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History 650 Syllabus Spring 2013

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History 650: Oral History: Theory and Practice
La Salle University, Spring 2013

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Objective:

This seminar will provide students with the foundations for designing and executing oral history research projects. Students will read and discuss literature about oral history theory and methods and will examine how historians use oral history interviews to construct interpretive historical narratives. Students will undertake independent fieldwork that will allow them to apply the methods and approaches studied in class. This semester, fieldwork will focus on the community in and around La Salle University. The class requires prior knowledge of or the willingness to learn how to use digital recording devices, digital playback software, and digital methods of submitting course projects.

Required readings:

You must read in order to participate in discussion and in order to carry out the interviewing projects.

1. Baylor University Online Oral History Workshop:
<http://www.baylor.edu/oralhistory/index.php?id=23560>
2. John A. Neuenschwander, *A Guide to Oral History and the Law*; Ted Palys and John Lowman, "Defending Research Confidentiality 'To the Extent the Law Allows:' Lessons from the Boston College Subpoenas," *Journal of Academic Ethics*, vol. 10 (2012), no. 4: 271-297. See also *Boston College Subpoena News* at <http://bostoncollegesubpoena.wordpress.com/>
3. Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*, 2012 illustrated ed.
4. Jean Seder, *Voices of Kensington: Vanishing Mills, Vanishing Neighborhoods*, (copies provided)
5. *A Revolution of Their Own: Voices of Women in Soviet History*, edited by Barbara Alpern Engel and Anastasia Posadskaya-Vanderbeck,
6. Donald J. Raleigh, *Russia's Sputnik Generation: Soviet Baby Boomers Talk about their Lives* (Indiana University Press, 2006)
7. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, James Leloudis, Robert Korstad, Mary Murphy, Lu Ann Jones, and Christopher Daly, *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*, 2000 reprint with new afterword
8. Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome*
9. *After the Fall: New Yorkers Remember September 2001*, eds. Mary Marshall Clark et al
10. John P. Rossi, *Living the Promise* (do not purchase; five copies on reserve at Connelly Library)

Additional readings, essential documents, and samples of required work are on Blackboard. See the schedule below for due dates of readings.

Recording equipment and supplies:

Digital voice recorders or digital video recorders

**Purchase at a store of your choice or borrow from La Salle University Media Services (Olney Room 200 – reserve through the mylasalle portal)

Digital voice recorders should come with a USB cable and record in WAV or MP3

Blank CDs, DVDS, and/or flash drives

For storage of interview materials and submission of materials to the instructor (see below).

Foot pedal (optional)

Use to manipulate the speed of the recording while playing it back for transcription. The History Department possesses one foot pedal for loan; see Lauren De Angelis, the department secretary.

Acid-free unlined white paper

Print log, field notes, legal releases, and other necessary forms for submission to instructor and deposit in archive. Print on one side only.

Playback software

Free download from <http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/>. This software slows down the recording to allow you to transcribe more easily.

Oral history websites with guidelines:

Oral History Association: <http://www.oralhistory.org/>

H-Oralhist: <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~oralhist/>

Baylor Institute for Oral History: <http://www.baylor.edu/oralhistory/index.php?id=23560>

National Oral History Association of New Zealand: <http://www.oralhistory.org.nz/>

Vermont Folklife Center: <http://www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/index.htm>

Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling Concordia University: <http://storytelling.concordia.ca/oralhistory/>

Oral history websites with interviews:

La Salle University Oral Histories (<http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/histdeptoh/>)

Oral Histories of the American South (<http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/>)

Miller Center of Public Affairs (UVA) Presidential Oral History Program (<http://millercenter.org/academic/oralhistory/index>)

Experiencing War: Stories from the Veterans History Project (<http://www.loc.gov/vets/stories/index.html>)

Voices of the Manhattan Project (<http://manhattanprojectvoices.org>)

Grade distribution:

15% Participation in discussion (ongoing)

15% Readings quizzes (lowest grade dropped)

- 10% Critical analysis of online oral history interview (due Jan. 29)
 - 10% Recorded practice interview, 20-min. transcript, field notes, self-assessment (Feb. 12)
 - 10% Oral report on formal field interview (April 16, 23 or 30)
 - 40% Field notes, complete log, and recordings of formal field interview(s) (due April 30)
- Students must submit a legal release signed by each interviewee.
Failure to submit the original signed legal release will result in a grade of incomplete.

All work should be performed in a professional manner. Late assignments will result in reduced grades. Penalties will be imposed for poor attendance. See the 2012-2013 Orientation Guide to the Graduate History Program for clarification of the attendance policy.

Schedule of classes, readings, and assignments:

**Explanations of assignments are after the schedule

January 15

Discuss Baylor University's oral history manual, *Introduction to Oral History* (<http://www.baylor.edu/oralhistory/index.php?id=23566>) and Paul Thompson's "Life story interview guide" (Blackboard).

January 22

Discuss *Hard Times* (read self-selected portions from each part of the book)
 View "Oral history: a century of living" (HBO documentary) in class.

January 29

Discuss internet-based oral history interviews and submit written critiques of the same. Use interviews from one of the following sites:

1. Oral Histories of the American South (<http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/>)
2. Miller Center of Public Affairs (UVA) Presidential Oral History Program (<http://millercenter.org/academic/oralhistory/index>)
3. La Salle University Oral Histories (<http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/histdeptoh/>)
4. Experiencing War: Stories from the Veterans History Project (<http://www.loc.gov/vets/stories/index.html>)
5. Voices of the Manhattan Project (<http://manhattanprojectvoices.org>)

February 5

Discuss *A Guide to Oral History and the Law* and the legal case of the Boston College Belfast Project (Ted Palys and John Lowman, "Defending Research Confidentiality 'To the Extent the Law Allows': Lessons from the Boston College Subpoenas," *Journal of Academic Ethics*, vol. 10 (2012), no. 4: 271-297 (Blackboard); *Boston College Subpoena News* at <http://bostoncollegesubpoena.wordpress.com/>; CNN "Secrets of the Belfast Project" at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZ2ImnRoJ1A>; http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/law/july-dec12/ireland_08-23.html).

February 12

Discuss practice interviews and Raphael Samuel's "Perils of the Transcript" (Blackboard). Submit recording of practice interview, a twenty-minute transcript, field notes, and a typed self-assessment (3-4 pages). Submit all materials in a large envelope; place disks or flash drives within small envelopes inside the larger one. As an alternative means of submission, we might use an electronic drop box in Blackboard.

February 19

Discuss *Voices of Kensington* and interview transcripts posted on Blackboard
Student must have selected and contacted interviewee by this date

February 26

Discuss *A Revolution of Their Own*

March 5 Spring Break – class does not meet

Work on Formal Field Interview Project and read *Like a Family*

March 12

Discuss *Like a Family*; view "The Uprising of '34"

March 19

Discuss *Russia's Sputnik Generation*; view "My Perestroika" in class

March 26

Discuss *The Order Has Been Carried Out*.

April 9

Discuss *After the Fall: New Yorkers Remember September 2001*

April 16**Oral Presentations****April 23****Oral Presentations****April 30****Oral Presentations**

Everyone must submit recordings, logs, field notes, legal releases, etc. Submit all materials in a large envelope; place disks or flash drives in small envelopes. Do not staple logs or field notes; use clips instead. As an alternative means of submission, students might be asked to upload their interview materials to Digital Commons. More information will be provided in class.

Participation (15%):

Students must complete all assigned readings and be prepared to discuss them in depth in class, according to the schedule in the syllabus. At the graduate level, students should take the initiative in posing questions for discussion and in contributing analysis and observations to

discussion. Students are expected to critique readings and to respond to other students' contributions to discussion. If students do not volunteer comments, I will call on them to speak. Students who consistently have little or nothing to contribute to discussion might receive F's for their participation grades.

Readings quizzes (15%):

At the beginning of class on nights when we are scheduled to discuss required readings, there will be a 10-15 minute long response quiz on the assigned reading for the night. At the end of the semester, the lowest grade on the quizzes will be dropped.

Critical analysis of online oral history interview (10%) (due January 29):

Write a four to five page critique of an oral history interview from one of the following collections:

1. Oral Histories of the American South (<http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/>)
2. Miller Center of Public Affairs (UVA) Presidential Oral History Program (<http://millercenter.org/academic/oralhistory/index>)
3. La Salle University Oral Histories (<http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/histdeptoh/>)
4. Experiencing War: Stories from the Veterans History Project (<http://www.loc.gov/vets/stories/index.html>)
5. Voices of the Manhattan Project (<http://manhattanprojectvoices.org>)

Choose an interview that is at least one hour long or compare and contrast two shorter interviews. Be prepared to present the critique in class. Evaluate the interviewer's technique using criteria based on guidelines provided by the Baylor manual, as well as your own standards. In addition, assess the organization and accessibility of the web site you used. Use size 12 font; double-space the text. Cite interviews using *Chicago Manual of Style* format.

Practice Interview (10%) (due February 12):

Despite the designation "practice," a high level of professionalism is expected. Interview a family member, friend, or work colleague (the older, the better). Interview the narrator for at least thirty minutes, record the interview and burn it to flash drive, CD or DVD. Choose a topic or topics from the Paul Thompson questions. Transcribe the first ten minutes. Follow the transcription guidelines in the Baylor University Style Guide (Blackboard). Put a time stamp on each page of the interview transcript (see examples on Blackboard). Write field notes (see examples on Blackboard) and a 3-4 page evaluation of the interview experience, critiquing your strengths and weaknesses as an interviewer and discussing how you might improve your technique and preparation in future interviews.

You must submit to me by the date indicated in the syllabus, an audio or video recording of the interview on CD, DVD, or flash drive in WAV, MP3, or MPEG format, a typed transcript of twenty minutes from the interview (the first ten and last ten minutes), typed field notes, and a typed evaluation. Submit all materials in a large envelope labeled with your name; enclose disks in small envelopes; staple papers. Students might be permitted to upload their interview materials to a Blackboard dropbox. In class, each student will spend about ten minutes

discussing what he or she learned from the practice interviews. It is not necessary to obtain a legal release from practice interviewees, unless the practice interview will be deposited along with the formal field interview.

Practice interviews may be conducted by phone or Skype.

Formal Field Interview (40%) (due April 30):

Select an interviewee in consultation with the instructor. Interviewees must be one of the following: 1) Christian Brother, 2) a La Salle University faculty or staff member (including retirees) or alumnus/alumna, or 3) a longtime resident of a neighborhood near La Salle (Olney, Germantown, Logan, Hunting Park). The product of the fieldwork will be a primary historical source in the forms of an audio recording and a complete log (abstract), accompanied by an approved legal release and field notes. The source will be made available to other historians for research by posting it to La Salle's space on Digital Commons and depositing it in the La Salle University Library and Archives. Students must take responsibility for fully informing interviewees of the interview's purpose and of how the interview will be used and made available.

The instructor must approve interviewees in advance and will provide a list of Christian Brothers and La Salle faculty, staff, and alumni who are a priority to interview. Students are responsible for setting up the interviews and designing the questionnaires. Interviewees should be older people (over sixty), preferably at or near the end of their careers and possessing an appropriate frame of mind in which to reflect upon their lives. You should not interview someone who has already been interviewed at length.

The interview should take the form of a life history, but should include around thirty minutes or more about the interviewee's experiences at La Salle, as a Christian Brother, or developments in the neighborhood(s) near La Salle (as appropriate). The purpose of the interview is to collect information that would be useful to historians conducting research. Your approach and questions must reflect familiarity with techniques and approaches discussed on the Baylor website and in the other required readings for the course.

The student should conduct background research into the narrator's work and life in order to compose interview questions. Seek research assistance from Bro. Joseph Grabenstein, the university archivist (College Hall, Room 101; email: grabenst@lasalle.edu; telephone: (215) 951-1294. Remember at all times that you are **not** conducting a publicity project for the university. Students should also read relevant sections of John Rossi's history of La Salle, *Living the Promise* (on reserve at Connelly Library).

Students should seek assistance from Dr. Allen and University Archivist Bro. Joe Grabenstein in composing questions. Dr. Rossi is also willing to offer assistance with selected interviewees. Questions on early life and family life may be modified from the comprehensive questionnaire designed by Paul Thompson (see Blackboard). You are encouraged to submit interview questions to the instructor for feedback, before you begin interviewing. Submit the questions well in advance of the interview (at least 72 hours in advance).

You should have a preliminary conversation with the interviewee to explain the project, what will be done with the interview, and to establish a rapport with the interviewee. You may submit questions to the interviewee in advance of the interview, but make clear that you want to record an oral interview, not receive answers in writing.

Conduct at least two hours of recorded interviewing time. You must obtain a signed legal release from the interviewee for each interview session. Formal field interviews should be conducted face-to-face. Choose a quiet location where the interviewee feels comfortable. Do not speak excessively about yourself during the interview, even if the interviewee seems interested. Do show sympathy if the interviewee discusses traumatic memories. Stop the recording if the interviewee loses composure and resume recording after the interviewee has regained composure. After each interview session, students should make a copy of the original digital recording.

The interview will be graded on the basis of the following:

1. historical value of the interview
2. interviewer's skill in posing questions
3. avoidance of errors such as interrupting the interviewee or failing to pursue potentially productive new avenues of inquiry
4. audio quality of the recording
5. interviewer's professionalism in conducting the interview
6. accuracy and comprehensiveness of the log (abstract)

Original, signed legal releases must be obtained for archival deposit. Recorded interview sessions, logs (abstracts), field notes, legal releases and logs must be submitted to the instructor. The recorded interview sessions must be submitted on CDs, DVDs, or flash drives in WAV or MP3 format. Logs and field notes must be saved in PDF, DOC or DOCX file format. In addition to electronic copies of documents, you must also submit high-quality printed copies of documents to the instructor. Legal releases should be submitted on acid free, white, unlined paper and in excellent condition (do not fold, spindle, or mutilate). As an alternative means of submission, students might be asked to upload their interview materials to Digital Commons. More information will be provided in class.

Oral reports (10%) (April 23 and 30):

Students will report in class about their formal field interviews. Discuss the interview design, preparation for it, significance of information gleaned during the interview, and strengths and weaknesses of your approach. You should use visual aids (either PowerPoint or handouts incorporating photographs), outlines, and any other helpful accompanying materials. Play a short excerpt (1-3 mins.) from your interview. Reports should last from fifteen to twenty minutes; we should allow ten minutes after each report for questions and answers. Reports that fall considerably below fifteen minutes will receive reduced grades. If you talk for much longer than twenty minutes, I will have to interrupt you, in order to give other students time to deliver their presentations. Your presentation will be graded on the content delivered before I interrupt you.

Field notes (due April 30):

Your field notes must identify the interviewee and yourself, describe preparatory work you did for the interview, and describe the setting of the interview and demeanor of the interviewee. Note the mood and mannerisms of the interviewee, and any other information that might be of interest to an historian listening to the recording and attempting to interpret it. Follow the examples given by the sample field notes on Blackboard. Your choice of information to convey may be adapted to your personality, but the more detail you can provide, the better. Field notes should be 2-5 pages in length.

Interview Log (Abstract): (due April 30)

The log should consist of detailed narrative summary that would be helpful to a historian conducting research on any of the usual topics of historical inquiry: gender, labor, politics, institutional history, social history, ethnicity, culture, religion, etc. Include in the log your questions and comments that were voiced in the interview. Use direct quotes to render especially illustrative statements by the interviewee. The log should correctly spell all names of people, institutions, and places mentioned in the interview. For an explanation of how to abstract an interview, see www.oralhistory.org.nz/documents/duddingabstractingguide2008.pdf. If you are unsure of the correct spelling of some words and names, please contact the interviewee for confirmation. Do not correct an interviewee's grammar, colloquialisms, or regional dialect. Do not attempt to render foreign accents or nonstandard pronunciations in the transcription.

Insert a time stamp at the left-hand margin next to each of your questions (indicating how much time has passed since the beginning of the interview session). Use a standard font in size 12. Print on one side only of white paper. Save the transcript to disk in DOC, DOCX or PDF. Students might be asked to upload their interview materials to Digital Commons. More information will be provided in class.

Legal Release (due April 30):

You **must** obtain an original signed legal release from the interviewee(s) in the formal field interview. Use the legal release forms provided by the instructor. You must explain the legal release to the interviewee before the interview begins. Obtain the interviewee's signature at the end of the session. Obtain a signature for each session of the interview. The interviewee has the right to make changes to the legal release. If the interviewee balks at signing the legal release, contact the instructor as soon as possible. In addition to the signed legal release, you must ask the interviewee at the beginning of the recorded interview for oral permission to record. Students must also sign legal release forms for interviewers.

Interviewees may choose to restrict access to their interviews (for example, for twenty years after the interview or until the death of the interviewee). Interviewees may **not** restrict access until the death of everyone mentioned in the interview. This places an undue burden on the archive. Students must inform interviewees that sealed interviews can be opened by court order.