

Teachers College, Columbia University

Harlem Stories: Oral History and Digital Tools

A&HH 5051

Spring 2019

Wednesdays 5:10-6:50 pm (and other times as listed below)

Professor Ansley Erickson

Office hours by appointment Monday 4 to 5 pm and Thursday 1 to 3 p

Course Description and Purpose

This course offers a collaborative inquiry into the history of education in Harlem, an introduction to oral history as a method of historical research, and practice with creating digital exhibits as a way to share historical knowledge publicly. This course is one aspect of Teachers College's *Harlem Education History Project*, which focuses on the history of 20th century Harlem.

One Harlem school is the focus of our work. The Modern School was an independent educational institution founded by a member of the early-twentieth-century Harlem elite: Mildred Johnson Edwards, daughter of musician and composer J. Rosamond Johnson and niece of writer and poet James Weldon Johnson. Edwards led and sustained The Modern School from the 1930s to the 1990s. Her work was influenced by pedagogically progressive educational approaches in circulation in the early part of the century, and the school served many middle-class and elite residents of Harlem's Sugar Hill neighborhood. Our oral histories on The Modern School are guided by a collaboration with a group of TMS alumni and with While We Are Still Here, a public history organization documenting the history of Sugar Hill.

The Modern School illuminates key questions about the enterprise of schooling in Harlem. What did Harlem residents and community members want from their schools, and how did they pursue these goals? How did residents from different perspectives –middle-class, working-class, and poor residents, teachers, students, parent leaders, of various heritages - perceive their schools and their community, and how did these perceptions change over time? How did schools and community interact? How did citywide education policy and politics affect Harlem schools, and how did they respond? How have various Harlem constituents kept and attached meaning to their schools and their histories, in the context of U.S. racism and inequality? What are the legacies of a school?

The products of our efforts – both oral history interviews and digital exhibits – may become part of the [Harlem Education History Project Digital Collection](#), a public repository of primary sources and interpretive exhibits.

Doing this work requires building collective knowledge and skill in three areas. These are not

separate sections of the course, but instead are interwoven through the course schedule:

- 1) The history of Harlem and of its schools. Schools do not function in isolation, but operate and gain meaning in relationship to the communities they serve. We will read in the existing secondary literature on Harlem, Sugar Hill, New York City schools, and related areas, to think about The Modern School and its contexts.
- 2) Oral history: interviewing and interpretation. How does learning about the past from oral testimony differ from learning about the past from other sources? What particular opportunities, and cautions, are involved? How do matters of identity and racism past and present matter in the practice of oral history? How do historians interpret oral history evidence? Using readings in oral history method as well as class exercises to practice preparing for, conducting, and interpreting oral history, we will become familiar with and practice this approach to historical research.
- 3) Digital presentation of historical materials and analysis. Creating digital collections and historical exhibits requires skill with digital platforms, digital archiving issues such as metadata, and writing for broader audiences, all of which we will work on in this course. Creating these exhibits also engages core challenges in historical representation – what does it mean to tell someone else’s story? What modes or media convey history best? These are issues we will confront and discuss throughout the semester. We are working with [Omeka](#) and [Neatline](#), but students with skill (or desire to develop skill) in other platforms or media are invited, with consultation, to design projects in these.

The course does not presume prior expertise in the history of education, oral history, or in digital work in history. There are no prerequisites, although a willingness to read extensively and critically is required, as is a reflective disposition toward historical sources and a critical attention to the strengths and limits of one’s own responses to them.

For future teachers, the main mode of learning about historical inquiry and historical pedagogy in this class is through practice – through the work of conducting historical research and reflecting upon it. However, final project options include opportunities for future teachers to draw on this work to design a curriculum unit they believe will be of use in their own teaching.

Required texts:

These texts are on reserve at the Gottesman Library. They can also be ordered through local independent bookstores:

Sisters Uptown Bookstore 1942 Amsterdam Ave. at 156th St.

Word Up Books 2113 Amsterdam Ave. at 165th St.

bookculture, 536 W. 112th St.

Additional articles and book chapters are available via Course Reserves, and marked below with an **R**, or are available in our Google folder and marked with a **G**.

Herb Boyd, *The Harlem Reader* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003)

Bruce Haynes and Syma Solovitch, *Down the Up Staircase* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017)

Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006)

Schedule of Meetings and Readings

We will use Google Drive as an electronic repository for some course readings and materials (beyond the E-reserve system via the library) as well as for assignments. We have a [folder for our class](#) that contains this syllabus (and revisions to it) and other relevant readings and links. Each student will have an individual folder for each student, which can be accessed only by you and me. You will turn in work by placing your files in your individual folder; I will comment on them inside the folder.

Week 1 – Jan. 23 Introduction to the Course

In class: Syllabus review and discussion
 Harlem, oral history, and digital presentations of history
 Phases of an oral history project

“[Barbara Wilson-Brooks’ Harlem Community](#)”, Harlem Education History Project exhibit

["Learning the Landscape: Deborah Lucas-Davis on Growing Up in Harlem"](#) Harlem Education History Project exhibit, in progress

Please bring your laptop and headphones.

Week 2 – Jan. 30 Harlem: An historical introduction

Before class: Boyd, *The Harlem Reader*. [Selections and assignment listed here](#).
 available as an e-book through the [Columbia Library](#).

Due: Create a personal folder inside our class folder in Google Drive.
 Make it accessible only to you and I. Name it
 A&HH5051_YourLastName

In class: Locating literary sources on Harlem in historical context.

Week 3 – Feb. 6 Sugar Hill and Harlem

Haynes and Solovitch, *Down the Up Staircase* **R**

Wallace, "Places I have Lived, *Assemblage*, 1993 **G**
 Harris, "Playing the Numbers: Stephanie St. Clair and African American Politics Culture in Harlem," *Black Women, Gender & Families*, 2008 **G**

In class: "In the face of what we remember" - Documentary on Sugar Hill.

Note: On February 7 at 5 pm in 408 Zankel Hall, Prof. Michelle Purdy will present on her new book Transforming the Elite: Black Students and the Desegregation of Private Schools. While this work is not focused on Harlem, it is thematically related to our class and offers an example of an historical study rooted heavily in oral history.

Week 4 – Feb. 13 The Harlem Educational Landscape

Before class: Harbison, "A Serious Pedagogical Situation" **G**
 Back, Adina "The Harlem Nine," in Theoharis and Woodward,
Freedom North **G**
 HARYOU Report, Excerpts, 1964 **G**

Recommended reading: Ransby, *Ella Baker*, Chapters 5, 12 **R**

In class: Defining "progressive" education

Week 5 – Feb. 20 Oral History as Evidence on The Modern School

Before class: Perlstein, "Schooling the New Negro: Progressive Education, Black Modernity, and the Long Harlem Renaissance." **G**
 Video of 2017 Modern School Multigenerational Reunion
[Panel discussion](#) **G**
[Your choice of two interviews](#) **G**

Due: [Short assignment #1, on readings weeks 2-4, due to Google Drive folder](#)

Week 6 – Feb. 27 Interpreting oral history, pt. 1

Before class: Columbia Center for Oral History Guidelines at
[http://library.columbia.edu/content/dam/libraryweb/locations/ohr/o/CCOH Three-Pager.pdf](http://library.columbia.edu/content/dam/libraryweb/locations/ohr/o/CCOH%20Three-Pager.pdf)
 Perks and Thompson, *Oral History Reader*, Part III, Introduction and Ch. 24, 25 **R**
[Faulkenbury, T. Evan, and Aaron Hayworth. "The Carolina Gay Association, Oral History, and Coming Out at the University of North Carolina," *Oral History Review* 43 \(2016\): 115-137](#) **R**

Week 7 – Mar. 6 Interpreting oral history, pt. 2

Erickson, *Harlem Stories: Oral History*, Spring 2019, p 4

Perks and Thompson, *Oral History Reader*, 3d edition
Part I, Ch. 9 and Part IV, Ch. 30 **R**

Due: *Short assignment #2: Interpretation in the form of a blog post on selected clip (c. 1-3 minutes) from one oral history, contextualizing in relationship to class readings to date. [Assignment details here.](#)*

Week 8 – Mar. 13 Presenting Oral History on the Web, Part I: Digital Storytelling and Oral History in Black History

Before class: Please choose one of the following example oral history projects, presented on the web, to browse. Note the content of the collection overall, what you notice from listening to a sample interview or two, and what you observe about the interface as it relates to the questions raised in the Douglas Boyd article in last week's reading.

<http://oralhistory.nypl.org/neighborhoods/harlem>
http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/civil_rights.html
<http://www.crmvet.org/nars/narshome.htm>
<http://brooklynhistory.org/cbbg/>

In class: Omeka and Neatline platforms for digital exhibits on oral history

Due: *[Short assignment #3](#), on themes and challenges in oral history interpretation, drawing on readings from weeks 6 and 7.*

Spring Break – No class Mar. 20

Week 9 – Mar. 27 Presenting Oral History on the Web Part II: Metadata and Tagging in Black History

Before class: Jessica Marie Johnson, [“Markup Bodies,”](#) *Social Text* (link works if logged in to CU Libraries)
 Laura Helton, [“On Decimals, Catalogues, and the Racial Imaginaries of Reading”](#) *PMLA* (link works if logged in to CU Libraries)

In class: Collaborative approaches to metadata tagging

Due: *[Short assignment #4](#) :
 Proposed metadata and tags for two existing *The Modern School* oral history interviews*

Digital exhibit proposal due.

Week 10 – April 3 Oral History as Method, Part I

Before class: Perks and Thomson, Part I, Intro, Ch. 1, 2, 4, 6, 8 **R**
[Yow, “Do I Like them Too Much?”](#)

Week 11 – Apr. 10 Oral History as Method, Part II

Before class: Perks and Thomson, Part II, Introduction, and Ch. 12 (Anderson and Jack), and 14 (Bozzoli). Please also read your choice of Ch. 13 or 16. **R**

One additional, complete transcribed interview of your choice, from

<http://oralhistory.nypl.org/neighborhoods/harlem>

and the [Mildred Johnson Edwards interview here](#).

Due: [Short assignment #5](#) – *Critical listening response to oral history interviews: one from NYPL community oral history project above, and the Edwards interview above.*

Week 12 – Apr. 17 Oral History as Method, Part III

Before class: Norkunas, Learning to Listen (in Readings folder)
 And Gunaratnam, Researching Race and Ethnicity (in Readings folder)

In class: Peer-to-peer interviews with audio recording equipment

Week 13 – Apr. 24 No class meeting (replaced by oral history recording)

Due: *Digital exhibits due.*

Week 14 – May 1 No class meeting (replaced by oral history recording)

Oral history recording day #1: Saturday, May 4, noon to 6 pm - 332 Horace Mann.

Oral history recording day #2: May 8, 5 to 8 pm - 112 Zankel Hall.

Due: Oral history research memo (see additional guidelines in **G**)

Week 15 – May 15 Reflection and celebration, 5 to 7 pm.

Note that this date is one day after the regular end of TC classes. If this date poses a problem for you and your schedule, please let me know ASAP.

Due: Complete interview transcription

Identify 1 or 2 audio segments from your interview to share with the class. Instructions to be distributed in class.

Short assignment #6: Reflection

Assignments (due as indicated in schedule above)

Students enrolled for 2 points will complete #1 and #2 below. Grades will be calculated out of 100 possible points.

Students enrolled for 3 points will complete #1 and #2 below, and their choice of #3 or #4. Grades will be calculated out of 140 possible points.

- 1) Six short assignments as described on the schedule above. 10 points each, 60 points total
- 2) Oral history preparation, interview, and reflection. 40 points plus 10 point reflection
 - Research memo – 14 pts
 - Class sharing (ungraded)
 - Completed transcription – 13 pts
 - Metadata – 13 pts
 - Reflection (which is also Short Assignment #6)- 10 points
 - Guidelines for each will be distributed in class.
- 3) Digital exhibit based on oral history, on the Educating Harlem Digital Collection site using Omeka/Neatline. Proposal required. Examples and guidelines will be presented in class - 40 points
- 4) Curriculum unit proposal, incorporating at least one of the course's foci – oral history, history of education and/or Harlem, or digital presentations of historical material. Guidelines will be presented in class - 40 points. (If you are taking the course for 3 points and this is of interest to you, speak to me ASAP).

Attendance

Attendance is required at all class sessions. Please inform me in advance if you are going to be absent. More than one absence may impact your class grade; more than two absences may result in course failure.

Classroom Civility and Professional Habits

This is a collaborative course in which students are not only learning about a new history, but engaging in work with new technology. The classroom should be a safe space for

students to shape, share, and challenge ideas with both respect and rigor. Please monitor your own contributions in light of this shared purpose.

Technology is a central medium for our work, but can also become a barrier to in-person conversation and collaboration. Please monitor your own use of your laptop or other technology to ensure that it is in service of the work of the class. If you use class time for social media, email, or other communication not related to course work, you will be counted as absent.

Any students with documented need for assistive technology within the classroom are welcome to speak with me about how to enable their full participation.

Course and College Policies

Academic Integrity

The Teachers College policy on Academic Integrity can be found in the Student Handbook, available at tc.edu/administration/student-handbook, pp. 76-77.

Plagiarism violates academic integrity. Any attempt to present someone else's work as your own, on papers, exams, transcripts, etc. constitutes plagiarism, a form of theft and fraud. There are various forms of plagiarism of which the following are most common. It is your responsibility to ensure that you clearly distinguish between your words and ideas and those of other authors, and to understand proper ways to give credit to other authors and sources.

1. *Word-for-word plagiarism.* This includes (a) the submission of another student's work as your own; (b) the submission of work from any source whatever (book, magazine, or newspaper article, unpublished paper, or thesis, internet) without proper acknowledgement by footnote or reference within the text of the paper; (c) the submission of any part of another's work without proper use of quotation marks and citation.
2. *Patchwork plagiarism.* This consists of piecing together of unacknowledged phrases and sentences quoted verbatim (or nearly verbatim) from a variety of sources. The mere reshuffling of other people's words does not constitute "original" work.
3. *Unacknowledged paraphrase.* It is perfectly legitimate to set forth another author's facts or ideas in one's own words, but if one is genuinely indebted to the other author for these facts or ideas, the debt must be acknowledged by footnote or reference within the text of the paper.
4. *Self-plagiarism.* Work created for a class may be turned in only for credit in that class. Attempting to receive academic credit for work done for another class is a form of academic dishonesty. Please speak with me if you are considering combining your work for this class with work for another class.

This statement draws from conversations with colleagues in the Department of Cultural Foundations

of Education, Syracuse University, 2011-12.

Accommodations

The College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students are encouraged to contact the Office of Access and Services for Individuals with Disabilities for information about registration (166 Thorndike Hall). Services are available only to students who are registered and submit appropriate documentation. As your instructor, I am happy to discuss specific needs with you as well.

Incomplete policy

The grade of Incomplete will be assigned only when the course attendance requirement has been met but, for reasons satisfactory to the instructor, the granting of a final grade has been postponed because certain course assignments are outstanding. If the outstanding assignments are completed within one calendar year from the date of the close of term in which the grade of Incomplete was received and a final grade submitted, the final grade will be recorded on the permanent transcript, replacing the grade of Incomplete, with a transcript notation indicating the date that the grade of Incomplete was replaced by a final grade. If the outstanding work is not completed within one calendar year from the date of the close of term in which the grade of Incomplete was received, the grade will remain as a permanent Incomplete on the transcript. In such instances, if the course is a required course or part of an approved program of study, students will be required to re-enroll in the course including repayment of all tuition and fee charges for the new registration and satisfactorily complete all course requirements. If the required course is not offered in subsequent terms, the student should speak with the faculty advisor or Program Coordinator about their options for fulfilling the degree requirement. Doctoral students with six or more credits with grades of Incomplete included on their program of study will not be allowed to sit for the certification exam.

Activation of the CU Network ID

Teachers College students have the responsibility for activating the Columbia University Network ID (UNI), which includes a free Columbia email account. As official communications from the College – e.g., information on graduation, announcements of closing due to severe storm, flu epidemic, transportation disruption, etc. -- will be sent to the student's Columbia email account, students are responsible for either reading email there, or, for utilizing the mail forwarding option to forward mail from their Columbia account to an email address which they will monitor.

Policy on Religious Observances

It is the policy of Teachers College to respect its members' observance of their major religious holidays. Students should notify instructors at the beginning of the semester about their wishes to observe holidays on days when class sessions are scheduled. Where academic scheduling conflicts prove unavoidable, no student will be penalized for absence due to religious reasons, and alternative means will be sought for satisfying the academic requirements involved. If a suitable arrangement cannot be worked out between the student and the instructor, students and instructors should consult the appropriate department chair

or director. If an additional appeal is needed, it may be taken to the Provost.

Emergency Plan

TC is prepared for a wide range of emergencies. After declaring an emergency situation, the President/Provost will provide the community with critical information on procedures and available assistance. If travel to campus is not feasible, instructors will facilitate academic continuity through Canvas and other technologies, if possible.

1. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that they are set to receive email notifications from TC and communications from their instructor at their TC email address.
2. Within the first two sessions for the course, students are expected to review and be prepared to follow the instructions stated in the emergency plan.
3. The plan may consist of downloading or obtaining all available readings for the course or the instructor may provide other instructions.