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Writing, Research, Technology, Spring 2009

Assignment 3 Oral History Video Composition

<http://williamwolff.org/courses/wrt-spring-2009/wrt-assignments-s09/assignment-3-oral-history-video-composition/>

Assignment Overview

In their Introduction to the second edition of *The Oral History Reader* Perks and Thompson (2006) note that when one engages in the practice of oral history she is also challenging traditional notions of the construction of history. Correspondingly, by challenging history she is also challenging traditional conceptions that reliable research is the investigation of written texts found in libraries, databases, and archives. Later, in their opening words to Part I, they announce that human beings are now “in the middle of a fourth, dizzying digital revolution in oral history and its outcomes are impossible to predict” (p. 8). They describe this revolution as being a result of the proliferation of information technologies—email, the Internet, digital recording devices—and the potential for ubiquitous access to interviews. In short, “the future of oral history . . . has never been so exciting, or so uncertain” (p. 8).

With Flip Video Cameras in hand (or on tripod) we are going engage that exciting uncertainty by composing video oral histories of individuals whose voices on important social issues might never have been recorded, preserved, and broadcast to a world eager to watch, listen, learn about what others think and do. Our videos will not be about people, though we will learn about them through their interviews. Rather, the videos will explore a particular issue as understood by the people you interview. The distinction is subtle, but important. When conceiving of your issue, think in broad strokes at first but then narrow down to local specifics. We discuss this in great detail in class.

This ten-week assignment will challenge our critical thinking, reading, writing, and composing skills. It will test our patience and bring us thrills. It will ask us to think visually and aurally. We will explore in depth questions writers of written texts often take for granted (or never have to think about), especially those relating to time, transition effects, sound, silence, blanks, color, among many others.

Subjects and Research

Our subjects can be family members, colleagues, community members, strangers, and/or experts in a field relating to your issue (the only subjects off limit are fellow students [unless absolutely necessary due to the issue being considered]). Due to the time constraints of the semester, it will be better if you have a relationship of some sort with your interview subjects prior to beginning the project. That relationship can be as close as a family member or as minor as belonging to the same church. The key will be finding subjects who have lived experiences directly relating to the issue you wish to explore.

The fact that we conducting interviews does not preclude us from engaging in more traditional modes of research. Indeed, oral history presentations depend on it for evidence to support and enhance statements uttered by interview subjects. Interviews also require a substantial amount of traditional research about the particular issue you are investigating, the organizations your

subjects might be a part of, and so on. The more prepared we are the better listeners and questioners we will be, and the more effective we will be at helping the subject articulate their memories.

Assignment Due Dates

Our final product will be an 8 – 10 minute idea-driven mashup of video, audio, and still images that makes a point(s) about an important social issue. Due to the complexity of the project we will be going through three overlapping stages:

- Preparing the Oral History Study (2/23 – 3/25): this stage includes completing the following:
 - March 2: video proposal due
 - March 9: list of potential subjects due on wiki
 - March 9: potential interview schedule due on wiki
 - March 11: subject consent form due on wiki
 - March 23: two-page researched topic summary with bibliography due on wiki
 - March 23: final interview schedule due on wiki
 - March 23: drafts of interview questions due on wiki

- Conducting the Interviews (3/23 – 4/15): this stage includes completing the following:
 - all interviews
 - follow-up interviews
 - signed consent forms
 - detailed notebook in paper/on wiki that records the subject name, number of the interview with the subject, date, time started, time completed. location of interview, type of interview (formal or informal), questions asked, topics covered, questions for follow-up interview, file name of the digital file

- Composing the Video (3/23 – 4/27): this stage includes completing the following:
 - April 1: test photo story of 5 photos
 - April 6: first video draft due (2 – 3 minutes) on YouTube and embed in wiki
 - April 6 – 8: conference with Dr. Wolff
 - April 13: digitized primary documents and screen shots
 - April 15: music selections
 - April 20: second video (5 – 6 minutes) draft due on YouTube and embed in wiki
 - April 27: final video due (8 – 10 minutes) on YouTube and embed in wiki