MESSAGE FROM THE OUTGOING PRESIDENT

Greetings to all members! As I gathered my thoughts for this final message, I found myself reflecting on the many creative and engaging SOHA members with whom I’ve had the great pleasure to meet. While it is always enjoyable to see familiar faces at our Annual Conference, I am particularly pleased to have seen so many new, young and energetic faces! This is vital for the longevity of our organization. So I encourage all of the longtime SOHA members to reach out and encourage the continued involvement of those new to SOHA.

We look ahead to our future collaborative work with the Oral History Association (OHA). Several of our board members had the opportunity to meet informally with OHA President Paul Ortiz in Del Mar and brainstorm over potential ways both organizations could enhance each other’s work. In 2016, OHA will be celebrating its 50th anniversary, while SOHA, its 35th. We are discussing ways to jointly celebrate – keep posted!

I am also very pleased to announce that the “VACANCIES” on our board have been filled. Jennifer Keil of the Balboa Museum has recently stepped into the CA Delegate role. Additionally, Maria E. Trillo of Western New Mexico University will serve as New Mexico’s Delegate. Thanks to both of them for agreeing to serve as their state liaison. Lastly, Juan Coronado of University of Texas-Pan American has enthusiastically offered to step into the 2nd VP position. I am confident that Juan will bring vision and leadership to the board.

SOHA continues to make its presence felt on the UNLV campus. Many thanks, once again, to UNLV Deans Christopher Hudgins and Patricia Iannuzzi for their ongoing support of SOHA’s work. Their joint underwriting of our office space, graduate assistantship, and board operational expenses has enabled SOHA to become more efficient and effective.

As always, many thanks to those who have served SOHA in the past and to those currently undertaking leadership roles for our organization. My colleague, Marcia Gallo, who has been extraordinarily effective as 2nd Vice President will move into the role of SOHA’s President this July. Her enthusiasm and capable leadership can only mean promising days ahead for SOHA. It has been my great privilege to serve as SOHA’s 2013-2015 President. I have enjoyed meeting the wide range of intellectually curious and engaging historians who fill the ranks of SOHA’s membership. I look forward to remaining in conversation with all of you in the years ahead.

Caryll Batt Dziedziak
SOHA President 2013-2015

SOHA’s office:

UNLV

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Box 455020
4505 S. Maryland Parkway
Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-5020
Email: soha@unlv.edu
Office: 702-895-5011

SOHA’s Graduate Assistant:
Stefani Evans
MEET OUR NEWEST BOARD MEMBERS

INTRODUCING SOHA’S 2ND VICE PRESIDENT
JUAN CORONADO

I am Juan David Coronado and proudly hold a lecturer position at the University of Texas-Pan American (soon to be The University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley) located in my hometown of Edinburg. I specialize in Mexican American Military History and Mexican American History and currently teach US History, Texas History, and Mexican American History. Oral histories have played a vital role in my research as they have added a voice to the voiceless. Recently, I completed an article on Mexican Americans in Baseball in South Texas and am working on a photograph book on the same topic. I am also converting my Ph.D. Dissertation, “I’m Not Going to Die in this Damn Place: Manliness, Identity, and Survival of the Mexican American Vietnam POW” into a manuscript.

Aside from working as a historian, I enjoy traveling with my wife, Ana Satterfield, who is also a historian. Running and other athletic activities are always on my schedule as well as taking our bulldog Sophia for walks.

SOHA’S NEW MEXICO DELEGATE
MARIA EUGENIA TRILLO

Trillo, born and raised in El Paso, Texas earned her BA from Universidad de las Américas, México; her MA from the University of Toronto, and PhD in Spanish Linguistics from the University of New Mexico. She has taught Spanish Language Heritage Learners, native speakers of Spanish and students of Spanish-as-a-second language in Canada, Arizona, Texas, and New Mexico. She teaches oral history as a methodology to student teachers and other professionals who wish to document and produce oral artifacts and/or ethnographies. Trillo is a sociolinguist, an oral historian, and a community-based educator. Her seminal work on the Chamizal in El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua in Mexico has allowed other historians to cover this important and still little-known story of international importance.


Subsequently, the New York Times also used Trillo’s taped oral histories and her interview by Vanderbilt University historian, Dr. Paul Kramer, to write a story printed in September 2014. These publicly accessible stories led to a May 2015 oral history project conducted by an El Paso middle school student.
CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2015 AWARDEES

MINK AWARD: Claytee D. White
SPECIAL SERVICE AWARD: Tensia Moriel Trejo
COOKE-HOLMES AWARD: Stan Thayne
EVA TULENE-WATT SCHOLARSHIP: Bridget Baumgarte
GENERAL SCHOLARSHIP: Ophelia Zepeda, Miguel Juárez, Farina King
MINI-GRANT: Aaron Bae, Jordan Biro
Henderson Historical Society

OHA’S 2015 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

It took a village + the SOHA team working together to create a memorable SOHA Conference 2015. The Del Mar Historical Society, with support from local businesses and organizations, opened their doors to SOHA guests from the Southwest and beyond.

The pre-conference Community Oral History workshop and other oral history presentations held in the Del Mar Library, formerly the Saint James Catholic Church, could not have been more perfectly suited for our program. Guests also enjoyed the historical Powerhouse Park and newer L’Auberge as venues for additional presentations. Diverse names, faces and collaborative oral histories enriched the event with perspectives of different times and cultures.

Thank you to all those who participated in mapping out an event that will resonate in time as a Del Mar Community milestone. Thank you to those whose passion for oral histories are the reason we come together: to share the collection of interviews with people having personal knowledge of past events.

CONFERENCE CO-CHAIRS, ANNIE DUVAL & SUZI RESNIK

CLAYTEE D. WHITE
2015 Mink Awardee

I am so honored to be the 2015 recipient of the Mink Award! Me, Claytee, a Mink Award winner! It’s so surreal. I did not have the opportunity to visit Del Mar during the conference planning or for the conference itself so I don’t feel like I have won the highest SOHA award. And this feeling is perfect because it doesn’t feel real thus allowing me to remain unpretentious.

The Mink Award is earned by those who have made a mark in the field of Oral History. While I believe that and believe that I have, I feel that there is so very much work to do. I missed the conference because of the death of my brother, McCoy, as his pastor said, the ‘Real’ McCoy. We don’t have his voice. We don’t know enough about his 24 years in the military. We don’t understand why, at 75 years of age, he had completed a college application to attend the university whose offer he had to reject because of financial lack when he completed high school in 1959. Our family will never know if he seriously would have gone back to Korea to find the woman who provided an unforgettable week during a military furlough over 40 years ago (before his marriage, I’m sure).

Yes, this is family history but also oral history because it is the foundation to learning about the black military experience in the 1960s. He told me about not being able to trust children during his two tours of duty in Vietnam. That long conversation as we drove from North Carolina back to Virginia one Saturday evening, was never approached again, it was never recorded. What a missed opportunity.

Can I record every Las Vegas story? Of course not, but we can complete enough projects to lend a more complex multifaceted voice to the Las Vegas narrative. I want to record the history of Latinos/Latinas, Asians and Pacific Islanders, histories of several small Las Vegas communities, and a history of the downtown redevelopment effort. I have enough projects in mind to last until I retire.

But before I retire, I would like to task Mink Awardees with fundraising for SOHA. If we are who the membership thinks we are, let’s put this clout, knowledge and influence to the test. Let’s make an effort to put SOHA back on a more firm, secure, financial footing. Why? So we can give more scholarships and not have to be concerned if a conference is in the red but concentrate on the richness of the history. Agree with me anyone?
Attending the 2015 Southwest Oral History Association (SOHA) Annual Conference, as a 2015 recipient of the SOHA General Scholarship, in the seaside Village of Del Mar was an incredible experience. We were fortunate to have many sessions and various keynote sessions, several scheduled at the historic Powerhouse next to the Pacific Ocean. I particularly enjoyed the intimacy of the conference and the multitude of sessions utilizing various formats that were presented that resonated with my research.

I appreciated that the local committee was able to schedule speakers who offered us rich glimpses of the history of Del Mar and its famous residents. For me, SOHA in Del Mar, was also a great opportunity to reconnect with long-time SOHA members, and to network with other oral historians and graduate students engaged in oral history. I also appreciated that the conference was a welcoming environment that included oral historians from all facets of research, from university professors to community scholars. I also appreciated that this year’s conference was one that featured many Latina/o and Native American speakers and presentations.

Steven F. Dansky, Ian Baldwin, Marcia Gallo, and Miguel Juárez

I particularly enjoyed sessions that focused on communal topics that has led me to re-examine my work given various discussions at the conference. I believe that the SOHA Del Mar conference will have a lasting influence on my future work in oral history. Dr. María Eugenia Trillo, an Associate Professor of Spanish at Western New Mexico University in Silver City, summed it up well in her comments at the “American Indian Community Oral History Projects” panel, when she stated that communities we interview deserve “respect” and “responsibility.”
2015 SOUTHWEST ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE IN DEL MAR, CALIFORNIA

Our panel from Henderson, Nevada, *The Henderson Oral History Project: Building a Community of Collaboration*, included former principal and Henderson Historical Society director Rick Watson, Henderson District Public Libraries digital librarian and oral history program manager Dr. Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm, and UNLV Digital Collections specialist Melissa Stoner, who worked on a grant funded oral history digitization project at Nevada State College. Our experience working with schools generated the greatest interest and will be furthered by a generous SOHA mini-grant to the Henderson Historical Society for the creation of a video recording kit, which will be used to train society members and school children to conduct oral histories in the Henderson community. By serving as an educational opportunity, the kit will greatly extend the community outreach of oral history collaborators in Henderson and help us engage future generations to preserve Henderson’s unique and inspiring legacy.

Ahead of our presentation, we gained valuable perspectives from others engaged in community building and preservation. In particular, the panel sessions broadened our awareness of cultural insensitivity and the potential to increase participation from members of historically marginalized communities by providing the opportunity to express personal beliefs. The enormous potential to generate goodwill with oral history programs was reinforced by each of our encounters.

For this school year, I have worked as a graduate student at the University of Arizona Libraries Special Collections. It was interesting to meet so many historians as I am a Library and Information Sciences Major at the University of Arizona as well as a Knowledge River Scholar, Cohort 13. I have usually seen the end results of the work historians have created or have assisted in their research by processing collections, but I know that archivists have been working to create oral histories as well. Oral history has always been part of who I am, although I am not an oral historian by profession. I am Tohono O’odham. Like many other O’odham, and Native People for that matter, I grew up with the power of language and experienced how it creates a permanence of knowledge and memory.

Oral histories taken with great care are vital to Native American communities. Too often, there have been accounts related to issues of misappropriation by, what I would deem, unethical individuals. For this reason alone, I deeply valued the rich experiences I encountered. Every individual I met emphasized to me that stories are valuable vessels of culture. For many Native Americans, stories help to preserve our history through our language and even preserve the language itself, since there is sometimes story-specific language which is not used in the everyday vernacular. By being able to attend this conference, I met individuals from a wide-range of expertise and specialties. I found there was something to learn from everyone. The insight I was able to glean from the information-rich presentations has definitely helped to pique a deeper interest in the oral tradition.

Imagine my surprise to find out our benefactor was the Ak-Chin Indian Community. I grew up outside of a very small town mere miles away from Ak-Chin. The tribal representatives, Genevieve Miguel and Felicia Vincent were amazing to meet. They have been doing great work in Ak-Chin and have utilized oral tradition and history to assist in their many achievements. In fact, Genevieve Miguel and I shared a relative. She knew many of my relatives and Felicia, I later found out, and I have a mutual friend. I found this out through story. It was nice to know that oral history could bring O’odham together even though we were all miles away from home.
On behalf of the Oral History Association, I want to begin by thanking the Southwest Oral History Association for the superb intellectual work that you are doing. The panels and presentations at this conference place oral history at the center of dialogs on museum studies, archival preservation, community organizing, historical memory, and the building of intercultural understanding between diverse peoples. In this conference, SOHA has created a vibrant intellectual space for reflection on the meaning of our craft; in one day of sessions I’ve already taken several pages of notes and I look forward to today’s sessions as well. Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention the fact that I owe a great personal debt to so many of you in this room for being mentors, guides and role models for me as I have grown as an oral historian. Thank you!

Yesterday, I met with Caryll Dziedziak and several SOHA leaders over dinner and we brainstormed about ways to mutually support each other’s upcoming associational anniversaries. In 2016 OHA will be celebrating our 50th anniversary; meanwhile, SOHA will be celebrating its 35th. We are in the beginning stages of talking about how to amplify the impact and outreach of these critical anniversaries. During the course of these exciting discussions I was asked how OHA views SOHA in comparison with other regional oral history associations. My response is that the perspective from OHA council is that SOHA is fully a peer oral history organization. Really now: any organization whose membership encompasses territory from Las Vegas to San Diego is more than just a regional organization. That is a lot of real estate! The work that members of SOHA do in gathering, preserving and promoting history and building community is priceless. Thank you!

This morning, I’d like to offer a few thoughts on oral history in the form of a talk titled: “I Dreamed I Saw Stetson Kennedy Last Night: Subjectivity, and Oral History’s Refusal to Stay Silent.” Those of you familiar with the name of Stetson Kennedy know him as a pioneering oral historian, the author of numerous, radical exposes of racist and anti-labor violence in the South including Southern Exposure, The Jim Crow Guide, Palmetto Country and many others. Stetson worked with Zora Neale Hurston on the Works Progress Administration oral history project in the 1930s. This included supervising the process that lead to interviews with former enslaved African Americans in Florida. I had the great privilege of getting to know Stetson late in his life. He became a guiding light of the Oral History Association as well as at the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program.

I’d like to talk about oral history on three levels: One level is the personal, that is, how I was drawn to oral history. The second area I want to address is the social context of oral history in 2015. Finally, I’d like to conclude by remarking on the work of the emerging generation of the newest oral historians. Here, I will especially focus on the work of students, volunteers, and staff at the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program at the University of Florida.

I’d like to begin with a prelude that illustrates the power of oral history in the pursuit of truth. One of the greatest Civil War novels is Michael Shaara’s The Killer Angels, a Pulitzer Prize-winning book of the Battle of Gettysburg that has sold millions of copies. Ken Burns credited The Killer Angels with changing his life. General Norman Schwarzkopf noted that the The Killer Angels was “the best and most realistic historical novel about war that I have ever read.” Undoubtedly, The Killer Angels is a brilliant novel, but there is a curious silence in the book about the meaning of the war in the context of the history of our hemisphere. What do I mean by this? Early on in the novel Colonel Joshua Chamberlain delivers an eloquent address before the great battle to his Union soldiers about why they are fighting. He states:

“This is a different kind of army. If you look back through history, you will see men fighting for pay, for women, for some other kind of loot. They fight for land, power, because a king leads them or -- or just because they like killing. But we are here for something new. This has not happened much in the history of the world. We are an army out to set other men free. America should be free ground -- all of it. Not divided by a line between slave state and free -- all the way, from here to the Pacific Ocean.”

2 For an overview of the Proctor Program’s research, teaching, and service programs, see: http://oral.history.ufl.edu/ (Accessed May 3, 2015).
I will comment on two aspects of this speech. The first point is that Colonel Chamberlain’s concept of “free ground all the way, from here to the Pacific Ocean,” completely erases Native Americans from the North American continent. There is nothing democratic about such a notion and Chamberlain’s conception of “free ground” depends on denying freedom to others. Furthermore by placing the Civil War on the plateau of the extraordinary in human history, The Killer Angels misses a recently concluded war on the North American continent that was also about freedom.

The war I am referring to here was the Mexican War of Independence. This war for liberation from Spain was fought by the Mexicans between 1810 to 1821. It was a struggle waged by people of African and Indigenous descent as well as Mestizos against slavery, inequality and caste oppression. The Mexican War of Independence was part of a broader wave of wars of freedom against slavery and colonialism connected with the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804. To say that the outcome of the Mexican War of Independence did not result in equal justice for all people in Mexico is to say that it was no more successful than the denouement of the American Civil War at the end of Reconstruction fifty years later.

What is the price of excluding the Mexican War of Independence from our definitions of what it means to fight for freedom? It means that generations of Anglo & Mexican Americans have been taught by omission that Mexico has nothing to offer to that great pantheon of democracy. That we Latinos might be good dancers, cooks or musicians but that we are not political thinkers and that we have no democratic lineages to call upon. Forgetting the Mexican War of Independence, its Black-Indian generals like José María Morelos and its barefoot Indigenous and mixed-race freedom fighters has robbed generations of youth in this hemisphere of a stirring example of faith in humanity, mutuality, and hatred of inherited privilege.

My own youth was an example of this absence. I came of age knowing nothing of this part of my heritage as a Mexican American boy. I grew up in the post-Chicano movement era in the shipyard town of Bremerton, Washington in the 1970s. My parents were terrified of teaching us Spanish for fear of subjecting us to discrimination. I spent part of my childhood fighting as best as I could the taunts of “wetback, spic, and greaser,” from white peers and from adults around me. As kids, we knew of rudiments of the 20th century Mexican Revolution, but only names and little of the content. If a ‘wetback’ was someone who arrived in this country with no history to be proud of, my family appeared to have fit the bill perfectly.

Decades later, teaching Latino college students at UC-Santa Cruz, many of them hailing from Mexico, I discovered that the situation had not really improved. After my lectures on the Mexican War of Independence Latino students would come to my office hours sometimes in tears, sometimes in moods of rage. Why hadn’t anyone told them of those armies of freedom of the 1810s that had established the continent’s first truly anti-slavery republic? Why had their earlier teachers in Mexico and the US not taught them about the achievements of troops who armed with little more than the most rudimentary of weapons had defeated a mighty empire? These students observed that we had been programed to look to Thomas Jefferson and not to José María Morelos—for their model of political engagement. The former man of course was an aristocratic slave owner; the latter, the descendant of slaves.

It did not have to be this way. Oral history interviews conducted by investigative journalist Harold Preece with Mexican American railroad workers in Austin, Texas in 1945 tell us that for generations, at least some Mexican Americans told a radically different story about their past. Preece, a Texas socialist, discovered that railway workers in the Austin area passed down narratives about the War of Independence that centered on the role of African-descent soldiers in the struggle for freedom. A number of these precious fragments of memory concerned the role of Mexican General Vicente Guerrero, whom Preece called “Mexico’s Black Lincoln,” after conducting these interviews.5


5 The following interviews are taken primarily from: “Mexico’s Black Lincoln,” Plaindealer (Topeka, Kansas), February 16, 1945. This was part of a broader investigative series by Preece titled, “The Negro in Latin America.” For a wonderful analysis of how historical memories of revolution can be passed down for generations, see: Erin Zavitz, Revolutionary Memories: Celebrating and Commemoration The Haitian Revolution,” (PhD Dissertation, University of Florida, 2015).
Born in 1782, General Guerrero was of mixed African, Indigenous & European ancestry. The Mexican American railway workers that Preece talked with in Austin framed Guerrero as a heroic, revolutionary general dedicated to the ideals of freedom. “I’ve just come back to my typewriter after listening to tales of Guerrero told me by citizens of the Mexican-American community here in my Texas home town,” Preece marveled. “After hearing those tales of that knight of humanity, I am planning to get a picture of Vicente Guerrero to hang alongside the picture of Abraham Lincoln in my den.”

One Mexican American railway worker told the journalist, “My great grandfather fought with him, barefooted and bareheaded, in the hills of Mexico, when all the white leaders of the revolution had surrendered and accepted pardons from the King of Spain. You see, Guerrero would never make peace with the King because the King would not grant any reforms that ended discrimination against Guerrero’s people, los Negores de Mexico.”

In another vivid story related to Preece by a railway worker “Guerrero’s men armed with only clubs and two muskets that wouldn’t shoot staged a surprise attack on a detachment of Spanish troops, many times larger than the guerilla band of patriots. They routed the Spaniards and also had a bite to eat after the battle was over since the Spaniards left their groceries behind when they started running from the Negro-Indian fighters, flailing their clubs.” In an article published on February 16, 1945, Harold Preece argued, “This week, as we celebrate the birthday of the rail splitter, Abe Lincoln, it seems to me that we might start making plans to celebrate on April 4, the birthday of the mule skinner, Vicente Guerrero.”

If oral history and historical memory are tools that can help us rediscover forgotten stories of struggle, then what are the conduits that keep these stories alive? How and why did the parents & grandparents of these Mexican American railway workers pass on revolutionary traditions over the span of a century and a half? Oral history resonates with people because it is grounded in the local rhythms of everyday life. These rhythms do not admit of linear tales of progress in any field of human experience. Because of the hard work of community organizing that many of us are involved in we understand that history moves, to paraphrase Barbara Harper’s memorable keynote address yesterday: “One step forward, two steps backward.” The progress we were making—or appeared to be making in an earlier period against racism for example came apart in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Ferguson, and the mass incarceration of African Americans.

The social context that oral history lives in today is one of rising economic inequality, mass incarceration and a sense that we are losing ground in the battle against racism. What role does and should oral history play in such a crisis era? We have learned through oral history that the only way to stem these setbacks is through organizing, and story-telling is an integral aspect of this organizing. Who could forget the magnificent compilation of radical voices and narratives contained in Southern Exposure’s winter, 1974 special issue—including a groundbreaking history of the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union? Not a single person in this audience would be surprised to know that Jacquelyn Dowd Hall was then on that journal’s board of editors for this and many other groundbreaking issues of Southern Exposure written in the muckraking tradition of Stetson Kennedy.

The grand story telling tradition at the root of social change is alive and well. In more recent months, it is not surprising that in the US, the most poignant stories of struggle are arising from places like Ferguson, New Orleans, Tucson, Arizona & El Serreno, East Los Angeles.

My own journey in oral history began as a labor organizer with the United Farm Workers of Washington State in the late 1980s. Our main organizing campaign was the Chateau Ste. Michelle wine boycott. As an apprentice historian, one of the roles I was expected to play in this movement was to learn and to tell stories about the early days of the United Farm Workers. My comrades asked me to conduct workshops and to write short historical essays on what had worked in the days of the Grape Boycott of the 1960s—and what had not worked. What I learned was that incipient social movements break through the dominant stereotypes of passivity by telling—and promoting—stories of identity and struggle that allow them to defeat a status quo that shackles their imaginations. A good community organizer is a facilitator of stories such as those that were passed down by Mexican American railway workers in the 1940s.”

Movimiento activists were frequently angered by the media coverage of the St. Michelle Boycott. We felt that protesting farm workers were portrayed as simplistic and selfish. Even liberal public radio programmers often got it wrong. Certain “allies” urged us to end the boycott and act reasonably. This spurred me to head down to a local Radio Shack and purchase

---

6 Theodore Vincent, The Legacy of Vicente Guerrero, Mexico's First Black Indian President (University of Florida Press, 2001).
9 Sue Thrasher and Leah Wise, “The Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union,” Southern Exposure 1, nos. 3-4 (winter 1974), 5-8.
a hand-held recorder. The goal was to present the voices and stories of workers first-hand. I began interviewing agricultural laborers and organizers for an international labor affairs radio program that I started at KAOS-Olympia (the campus radio station at the Evergreen State College) in 1991. What hooked me on interviewing was the power of the subjective voice of struggle to break through the polite conventions of a society that had grown comfortable in the Reagan era with inequality and working class powerlessness. Listeners of these interviews responded to stories told by farm workers about oppression by calling in and sharing their own thoughts on injustices. This dialogic process enabled people from radically different backgrounds, cultures and language communities to share aspirations for a new world, a place where the Industrial Workers of the World motto “An injury to one is an injury to all,” would become a way of life. In 1993, I started graduate school and had the good fortune to be recruited to be a research assistant for the NEH-sponsored “Behind the Veil: Documenting African American Life in the Jim Crow South,” oral history project which was housed at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University. I was part of several oral history field teams of graduate students who fanned out across the South to collect over 1,500 interviews with African American elders who came of age in the Jim Crow South. Black communities across the region adopted us, and guided us through the process of peeling back many painful layers of history that implicated the entire society in the deep corruption that constituted the system of legal segregation.

“Time and time again, I learned that the violent histories of racism and class oppression were still unfolding in the South.”

Community-based oral history field work taught me how to achieve a much deeper understanding of the relationship between the past and the present. Early in my graduate career I was thinking about writing my dissertation on the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union. Being part of the Behind the Veil Arkansas Delta in field work team in 1995 seemed to offer me the perfect opportunity to gather material on the STFU. When I sat down to talk with an elderly couple—then in their mid-70’s—who lived near Brinkley, Arkansas they patiently answered my questions until we got to what I thought would be the meat of the session. Had there been any labor organizing in this part of the Delta, I queried? “Oh yes,” the wife replied. “There was a young man who tried to bring the union in. But one of the deputy sheriffs’ caught him out on a county road one day. He shot that poor man and dumped him on the edge of the county. Told him to never come back. That was the end of the union.” Visibly excited, I asked: “Was this in the 1930s or 40s?” Confused, the couple looked at each other and finally smiled in recognition at the fundamental error that I had made. The wife turned back to me with a bemused look on her face. “Honey, that didn’t happen in the ’30s or the ’40s. That labor union man was near here just two or three years ago.” Time and time again, I learned that the violent histories of racism and class oppression were still unfolding in the South and that, to quote Faulkner, in *Requiem for a Nun*, “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”

I was part of the three-person Behind the Veil field team that arrived in Tallahassee, Florida in the summer of 1994. This was in the immediate wake of the Rosewood massacre compensation hearings. Black Floridians had spent decades enduring the Disneyesque myth that Florida was a “moderate” state in terms of race relations. The Rosewood hearings blew the lid off of this false narrative. Once again, subjective narratives of struggle and survival had driven a truth home that state authorities had buried. That summer, I was guided by black labor organizers to the house of Laura and Samuel Dixie who lived near the historically-black Florida A&M University, and the Dixie family eventually steered me to my dissertation topic. Mrs. Dixie was the co-founder of the local hospital workers’ union and she had been a rank-and-file organizer of the 1956 Tallahassee Bus Boycott. However, when I asked her questions about 1950s and 60s freedom movement she insisted that I would have been better served talking with her mother’s generation. In our many conversations since that time, Laura Dixie has told me that “black people have always been struggling to survive. It didn’t just start in the ‘60s.” This led me to my dissertation topic which explored the black freedom struggle in Florida between Reconstruction and the Great Depression.

The connections between past, present and future were palpable in the oral histories I conducted in preparation for writing *Emancipation Betrayed*. When I started asking questions about Ku Klux Klan violence in the Panhandle, Mrs. Dixie’s husband Sam called to tell me one evening that people in the community feared for my safety. He insisted that I move from the hotel I was staying in on the outskirts of Tallahassee to their house. I demurred, telling Mr. Dixie that I had years of military training and could defend myself. “This is not a request young man,” Sam Dixie replied. “You don’t understand how vengeful those people are that you are digging into. I’m coming by to help you pack so get ready.” That was the end of that discussion. For years afterwards I stayed with the Dixie family whenever I did research in Tallahassee. We held the first reading for *Emancipation Betrayed* at the Dixie residence with extended family members in 2005—over a decade after we had initially met.¹³

The fieldwork I did as a graduate student defines my pedagogical approach to oral history.¹⁴ I take my students and staff at the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program every summer to visit with Laura Dixie on our way to interview veterans of the civil rights movement in the Mississippi Delta. Mrs. Dixie’s husband Sam has passed on; however, Sam Dixie, Jr., cooks up a grand fish fry for us. Our students listen to Laura Dixie talk about the Tallahassee Bus Boycott and are given admonitions to “keep organizing; the struggle is not over.” When we arrive in the Mississippi Delta we work with the sons and daughters of the black freedom fighters I interviewed in the summer of 1995 in towns like Indianola and Greenwood. For the 50th anniversary of Freedom Summer in Indianola, our students produced a commemorative booklet of the eight years of fieldwork we’ve done with Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee veterans and local people in the Delta. We presented this at the Freedom Summer reunion in Indianola that was sponsored by the Sunflower County Civil Rights Organization—a group chaired by Dr. Stacy White, the daughter of Bernice White, who I interviewed in 1995.¹⁵

I would like to close my talk by drawing on reflections of Proctor Program students who are engaging in a new generation of fieldwork. The first reflection was written by an African American student who was initially hesitant about traveling with us to Mississippi. Herein, she discusses the transformative impact of oral history on her life:

> At first I was a bit skeptical about going on the trip. I did not think that going to Mississippi the week before taking the LSAT was such a good idea. However the opportunity to meet civil rights activists and original members of SNCC was an opportunity that is not offered to everyone. Now I can honestly say that going on the trip to Mississippi was one of the best risks that I have ever taken in my life. I did not expect the trip to impact my life in the way that it has.

> It is an honor to have met Ms. Margaret Block and Mr. [Lawrence] Guyot [co-founder of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party]. They have so much wisdom. They also have many vivid memories of the struggles they have suffered. Mr. Guyot’s open discussion about learning more about SNCC has encouraged me to channel the inner activist in myself. He emphasized that there were less than 200 people involved in SNCC. When I read about SNCC in my freshmen American history class I thought that it involved a much larger group of students and a few ordinary people. Now I understand that the reverse was true.

> All in all, words do not justly express how amazing and influential this trip has been on my life. I am currently planning to be an attorney. This experience has definitely shaped my ideas about the type of law that I want to practice. I want to use my legal education to help bring justice to people. I actually want to do something purposeful in this world. I did not leave Mississippi the same person. I hope that many others will use this experience to help promulgate important issues and to make a difference wherever their journey in life takes them.

This student has recently graduated from Howard Law School. Her narrative is a reminder of the importance of what we do as oral historians. Whether we are archivists, primary school teachers, curators, public scholars, professors, etcetera, our work in guiding people to subjective, first-person storytelling is vital in infusing history with meaning, passion, and a sense of solidarity between the generations.

---


¹⁴ For a profile of the community-based oral history course I taught at Duke as a graduate student—along with other community-based approaches, see: Marjorie L. McLellan, “Case Studies in Oral History and Community Learning,” *Oral History Review*, 25 (Summer/Fall 1998), 81-112.

¹⁵ Teaching for Change has made this booklet available online as part of its Putting the Movement Back into Civil Rights Teaching: [http://civilrightsteaching.org/resource/i-never-will-forget/](http://civilrightsteaching.org/resource/i-never-will-forget/) (Accessed May 11, 2015).
The final anecdotes I’d like to share come from our recent field work trip to Tucson, Arizona. Students in the Proctor Program’s Latina/o Diaspora seminar are huge fans of the works of poets and scholars such as Martín Espada, Sandra Cisneros, and Rodolfo Acuña. When they learned that the opportunity to read these authors was being taken away as part of Arizona’s House Bill 2282 banning the K-12 Mexican American Studies Program at Tucson Unified School District, our students approached me about the possibility of traveling to Tucson to find out what kind of an impact ethnic studies education—or the lack thereof—had on underserved communities. This group of twelve students gave up their spring break, did extra readings, and designed a field work program in tandem with community organizers in south Tucson as well as colleagues at Prescott College. Much of the UF students’ work involved grounding with high school pupils in Tucson.

Several local teachers and administrators in Tucson seized the opportunity to put our students to work, and explicitly asked them to talk about their own pathways to academic success. The impact of first-generation Latina/o college students testifying about their struggles against racism and hopelessness on the way to earning college degrees confirmed the power of story-telling and social change. What needs to be emphasized is that the oral testimony had an empowering, reciprocal effect on all of the students involved. Yes, minority and working class high school students drew inspiration by learning from older peers who were succeeding in college. At the same time however, UF students gained personally as well. Being immersed in middle school classrooms reminded our students how difficult their own educational pathways had been. They were reminded of how much they owed to elders who paved the way for their triumphs, and how they were obligated to work on behalf of others. The subjective power of oral history was on full display in Tucson as student after student found strength in sharing personal stories that demonstrated the power of solidarity to overcome isolation and despair. I’d like to share the insights from a Latina student at the University of Florida on the mutual impact of her fieldwork in Tucson:

“As my time in Arizona went on, I realized that the community I was learning about knew what struggle felt like, they carried resistance in their bones and while they were a bit hesitant to accept strangers in their midst, they accepted us nonetheless. It is one thing to read the articles, watch the documentary and another to shake the hand of a man who was fired for fighting for his students. It is another thing to interview people who became my motivation to succeed in my classes because somewhere in the West, there was a student who was unable to read a book by Sandra Cisneros, a writer who helped me define myself.

There is nothing more important to me than education. My grandmother, a woman who grew up having nothing and on some levels, because my family is an immigrant family who earns the minimum to survive continues to have nothing, told me when I was accepted into the University of Florida that the only thing that will forever be mine was my education. The students were extremely receptive to what we had to say, they listened and I truly believe that we not only conducted ten interviews, but we inspired multiple middle school students to go to college.

I am proud to say that I was able to somehow impact the lives of students who maybe never believed that they were capable of graduating with a bachelor’s degree or higher. The amount of tears I shed over these middle school students as they held their cultural celebration later on that night is something that I will never forget. I refuse to forget the way that the young girls danced in traditional dresses, the boys danced hip-hop and the parents beamed from the sides. Here was culture and pride.

In conclusion, this narrative reminds us of the importance of what we do as professionals and as practitioners. Stetson Kennedy taught us that oral history was an invaluable tool of the investigative researcher. Furthermore, he showed us that it is also part of a larger, grander tradition that connects us with the aspirations of ancestors in struggle and emerging generations of young people who do not accept the status quo that they have been taught to obey.
This SOHA 2015 Conference was certainly a memorable one, especially since it took place in such a scenic and amazing place as Del Mar, California. We could see the surfers, swimmers, and the beach from the windows during my presentation. We were honored to present in the Powerhouse Community Center, which supports the community and its history. During the luncheon with the Friends of the Powerhouse, including Barbara and Joe Harper, we learned of the remarkable community efforts to preserve the Powerhouse and shape it as a public space. I must admit that I did not want to leave the Powerhouse and its beachside view.

During the roundtable that I participated in, “American Indian Community Oral History Projects,” we discussed the connections between diverse peoples and places. The next session in the Powerhouse, “Getting it Right: Honoring the Narrator’s Wishes in the Digital Age,” also reminded me of the relationships between people, community, and place. Suzi Resnik and Rob Healey described their work with oral histories such as the one of Jan McMillan. While the presentation focused on the collaborations between the interviewers and interviewees as well as the possibilities of technological and editing advancements, the oral histories reflected how the interviewees’ communities and sense of place defined them. I was impressed by how a couple of the interviewees, both women, identified as members of the Del Mar community. My work aims to understand such connections between people, community, and place, and I am grateful for the opportunity to not only meet diverse scholars and learners but also to meet a new community and be introduced to its foundations.

BRIDGET BAUMGARTE
2015 Eva Tulene-Watt Scholarship Awardee

As a 2015 SOHA recipient of the Eva Tulene Watt scholarship I would like to thank the scholarship committee and the Ak-Chin Indian community for the opportunity to attend my first conference. The conference was a great experience and allowed me to engage with scholars using oral history in the field of Native American History as well as many other areas. My attendance at the conference gave me a greater understanding of the rewards and challenges of undertaking oral history projects. I enjoyed attending the presentations and learned a lot.

One of the most important things I learned was how oral history champions voices often ignored. Although oral historians faced many challenges, not only in process of obtaining oral histories but also in storing, editing, and preserving oral history accounts, one theme stood out. The oral historians at the conference expressed gratitude for undertaking their projects and stressed the importance of their work on a personal level as well as to the people they interviewed. As I pursue a Ph.D. in the field of Native American History, I intend to use oral histories when writing my dissertation. Attending the SOHA conference showed me the importance of using Native American voices to tell their own history.
As the Student Representative to the SOHA board, I am very happy about the great student presence at this year’s conference. I was glad to see students included on many of the panels. I especially enjoyed presentations that addressed changing technology in oral history. The panel “Getting It Right: Honoring the Narrator’s Wishes in the Digital Age,” raised important questions about how the interview and transcript relate to each other, especially as they are increasingly presented online. Suzi Resnik and the other panelists addressed the messiness of oral history and the challenges of honoring the narrator’s wishes and intentions as the interview moves toward publication. I also appreciated the panel of student projects. The panelists presented different perspectives of working with oral histories but also addressed several common problems including what to do about nerves or shy narrators. I hope to see an even greater student presence at the next SOHA conference. If you have any ideas for student participation in SOHA or if you have any questions, please email me at angelacmoor@gmail.com

I thought it would be fun to look back and see what we were doing 20 years ago. The annual conference was held at the Mission Inn Hotel in Riverside California. What a beautiful venue. It has been dedicated a National Historic Landmark and, going to a conference or not, it is well worth the trip. There were over twenty speakers and the program had a wide range of topics. They reported on the sometimes neglected resources, ethnicity and culture, African Americans in Orange County and Native Americans in the Southwest, mining, and the one I found most fascinating, “Interviewing the Victims of Abuse.” This was a session given by Marwynne Selfridge from the Los Angeles Superior Court System. I got tears in my eyes just reading the recap of the session.

The most interesting stat for the Conference was that there were 65 in attendance. It was called an “intimate and friendly group.” Today, twenty years later, our conferences are not much larger. Although we are still a “friendly” group, each one of us shares the responsibility to broaden the “intimate” setting to include more of our colleagues and encourage their participation in our next conference. There are always exciting projects to share and, as we look back, memories to cherish.
Closing Performance: Natalie Navar, Kevin Cabrera, and Carie Rael

“Recording Local Activism through Oral History”
John Grygo, Shannon Nutt, Summer Cherland

Tensia Trejo, Barbara and Joe Harper, and Suzi Resnik
MEMBERSHIP CORNER: Please renew today!
Membership Fees apply for the calendar year (Jan-Dec).

SOHA MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION
To become a member or renew, please print out the following application, fill in the relevant information (as you would like it to appear in the directory), and mail it to the address below.

Name: _____________________________________________

Address: ___________________________________________

City: ________________________________________________ State: ___ Zip: __________

Preferred Phone: ( _______ ) _____ — ________________

E-Mail Address: ____________________________________ @ ______________________________________

Institutional Affiliation: ____________________________

Please circle committees in which you might be interested:

Newsletter | Membership | Annual Meeting | Grants/Scholarships

It's time to renew your Southwestern Oral History Association Membership!

Here's a quick review of the membership levels:

Individual Annual: $35
Individual Two-Year Membership: $65
Student Annual: $20
Individual Lifetime: $250
SOHA Community Partners: $100
SOHA Corporate Partners: $350
SOHA Institutional Partners: $500

(Note: If you took advantage of the two year membership during the past fiscal year, you are paid up through December 2016.)

Make checks payable to SOHA and send payment to:

Southwest Oral History Association
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Box 455020
4505 S. Maryland Parkway
Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-5020

SOHA is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization and donations are very much appreciated. Donations are tax deductible in accordance with IRS Tax Code Section 170(c).
The SOHA newsletter is issued three times a year. It welcomes submissions regarding regional news, articles by oral historians about oral history, reviews, and other items related to oral history.

Due dates are: **Spring: February 1, Summer: June 1, Fall/Winter: October 1.**

**Please send submissions to:**
SOHA Editorial Board: soha@unlv.edu

Our thanks to . . .
Judy Smith, UNLV Reprographics
Dean Christopher Hudgins, College of Liberal Arts, UNLV
for underwriting the costs of production