take these obligations seriously and be committed to the goals of scholarship and community building entailed in the course. In addition, your classmates will depend on you to act considerately and cooperatively, since you will be working together to build a collection of interviews and to create collaborative final projects. In more concrete ways, too, you will share equipment, information, and materials, an arrangement that will require you to be punctual, well organized, and responsible to each other. You will find the results make this collaboration worth while.

Readings:

The following books are required for this class:

Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*

Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson, *Oral History Reader*

Gail Dubrow with Donna Graves, *Sento at Sixth and Main*

Bruce Jackson, *The Story is True: The Art and Meaning of Telling Stories*

Daniel Makagon and Mark Neumann, *Recording Culture: Audio Documentary and the Ethnographic Experience*

All required books should be available at the Brown University bookstore and are on reserves at the Rock library. In addition, copies of the books, as well as additional articles will be available in the JNBC library.

Assignments:

Participation (20%): Attendance and participation are vital to the class success, along with the completion of assignments on time. Because you will be working collaboratively and cooperatively to conduct interviews with members of Fox Points communities, and to prepare final presentations, any absences will cause an unwelcome inconvenience to your classmates. Therefore, attendance is mandatory at all scheduled class sessions. You should attend class prepared to discuss topics that emerge from the assigned readings as well as your ongoing work and the work of others (for example, by sharing portions of your transcripts and other materials, and providing updates of your research).

In addition, students (in pairs) will be assigned a week when they will be in charge of leading class discussion, raising significant issues and questions related to assigned readings.

Interviews (30%): Each student must conduct a minimum of two interviews with former and current residents, business owners, and stake holders from the Fox Point neighborhood. All interviews must be fully documented, with completed consent forms, written transcripts, and supporting materials (a narrator biography and an interview

summary) in order to be used by other students in this class and archived at the end of the semester.

Final Project and Presentation (30%): Students will work collaboratively with classmates and community members to present the interviews and other research through audio documentaries, performance, web sites and/or an audio walking tour. These presentations should be developed according to three criteria: they should use interviews collected in this class (and may use materials collected in prior years); they will become publicly accessible after the class ends; and they should be developed in consultation or cooperation with members of the Fox Point community. These projects will be presented in a public session at the end of the semester.

Alternatively, students interested in public programming can work to organize a public program – e.g., an oral history workshop or digital storytelling session – that uses skills and methods learned in this class.

Project ideas will be submitted for review and approval in mid-October.

Project Proposal (20%): At the semester's end, students will submit a proposal or white paper that addresses some aspect of the Fox Point Oral History Project. For this assignment, your larger objective is to advise your professor about the future of this project; more specifically, you should develop a proposal/white paper that describes a particular shortcoming, gap, or problem with the project and devises a plan to address that concern. For example, you might focus on ways to broaden access to the interviews or to expand community participation.

You should present your ideas in one of two forms: a white paper or a mock grant proposal (suitable for submission to either the NEH, NEA, or RICH). While it is unlikely that your actual proposal would be submitted, your ideas will be seriously considered and may influence the future of this oral history project.

For helpful resources, see:

Designing an Oral History Project, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, at: http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/oral_history/4351/designing_an_oral_history_project/445228

Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Digital Oral History Workshop, at: http://www.baylor.edu/oral_history/index.php?id=61236

On White Papers, Purdue Online Writing Lab, at: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/546/1/>

The interviews and final projects will be discussed at length in class. Do not hesitate, however, to ask questions and seek clarification for any assignment.

CLASS SCHEDULE

September 7:

Introductions and overview

September 14:

Oral History and Storytelling: why storytelling? Why first-person narratives?

Read:

- Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, Chapter 1
- Bruce Jackson, *The Story is True*

September 21:

Interviewing, Remembering, and Narrating: how do oral history interviews differ from other kinds of stories? Other kinds of first-person sources?

Read:

- *Oral History Reader*, Part 1-2
- Lelia Lomba de Andrade, "Negotiating from the Inside: Constructing Racial and Ethnic Identity in Qualitative Research," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (2000) (JNBC library)
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September 28:

Oral history methods: what is a good interview? What is the role of the interviewer? What legal and ethical issues need to be considered?

Read:

- *Doing Oral History*, chapters 2-3 and Appendix 1, Oral History Association Evaluation Guidelines [These guidelines are currently under revision. See <http://www.oralhistory.org/do-oral-history/principles-and-practices/> for a draft of the new standards.]
- Jennifer Howard, "Oral History Under Review," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 10 November 2006, at: <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v53/i12/12a01401.htm>
- Schrag, Zachary M. "Ethical Training for Oral Historians." *Perspectives Online* 45:3 (March 2007), at <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2007/0703/index.cfm> and "How Talking Became Human Subjects Research: The Federal Regulation of the Social Sciences, 1965-1991. *The Journal of Policy History* 21:1 (2009): 1-35, at <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayIssue?jid=JPH&volumeId=21&seriesId=0&issueId=01>
- Center for Advanced Study, University of Illinois. "The Illinois White Paper: Improving the System for Protecting Human Subjects – Counteracting IRB 'Mission Creep'." November 2005, at http://www.primr.org/uploadedFiles/PRIMR_Site_Home/Resource_Center/Articles/11.%20Illinois%20Whitepaper.pdf

- Michael Seadle, "Whose Rules? Intellectual Property, Culture, and Indigenous Communities," D-Lib Magazine, March 2002; available at <http://www.dlib.org/dlib/march02/seadle/03seadle.html>

******September 29: film session**

6:30 -8:00 pm screening of "Some Kind of Funny Porto Rican: A Cape Verdean American Story. Pizza provided.

October 5:

Editing and self-editing in storytelling -- how are stories (re)constructed for audiences? Who decides what stories to tell -- and which to omit? How is a story transformed through the translation from speech to written text or finished product?

Read:

- Lorraine Sitzia, "A Shared Authority: An Impossible Goal?," *Oral History Review* (2003) (JNBC library)
- Kathleen Norris, "A Crowded Writer on the Lonely Prairie," *New York Times*, 27 December 1992 (JNBC library)
- Michael Frisch, "Preparing Interview Transcripts for Documentary Publication," from *A Shared Authority* (JNBC library)
- Lorraine Sitzia, "Making a Community Oral History Book," and Nick Osmond, "The Growth of a Community Oral History Archive," in *Oral History* (v. 26, 1998) (JNBC library)
- Richard Candida Smith, "Publishing Oral History: Oral Exchange and Print Culture," in *Thinking About Oral History* (JNBC library)
- Jessica Abel and Ira Glass, *Radio: An Illustrated Guide* (JNBC library)
- Candacy Taylor, *Counter Culture: The American Coffee Shop Waitress* (JNBC library)

5:00-6:30, presentation by Candacy Taylor, documentarian and author of *Counter Culture: The American Coffee Shop Waitress*

October 12:

Becoming acquainted with Fox Point -- what's the history of this community? What do people remember about this place?

"Fox Pointers" will visit the class to answer questions about the community

Read/Review:

- Fox Point interviews -- listen/read/review Fox Point interviews conducted in previous years, available at: <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/foxpoint/>. On this site, you can also find research and projects completed by students in prior years.

October 19:

Walking tour, weather permitting. Details TBA.

Due: Completed first interview, including paperwork, narrator biography, and verbatim transcript. Also, come with your ideas for final projects that you'd like to work on with your classmates.

******October 20: optional editing session**

Morning workshop led by Edrex Fontanilla from Brown's media lab, on using Audacity, Garageband and iMovie for editing interviews. Time and place to be announced.

October 26:

Interpretive Challenges – How can interviews be used, individually and collectively, to tell a larger story? What is significant about the stories that are not being told?

Read:

- Karen Fields, "What One Cannot Remember Mistakenly" (JNBC library)
- Alessandro Portelli, "The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory and the Event" (JNBC library)
- Jeff Friedman, "Fractious Action: Oral History-Based Performance," in *Thinking About Oral History* (JNBC library)
- *Oral History Reader*, Part 3

Due: Each team should submit (in writing, via email) a proposal that outlines your final project and the specific contributions each team member will make.

November 2:

Presenting community stories – how have museums, cultural programs, and community organizations used oral history interviews and first-person narratives? What are the benefits and limitations of presenting oral history interviews in edited audio, film, or written (transcript) form?

Read:

- *Oral History Reader*, Part 4
- *Doing Oral History*, chapter 8
- Ron Chew, "Collected Stories: The Rise of Oral History in Museum Exhibitions," *Museum News* (November/December 2002) (JNBC library)
- Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, *Oral History and Public Memories*, Part 2 (JNBC library)

November 9:

Presenting community stories, cont.

Read:

- Dubrow and Graves, *Sento at Sixth and Main*
- Charles Hardy and Pamela Dean, "Oral History in Sound and Moving Image Documentaries," in *Thinking About Oral History* (JNBC library)

Presentation by Kate Ellis, Consulting Producer, American Public Media. Ellis' work is available at: <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/documentaries.php> including the

shows *A Better Life*, *King's Last March*, *An Imperfect Revolution: Voices from the Desegregation Era*

November 16:

Citizen Storytellers: participatory media production. How have documentarians sought to transmit their skills and expand the range of storytellers? How do the methods and approaches of "citizen storytellers" compare to those utilized by professionals?

Read:

- Makagon and Neumann, *Recording Culture*
- Amber Reed and Amy Hill, "Don't Keep it to Yourself: Digital Story Telling with South African Youth," *seminar.net* (Vol 6, 2010), at <http://www.seminar.net/index.php/home/75-current-issue/146-dont-keep-it-to-yourself-digital-storytelling-with-south-african-youth> (or JNBC library)
- David Dunaway, "Public Oral History: Reflections on Educating Citizen-Historians," in Lanman and Wendling, *Preparing the Next Generation of Oral Historians* (JNBC library)
- American Folklife Center, "Folklife and Fieldwork: An Introduction to Field Techniques," at <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/fieldwork/index.html> (or JNBC library)

Due: Second completed interview (recording, transcript, forms, narrator biography)

5:00-6:30 presentation by board members of The History Project, a grassroots LGBTQ project in Boston. See more about The Project at: <http://www.historyproject.org>

November 23:

No class: use this week for interviews and to work on final projects

November 30: Memory and Community – how does history (or remembrances of the past) shape a sense of community? How do communities use history and memory to create a sense of shared identity or to promote common interests? How can community stories be mobilized for political purposes?

Read:

- Sarah Copeland and Clodagh Miskelly, "Making Time for Storytelling: The Challenges of Community Building and Activism in a Rural Locale," *seminar.net* (Vol 6, 2010), at <http://www.seminar.net/index.php/home/75-current-issue/151-making-time-for-storytelling-the-challenges-of-community-building-and-activism-in-a-rural-locale>
- *Oral History Reader*, Part 5
- Laurie Latham, "Bringing Old and Young People Together: An Interview Project," in *Remembering: Oral History Performance* (JNBC library)

5:00-6:30 presentation by Holly Eward, a Providence artist who works on community art, history, and environment projects. See more about her work at: <http://www.voicesandvisions.org/> and <http://hollyeward.com/>

December 7: Fox Point Oral History Project – how could the Project develop to more effectively serve the interests of Fox Point? Of the university? How to balance these interests?

Read:

- Ellen D. Swain, "Oral History in the Archives," *The American Archivist* Vol. 66, No. 1 (Spring - Summer, 2003) (JNBC library)
- Marjorie McLellan, "Case Studies in Oral History and Community Learning," *Oral History Review* (Vol 25, 1998) (JNBC library)
- Gregory Jay, "What (Public) Good are the (Engaged) Humanities?" at <http://www.imaginingamerica.org/reports.html>

December 16:

Group presentations and community reception

Final projects and proposals due