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Experiencing the Past: Oral History as World History

The first question historians ask me—a historian—about my use of oral histories as a source for understanding the past is, "But aren't they biased?" It's a peculiar question, I think, because the first lesson I teach in my introductory global history course, "Forging the Modern World," is about how to understand "bias" in primary source material. That historians can understand the bias, the perspective, of a document, but are unnerved by the bias of a storyteller illuminates the fundamental challenge and opportunity of using oral histories as primary source material. No historical source is objective, but as Alessandro Portelli has put it, "the holiness of writing often leads us to forget it."[1] The opportunity of oral history as world history is that it engages the tools of the historian as well as the tools of being human. At any level of engagement, oral histories can be transformational because they invite the historian to meet the source on common ground. This can be profoundly disruptive to established hierarchies and practices, and serves as a reminder that the very nature of "bias" in oral history may represent its greatest strength. Ethical engagement with oral history illuminates the contingency of all historical source material. In the decades since I first began to engage with oral history, it has gained traction in the discipline of history as a recuperative practice that creates space for marginalized voices to diversify and enrich our understanding of world history.[2]

As a historian, oral history has been a tool to unseat deeply embedded historical narratives rooted in established hierarchies of power defined by race, caste, and gender. Oral history has opened up new avenues for understanding the lived experience of historical events and provided opportunities for my students to experience world history at ground-level without ever leaving their classroom. (Except when oral history takes them out of the classroom to do their own interviews!) It has transformed the learning experience for my students and brought them into sympathy with people they may have believed were utterly Other, or about whom they knew nothing at all. In its experiential aspects, oral history links my research and teaching: by connecting me with people, it connects me more closely to their histories, and intimacy with those histories makes

learning from them more visceral and moving for my students. Stories become the throughline linking research and learning. Oral history practice embodies several key aspects of experiential education by engaging students in the process of their own learning through problem solving, reflecting and constructing meaning out of historical experience.[3]

All history is storytelling, but whereas in archival, documentary research we may not know all the context of a document's author or their experience, with oral storytelling, the context is everything. While I teach my students that in order to understand bias in any historical source we must consider the author's context and presuppositions as well as our own, the document itself does not change. The words on the page persist, even if our understanding of them shifts over time. For an oral history interview, this simply isn't true. The story itself emerges out of and into a specific context that both narrator and interviewer create. As we work to understand the role of bias in oral histories which, as educators, we must do, it is crucial to remember that the oral history experience (the interview) and the product that preserves the experience (the recording and/or transcript) are unique historical documents to which we must apply unique tools of historical interpretation.[4] Oral histories, as "verbal documents" do not represent an exception to historical analysis. We must analyze them for the ways that narrators use their storytelling to position themselves as individuals and members of communities to illuminate the historical record, both past and present, and thereby reveal much that official archives rarely deign to preserve.

As a discipline, oral history is oriented, foundationally, towards advancing equity. Oral historians have sought out the voices of people and the groups they identify with that have otherwise been ignored by official collection and archival priorities. While there may be an imbalance in power or educational attainment between interviewer and narrator, the best practices embed respect for the narrators as key to the integrity of any oral historical research undertaking, from the preparation stage to the analysis stage.[5] In the interview context, it is crucial that interviewers explain their purpose; explain to narrators the extent of their rights; seek their consent to be interviewed and ensure that narrators understand that they have control over the uses of the interview product. Narrators hold the copyright to their interview unless they actively release or transfer those rights. Ethical oral history practice relies on the notion of what Michael Frisch has called, "a shared authority," the principle that authorship is "shared" between interviewer and narrator and therefore has the "capacity to redefine and redistribute intellectual authority."[6] It is in part because of this notion of authority, and the understanding that oral history testimony represents individual lived experience, that it is standard to include the names and identities of consenting narrators.[7] Key, too, to the orientation of oral history is that it is a method of history-making, its concern is historical preservation and documentation. Thus, oral history interviews, recordings, and transcripts are historical documents that should be made available for future

researchers and members of the public, just like material records. Ultimately, the success of an oral history experience—whether singular or part of a larger collection—for all parties involved, depends upon excellent preparation: training, research, technological facility, and thorough planning.

As a historian focusing on South Asia, I have created oral history collections, taught oral history methodology to undergraduates and independent scholars, and used oral histories as a teaching tool that engages students experientially in both the creation and study of world history. Here, I elaborate on those projects, the challenges they present, and how educators might adapt oral history into their own world history teaching. As Brooke Bryan, who directed the Mellon-funded initiative *Oral History in the Liberal Arts* to develop oral history as experiential education for the Great Lakes Colleges Association, has suggested, if you're considering incorporating oral history into your teaching, you likely "share the vision that community-based learning is an active, participatory, experiential pedagogical strategy for more meaningful learning that 'sticks.'"[8] For many of my students, whose testimony and reflections are central to my analysis here, oral history practice presents a daunting but exciting opportunity to engage their whole selves in historical work: they are learners, researchers, creators, and interpreters of historical knowledge all at once. Whether they are reading oral history interviews created by others, or creating and conducting their own oral history interviews, the methodology engages them experientially in the process of knowledge creation. They are no longer concerned with remembering history as consumers, but are engaged with making historical meaning itself. Because I believe that oral history can, and arguably, should, be used at any level to teach world history, I will offer evidence of my own and my students' experiences as well as practical tips and prompts rooted in some of the most influential scholarly work on oral history to show how the method can endow students with the perspective they need to see past difference and into shared human experience.[9]

Origins of an Oral Historian

In the summer of 2000, I sat in on an interview I had helped another scholar to arrange. We were in Lahore, Pakistan, the city to which my family had migrated during the 1947 partitioning of British India when two independent states—India and Pakistan—were created as the British relinquished power over their massive empire. The narrator was my great uncle, Major General Syed Wajahat Husain (Ret'd) of the Pakistan Army. His title and experience, both as a general and an Ambassador for Pakistan, were formidable, but to me, he was my beloved Poonan Mama, my paternal grandmother's younger brother by ten years, who had a buttery voice, a sweet fragrance, and once gave me an emerald ring. To Lucy Chester, then a Fulbright scholar and Ph.D. candidate who was interviewing him, he was a resource, a surviving member of the ill-fated Punjab

Boundary Force, an informant on those disrupted days in 1947 when, as a 2nd lieutenant, he escorted refugee trains across the "Radcliffe Line," the newly drawn border between independent India and Pakistan.[10] As I pressed record on my cassette player and listened to him recall those dark and troubled days when he tried, with mixed success, to provide some security for the desperate people on board, I realized that though I had grown up visiting my family in Pakistan, my father never taught me Urdu, his mother-tongue (my mother, as a white American, never learned it either) and so I had been cut off from any storytelling the elders of the family may have engaged in. I had only a dim understanding that our family had migrated from India to Pakistan during the great migrations of 1947, when approximately 15 million people picked up and moved across the new state boundaries between decolonized, independent India and Pakistan. In fact, until I got to college, I had hardly heard about Partition at all.

I browsed my uncle's bookshelf and found histories with titles like *The Great Divide: Britain-India-Pakistan*; *Divide and Quit;* and *Stern Reckoning*. The first, a tome, written by H.V. Hodson, a British historian, focuses on the culmination of "the broad history of British policy in India;" the second was authored by Penderel Moon, a British Civil Servant remembered as "independent minded," with "strong, and at times, idiosyncratic views."[11] The third was written by an Indian, G.D. Khosla, then Chief Justice of the Punjab High Court, and reported on Partition's atrocities from the official perspective.[12] Hodson, especially, was dry, and the pages of my uncle's aging copies were brittle in my hands, their edges crumbling.

I wanted to know more about the people who survived this. I wanted to know more about Wajahat: how had he come to join the Boundary Force? More about my own family: how had the Partition and migration affected them? More about Aligarh, my father's birthplace and home to an important Muslim University from which generations of men in my family had graduated. Wajahat's story brought my own family's history and experience to life, and that interview planted the seed for what became, a decade later, my dissertation research project, and then my 2021 book *Partition's First Generation: Space, Place, and Identity in Muslim South Asia*.[13]

Image 1: Author's father, Tariq Azhar Abbas, aged five, crouches on the step of a Partition Special Train along with his cousins. Family photograph used with permission of Ahmar Abbas.

General Wajahat was my first informant, in June 2005. I sat down with him, in that same study, lined with books, and told him that I wanted to embark on a life history exploration with him. I attached the microphone, asked my first question, and he began to *read*! He pulled out a typed article he had written, and read it to me aloud. I was horrified! As a budding oral historian, I had read *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw*, and marveled at the description the interviewers gave of meeting 84-year-old Nate Shaw, of the then-defunct Alabama Sharecroppers Union, "we asked him right off why he joined the union. He didn't respond directly; rather, he 'interpreted' the question and began, 'I was hauling a load of hay out of Apafalya one day—' and continued uninterrupted for eight hours."[14] While I understood that this experience was extraordinary, it didn't stop me from imagining something similar. It was a colossal disappointment that my first question had elicited this staid portrayal:

> *We were a happy family. The main stress in the family was on education and correct upbringing. We were brought up in a fairly well-disciplined family where my mother saw to it that we carried out our early education in the house under her supervision … It was a very happy family and my mother, my parents, kept very strict control and discipline ensuring that a) we got the best possible education and b) we were all kept under tight discipline. Truthfulness, straightforwardness, obedience to our elders and, of course, love and affection between all the boys and*

> *the girls and, of course, to our parents were the cardinal points of our upbringing.*[15]

I frantically searched for the next question, anything to break the rhythm, to shift him away from the document. My follow-up "Where did the family's money come from? Did they own property?" at least got him to look up from the paper and as the interview progressed the conversation became easier, the exchanges more spontaneous. Looking back at it now, I was impatient, transitioning too quickly from the early life history questions, to the topic questions, those that got to the heart of my research agenda. I could have gone more slowly, encouraged him to fill in the texture of his experiences, and not just the turning points. Though I had been trained by a wonderful oral history scholar, Martha Norkunas, whose practice revolves around deep listening, I could only learn to be an effective interviewer experientially. If I had been interviewing Nate Shaw, would I have been willing to give him the space to speak uninterrupted for eight hours? My challenge was different, but it took many efforts to cultivate a patient and spacious interview practice. I interviewed Wajahat thirteen more times and the content of those interviews both became the basis of his own memoir *1947: Before, During, After* and informed my own research agenda substantially.[16] Over the course of the following five years I interviewed over 70 men and women in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh and developed a rich and thorough understanding of a new range of experiences of the 1947 Partition that had not yet appeared in existing scholarship.[17]

Right about the same time I first heard Wajahat speak about his experiences, a field of Partition studies was burgeoning, with the publication in the mid-late1990s of works of fiction, non-fiction and personal narrative.[18] At the turn of the millennium, close to fifty years after the events, three transformative works of Partition scholarship appeared. These works not only developed a narrative of on-ground lived experience of the disruptions of 1947 but they were rooted in feminist and subaltern research methodologies and foregrounded the experiences of women and children. *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (1998), by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin and *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (2000) by Urvashi Butalia, were followed by Gyanendra Pandey's *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (2001).[19] These three investigations incorporate oral history interviews, and Butalia's work in particular explores the method, its strengths and weaknesses, and the ways in which access to remembered history could change the way we understood the event. Far from the British argument that 1947 constituted a "Transfer of Power," as seen from the British perspective, Pandey argues that violence *was* Partition. Menon and Bhasin and Butalia excavated the intimate tragedies of that violence and the marks it left on the bodies of women and border communities from Lahore to Delhi.

These works were a model for my own. I, too, sought to hear stories of Partition, of migrations, and displacements along the border, starting with Wajahat's Border Force experiences. But as I listened, my research interests changed, and I began to focus on a community associated with the Aligarh Muslim University, a hub of Muslim education located in my family's ancestral hometown. It had been a hub of pro-Pakistan activism in the 1940s and listening to its graduates (including Wajahat), I started to hear different kinds of stories. The people I was interviewing were different in several ways from most of those Butalia, Menon and Bhasin interviewed. They were Muslims, they were highly educated and often came from middle or upper-class backgrounds, and they had not been anywhere near the border in 1947. The Partition stories they told had none of the features of either the official narratives (that drew attention to the chaos of the border disruptions) or the feminist narratives (that drew attention to the harms women experienced at the hands of family members, members of other religious communities, and the state itself) that I had come to expect. These narrators did not speak of violence; they were not forced to move (those who did move, like Wajahat, often did so out of professional ambition, and many had not moved at all); they had not witnessed Partition's bloodshed; few even mentioned the border. I was, again, disappointed, and felt that my research project had been a failure. And then a dear friend asked me gently, "Has anyone else ever heard these narratives? No? Then tell us what they say."[20] Again, though I had been trained to listen, I had not yet learned to allow the narratives to change me: my agenda, my conclusions, and my understanding of the events I was studying.

Because oral history is especially good at recovering marginalized voices, it may not have been an obvious methodological choice to investigate this economically and educationally well-endowed community. In contrast to the experiences of those harmed by border violence their stories may seem insignificant or uneventful, but oral history was the only method capable of cultivating the space in which their narratives could effect change in our understanding of the history. Oral history was the only method that could shed light on the otherwise unrecorded complexities of space, place, and belonging for South Asian Muslims throughout the extended processes of decolonization and state making in South Asia.

When I returned to the narratives, transcribed them carefully, listened to the storytelling and reflected deeply on the turns of the narrative, what I discovered was a whole new vein of Partition history. There, in the voices of those university-educated Muslim elites, the ostensible beneficiaries of the creation of the Muslim homeland of Pakistan, were stories of partitioning that began before 1947 and persisted long after in the state and nation-making politics of the three post-partition states. There were stories of displacement and disorientation from people who never left, or were not forced to leave their homes, and stories of continuity from those who did.[21] There were small triumphs, and great disappointments. These voices had been silent in the archive

and consequently in the scholarship, because in the absence of violence, there was no "event" to archive. These stories required me to completely rethink my understanding of 1947 as an "event," and following scholars like Vazira Zamindar, I have come to think of a *Long Partition*, and to argue that it makes more sense to think of "partitioning" as a process that people continue to live through.[22] This shift in perspective became necessary because oral history is both a recuperative practice, bringing new voices to bear on the construction of meaning, and a reflexive practice, that speaks of the past *in* the present, and reveals much about both.

Though the 1947 Partition—that is, the creation of *two* independent states carved out of British India—involved migrations of both Hindus and Muslims across the newly drawn borders, the stories of Muslims have remained woefully underrepresented in Partition scholarship. Furthermore, this scholarship has been geographically lopsided, focusing on the Punjab borderland at the expense of the border in Bengal that later became the boundary of independent Bangladesh when it broke away from West Pakistan in 1971. The oral history collection that I created, that is freely accessible and available online through the University of Kentucky Libraries, is one of the few to cross the boundaries Partition etched on the landscape in pursuit of a shared history.[23] By pulling my perspective away from the border, and listening to the stories narrators told, I imagined a reframed Partition History, told by Muslims, whose dreams of Muslim solidarity were not fulfilled by the outcomes of 1947.[24] Whether in India, Pakistan, or Bangladesh, Muslims in South Asia lamented the loss of Muslim community that the partitioning has wrought, and while they did not represent themselves as victims of the events, they also did not express the triumph one might expect from a community that was at the heart of the Pakistan demand.

In the last twenty years, much of scholarship in the field of Partition Studies has incorporated oral histories.[25] In addition to a number of independent scholarly projects, the 1947 Partition Archive, a non-profit founded in 2010, has concertedly collected thousands of oral histories, preserving a wide range of narratives.[26] The promise of these substantial collection efforts is that we will continue to fill in the spaces around historical understanding of Partition and its meaning for people representing South Asia's vast diversity of caste, gender, class, linguistic, geographic, and ethnic identities. For this, oral history is the perfect methodological choice, whether for research or teaching: it draws learners into the stories of real people in history, and creates the possibility of real-time connection.

Reading Oral Histories as World History in the College Classroom

The experiential aspect of oral history lends itself well to reproduction in the context of teaching and may yield some of the most profound educational experiences students will get. As the Association for Experiential Education outlines, opportunities for direct

experience, supported by reflection and analysis engage learning by requiring that the learner themselves "take initiative, make decisions, and be accountable for results."[27] Learning is initiated by curiosity and creativity, driven by problem-solving and decision-making, and culminates with reflection and meaning construction. Direct experience engages the learner holistically: intellectually, emotionally, socially, soulfully and/or physically, and often leaves a lasting and transformational mark.[28] Oral history is minimally represented in the literature on experiential education, which has tended to focus on study abroad, outdoor and environmental education. Though as guest editor of the *Journal of Experiential Education* Jay Roberts noted in March 2018, "we have begun to move past this limited notion of the field … But there is more work to be done. One of the central tenets of experiential education is codified in the etymology of the word 'experience.' Experience, in Latin, comes from *expereri*, which means to experiment, test, or risk."[29] This element of risk-taking need not imply only the physical risks of testing the body on a climbing wall or ropes course, but surely may include the intellectual risk-taking of engaging another in the delicate process of remembering and recounting. I teach several courses that incorporate oral histories at varying levels of experiential complexity from reading, discussing, analyzing, and even reenacting oral histories in an introductory-level class to creating, conducting, and analyzing oral histories in an advanced seminar. At all levels, oral histories engage students actively in many of the arenas crucial to experiential learning, and in every case, as their testimony below will show, oral histories visibly and demonstrably shift my students' perspective on the historical content we cover as well as on the content and goals of their own educational journeys.

I teach at a Jesuit, Catholic university in Philadelphia. Our student body is eighty percent white, and most identify as Catholic. Few have traveled outside of the United States or beyond Anglo-European cultural zones. Therefore, whether I am teaching an introductory global history course required of all students or an upper-division course on the History of South Asia, I do not expect students entering my classes to have prior knowledge of anything pertaining to South Asia (including what or where it is!). As students advance through the curriculum, I introduce oral histories and oral history transcripts as historical sources in a variety of ways. There are a number of strategies and options that adapt well to a variety of settings and historical contexts; even introducing a short unit using oral histories can make a substantial impact.

Oral history offers resources that can diversify established and accepted historical narratives. They illuminate the complexity and contingency of history, and I believe that the profound human connection to the past that oral history offers may allow more students to see themselves and their communities represented as meaningful historical actors. How would our World History courses change if, in teaching The First World War, students read the letters from some of the nearly 1.5 million Indian soldiers who fought for the British, perhaps from those who fought in the trenches on the Western

front?[30] The post-First World War "Roaring Twenties" may take on a different hue if students listened to the oral testimonies gathered from the Greenwood neighborhood, also known as "Black Wall Street," in Tulsa that was razed by a white mob in 1921.[31] How might our students' understanding of the bombing of Hiroshima be affected if they listened to the voices of Japanese survivors or Japanese Americans interned in the United States during the Second World War?[32] Once students learn both the accepted standard narrative and hear the stories of lived experience, they can compare and contrast to evaluate their own learning.

The most basic way to use oral histories is to select an oral history from an existing collection, many of which are available freely online.[33] (See Appendix.) To start, I typically offer a short introductory lecture on what makes oral history different from other kinds of primary sources that focuses on its contingent nature and questions of bias and credibility. Once students have a few tools in hand to understand the nature of interpreting oral sources, I guide them to a resource that has a few options to choose from. The instructor must be familiar with the resource—if it is online, make sure you know the pathways to access the oral history transcripts or audio—and it is helpful to curate the available options so that more than one student reads or, ideally *listens* to the available narratives. I may assign 3-4 students to each narrative and ensure that the narratives each tell parts of a shared story from different perspectives. In approaching 1947 Punjab border violence, for instance, narrators may represent Hindu women, Muslim women, Pakistani military officers, local Sikh farmers, or children. Students read the assigned narrative, then in class I organize a jigsaw activity where they first meet and discuss the narrative in a group with others who read the same one, then in groups with people who read the other narratives. This way, students first engage deeply with one narrative and then find their perspective challenged by the variety of other stories.[34] Merely reading oral histories adds such profound depth to history that students frequently respond emotionally to the discovery that there are aspects of history that, despite involving large numbers of people, they have never been taught. Patrick Runfola, a student in a recent upper-division South Asia course focused on the end of empire in India, reflected after reading the Partition oral histories included in Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence*:

> *I was genuinely astounded by many of the things I had read. I was even a bit angry that I had not had any prior knowledge of Partition, because the experience and stories that Butalia shared of those she interviewed were so visceral and horrifying … it was similar to learning about the Holocaust for the first time, and the sick feelings I had then. So much of the history surrounding Partition is reduced to the politics of it, and how and why the decision was made to partition India and create the new state of Pakistan. After learning about the atrocities, and the death that*

> *occurred during Partition, it seems almost criminal that it is not mentioned more.*[35]

It is clear here that the student's learning has come alive, even become embodied. It has provoked in him a profound sense of injustice in his education, and rendered visible the empty spaces in his learning that he had never been taught to recognize. Discovering these absences for the first time was emotionally provocative and caused him to reassess the value of his education. In so doing, he settled on the possibility that the absence was not incidental, but deliberate, as he says, "almost criminal." This young person has discovered that his education has been embedded within a white supremacist agenda, that by leaving out the histories and experiences of oppressed and non-white people, it has conveyed that they are unimportant. As Nikole Hannah-Jones, who designed the 1619 Project for the *New York Times,* reflects, as a Black girl growing up in the United States, she "believed that if it was important, we would, we would be taught it in school. The absence of learning about Black people led me to believe that Black people had not accomplished much of note for us to learn about, and that that's why we were invisible."[36] This problem is perhaps doubly pronounced for white people. As Robin DiAngelo has argued, white people "are taught not to feel any loss about the absence of people of color in our lives."[37] I would extend her critique to encompass the fact that white people are not taught to feel any loss about the absence of the *histories* of non-white people, either. Like Hannah-Jones, too often we accept absence of evidence as evidence of absence. When Runfola read the stories of Partition's survivors, he not only learned about the events, but took away a more profound lesson that history education must become more inclusive if, as Nikole Hannah-Jones articulated, "we want to live up to our highest ideals."[38]

In contrast to the skepticism professional historians have held in regard to the value of oral histories, students often experience a deep connection to their content. Another student in 2021, Maxwell Moyer, argued that the impact of the oral histories led him to the conclusion that "there is no history of Partition without the stories of the human beings who actually had to face its effects."[39] This demonstrates a profoundly iconoclastic moment of historical realization, that without the voices of those who lived history, there is *no history*. This is the kind of realization that can shape the future of a young historian by shifting their perspective on the discipline and their understanding of the world. This student will likely never again read history without awareness of its absences, without seeking evidence of the lived experience. And yet, it is appropriate to retain some skepticism. As Michael Frisch has cautioned, "memory is a deeply cultural artifact."[40] Oral history testimony is not the same as the past, but it is a product of the interaction between the past, the present, and the context of the interview itself. In an oft-quoted gem from Alessandro Portelli, "Oral History tells us less about *events* … than about their meaning."[41] Discovering the *meaning* of historical events is the goal of

historical inquiry, but too often students of history have been focused on the What or When of history, rather than the Why, How, or even Who. Oral histories have become an indispensable tool in shaping my teaching because they immediately engage students with the process of *meaning-making* as part of their learning.

To demonstrate their facility in moving from summary to meaningful analysis, students each take a turn serving as discussion leader throughout the course of the semester. I model the skill early in the semester by offering a short lecture on assigned material and then students work with a partner to develop a ten-minute oral presentation to share their findings. In her reflection paper on the experience, Alexandra Crespo revealed how personal the effort of meaning-making became. In offering her analysis of Butalia's published oral histories she said, "there is so much dimensionality to the Partition and it felt unfair to all those that suffered during that period to not provide the best analysis possible to elucidate the significance of their experiences."[42] Here, she articulates a sense of ethical obligation to Partition survivors. As a history learner, she felt intimately connected to those whose lives she studied. The excellence of her engagement was driven by a sense of personal commitment to the survivors—especially the women—themselves. While she could not go back and alter the past, she could honor its fullness and complexity. By remembering survivors, by honestly representing their experiences, Crespo felt she was initiating a reparative practice.

She was not alone; Ira Daly connected the experience of learning Partition through oral histories to coursework he had completed in another course, taught by my colleague Kazuya Fukuoka, on Truth and Reconciliation. "We learned that 'truth telling' is necessary for a complete and effective reconciliation. When one tells the truth, it allows for the perpetrator to accept blame and begin the reconciliation process … in recounting partition, these histories are often left out, hindering reconciliation between the perpetrators and victims."[43] Daly went so far as to imagine these oral histories as the foundation of a reconciliation between India and Pakistan, the two original post-Partition states. Though reading oral histories may not represent a "direct" experience, these reflections, connections, and the realizations they spawned represent the best outcomes of experiential learning: through guided reflection, students' perspectives on history and historical work shifted substantially. It is worth noting, too, that for these students, learning in the midst of the multiple crises of the COVID-19 pandemic, the pandemic of violence against Black and Brown communities in the United States, and against the backdrop of the Hindu nationalist persecution of Muslims and oppressed caste people in India, these lessons offer practical applications for their history education.[44] By taking the lessons from history itself, and reassessing historical learning, they are developing a multi-layered understanding of education and its power. All this without even leaving the classroom!

Creating Oral Histories with College Students and Immigrant Americans

In an upper division History seminar, however, I do have students leave the classroom to conduct an oral history interview with an immigrant to the United States. The course, "Oral History, Migration, and the Archive" takes on the challenge of assessing how history is experienced, made, and preserved. The seminar aims to introduce students to the history of a migrant community in the United States, to train them in oral history methodology, and to produce an archive-ready collection of oral history interviews during a 15-week semester. By the time I began teaching this advanced course, in which students learn how to conduct oral histories, I had an established oral history practice and methodology. Because I could not take students to the subcontinent to research, I worked to show them how immigration had brought the subcontinent's peoples to the United States. As I put it in the course description:

> *The liberalization of American immigration law in the 1960s sets the stage for a thorough examination of the migration of South Asian people from various states in the subcontinent (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives) from the 1960s onward. These migrants and their offspring populate the remainder of our study, in a very real sense. Students will prepare and conduct an oral history interview with a South Asian migrant in the Philadelphia area. These interviews will be linked together in a collection to be considered for archival preservation with the South Asian American Digital Archive (www.saada.org), based here in Philadelphia. The interviews that the students conduct, therefore, will add to a growing body of knowledge on South Asian America that they will use to write a culminating research paper incorporating the data from their own interviews, those of colleagues and those available in local and online archives.*[45]

The course first grounds students within oral history as a methodology with weekly readings and reflections on Paul Thompson's recently re-issued classic handbook *The Voice of the Past,* and through weekly listening exercises, then turns to a substantial discussion of the ethics of oral historical practice, and the role of archives.[46] Among the Learning Objectives for the course is simply "students will be able to design, conduct, transcribe, and analyze an oral history interview." While this "task-oriented" objective is assessable, looking back, it obscures the real purpose of the project, which is for students to engage with another human being whose experience is different from their own, and to develop a sense of respect and understanding. In addition, the true learning objective depends upon learning through experience, developing skills in problem-solving, and meaningful reflection.

Taking a lesson from my own oral history practice, the throughline of the course is listening. Students participate in weekly, ungraded, listening exercises designed by my mentor, Martha Norkunas.[47] The series of exercises, published in the *Oral History Review* in 2011 is structured around five-to-fifteen-minute interactions, each with a specific focus designed to train the learner's attention on a listening skill or challenge of oral history interviewing from learning to listen to "sorrowful stories," to finding "the story behind the story," to enduring small or large silences. Norkunas appended the exercises and the reflection questions she developed to her article, and I have used them as an ungraded assignment with a required reflexive journal. Students completed one exercise/journal each week and I read each reflection before our class meeting. I would sometimes then call on them to share more with the class to initiate a shared set of lessons and experiences in the classroom. As Callie Stewart reflected, her favorite was "The Story Behind the Story" because her sister recounted her experiences being a woman pursuing a career in a STEM field. Her least favorite was "Large Silences" in which the interviewer had to sit with a friend in silence for five full minutes while remaining focused on the experience. Though it was her least favorite, she found it "the most beneficial in preparation" for the oral history interview.[48] This exercise taught Stewart how critical true listening and noticing are to oral history and prepared her to allow for open spaces in the interview. This strategy creates a more balanced exchange; as Norkunas notes, "establishing an atmosphere of respect and equality of self in an interview means that neither the logic of the narrator nor that of the interviewer is privileged," and in this more equitable interaction "race, gender and other differences of importance can be explicitly addressed as a way of establishing an honest and open listening environment."[49] As oral historian and experiential educator Brooke Bryan maintains, "there are only three ways to become a better interviewer—know your topic (*do background research and be able to articulate a project statement and good questions*), be a deep listener *(ask follow up questions, be engaged, sit close, hold eye contact*)," and maintain a structured interview space.[50] All of these are facilitated by Norkunas' listening exercises and reflections, and they provide an experientially scaffolded learning experience for the final project through which students learn to be effective interviewers, but above all, effective *listeners*. As many have learned in developing an oral history practice, listening is harder than it looks, but through these exercises, we can learn to do it better.

I taught the oral history seminar in the Spring of 2020, and the semester was unusual even before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, at the outset of the semester, I spontaneously enacted my favorite pedagogy of "do less, get more" in which I find ways to loosen my hold on the structure of the course while supporting the students to direct their own learning and reap the prodigious rewards of their own labor, often through peer teaching and evaluation. In this instance, I used a strategy of "ungrading," by telling the students that I expected and believed that everyone could

earn an A in the course, and that to facilitate it, I would be a collaboration partner in their learning.[51] This strategy is grounded in recent research suggesting that students often ignore qualitative feedback and focus on quantitative feedback, whether positive or negative.[52] By dispensing with numeric grades, I committed to providing substantive qualitative feedback and offered students opportunities for revision to allow them to demonstrate how they learned from that feedback. While this dramatic shift alarmed some students, ultimately it facilitated a collaborative learning environment in which I promised to read every word they wrote, remained available to guide and encourage them, and in which they developed their confidence by offering the same style of feedback through weekly peer evaluation of writing. When the semester was interrupted in March 2020 by an unexpected shift to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students had already engaged in eight weeks of oral history listening exercises, learned with and from their peers as discussion leaders and reviewers, given and received writing feedback, and prepared the questionnaires for their oral history interviews. Students reflected that they felt prepared to continue their learning online knowing that they had the skills they needed and that I remained attentive as a partner; in fact, on Zoom I was perhaps even *more* accessible! As Corinne Buttner reflected, "I was able to focus on connections and not 'Is this class gonna tank my GPA?'... I actually wanted to do the work and had a fun time doing so."[53] In a sense, we had cultivated a "shared authority" over their learning experience by dispensing with the expectation that their work was "for" their professor or the class rather than for the more humanistic goals of advancing their own learning and development. While such a radical grading pedagogy is by no means necessary for teaching oral history in the context of a course focused on content, or for teaching oral history as a method (I've taught this course many other times without it), it did help to align the democratizing impulse of oral history with the sometimes-hierarchical model of the college classroom.[54]

Because archival preservation is a best practice of oral history, it is important for teachers to consider the archival home for the interviews (or collections) their students will record.[55] This is a crucial part of effective preparation for conducting an oral history project; it is vital that teachers work with appropriate archives. Over the last several years, professional archivists and scholars have been reassessing their role in historical preservation, particularly with regard to inclusion.[56] In this context, scholars in the emerging field of Critical Archival Studies have made a substantial intervention in theorizing the role of community-based archives as sites for disrupting white supremacy and hetero-patriarchy through developing collecting priorities that are attentive to the desires and dynamics of specific communities.[57] This reformulation of the archive as an activist space has not been uncontroversial, but dovetails well with the goals of oral history as a recuperative, and reparative practice.[58] The interviews my students record are, by prior agreement, considered for preservation by The South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), a Philadelphia-based culture change organization that has

been dedicated to the democratization of archives by "giving voice to South Asian Americans through documenting, preserving, and sharing stories that represent their unique and diverse experiences."[59]

Image 2: SAADA published a collection of personal and scholarly essays entitled *Our Stories: An Introduction to South Asian America* in 2021. Photograph used with permission of SAADA, https://www.saada.org/.

SAADA was co-founded by Samip Mallick and Michelle Caswell, the leading theorist of community-based archives. My relationship with SAADA further helped students to navigate the vagaries of 2020 pandemic learning.[60] Students knew from the outset that their work for the course would have an afterlife in the lives of the narrators, to whom we return the audio and transcript, and also in the archives. Throughout the

course we engaged with archived materials, including but not limited to oral histories. At the time, SAADA had recently launched the "Archival Creators Fellowship," funded by the Mellon Foundation. The Fellowship, now in its third cohort, invites representatives of especially marginalized South Asian American groups to collect sources from within their own communities.[61] The first creators—Dhanya Addanki, Gaiautra Bahadur, and Mustafa Saif—were working with Dalit Americans, Indo-Guyanese Americans, and Queer and Trans Muslim South Asian Americans respectively. Their work occurred alongside coursework, helped to guide and inform our work, and our work may appear in the archive alongside theirs. This relationship was mutually beneficial: after the transition to online learning, one student struggled to complete an in-person interview, and I was able to assign her an existing oral history from SAADA's collection to transcribe, that of Ifti Nasim, a gay Pakistani activist in Chicago, that was included as part of Mustafa Saif's collection "Archive of Queer Brown Feelings."[62] Though the interview was challenging—it was old and the audio quality was poor—even the experience of deeply listening to an interview conducted by someone else, Lily Cosgrove said, "broke down preconceived notions of the United States… [to reveal that] it is not as white nor straight" as her previous learning had suggested. The act of transcribing—hours of work—she reflected, "brought that ideal even closer to me, since [I was] hearing his voice tell his story."[63] Here, Lily notes that the act of transcribing is fundamentally an experience of listening, and for her, a transformative one. Norkunas has suggested that the focus on listening serves to center the dialogic interview experience as an end in itself, shifting focus away from the oral history interview or transcript as a product.[64] This is truly an experiential approach, and one that serves both narrator and interviewer.

The reflections my students have offered, of their experiential learning journey, mirror my own in so many ways and also help me to see how my own practice as an oral historian researching primarily outside the United States has grown and changed through my teaching. I began engaging in teaching oral history among immigrant South Asian communities as a bridge to my own research sites abroad, and in the process have become deeply engaged in researching, teaching, and community-building with South Asian Americans. In the process, I've come to see my world history teaching as deeply implicated in revising students' understanding of power in history by revealing voices they have never heard before. The work of diversifying history teaching is, for me, about more than content. It includes diversifying pedagogy, democratizing the classroom space, engaging voices that resist established caste, gender and racial hierarchies, and encouraging students to take control of their own learning by listening to themselves, their peers, and narrators whose experiences may teach more lasting lessons than any history professor ever could.

The Challenges of Teaching Oral History as World History

It is always challenging to add a new tool or technique to our teaching. The pandemic has required that, as educators, we remain nimble and adaptable to rapidly changing conditions, and we may find that our "surge capacity" has begun to wane.[65] Under these circumstances, incorporating oral histories and collaborative learning projects for students at all levels may actually lift pressure from educators straining against the pandemic's myriad professional and personal demands. Oral Historians and the professional association that represents us, The Oral History Association, have long been concerned with how to encourage the use of oral history as an experiential practice in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary settings, and provides many resources on their website.[66] In addition, there are innumerable online resources that allow free access to oral history collections and guidelines for initiating oral history or other digital storytelling projects applicable to a broad range of content and skills learning objectives.[67] (See Appendix.) With these excellent resources, and good scaffolding, you may be able to let the students engage in self-guided exploration and investigation, and support them in structured reflection.

In 2018, I spoke as part of a roundtable session at the Oral History Association Annual Conference in Montreal, entitled "Oral History Pedagogy in Under-Resourced Institutions: Challenges and Solutions." The session featured three oral historians representing institutions without established oral history research centers, and addressed some of the challenges of this work when institutional support resources are limited. Our session proposal, co-authored by Erin Conlin, Carol Quirke and myself acknowledged that "in the absence of an oral history center there may be limited resources and technology and poor funding for oral history research (or even doubts about the extent to which it can be considered research!). These make it harder to, for example, support first generation college students or to enlist the support of colleagues, administrators, or staff in project development and completion."[68] Session participants shared their experiences and solutions, many of which have informed this paper. One key takeaway was that before choosing to undertake any significant oral history project, it is a good idea to ensure that there is sufficient institutional support and that the work will be valued by the institution as well as the students. When support is there, from departmental leadership (and tenure guidelines where appropriate), library staff, administrative assistants, Institutional Review Boards, etc., the balance of effort and payoff may be well in your favor.[69]

I'll sound a few cautionary notes here, however. As I noted above, oral histories are not neutral sources of historical reference or "a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings." Oral histories represent the narrators' "effort to make sense of the past and to give form to their lives," and must be read in their historical context.[70] How a project is designed and executed ultimately determines the

parameters of the oral history evidence it includes, thus, as Portelli has argued, "control of the historical discourse remains firmly in the hands of the historian."[71] It remains incumbent upon historians, and educators, then to provide this context, to participate in the democratizing work of restoring histories of marginalized people to world history, not as corollaries to the histories of Americans and Europeans, but as historical actors in their own right. Just as I teach the history of India's independence and partitioning through the stories of women, children, and Muslims who have been marginalized in the official histories, almost any topic could be enriched through the inclusion of oral history testimony. The internet puts many resources at our fingertips if we just begin to seek them out. (See Appendix.) Local archives may also be a useful resource for accessing oral histories from marginalized racial and class groups in your own community. Oral histories offer direct access to a wide range of stories and once we know they are there, we cannot ignore the evidence that they reveal about the dynamics of power, visibility, and storytelling in world history.

In the more complex undertaking of training students to become oral historians, there are abundant challenges, and I would caution against taking it on without first seeking your own oral history training.[72] This is not to say that only a trained oral historian can effectively engage or teach oral history, but as an experiential practice, it is indispensable for an educator to first cultivate their own experience. As I noted above, in reflecting on my first interview with Wajahat Husain, I concluded that I had moved too hastily on from his early childhood, but in 2020, Joe Feeney, a student in "Oral History, Migration and the Archive" reflected with satisfaction that his interview "focused a lot more on the early years. A lot of other interviews quickly jumped over the early years and used it almost as an introduction," though his interview lingered longer there.[73] This shift was partly a result of my teaching, and partly Feeney's own priorities in the interview, but I share with my students the challenges I have faced (including my most devastating failures) on my own oral history journey. By modeling this vulnerability, I encourage students to take risks and learn to anticipate problems they may encounter. I have found my students nervous to make connections, nervous to visit someone they may only barely know in their homes (pre-pandemic), or even via Zoom. They have been nervous to ask probing questions.[74] However, once they have faced and solved these problems, and completed their interviews, they feel proud, surprised, and empowered.

As is likely evident by now, providing effective structure for a course like this is enormously time-consuming, but it is also enormously rewarding. I have relied on Brooke Bryan's "Interviewing 101" model, available through *Oral History in the Liberal Arts* to teach students how to conduct oral histories. The model outlines how to structure the interview as a journey from introduction through early life to in-depth questions to reflection and final thoughts and has been an indispensable teaching tool.[75] Then, students work with me and their peers to develop personalized questionnaires for their interviews based in the knowledge of the community as well as any details they

have about the narrators' own experience. I require students to completed lightly-edited transcriptions of the interviews, which requires 6-8 hours of labor for every hour of audio. This part is daunting, but I warn students amply to plan ahead for it and provide them with transcription guidelines and software suggestions (I like Express Scribe, freely available online). They often find, as I do, that the cognitive process of listening and transcribing reveals more about the interview itself than conducting it did! Both a peer and I listen to their interviews in their entirety, read and edit their transcriptions, and then I read and offer feedback on their final papers. For many years, I required a full research paper, but I have since scaled back the expectations, and with excellent results. Following the model of "My Life, My Story," developed by Thor Ringler and Dr. Susan Nathan at the Boston VA Hospital, I now have students create an Annotated Bibliography and write a 1,000-word, first-person narrative drawn from the interview.[76] This project requires them to focus their analysis by carefully studying how a narrator structures their own story to convey the meaning of their own life. They use the narrator's own words to craft a story by removing the dialogical modality of the interview and therefore releasing control over the interview's form and content. This, too requires a kind of listening. As Norkunas asks, "how profoundly can I listen to another person so that he/she can narrate his or her life story in a way that best reflects his or her sense of self, and the many layers of meaning embedded in the construction, performance, and content of that narrative?"[77] The summary of a well-understood oral history interview preserves the narrator's voice and words and distills the story to key themes and turns. The summaries are often quite beautiful, more efficient, and purer than the interview. One advantage of this project over a standalone research paper is that it acknowledges that the work that went into designing, conducting, and transcribing the interview is itself valuable research.[78] Given the limited time available in a 15-week semester, the 1000-word essay provides a style of analysis perfectly adapted to oral history, one that honors the individual experience, that does not demand that it be "generalizable," and that also advances our historical understanding about the communities and groups with which the narrator may identify. For the Annotated Bibliography students must evaluate 5 sources that locate the narrator and the interview's themes within a broader social and scholarly context, but does not require that they "fit" the interview to that context and risk losing sight of the specificity of the narrator's experience that is so central to the value of oral history.

Conclusion

Oral history, I think, can do more than inform world history. As my student Maxwell Moyer suggested above, it *is* world history. While historians have worried that oral histories were too "partial," too "biased," Alessandro Portelli argues rather that oral

histories are always "partial"—that is, only a part of any narrator's life and memory. They are perpetually unfinished.

> *The unfinishedness of oral sources affects all other sources. Given that no research (concerning a historical time for which living memories are available) is completed unless it has exhausted oral as well as written sources, and that oral sources are inexhaustible, the ideal goal of going through 'all' possible sources becomes impossible. Historical work using oral sources is unfinished because of the nature of the sources; historical work excluding oral sources (where available) is incomplete by definition.*[79]

This is not a lament. It is a call to arms. As the world changes around us, our fields of inquiry must change. The work of decolonizing the syllabus requires more than adding the work of scholars from oppressed caste, class, race, and gender backgrounds. It means reevaluating how we teach about power and the extent to which our paradigms have been defined by dominant groups to the exclusion of the voices of those harmed and marginalized by the same historical actors whose experiences have been used to frame historical inquiry. When we democratize our classrooms, we create space for the voices of historical women, indigenous people, and others from oppressed caste, class and race backgrounds, but we also create space for all of the people that appear in our increasingly diverse classrooms. As my students have taught me, if we really allow those voices to change our minds we will discover that we have an ethical responsibility to a more representative history. We will no longer participate in the "almost criminal" marginalization of historically oppressed groups, but will initiate a compassionate and reparative practice of teaching and learning that honors the experiences of everyone involved: historical actor, storyteller, student, and even teacher. We must be prepared to change our minds about the value of oral and remembered sources, for our expectations of history and our teaching to be *affected* by new sources. Oral history highlights the unfinished nature of our work, by taking it seriously and incorporating it into our teaching we can continue to strive towards ensuring that that our work is inclusive by building more equitable research and teaching spaces in which we experience a fuller world history.

Appendix

Online Resources and Digital Oral History Collections

- The Oral History in the Liberal Arts (OHLA)'s "Interviewing 101" page is a helpful starting point for planning an oral history project that involves students. See: https://ohla.info/interviewing-101-a-few-resources-for-

teaching-undergrads-how-to-interview-for-public-facing-digital-projects-within-one-term/.

- The author's lesson plan "Oral History, Migration and the Archive" can be found here: https://www.saada.org/resources/lessonplan/20140603-3587.
- The author's own "Partition's First Generation Oral History Project" is available at the University of Kentucky Library's Louis B. Nunn Center for Oral History website: https://kentuckyoralhistory.org/ark:/16417/xt7p2n4zknom.
- The South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) mentioned in this article can be found here: https://www.saada.org/.
- The Oral History Association (OHA) "Principles and Best Practices" series is a helpful starting point for understanding key definitions, practices, and ethical considerations. See: https://oralhistory.org/principles-and-best-practices-revised-2018/.
- The OHA website also has a more targeted post, "How Can I Use Oral History Myself as an Educator?" See: https://oralhistory.org/how-can-i-use-oral-history-myself-as-an-educator/.
- An additional lesson plan on 1947 Partition from the South Asia Institute at the University of Texas at Austin can be found here: https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/southasia/public-engagement/k-12-programming/curriculum/lesson-plans.html.
- The 1947 Archive contains oral histories with those who experienced Partition: https://www.1947partitionarchive.org/.
- The "Empire, Faith & War" resource portal offers educational materials related to Sikh soldiers' experiences during the First World War: http://www.empirefaithwar.com/learning-resources/education-zone.
- The John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation has a curriculum resources page related to oral histories conducted with survivors of the 1921 Race Massacre in Tulsa, Oklahoma: https://www.jhfcenter.org/1921-race-massacre-survivors.
- The Densho web portal offers oral histories with Japanese Americans incarcerated in the U.S. during the Second World War and witnesses to the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima: https://densho.org/collections/oral-history/.
- The Simmons College Library has an online primary source portal with oral histories related to the U.S. bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the Second World War: https://simmonslis.libguides.com/c.php?g=856000&p=6142740.
- The Voices of Manhattan Project has an online collection of oral histories from participants in this Second World War effort: https://

www.manhattanprojectvoices.org/oral-histories?tid=All&tid_1=All&tid_2=906&page=1.

- The University of Southern California (USC) Shoah Foundation has a website showcasing multimedia projects related to its longstanding oral history project with Holocaust survivors: https://sfi.usc.edu/.
- The University of Minnesota's Immigration History Research Center (IHRC) has a website with curriculum resources related to oral history and digital storytelling: https://cla.umn.edu/ihrc/immigrant-stories/about-project.
- The Tulsa Historical Society & Museum has a wide-ranging oral history collection: https://www.tulsahistory.org/oral-history/.
- The Oral History in the Digital Age website contains a list of oral history-related web guides: http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/featured-resources/shopes-web-guides/.

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Notes

[1] Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, SUNY Series in Oral and Public History (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 53.

[2] In recent years, friends and colleagues trained in documentary history have repeatedly reached out to me with "I'd love to talk oral history with you sometime!" I refer them first to the "Principles for Oral History and Best Practices for Oral History," Oral History Association: Principles and Best Practices, 2018, https://www.oralhistory.org/principles-and-best-practices-revised-2018/.

[3] "What Is Experiential Education?," Association for Experiential Education, accessed January 17, 2022, https://www.aee.org/what-is-experiential-education.

[4] The Oral History Association defines oral history as both an "interview process and the products that result from a recorded spoken interview (whether audio, video, or other formats)" that should be made available in different forms to other users. "OHA Core Principles: The Core Principles of the Oral History Association," accessed January 17, 2022, https://www.oralhistory.org/oha-core-principles/.

[5] "OHA Core Principles."

[6] Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), xx.

[7] From a research ethics perspective, this is part of why oral history has been exempted from oversight by Institutional Review Boards. Oral History testimony is not considered "generalizable." "2018 Requirements (2018 Common Rule)," Office for Human Research Protections. https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/regulations/45-cfr-46/revised-common-rule-regulatory-text/index.html#46.104.

[8] *Oral History in the Liberal Arts* was a five-year "initiative funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support faculty-mentored undergraduate fieldwork in the humanities and humanistic sciences. OHLA funded 62 projects across 26 institutions in the Midwest and through transnational and global partnerships. Resources and searchable interview projects can be accessed in the consortial repository at https://ohla.info/; Brooke Bryan, "Interviewing 101: A Few Resources for Teaching Undergrads How to Interview for Public Facing Digital Projects. Within One Term.," *Oral History in the Liberal Arts* (blog), accessed January 15, 2022, https://ohla.info/interviewing-101-a-few-resources-for-teaching-undergrads-how-to-interview-for-public-facing-digital-projects-within-one-term/.

[9] See Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, Third Edition, Oxford Oral History Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai eds., *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Katrina Srigley, Stacey Zembrycki and Franca Iacovetta eds., *Beyond Women's Words: Feminisms and the Practice of Oral History in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Ann Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, eds., *Oral History Off the Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[10] Lucy Chester, *Borders and Conflict in South Asia: The Radcliffe Boundary Commission and the Partition of Punjab* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

[11] H.V. Hodson, *The Great Divide: Britain-India-Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1985); William Clarke, "Preface and Acknowledgements in Divide and Quit," in *The Partition Omnibus*, ed. Mushirul Hasan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), iii.

[12] G.D. Khosla, *Stern Reckoning: A Survey of the Events Leading Up to and Following the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[13] Amber H. Abbas, *Partition's First Generation: Space, Place, and Identity in Muslim South Asia* (London: I. B.Tauris, 2021).

[14] Theodore Rosengarten, *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 3.

[15] Wajahat Husain, Interviewed by Amber H. Abbas, Lahore, Pakistan, June 13, 2005, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, Special Collections and Digital Programs, University of Kentucky Libraries, https://kentuckyoralhistory.org/ark:/16417/xt7qv97zpj1c.

[16] Major General Syed Wajahat Husain, *1947: Before, During, After* (Lahore, Pakistan: Ferozsons (Pvt) Ltd., 2010); Abbas, *Partition's First Generation*, xvii.

[17] Amber H. Abbas, "Partition's First Generation Oral History Project," Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, Special Collections and Digital Programs, University of Kentucky Libraries, n.d., https://kentuckyoralhistory.org/ark:/16417/xt7p2n4zkn0m.

[18] A partial list includes: Alok Bhalla, *Stories About the Partition of India*, 3 vols. (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 1994); Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Mushirul Hasan, *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*, 2 vols. (New Delhi: Roli Books, 1995); Mushirul Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims Since Independence* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); Ranabir Samaddar, *Reflections on Partition in the East* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1997); Ian Talbot, *Freedom's Cry: The Popular Dimension in the Pakistan Movement and Partition Experience in Northwest India* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996); Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *Region and Partition: Bengal, Punjab and the Partition of the Subcontinent* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Tan Tai Yong and Gyanesh Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2000).

[19] Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998); Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[20] Jill Anderson, personal communication, September 2006.

[21] Amber H. Abbas, "Disruption and Belonging: Aligarh, Its University, and the Changing Meaning of Place since Partition," *The Oral History Review* 44, no. 2 (Summer-Fall 2017): 301–21.

[22] Vazira Fazila Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Abbas, *Partition's First Generation*.

[23] Abbas, "Partition's First Generation Oral History Project;" Anam Zakaria, *The Footprints of Partition: Narratives of Four Generations of Pakistanis and Indians* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015).

[24] Amber H. Abbas, "The Solidarity Agenda: Aligarh Students and the Demand for Pakistan," *South Asian History and Culture* 5, no. 2 (2014): 147–62.

[25] A few examples: Devika Chawla, *Home, Uprooted: Oral Histories of India's Partition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014); Kavita Daiya, *Violent Belongings: Partition, Gender, and National Culture in Postcolonial India* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008); Ravinder Kaur, *Since 1947: Partition Narratives Among Punjabi Migrants of Delhi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Furrukh Khan, "Speaking Violence: Pakistani Women's Narratives of Partition," ed. Navnita Chadha Behera (New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd., 2006), 97–115; Rita Kothari, *The Burden of Refuge: The Sindhi Hindus of Gujarat* (Chennai: Orient Longman, 2007); Aanchal Malhotra, *Remnants of Partition: 21 Objects from a Continent Divided* (London: Hurst and Co., 2019); Pippa Virdee, "Remembering Partition: Women, Oral Histories and the Partition of 1947," *Oral History* 31, no. 2 (Autumn 2013): 49–62; Zakaria, *Footprints*.

[26] "The 1947 Partition Archive," 1947 Partition Archive, n.d., https://www.1947partitionarchive.org/.

[27] See the Association for Experiential Education's website at: https://www.aee.org/what-is-experiential-education.

[28] See the Association for Experiential Education's website at: https://www.aee.org/what-is-experiential-education; Mary Breunig, "Experientially Learning and Teaching in a Student-Directed Classroom," *Journal of Experiential Education* 40, no. 3 (2017): 213–30; Caitlin Coyer et al., "Cultivating Global Learning Through Community-Based Experiential Education," *Journal of Experiential Education* 42, no. 2 (2019): 155–70.

[29] Jay Roberts, "From the Editor: The Possibilities and Limitations of Experiential Learning Research in Higher Education," *Journal of Experiential Education* 41, no. 1 (March 2018): 7.

[30] Shweta Desai, "Heart-Rending Letters of Indian Soldiers Who Fought in World War I," *Scroll.In*, September 13, 2014, https://scroll.in/article/677257/heart-rending-letters-of-indian-soldiers-who-fought-in-world-war-i; the web resource "Empire, Faith & War" commemorates the service of Indian Sikh soldiers during the First World War. Its "Learning Resources Page" includes a number of lesson plans, see: http://www.empirefaithwar.com/learning-resources/education-zone.

[31] The John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation's website includes a number of oral historical and curricular resources, including lesson plans. The site includes interviews with survivors as well as both Black and white Tulsans who grew up in the aftermath of Greenwood's destruction. See: https://www.jhfcenter.org/1921-race-massacre-survivors.

[32] While Densho.org primarily includes stories of interned Japanese Americans, these include some stories of Hiroshima survivors in the United States. See https://densho.org/collections/oral-history/. This Simmons University Library Guide offers a range of resources: https://simmonslis.libguides.com/c.php?g=856000&p=6142740. "Voices of the Manhattan Project" is a public archive of oral histories from Manhattan Project veterans and their families, see: https://www.manhattanprojectvoices.org/oral-histories?tid=All&tid_1=All&tid_2=906&page=1.

[33] A few among many: Densho.org preserves stories of Japanese Americans https://densho.org/; SAADA preserves stories of South Asian Americans https://www.saada.org/; The USC Shoah Foundation has its roots in collecting testimonies of Holocaust survivors, see: https://sfi.usc.edu/; Immigrant Stories at the University of Michigan Immigrant History Research Center https://www.tulsahistory.org/oral-history/; some oral histories from survivors of the Tulsa Race Massacre are collected here: https://www.jhfcenter.org/1921-race-massacre-survivors. A list of regional and international oral history organizations is available here: https://www.oralhistory.org/regional-and-international-organizations/.

[34] For this selection, check out Amber H. Abbas, Jamison Warren, and Rachel Meyer, "Partition in the Classroom: Teaching Migration through 1947 India" (The South Asia Center at the University of Texas at Austin, n.d.), https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/southasia/public-engagement/k-12-programming/curriculum/lesson-plans.html; "Lesson Plan: Oral History, Migration and the Archive," 2014, https://www.saada.org/resources/lessonplan/20140603-3587.

[35] Patrick Runfola, "HIS 359: Analytical Paper," Saint Joseph's University, 2021. Used with permission of the author.

[36] Gene Denby and Shereen Marisol Meraji, "Code Switch: Nikole Hannah-Jones on the Power of Collective Memory," accessed January 20, 2022, https://www.npr.org/2021/12/22/1067027360/nikole-hannah-jones-on-the-power-of-collective-memory.

[37] Robin J. DiAngelo, "My Class Didn't Trump My Race: Using Oppression to Face Privilege," *Multicultural Perspectives* 8, no. 1 (2006): 54.

[38] Denby and Meraji, "Code Switch: Nikole Hannah-Jones."

[39] Maxwell Moyer, "HIS 359: Analytical Paper," Saint Joseph's University, 2021. Used with permission of the author.

[40] Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, xxiii.

[41] Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, 50.

[42] Alexandra Crespo, "HIS 359: Analytical Paper," Saint Joseph's University, 2021. Used with permission of the author.

[43] Iraenus Daly, "HIS 359: Analytical Paper," Saint Joseph's University, 2021. Used with permission of the author.

[44] Lindsay Maizland, "India's Muslims: An Increasingly Marginalized Population," *Council on Foreign Relations* (blog), accessed July 22, 2022, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/india-muslims-marginalized-population-bjp-modi; the Kashmir Syllabus is a research collaborative that has assembled scores of scholarly resources on the history of the disputed province of Kashmir, India's only Muslim majority state, and its most militarized, see: https://standwithkashmir.org/the-kashmir-syllabus/.

[45] Amber H. Abbas, "HIS 478: Oral History, Migration and the Archive Syllabus, Spring 2020," Saint Joseph's University; Amber H. Abbas, "The Pedagogy of the Archive: South Asian America in the Classroom," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 33, no. 4 (Summer 2014): 61–67; Amber H. Abbas, "Lesson Plan: Oral History, Migration and the Archive."

[46] Paul Thompson and Joanna Bornat, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[47] Martha Norkunas, "Teaching to Listen: Listening Exercises and Self-Reflexive Journals," *The Oral History Review* 38, no. 1 (2011): 63–108.

[48] These comments, and those that follow, were assembled and presented in a round-table discussion in which my students and I presented on our own experiences of the class for an international conference and are used with permission of my co-presenters. Amber H. Abbas et al., "'I Blew up the Format': Students and Faculty Reflect on an Oral History Seminar," in *The Quest for Democracy: One Hundred Years of Struggle* (Oral History Association Annual Meeting, Virtual, 2020).

[49] Norkunas, "Teaching to Listen," 64.

[50] Bryan, "Interviewing 101."

[51] "Ungrading" became critical to the 2020 COVID-19 Crisis Response in Higher Education. Beckie Supiano, "Ungrading: 4 Approaches," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 2, 2019; Adam Rosenblatt, "Committing to Ungrading, in an Emergency and After," *UWIRE Text*, March 26, 2020, Gale OneFile: News; Susan D. Blum, *Ungrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and What to Do Instead)*, Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2020).

[52] Jeffrey Schinske and Kimberly Tanner, "Teaching More by Grading Less (or Differently)," *CBE Life Sciences Education* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 159–66.

[53] Corinne Buttner in Abbas et al., "I Blew up the Format."

[54] Breunig, "Experientially Learning," 216.

[55] See the Oral History Association (OHA) "Principles for Oral History and Best Practices for Oral History," https://oralhistory.org/archives-principles-and-best-practices-overview/.

[56] Terry Cook, "Evidence, Memory, Identity and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms," *Archival Science: International Journal on Recorded Information* 13, no. 2–3 (June 2013): 95–121.

[57] This reckoning within the field has been driven in part by Michelle Caswell, and her students. Caswell is a co-founder of SAADA and founder of the Community Archives Lab at the University of California Los Angeles. Michelle Caswell, "Inventing New Archival Imaginaries: Theoretical Foundations for Identity-Based Community Archives," in *Identity Palimpsests: Archiving Ethnicity in the U.S. and Canada* (Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, 2014), 35–55; Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario H. Ramirez, "'To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing': Uncovering the Impact of Community Archives," *The American Archivist* 79, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2016): 56–81; Michelle Caswell, *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

[58] The pages of *The American Archivist* are alive with vigorous debate about this shift. For examples, see: Mark Greene, "A Critique of Social Justice as an Archival Imperative: What Is It We're Doing That's All That Important?," *The American Archivist* 76, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2013): 302–34; Mario H. Ramirez, "Being Presumed Not to Be: A Critique of Whiteness as an Archival Imperative," *The American Archivist* 78 (Fall/Winter 2015): 339–56; Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario H. Ramirez, "'To Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing.'"

[59] "Mission Statement," *The South Asian American Digital Archive*, www.saada.org.

[60] I have been involved with SAADA since 2011, when I contributed the first oral history in the archive, an interview I did with my father. I have served the organization's goals as a thought partner, co-chair of the Academic Council, Board member, and as Board president (2019-2021).

[61] I led the oral history training for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 cohorts of fellows. "Archival Creators Fellowship," *SAADA*, https://www.saada.org/acfp2020.

[62] Ifti Nasim, Interviewed by Kareem Khubchandani, Chicago IL, 2009, The South Asian American Digital Archive, https://www.saada.org/item/20200309-6038.

[63] Lily Cosgrove in Abbas et al., "I Blew up the Format." See endnote 48 for source explanation.

[64] Norkunas, "Teaching to Listen," 65.

[65] Tara Haelle, "Your 'Surge Capacity' Is Depleted—It's Why You Feel Awful," *Elemental.Medium.Com* (blog), August 17, 2020, https://elemental.medium.com/your-surge-capacity-is-depleted-it-s-why-you-feel-awful-de285d542f4c.

[66] Barry A. Lanman and George L. Mehaffy, *Oral History in the Secondary School Classroom* (Oral History Association, 1988); "How Can I Use Oral History as an Educator?," *Oral History Association* (blog), n.d., https://www.oralhistory.org/how-can-i-use-oral-history-myself-as-an-educator/;"Oral History in the Digital Age," OHDA, n.d., http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/; "Special Issue: Oral History in the Digital Age," *The Oral History Review* 40, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 2013); Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*; Thompson and Bornat, *The Voice of the Past*.

[67] The Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota provides a clear and illustrated guide to Digital Storytelling, see: https://cla.umn.edu/ihrc/immigrant-stories/about-project; Norkunas, "Teaching to Listen;" The USC Shoah Foundation IWitness Project promotes "Teaching Through Testimony," https://iwitness.usc.edu/spotlight. Some excellent resources are available here: http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/featured-resources/shopes-web-guides/.

[68] Amber H. Abbas, Erin Conlin, and Carol Quirke, "Roundtable: Oral History Pedagogy in Under-Resourced Institutions: Challenges and Solutions," in *Oral History in Our Challenging Times* (Oral History Association Annual Meeting, Montreal, Canada, 2018).

[69] Though the Office for Human Research Protections Common Rule exempts oral history from IRB oversight, it may be worth speaking to your IRB Administrator to affirm this shared understanding for projects that abide by best practices in oral history. For the Office for Human Research Protections' explanation, see: https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/regulations/45-cfr-46/revised-common-rule-regulatory-text/index.html#46.104.

[70] Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, 52.

[71] Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli,* 56.

[72] There are many options available through established Oral History Centers including The UCLA Center for Oral History Research, https://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/pages/training; The Oral History Center at the Bancroft Library at the University of California-Berkeley https://update.lib.berkeley.edu/2022/01/06/sign-up-for-the-2022-oral-history-center-educational-programs/; The Baylor University Institute for Oral History https://www.baylor.edu/library/index.php?id=974437; Columbia University Center for Oral History Research https://incite.columbia.edu/ccohr/; Oral History Summer School is an independent immersive training program https://www.oralhistorysummerschool.com/; The Oral History Center at the Science History Institute focuses its work on scientists https://www.sciencehistory.org/ohtraining; The 1947 Partition Archive offers training for Citizen Historians https://www.1947partitionarchive.org/collect_stories. A substantial (but not exhaustive) list of Centers and Collections is available here: https://www.oralhistory.org/centers-and-collections/.

[73] Joseph Feeney in Abbas et al., "I Blew up the Format." See endnote 48 for source explanation.

[74] In her article, Norkunas addresses how the listening exercises helped students to overcome this reticence. See Norkunas, "Teaching to Listen," 63–108.

[75] For Brooke Bryan's Life History Interview Model, see https://ohla.info/interviewing-101-a-few-resources-for-teaching-undergrads-how-to-interview-for-public-facing-digital-projects-within-one-term/.

[76] I first learned about this work during a panel at the 2018 OHA Meeting in Montreal. Thor Ringler and Eileen Ahearn, "My Life, My Story: Improving Care in Veterans Affairs Hospitals through Oral History," in *Oral History in Our Challenging Times* (Oral History Association Annual Meeting, Montreal, Canada, 2018); Amy Woods Butler, "My Life, My Story with Dr. Susan Nathan and Thor Ringler," *The Life Story Coach*, October 30, 2018, https://thelifestorycoach.com/category/episodes/page/6/.

[77] Norkunas, "Teaching to Listen," 64.

[78] This aspect of social science or humanities research is distinct from the definition used by the Office for Human Research Protections.

[79] Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*, 55.