

Oral History Online

Oral history is a history built around people. It thrusts life into history itself and widens its scope. It allows heroes not just from the leaders, but from the unknown majority of the people. It brings history into, and out of, the community. It helps the less privileged, and especially the old, towards dignity and self-confidence. It makes for contact – and thence understanding – between social classes and between generations... oral history offers a challenge to the accepted myths of history, to the authoritarian judgment inherent in its tradition. It provides a means of a radical transformation of the social meaning of history.

— *The Voice of the Past*, by Paul Thompson

Oral histories are the voices of the disenfranchised—the famous and the lesser known. Artists, musicians, laborers, survivors, immigrants, and students are just a few of the silent people to whom oral histories give voice. Groups whose stories otherwise might remain unnoticed—the illiterate, common people, minorities, and others who rarely see their stories published—can finally be heard through oral histories.

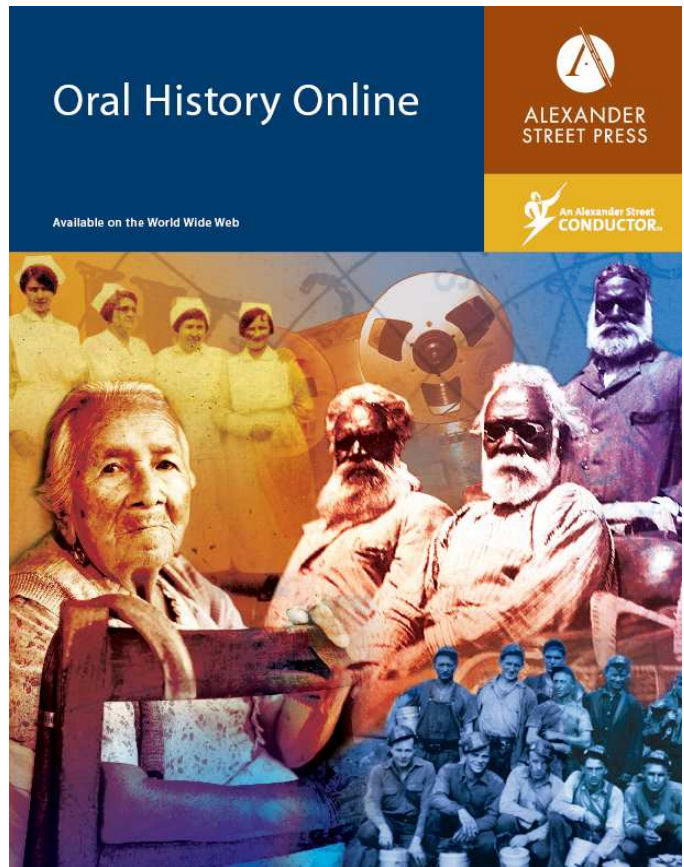
This kind of material has not been accessible to a wide audience. Most existing indexes reference oral history only as a broad collection category. The rare finding aid that does point to specific collections lacks controlled vocabularies and is not electronic. As a result, there has been no easy way for scholars to find such materials related to their research. Even when they can locate the writings, researchers face the task of wading through hundreds of pages of text before determining whether any of the content is relevant.

AN EVER-EXPANDING RESOURCE

Oral History Online is a major initiative that will continue to grow, with new collections being added regularly. We aim to index all the important oral histories available either on the Web or hidden away in archives, in English, all around the world, linking subscribers to full text, audio, and video whenever available. The database also includes tens of thousands of pages of full text that are available nowhere else but through Alexander Street—including 40,000 pages of Ellis Island oral histories in electronic format for the first time, exclusive Black Panther Party narratives, and other unique and in-copyright content.

The index points to thousands of collections that represent millions pages of histories. We have created a richly detailed bibliographic record for every interview, every collection, and every repository, allowing users to search using multiple, combinable fields as well as with keyword searching of every interview.

If you read the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States, if you read and believe that they're for you, which I grew up believing, then it is very difficult to believe that



you're not a worthwhile person, that you shouldn't have access to all the things that go along with being a free person in a free society and a democratic society. Now, of course, when the Declaration of Independence was written, the people who wrote it really did not have black people in mind when they wrote it. But when I read it, I read it to include me. You know, if you read Martin Luther King's statements, he believed also that these things were for all people, and that's what he preached.

- Margaret C. Dabney, relating her experiences during the Civil Rights struggle. Interview by Prudence L. Justis and Kendra Johnson for Virginia Commonwealth University, March 28, 1992.

ALEXANDER STREET'S SEMANTIC INDEXING™

Because we have added our *Semantic Indexing* to each bibliographic record, users can search in ways that yield details that, in many instances, have been difficult to find until now. Labor historians, for example, will learn about the personal experiences of male and female workers in relation to unions, along with accounts of the normal experience of work and its impact on the family and community. Urban historians will probe the less-explored aspects of urban social life—the small industrial or market town, for example, or the middle class suburb. Researchers can get an inside look at the struggles for woman suffrage, civil rights, or gay rights, or examine firsthand accounts from Holocaust survivors, Vietnam veterans, or terrorist attack victims.

EXAMPLES OF SEARCHES

- List all oral history interviews conducted with miners in Pennsylvania between 1950 and 1960.
- Detail all oral histories pertaining to women's status during World War II.
- What did Huey Newton say about the government's actions against the Black Panthers?
- Identify all collections that have material relevant to substance abuse.
- Determine which collection contains a video recording of Kenzaburo Oe.
- Find all interviews with survivors of the Titanic disaster.
- Locate all audio files of narratives on the subject of gender identity.
- Find full-text narratives describing conversations with Fidel Castro.
- Locate oral history projects in South Africa on the subject of Apartheid.

... He said that we had married on the theory that I was to continue work and that as soon as the baby got a little older, I was to get a babysitter and get back to my job. He said he had no intentions of supporting me and the baby. That was the agreement when we were married. So it occurred to me, at that point in Las Vegas, that we women were getting into hot water on some subjects about the future and some of the women were getting into hot water, too.

- Sylvie Grace Thompson Thygeson, "In the Parlor," an oral history from The Suffragists: From Tea-Parties to Prison, Regional Oral History Office, University of California, Berkeley, 1975. Courtesy, The Bancroft Library.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

Oral History Online is available on the Web through annual subscription. It contains an index and links to editorially vetted, Web-based oral histories in English in archives and libraries around the world, with links to full text, audio, and video when available. It also contains tens of thousands of in-copyright, full-text interviews from proprietary collections. Prices are scaled to budget and FTE.

ALEXANDER STREET PRESS

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