

History 195S.09/African and Afro-American Studies 199S.09

AMERICAN COMMUNITIES: AN ORAL HISTORY APPROACH

Course Syllabus and Reading List

Fall Semester 1997

Wednesdays, 3:50-6:20 p.m

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Introduction

The American Communities seminar, based at the Center for Documentary Studies, introduces students to communities of older Triangle area residents through oral history. Our goal is to examine historical and contemporary issues that shape the social and political fabric of the United States and the American South. In “American Communities” we do this by listening to the voices and perspectives of people who have lived, experienced, and “made” this history firsthand.

In this year’s seminar, students will learn the craft of oral history and conduct life history interviews with Black elders in Durham’s African American community. We will focus on the history of the African American freedom struggle in Durham and the South from the end of Reconstruction to the contemporary era, focusing especially on the decades of legal segregation. We will critically assess, through oral history, readings, archival documents, speakers and documentary films how major forces of social change—the Civil Rights Movement, urban renewal, etc.—have affected the struggle for community and dignity in Durham’s African-American neighborhoods.

This seminar will encourage students to develop a number of important skills. Students will gain experience in interviewing techniques, primary research, as well as writing through keeping a field journal. Since most of the people we will interview have been excluded from the so-called traditional history texts, seminar participants will have the opportunity to use the oral record to critique and reexamine existing preconceptions and myths about African-American life in the South. No matter what you already know about African American history, southern culture, or contemporary race relations, I can assure you that “American Communities” will greatly expand your intellectual horizons.

American Communities is an interdisciplinary and **collaborative** oral history project that seeks to challenge college students to think about the relationships between community and history, between past and present and between Durham and Duke.

Course Requirements

Since this is a collaborative venture, **attendance is critical** particularly at the sessions with guest speakers (including the Durham field trip). Seminar participants will conduct two oral history interviews each. Emphasis will be placed on preparatory research and learning to ask “good questions” while remaining sensitive toward working with older informants. On some weeks, students will read or listen to excerpts from oral history interviews to gain a better understanding of the process.

Participants will be required to keep a journal chronicling their reflections on the interviews, preparation, and the readings. In addition, students will transcribe and index a significant portion of one interview.

A final project, individual or collaborative, is required and will be discussed in class. You might want to look at the American Communities Web Site at <http://www.duke.edu/web/hst195.15/> for ideas on final projects.

Course grades will be based on the following:

Fieldwork (interviews, journal, transcripts, index, etc) 40%

Class Participation 30%

Final Project 30%

I will hold office hours each week on Tuesdays from 2:00-3:00 and Wednesdays from 2:00-3:00, in room 201, of the Center for Documentary Studies. If you need to schedule a meeting outside of these hours, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Information Technology

In addition to perusing the American Communities Web Site for background and preparation, I encourage you to use information technology to enhance your learning experience in this seminar. As a class we may want to use the “net” to send questions back and forth about interview experiences. In addition, I will provide a list of African American and oral history Web Sites for you to “surf” at your leisure.

Course Readings

All required and recommended readings are available on reserve. You may find it helpful to purchase four books: C. Eric Lincoln’s *The Avenue, Clayton City*; Osha Gray Davidson, *The Best of Enemies: Race and Redemption in the New South*; Edward D. Ives, *The Tape-Recorded Interview: A Manual for Fieldworkers in Folklore and Oral History* and Karen Brodtkin Sacks, *Caring By the Hour: Women, Work, and Organizing at Duke Medical Center*. These books are available at the Regulator Bookshop on Ninth Street.

Syllabus and Readings

September 3 Meet at Center for Documentary Studies

What is Oral History?

Introductions

Film: "Wylie Avenue Days"

Handout on Wylie Avenue

September 10 Center for Documentary Studies (CDS)

African American Narratives

Topics: Narratives and the Historical Imagination.

Readings: C. Eric Lincoln, The Avenue, Clayton City

Ned Glascock, "A Piece of Durham's History Falls,"
News and Observer

Film: "Negro Durham Marches On"

September 17 Center for Documentary Studies/Durham

African American Communities In Durham

Topics: Migration. Residential and Work Experiences
Class and Gender Issues. Neighborhoods.

Durham Tour conducted by Joanna Miller of Southerners
for Economic Justice. Depart from CDS at 3:50

Readings: Osha Gray Davidson, Best of Enemies, 15-57

Karen Sacks, Caring by the Hour: Women, Work and
Organizing at Duke Medical Center, 13-36

Pauli Murray, Proud Shoes: The Story of
an American Family, 1-44; 112-156.

Listen To: Thirty Minute Oral History Interview

Excerpt

September 24 Center for Documentary Studies

Oral History Workshop

Topics: The "Nuts and Bolts" of doing the Interview.
Ethics of Oral History. Using Audio Recording
Equipment. Practice Interviews.

Reading: Edward D. Ives, The Tape Recorded Interview

Relationships Valerie R. Yow, "Ethics and Interpersonal
in Oral History Research," The Oral History Review,
22 (Summer, 1995), 51-67.

Donald Ritchie, Oral History, "Appendix A"

Behind the Veil Oral History Transcript:
Interview with Cleaster Mitchell, Brinkley,
Arkansas, July 16, 1995

Listen to a 30 Minute Oral History Interview Excerpt

October 1 Hayti Heritage Center/St. Joseph's A.M.E. Church

**Thinking About Your First Interview/
African American Community Institutions**

Topics: Interview dynamics and preparation.
Beginning the interview. Practice Interviews.
Panel Presentation on Black Community
Institutions in Durham.

Guest speakers: Mrs. Dorothy Jones, Center
for the Study of Black History; Mr. William
Gattis, Stanford L. Warren Library

Reading: Valerie R. Yow, Recording Oral History: A
Practical Guide for Social Scientists
("How to do an interview," chapter.)

Theodore Rosengarten: All God's Dangers: The Life of
Nate Shaw, 103-216.

James Hoopes, Oral History, 72-109

Behind the Veil Oral History Transcript: Interview with Willie Ann Lucas, Brinkley, Arkansas.

Sign up for an Interview Assignment Meeting!

October 8 Center for Documentary Studies

African American Political Struggles and Folklore: Telling the Story Through Oral History

Topics: Political Struggle; Folklore; Biographical Paperwork. Final Interview Preparation. Equipment Check-out.

Reading: Lawrence Goodwyn, "Populist Dreams and Negro Rights: East Texas as a Case Study," American Historical Review, 76, (December 1971), 1435-1456.

Ray Gavins, "North Carolina Black Folklore and Song in an Age of Segregation," in North Carolina Historical Review, October 1989 vol. LXVI, No. 4, pp. 412-442

Robin D.G. Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," Journal of American History, pp. 75-112.

Behind the Veil Oral History Transcript: Interview with Malachia Andrews, Tallahassee, Florida.

October 15: Center for Documentary Studies

Oral History Fieldwork

(Your First Interview Completed or Scheduled by Now)

Topics: Discussion on Interview Preparation. Feedback from First Interviews. Strategies for Follow-Up Interviews.

Reading: Hugh Penn Brinton, "The Negro in Durham:

A Study of Adjustment to Town Life," (1930)
pp. 295-331; 412-439.

Susan Tucker, Telling Memories Among Southern Women: Domestic Workers and Their Employers in the Segregated South, 198-221.

Karen Sacks, Caring By the Hour, 37-98.

October 22: Center for Documentary Studies

Initial Interview Evaluations

Topics: Discuss and present interview excerpts.
Issues for follow-up interviews.

Reading: Katherine Borland, "That's Not What I Said: Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research," in Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patain, eds., Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History

David Cecelski, "Ordinary Sin," The Independent (March 19-25), 11-15.

Osha Gray Davidson, Best of Enemies, 59-151.
Scott Ellsworth, "The Secret Game: Defying the Color Line," Duke Magazine (September-October 1996), 8-11.

October 29 Center for Documentary Studies

Community and Oral History

Topics: Community and Oral History. Interview reports, interview issues.

Note: Follow-Up Interviews Should be Scheduled by Now.

Reading: Linda Shopes, "Oral History and Community Involvement: The Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project," Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, Roy Rosenzweig, eds., Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public, 249-263.

Ben Stocking, "Reaching to Recapture Glory: Raleigh's Idlewild Neighborhood," News and Observer, February 8, 1997.

Laurie Mercier and Madeline Buckendorf, "Using Oral History in Community History Projects," Oral History Association Pamphlet Series (#4)

November 5 Center for Documentary Studies

Transcribing The Interview

Topics: Editing and Transcribing. Beginning to think of the "finished product."

Reading: 1996 "Community Stories" indexes, transcripts.

transcripts Behind the Veil "Appeal to this Age" Exhibit

Raymond Gavins, "Fighting for Civil Rights in the Age of Segregation: The NAACP in North Carolina to 1955," 146-176 in Armstead L. Robinson and Patricia Sullivan, eds., New Directions in Civil Rights Studies

Osha Gray Davidson, Best of Enemies. 153-243

I.F. Stone, "Little Rock: A Piece of Foreign Correspondence," in Stone, The Haunted Fifties, 240-251.

November 12 Center for Documentary Studies

Duke and Black Durham

Topics: Interview issues and reports. Documentary and Archival Issues. Community and scholarly access to oral history tapes and materials. Indexing

Reading: Karen Sacks, Caring By the Hour, 99-216

November 19 Center for Documentary Studies

Postwar Durham and Civil Rights Struggles

Topics: Interview reports, issues. Discuss final projects.

Reading: Davidson, Best of Enemies, 245–Conclusion.

November 26 THANKSGIVING BREAK

December 3 Center for Documentary Studies

Contemporary Durham

Topics: Final projects. Audio Tape Preservation

Reading: Michael H. Frisch, "The Memory of History," in Benson, Brier, Rosenzweig, eds., Presenting the Past , 5–17.

*****Turn in Interview Transcripts, Indexes*****

December 11 Place To Be Determined

Final Presentations

Joint Class With Interviewees
and special guests.

(If necessary, we can schedule this
session later in the week.)

Lane Windham, "Greenhands: A

History of Local 10 of the Food, Tobacco,
and Agricultural Workers of America in
Greenville," (Senior Thesis using oral history)

Guest Speaker: Karen Jefferson, Bibliographer
of African American History, Perkins Library
Recommended:

Mary Mebane, Mary

Pauli Murray, Proud Shoes: The Story of
an American Family

Archival Assignment: Look over Sanborn Map
and Durham City Directories at Perkins
Library

Guest Speakers: Mrs. Dorothy Jones,

Center for the Study of Black History,
William Gattis, Stanford L. Warren
Library