



Recommended Readings for Public History Courses

Oral History

Prepared by the NCPH Curriculum and Training Committee, July 2011

Manuals

Ives, Edward D. *The Tape-Recorded Interview: A Manual for Fieldworkers in Folklore and Oral History.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995.

Informative about the process and written in an engaging style, but somewhat dated concerning technology.

Ritchie, Donald. *Doing Oral History, 2nd Ed.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

A basic introduction, with good “how to” suggestions and some discussion of ethics. Written in a very accessible question-and-answer format.

Sommer, Barbara W. and Mary Kay Quinlan. *The Oral History Manual, 2nd Ed.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, AltaMira, 2009.

Very useful for students. While it contains some theoretical discussion, it is basically a very good “here is how you do it” guide. Particularly instructive are the included sample forms. (Useful forms also may be found in: McKay, Nancy. *Curating Oral Histories: From Interview to Archive.* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2006.)

Yow, Valerie. *Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists. 2nd Ed.* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, AltaMira, 2005.

Accessible and comprehensive: covers ethics, methodology, techniques, theoretical issues of memory, interpersonal relations, the role of the narrator, and other topics.

Collections of Essays

Perks, Robert and Alistair Thomson, Eds. *The Oral History Reader. 2nd Ed.* New York: Routledge, 2006.

Effective for teaching. Many short, diverse chapters. Has excerpts or article-length versions of many of the longer readings on this list. The section on oral history as advocacy can be used to engage with broader questions in public history

Shopes, Linda and Paula Hamilton. *Oral History and Public Memories.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008.

Effective as a classroom text. Puts oral history in a broad context with memory studies.

Individual Essays and Books

Brecher, Jeremy. "A Report on Doing History from Down Below: the Brass Workers History Project," in Rosenzweig, Roy, Susan Porter Benson, and Stephen Brier, Eds. *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986.

Offers good ideas about how to use community organizing style techniques when pursuing a long community history project. Good for both undergraduates and graduates.

Portelli, Alessandro. *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

Although any individual essay in this collection can be used effectively for a class on oral history, the book as a whole works wonderfully to unfold the problems and biases in many different source materials, including oral histories, newspaper accounts, and later secondary sources. For instructors looking for diversity in readings (culture or geography), this book compares an Italian case study and an American one. It also is helpful in documenting challenges in recording political movements.

_____. "What Makes Oral History Different." In: Del Giudice, Luisa, Ed. *Oral History, Oral Culture, and Italian Americans*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

An important essay which offers a good overview and defense of the practice of oral history.

Shopes, Linda. "Oral History and Community Involvement: the Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project," in Rosenzweig, Roy, Susan Porter Benson, and Stephen Brier, Eds. *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986.

A critical look at the problems and missteps in a big oral history project. It exposes not only the challenges of public history, but also the different expectations of academically-trained historians and Baltimore residents over the purpose of oral history. Students like this essay.

Terkel, Studs. *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*. New York: New Press, 2000.

Short selections that are easy to read. The stories are appealing to undergraduate students as a way to get a feeling for what it was like to live through the Great Depression. For sophisticated students, the book can be used to question the validity of Terkel's techniques in comparison to standard, best practices among oral historians.