

S St 560: Oral History of Southern Social Movements

Fall 2023

Professor Ryan Parsons

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Lamar 561

Tuesdays 4 – 6:30 pm

Classroom: Barnard Observatory 105

Office hours by appointment: <https://calendly.com/parsons-um>

Oral histories represent a key method in the public facing humanities and social sciences, and the South has a rich tradition of documenting its stories through original and creative oral history projects. This course is an opportunity to contribute to public understanding of the Civil Rights Movement and other social movements through original data collection and analysis. This is a project-based course designed in consultation with a community partner. For the Spring 2023 semester, we will be working with the Emmett Till Interpretive Center in Sumner, MS, to collect oral histories related to the murder of Emmett Till and subsequent events. We will engage with community partners in Tallahatchie County and the surrounding area to identify important research topics, recruit oral history participants, and find other ways to document and celebrate life in these communities. While collecting audio recordings of oral histories is the primary task of this project, there will be ample opportunity to find other ways to contribute through film, photography, and other visual media.

This course is designed with community engagement principles as a bedrock:

Respect: The Emmett Till Interpretive Center has done crucial work in advancing racial reconciliation, truth-telling, and justice. This work informs both our contributions in this partnership and in the ways in we act as students and campus stakeholders. Respect for the work that has been done and the difficulty of the work ahead is integral to how we must think about this collaboration.

Reciprocity: The specific project we are working towards is intended to benefit the work of ETIC and the broader community. This includes both tangible impacts (such as creation of audiovisual and photography materials for use in local exhibitions) and intangible outcomes like broadening stakeholder networks and sharing its existing work with new audiences.

Reflection: By structuring much of this work around a University course, we collectively work to reflect on the nature of this relationship and to create space for critical dialogue about the potential role of the University in work like this.

The assignments and required readings for this seminar were selected to ensure our collective success in the overall project. By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Conduct, edit, and prepare oral histories for public use
- Contribute to the curation and presentation of oral histories through multiple media
- Synthesize themes and findings across individual oral histories to develop arguments about social movements in the South
- Design public humanities projects that embody the principles of community engagement

Assignments

By the end of the semester, you must complete the following tasks:

Contribute to the vibrancy of in-class discussions, especially during our “Salons”: While this is a project-based class, our in-class discussions will be a vital source of community and professional development. You should come to class prepared to contribute and engage with your colleagues ideas. This means doing any required readings ahead of time (see the end of this syllabus for a detailed class schedule).

Facilitate at least two oral histories: During the first weeks of the semester, we will recruit participants for oral history projects in the communities around Sumner. Interviews will be conducted in pairs; each of you will be responsible for being the lead facilitator in at least one of these interviews. This task includes scheduling with the narrator, working with the narrator to select an appropriate venue, conducting the interview itself, and following up with the narrator to ensure paperwork has been signed.

Assist with 1-2 additional oral histories: In addition to leading an interview, you must also assist one of your collaborators on their interview. This role includes managing camera and recording equipment, transferring recordings to our shared Box folder, editing the transcript of the interview, and writing a brief fieldnote describing the context of the interview.

Contribute a piece of visual material related to the project: In addition to the oral histories themselves, we will build a visual archive of our work in this community. These visual outputs can take many forms, but the most straightforward options are the creation of a photo essay, editing footage of an interview, or collecting footage of sites in the community. You should discuss your plans for this component of the project with me in advance to ensure that it is both feasible and appropriate.

Write a memo synthesizing themes across multiple interviews: Transcripts of interviews will be available to the entire group; towards the end of the semester, you should write a memo of around 1,000 words in which you identify and engage with emergent themes across interviews.

Write a memo reflecting on your engagement with the community and possibilities for enriching that collaboration: In the final week of the class, you will each write an essay reflecting on the community engagement work of this course; this should be a critical reflection on what worked and what could work better. A specific prompt will be distributed later in the semester.

*Note: funds are available to reimburse you for driving to interview sites. Interviews will be professionally transcribed, but you will need to edit these transcripts for accuracy and clarity.

Readings

The following book is required:

- Tell, D. (2019). *Remembering Emmett Till*. University of Chicago Press.

Depending on your prior experience working with oral history methods and your familiarity with Emmett Till and his family, you may find the following recommended books useful:

- Ritchie, D. A. (2014). *Doing oral history*. Oxford University Press.
- Till-Mobley, M., & Benson, C. (2004). *Death of innocence: The story of the hate crime that changed America*. One World.

Additional readings will be available on Blackboard.

Grading Scale

A	90 – 100%
B+	85 – 89%
B	80 – 84%
C+	75 – 79%
C	70 – 74% (minimum grade to receive credit towards the major)
D	60 – 69% (minimum grade to receive credit)
F	59% and below

Assessment

Each of the five assignments listed above, along with your engagement during class sessions, will contribute equally to your grade. Because our goal is to produce an exhibition of material suitable for public viewing, each assignment must be complete, carefully edited, and appropriate for a wider audience. You will be asked to revise and resubmit any assignments that do not meet these standards. Consistent attendance will be essential to your success in this course, particularly since we meet once a week. However, because this class will require travel to field sites, we may cancel mid-semester classes or have shorter meetings via Zoom. If you must miss a class due to an illness or University-related business, please let me know as soon as possible. *Feeling unwell is always a good reason to miss class.*

Office Hours

You were welcome to stop by during office hours to chat about the readings, talk about your field notes, or ask questions. You can make an appointment for in-person or virtual office hours here: <https://calendly.com/parsons-um>

Academic Honesty and Integrity

I expect you to produce your own work for this class and cite others' ideas appropriately. In cases of inadvertent plagiarism (i.e., incorrect citations) you will be asked to edit and resubmit the assignment. Intentional plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty, including copying others' ideas, paying someone to complete your assignments, or cheating during exams, will likely result in your failing the assignment.

Communication

I will do my best to respond to all emails within 2 business days during normal business hours; if you have not had a response by then, please send a follow up message. Emails with questions that can be answered with this syllabus will likely be ignored. Please do not send emails with questions about assignments fewer than 2 days before the deadline.

Attendance

The University requires that I verify attendance during the first two weeks of the semester. Missing the first two weeks of class may result in your being removed from the course roster. Beyond this requirement, students should plan to attend class every session, though we will adapt our schedule to account for field work or class trips as needed. If you must miss a class for an illness, isolation, or University-related business, please let me know ahead of time so I can record the lecture and provide supplementary material.

COVID-19 Accommodations and Responses

Masks are not required by the University but are always allowed. None of us should make judgements or assumptions about people who choose to wear a mask. The University requires students to report a COVID-19 diagnosis to the Student Health Center online at <https://coronavirus.olemiss.edu/report/> or by calling 662-915-7274. If you have been exposed to COVID-19, current guidance is to wear a high-quality mask for 10 days and test yourself on day 5. If you need to miss class because you are feeling ill or need to isolate, let me know in advance and I will do my best to record lectures and provide supplementary material.

Please be mindful of any risks you may create for community partners before traveling to conduct an interview. While the University does not permit mask requirements on campus, keep in mind that many of our interviewees may be elderly or otherwise have health concerns.

Student Support Services

The University prepared the following information regarding mental health services:

The University Counseling Center is a professional facility offered by the University of Mississippi to assist students, faculty, and staff with many types of life stressors that interrupt day-to-day functioning, including the stressors associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. They offer individual counseling, couple's counseling, group counseling, stress management, crisis intervention, assessments and referrals, outreach programs, consultations, and substance abuse services. There is no fee for currently enrolled University students and everything you say to your counselor is confidential. You can contact the Counseling Center for information about mental health issues at <https://counseling.olemiss.edu>, counselg@olemiss.edu, 662- 915-3784, 320 Lester Hall, and <https://www.facebook.com/universitycounselingcenterolemiss/>. You can schedule an appointment or get information about appointments by calling the UCC at 662-915-3784.

Updated Contact Information

Please note the following requirement from the University:

The University must have accurate contact information, including cell phone numbers, to facilitate student communications and contact tracing. Students should check and update their University contact information available at <https://olemiss.edu/mystudentprofile>.

Disability Access and Inclusion

The following language was written by the Student Disability Services office:

“The University of Mississippi is committed to the creation of inclusive learning environments for all students. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your full inclusion and participation, or to accurate assessment of your achievement, please contact the course instructor as soon as possible. Barriers may include, but are not necessarily limited to, timed exams and in-class assignments, difficulty with the acquisition of lecture content, inaccessible web content, and the use of non-captioned or non-transcribed video and audio files. If you are registered with SDS, you must log in to your Rebel Access portal at <https://sds.olemiss.edu/rebel-access-portal> to request approved accommodations. If you are NOT registered with SDS, you must complete the process to become registered. To begin that process, please visit our website at <https://sds.olemiss.edu/apply-for-services>. SDS will:

1. Complete a comprehensive review to determine your eligibility for accommodations,
2. If approved, disseminate to your instructors a Faculty Notification Letter,
3. Facilitate the removal of barriers, and
4. Ensure you have equal access to the same opportunities for success that are available to all students.

If you have questions, contact SDS at 662-915-7128 or sds@olemiss.edu.¹

If you feel that there are other barriers to your success in this course (including disabilities not covered by SDS or difficult personal circumstances) please feel free to reach out to me to discuss ways to improve your experience in this course.

¹ Student Disability Services, University of Mississippi. (n.d.). *Syllabus Statement*. Student Disability Services - Syllabus Statement. Retrieved July 26, 2022, from <https://sds.olemiss.edu/syllabus-statement/>

Class Schedule:

January 24: Course intro and logistics

** Homework: complete the CITI ethics training by next week*

<https://www.research.olemiss.edu/irb/education>

January 31: What is oral history?

** Class will begin in the archives at the University library*

February 7: Telling stories: Documentary

February 14: Telling stories: Dramatic film

** Read Remembering Emmett Till before next week*

February 21: Discussion of *Remembering Emmett Till*

February 28: Salon: Civil rights oral history

** For salon sessions, we will each choose an article or similar document from the past five years to share with the group. E.g., for this week you should find a recent academic journal article about the Civil Rights Movement that relies on oral histories and prepare an informal presentation (no slides) about its argument and what we can take from it.*

March 7: Salon: Oral history methods

Find a recent article from one of the following journals and prepare an information presentation: Oral History, The Oral History Review, Narrative Inquiry

March 14: Spring Break

March 21: Check-ins (Zoom)

** In anticipation of travel to conduct interviews, during these weeks we will meet over Zoom for update/check in meetings rather than a full, in-person session.*

March 28: Check-ins (Zoom)

April 4: Salon: Emmett Till historiography

Find a recent academic journal article or work of public history about the legacy of the Till-Mobley family and prepare an informal presentation

April 11: Salon: Diversity, equity, and inclusion in oral history work

Find a recent academic journal article or work of public commentary about the role of diversity and inclusion in public history/oral history and prepare an informal presentation

April 18: Salon: Community engagement in oral history work

Find a recent academic journal article or work of public commentary about the role of community engagement (e.g., the role of community partners, “giving back” to host communities) and prepare an informal presentation

April 25: Workday

May 2: Presentations