

HH 2090: Special Topics

Oral History & Memory

Thursdays 10:30-13:20

Academic Year	2026-27	Semester	1
Course Coordinator	Dr Jennifer Cash		
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Course Code	HH2090		
Course Title	Oral History & Memory		
No of AUs	3		
Contact Hours	39 (weekly seminars)		
Office Hours	Thursdays, 2-4 p.m. or by appointment		

Course Description:

Most historical studies rely on written records, but how can we understand the past when written records are scarce or incomplete? What if we want to know about topics that are rarely written down (“lived experience”), communities that don’t or didn’t write, or perspectives beyond those already recorded? Most of the human past has not been systematically recorded or narrated, and this is true for most people’s lives in the 21st century as well, despite burgeoning quantities of personalized data (photos, videos, blogs, etc.). Oral history provides powerful and creative ways of approaching both the near and distant past when traditional historiography proves insufficient. This course provides an introduction to the scope and methods of oral history, coupled with theoretical consideration of the concept of social or collective memory. Memory refers not only to individual cognitive processes, but also to the social structures and relations that communities have to the past. Oral historical methods rely on sophisticated handling of the dynamics between memory and history, and can be used to strengthen traditional historiography as well.

Oral history, focused on non-written narrations of the past, encompasses methods and media drawn from ethnography, qualitative sociology, folklore, and studies of material culture – and confronts the traces of memorialization and related processes in a variety of verbal records, literary accounts, interviews, reminiscences, rituals, monuments, and more. Training in oral history strengthens applied work in Public History, Heritage, and Community studies.

Students taking this course will gain a broad theoretical view on how collective memories form, change, and interact with historical accounts. They will also gain experience in the practice and ethics of several oral history methodologies. Students will complete the CITI certification which is a prerequisite for all URECAs, FYPs, and other research projects at NTU that involve interviewing or observing human subjects and require ethics review.

A Note on the Readings: Most readings are available in e-format through NTULearn. A few will be on physical reserves or in the stacks.

Changes to readings will be announced at least one week in advance.

Provisional Syllabus as of 8 July 2026

Week-by-Week

****Please come prepared for a mix of discussion and in-class activities, lest we all be bored by an over-reliance on lectures.****

****Complete the readings before class on the week that they are assigned. (Except for Week 1).****

Part 1: Orientations in Oral History

Week 1 (13 Aug): Introduction: What is Oral History? Why use non-textual methods?

Ritchie, Donald. (2012). "Introduction: The Evolution of Oral History". In, *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Donald Ritchie. Oxford University Press, pp. 4-20.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195339550.013.0001>

Week 2 (20 Aug): "People without History" ... or, how to approach history "without" written records? (Example #1: Sub-Saharan Africa)

Ménard, Anaïs. (2023). "Narratives of Colonial Encounters", Chapter 2, *Integrating Strangers: Sherbro Identity and The Politics of Reciprocity along the Sierra Leonean Coast*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Wilks, Ivor. (1982). "The State of the Akan and the Akan States: A Discursion". *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, Vol. 22, Cahier 87/88, Systèmes étatiques africains, pp. 231-249.

Jordan, Coleman. (2007). "Rhizomorphics of Race and Space: Ghana's Slave Castles and the Roots of African Diaspora Identity". *Journal of Architectural Education*, vol. 60, No. 4, pp. 48-59.

Recommended:

Wolf, Eric R. (1982). Chapter 1, *Europe and the People Without History*. California: University of California Press, pp. 3-23. (e.g.: https://is.muni.cz/el/cus/jaro2015/CZS13/um/lecture1/1_4_Wolf.pdf)

Week 3 (27 Aug): Example #2: Oral Traditions as History; Promises and Pitfalls around the World over the last 1 ½ Centuries (or more)

Spear, Thomas. (1981). "Oral Traditions: Whose History?" *History in Africa*, Vol. 8, pp. 165-181.

Mercer, P. M. (1979). "Oral Tradition in the Pacific: Problems of Interpretation". *The Journal of Pacific History*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 130-153.

Thom, Brian. (2003). "The Anthropology of Northwest Coast Oral Traditions". *Arctic Anthropology*, Vol. 40, No. 1, pp. 1-28.

Recommended:

Lowie, Robert. (1917). "Oral Tradition and History". *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 30, No. 116, pp. 161-167.

Week 4 (3 Sept): Histories of the Contemporary, Near, and Lived Pasts: Interviews

Quinlan, Mary Kay. (2012). "The Dynamics of Interviewing" in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Donald Ritchie, pp. 23-36.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195339550.013.0002>

Watch: Smithsonian Institution Archives, "Oral History at Home in 5 Easy Steps"

<https://youtu.be/pxrkKhLExxw?si=MBqoeF9Ecw0lfZQF>

Recommended:

Clark, Mary Marshall. (2012). "Case Study: Field Notes on Catastrophe: Reflections on the September 11, 2001, Oral History Memory and Narrative Project". In, *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Donald Ritchie, pp. 255-264.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195339550.013.0018>

Part 2: Doing Oral History (Practica)

Week 5 (10 Sept): Ethical Considerations & CITI certification (Possibly with Guest Speakers)

Explore: <https://oralhistory.org/>;

Read: <https://oralhistory.org/oha-core-principles/>; <https://oralhistory.org/oha-statement-on-ethics/>

Recommended: Mary Larson, (2013). “Steering Clear of the Rocks: A Look at the Current State of Oral History Ethics in the Digital Age,” *The Oral History Review*, 40:1, 36-49.

****See below for Week 7;** if you wish to conduct project research on any archive other than the ones listed under Week 7, you must submit the research abstract and plan by 10 September 23:59)**

Week 6 (17 Sept): From the interview to ethnography and back to history: ranges of qualitative methodologies

Explore: <https://www.southernfoodways.org/oral-history/>

Read: Taylor, Andre (2022). “Sweet Memory: Extracting Oral Histories from Unwritten African American Recipes,”

<https://historiansforhistory.wordpress.com/2022/08/16/sweet-memory-extracting-oral-histories-from-unwritten-african-american-recipes-by-andre-taylor/>.

Recommended: Anna Sheftel & Stacey Zembrzycki, (2017). “Slowing Down to Listen in the Digital Age: How New Technology Is Changing Oral History Practice,” *The Oral History Review*, 44:1, 94-112.

Due at the end-of-class (and no later than Thursday 17 September 23:59): Interview into History, Draft 1.

Due by Friday 18 Sept. 23:59: CITI certificates and completion reports to be uploaded

Week 7 (TBD): Beginning “Fieldwork” and Consultations

Explore these online oral history archives:

<https://americandiplomacy.web.unc.edu/2022/05/the-foreign-affairs-oral-history-collection-a-national-treasure/>

<https://guides.library.yale.edu/oham/collectionsguide>

<https://www.library.gov.au/discover/what-we-collect/oral-history-and-folklore/>; Explore also the specific collections: <https://www.library.gov.au/research/collection-guides>, and other links to pre-curated collections within the site.

<https://seaa.lib.uci.edu/southeast-asian-archive>

<https://archivum.org/collections/curated-collections/yugoslavia-archive-project> (nb; this one is only partially “oral history” collections)

<https://heirloomgardens.princeton.edu/>; (see also <https://civileats.com/2024/06/04/oral-history-project-preserved-black-and-indigenous-food-traditions/>)

RECESS WEEK

Part 3: From Memory to History

Week 8 (8 Oct): Collective Memories and Mnemonic Traditions

Nora, Pierre. (1989). "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory. (Spring), pp. 7-24.

Recommended:

Halbwachs, Maurice. (1980 [1950]). *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter, Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter. New York: Harper Colophon.

Due: NLT Thursday 8 October 23:59, Research Abstract and Plan. Any restrictions will be communicated before the Week 9 class.

Week 9 (15 Oct): Fitting the Past to the Present (e.g. Genealogies)

Peristianis, Christakis. (2025) A Widow's Story, or, Dead Men (Are Meant to) Tell No Tales: Self-Reflexivity, (Inter)Subjectivity, and Unconscious Processes in Family History Interviews, *The Oral History Review*, 52:2, 326-349.

Ismailbekova, Aksana (2017). "Scales of Rahim's Kinship: Zooming In and Zooming Out", chapter 2, *Blood Ties and the Native Son: Poetics of Patronage in Kyrgyzstan*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. (Skim the rest of the book if you are interested in Rahim's story).

Shryock, Andrew. (1995) "Popular Genealogical Nationalism: History Writing and Identity among the Balqa Tribes of Jordan". *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Apr.), pp. 325-357

Recommended:

Sárközi, Ildikó Gyöngyvér (2023) *A Piece of Qing History: The Historical Value of a Sibe Self-taught Historian's Collection of Genealogies*. MING QING YANJIU, 27. pp. 54-94.

Due: end-of-class and NLT Thursday 15 October 23:59, Interview to History, Final Draft

Week 10 (22 Oct). How does Memory become History? Codification, Authorization, Transmission

Lass, Andrew (1994). "From Memory to History: The Events of November 17 Dis/membered", in *Memory, History, and Opposition under State Socialism*, ed. Rubie S. Watson. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, pp. 87-104.

Hirsch, Marianne (2008). "The Generation of Postmemory". *Poetics Today* 29 (1): 103–128.

Due: end-of-class and NLT Thursday 22 October 23:59, Updates to Research Plan; Any restrictions will be communicated before the Week 11 class.

Week 11 (29 Oct). Whose Memory? Claims, Conflicts & Forgetting

Hilly, Sally and Giacomo Lichtner (2026). "Remove. Retain. Reframe: Visible Legacies of Italian Fascism and What to Do with Them". *History & Memory*, Volume 38, Number 1, Spring/Summer, pp. 3-37.

Popa, Gabriela (2009), "(Re)producing Spaces, Deriving Identities: Symbolic Appropriation of the Second World War Monuments in Post-Soviet Moldova," Working paper for the project New and Ambiguous Nation-Building Processes in South-Eastern Europe: Collective Identities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Moldova and Montenegro in Comparison (1944–2005).

Recommended:

<https://aseees.org/newsnet-article/oral-history-in-central-asia/>

Week 12 (5 Nov): Presentations and Discussion

Due: By Monday 2 November 23:59, All Presentations must be posted and available to class members.

Week 13 (12 Nov): Oral History for the Future (Forgetting and Remembering in the Digital Age)

Read: to be assigned, 1 of 7 articles from this special issue of *The Oral History Review* (53:1) on AI and Oral History: <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/uohr20/current>

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO)

By the end of this course, you (as a student) will be able to:

- 1) Identify and distinguish key features of “oral history” from conceptual and methodological perspectives.
- 2) Evaluate oral history projects and related outputs from methodological and ethical perspectives.
- 3) Integrate a range of qualitative methodologies, sources, and information into historical presentations.
- 4) Explain and evaluate how individual and collective memories are expressed, informed, and negotiated in/through oral representations of the past.

Assessment (includes both continuous and summative assessment)

Component	Course LO Tested	Related Programme LO or Graduate Attributes (See History Programme's LOs)	Weighting	Team/ Individual	Assessment Rubrics (See History Programme's assessment rubrics)
1. In-Class Activities	1, 2, 3, 4	1, 2, 3, 10	20%	Individual (15%) + Team (5%)	2, 5, 6, 11, 13
2. Interview	2, 3	3, 5, 7, 9	20%	Individual	2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 14, 15
3. CITI Certification	2	10, 11	10%	Individual	2, 14, 15
4. Final Project	1, 2, 3, 4	1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11	50%	Individual (40%) + Team (10%)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15
Total			100%		

Course Assessments

20% In-Class Activities (15% Individual, 5% Team): Your active participation in discussion and all class activities is essential for us all to learn effectively.

20% Interview: Turning Interview into History – A foundational task for oral history is to turn the “data” of interviews into historical accounts. This might seem straightforward, but it is also a highly creative task, requiring significant decision-making from the historian. In this assignment, you will work with the interviews that you conduct in-class with your peers to draft a historical narrative. The assignment is to be submitted in two stages. The first is due *immediately* after conducting the interview in-class in week 6 (10%); the final version is due in week 9 (10%). Unless you have an excused absence on the due-date, the assignment will not be accepted after 23:59 on the same day. You may use the intervening weeks to conduct follow-up interviews/research and the interviewee should review and agree to the penultimate draft before you submit it. *The final draft should also contain notes on your methodology and decision-making process.* **GAI usage is not permitted in stage 1; any subsequent usage must be discussed in advance and declared.** *Failure to disclose GAI usage fully will be treated as a breach in research integrity.*

Instructor written feedback to be provided on Drafts 1 and 2.

10% CITI Certification: CITI certification is required for all NTU-hosted research involving human subjects with the intent to produce new knowledge. This includes student projects, like the final project for this class. Successful completion of the online CITI course in Social, Behavioral, and Economic Research (SBER) modules is therefore a CA. The marks for this component will be scored based on the CITI completion report (70% of the average module scores) + date of completion (30% if completed by the deadline; 10% if before week 7 class; 5% if before week 8 class; 2% if before week 9 class; 0% if later).

50% Final Project (40% Individual; 10% Group – see below): The final project for this class involves the use of existing oral history collections to produce a public presentation. (Individual weightage is prioritized for the purpose of coursework, but students are advised to note the fundamentally collaborative nature of oral history and of oral historical archives). There are several stages:

Week 8 – Research Abstract and Plan (Individual 10%). Following exploration of the pre-selected online archives, select one host archive. (****Any archive other than those that have been pre-selected for the course must be proposed by 10 September 23:59 to ensure adequate time for School Ethics Review****). Submit an abstract and plan that explains the choice of the archive; identifies core source files; and outlines the research questions to be asked. ****Note whether the archive requires any permission, special procedures, or limitations on the use of the source files****

Research is intended to be completed individually; however, presentations will be made in the context of group assemblages (see weeks 9 and 10).

Instructor oral/written feedback to be provided on the Research Abstract & Plan.

Week 9 – Confirmation of Group Assemblages. Presentations will be nominally grouped according to archive. Students proposing alternative groupings across archives or sub-groupings within archives, must do so during Week 9's class. In cases where only 1 student chooses to work on an archive, the instructor will suggest a grouping. There should be a minimum of 3 students per grouping and an absolute maximum of 6. (This means the class should result in 5-10 total group presentations).

Week 10 – Concept for Final Presentation (Individual 10%). The concept for the final presentation should describe what you have learned from the core source files and *how* you will present a historical account from them. You should also take into account at least one facet of the relations between oral history and memory that we have discussed in class.

Choices of the historical account: 7-10 page written paper; virtual installation (as if in a museum); design a website; other options (please discuss).

The plan needs to be specific to your individual research, but may be linked to the group assemblage plan (see below).

The concept should also indicate whether you have expanded the scope to include additional files within the earlier identified core; and whether you will conduct any additional research beyond the initially chosen archive (e.g. use of other online archives; interviewing/observation of your own; bibliographic research; etc.).

****All additional planned research involving Human Subjects must be declared at this point for review and approval. ****

Week 11 – Confirmation of Group Assemblage and Presentation Plan. During Class on Week 11, group members should **agree** the architecture for Week 12 presentations and how the individual presentations will be integrated. This includes the approximate speaking times for individual members (it is possible that not everyone will speak but individual contributions must be identifiable). The default platform for presentation materials is Miro.

Week 12 – Presentations (30%; Individual 20% and Group 10%). The presentations must be based on individual research projects; however, as they will be clumped together thematically, the group may choose to integrate their work into more or less complex assemblages. This strategy must be made clear in week 11 and during the presentations.

As you plan your presentation, think about the many end-products of oral historical research that we have discussed in-class. Who is your ideal/intended audience? Do you want to produce a “definitive” account or narrative? An analysis of memory? A non-textual presentation? etc.? A significant component of the

presentation mark will be based on your capacity to communicate that you have reflected critically on the choices that you make <i>with and about</i> the source material.
Formative feedback You will receive formative feedback through written responses to the Interview. You will also receive verbal feedback through in-class discussion, activities, and presentations.
Course Policies and Student Responsibilities
General You are expected to complete all assigned pre-class readings and activities, attend all seminar classes punctually, participate fully, and complete all scheduled assignments by due dates. Absenteeism Absence from class can affect your overall course grade. For all valid absences, please request a <u>short-term leave of absence</u> from your home school. Valid reasons include falling sick supported by a medical certificate or participation in NTU's approved activities supported by an excuse letter from the relevant bodies. There will be no make-up opportunities for in-class activities. Please notify the instructor in advance of valid absences whenever possible. You should take responsibility to follow up with course notes, assignments and course related announcements for any missed sessions. Late Policy Assignments submitted after the stipulated deadline will be subject to 10% deduction per 24-hours-late. In case of valid absences, an extension can be granted in-proportion to the excused absence. <i>Students experiencing unforeseeable delays should communicate with the instructor as soon as possible to discuss appropriate options.</i>
Academic Integrity Good academic work depends on honesty and ethical behaviour. The quality of your work as a student relies on adhering to the principles of academic integrity and to the NTU Honour Code, a set of values shared by the whole university community. Truth, Trust and Justice are at the core of NTU's shared values.

As a student, it is important that you recognize your responsibilities in understanding and applying the principles of academic integrity in all the work you do at NTU. Not knowing what is involved in maintaining academic integrity does not excuse academic dishonesty. You need to actively equip yourself with strategies to avoid all forms of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, academic fraud, collusion and cheating. If you are uncertain of the definitions of any of these terms, you should go to the [academic integrity website](#) for more information. Consult your instructor if you need any clarification about the requirements of academic integrity in the course.

Generative AI: The appropriate use(s) of Notebook LLM, ChatGPT, Bard, Dal-E, Grammarly, and other similar Generative AI resources will be discussed and stipulated throughout the semester in the context of individual assignments. GAI-use will not be permitted on some activities and assignments. When permitted, all usage must be fully declared and appropriate papertrails must be kept and provided on request.

Failure to submit a declaration; inaccurate declaration; lack of an appropriate papertrail; and/or other evidence of GAI mis-use will be treated as serious breaches of academic integrity.

History Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

1. {Competence} Investigate and explain the role of a range of historical processes in the political, cultural, and societal formation of the modern world.
2. {Competence} Compare and contrast the major historical approaches and theories.
3. {Competence} Analyze and interpret primary and secondary historical sources.
4. {Competence} Collect and synthesize large quantities of historical evidence.
5. {Creativity} Formulate novel historical arguments and explanations that effectively deploy primary and secondary source evidence.
6. {Creativity} Develop novel ways of conceptualizing and explaining history and its significance to specialist and non-specialist audiences.
7. {Communication} Articulate compelling, evidence-based, and well-reasoned arguments in written and oral form.
8. {Communication} Present historical ideas and evidence to specialist and non-specialist audiences in a variety of media.
9. {Civic Mindedness} Develop “historical empathy” with regards to individuals and groups in the past.
10. {Character} Understand the professional, ethical, and moral responsibilities of historical practice.
11. {Character} Demonstrate an understanding of how to appropriately acknowledge and build upon the work of others.

