

Memory Lines

An occasional publication of the Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

Issue 2 • Fall 2004

NEW DIRECTIONS

IN ORAL HISTORY

Research news at
the intersection of
memory and history

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ROOTS AND BRANCHES OF ORAL HISTORY

By Richard Cándida Smith

Going out and interviewing people for firsthand knowledge of historical events is as old as the historical discipline itself. Both Herodotus and Thucydides based their histories on interviews for which we have only their paraphrases. Giorgio Vasari's biographies of the famous artists and architecture of the Italian Renaissance were drawn from extensive conversations with their friends and peers. In these cases, we have no record of what the informant said other than the author's reconstruction. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, records of conversations as taken down by transcribers were prepared as part of the research process. Jules Michelet's multivolume history of the French Revolution involved several thousand interviews, and Hubert Howe Bancroft's history of California required hundreds of interviews. Transcriptions of these interviews remain available for scholars to examine at the Bibliothèque Nationale and at the Bancroft Library. The interviews continue to generate new information for contemporary scholars, whose interpretations often challenge those of Michelet and Bancroft.

The tape recorder simplified the challenge of getting an informant's exact words. In the second half of the twentieth century many universities in the United States and abroad established oral history programs. Berkeley's program, the Regional Oral History Office, founded in 1954, is the second oldest program in the country, probably in the world. It has collected interviews and served as a place for scholars to donate tapes and transcripts that they made in the course of their research.

Like every source about the past, interviews have their own inherent problems. Memory is synthetic and symbolic, and complex historical events are compressed into relatively simple accounts that are easy to remember, easy to tell, and that convey a judgment about what it all means. Each interviewee brings to the interview situation the biases that prevent him or her from ever knowing the full story of what happened even when they were direct participants. Oral history is not about getting *the* accurate account; it's about expanding what we have available to understand the past, by engaging narrators about their personal experiences.



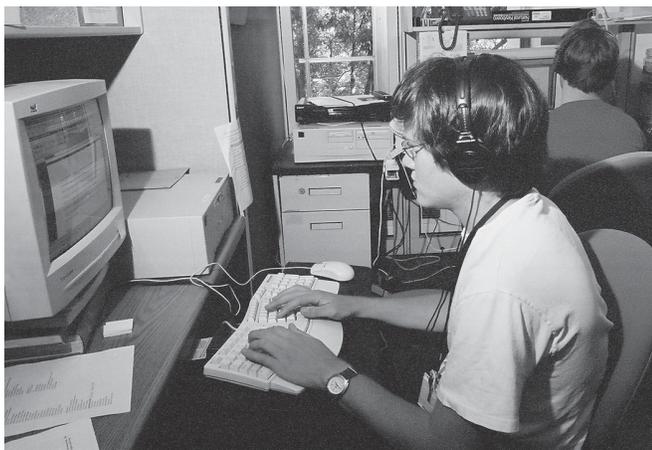
Cal student and ROHO interviewer Nick Garcia interviewing Professor Carlos Muñoz, 2004. Dr. Muñoz was the founding chair of the first Mexican American Studies department in the nation in 1968 at the California State University at Los Angeles, and the founding chair of the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS). He is a scholar-activist and the author of many works about the Mexican American political experience and African American and Latino political coalitions. He is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Ethnic Studies, University of California, Berkeley. Photo: David Washburn

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Interviewers at ROHO come prepared, having already researched the relevant background information. They know what an interview could contribute to ongoing historical and scholarly debates about what happened when, where, and how. They lead the interviewee through a disciplined, *lengthy* discussion. Two knowledgeable people discuss topics of common interest, oftentimes challenging each other's presuppositions. Behind the interplay of interviewer and narrator, we can glimpse the stories told in the communities important in the life of the narrator, stories that he or she heard, told before, and retells to the interviewer. Those stories reveal vernacular constructions of the past that are essential for historians to understand why groups of people made the decisions they did, as well as how groups were divided.

Oral history works because we all are participants in oral culture. Even such a text-based community as the university relies on daily conversation—in the seminar room, in committee meetings, at the lunch table, and so forth. Decisions are codified and rationalized in writing, but they are arrived at through a lengthy process of oral exchange. Oral history provides us a way of seeing the conventions and understandings inherent to defining a group. In this way, besides perspectives on the factual details that always require verification in other sources, oral interviews tell us something we would not know any other way. *∞*

Richard Cándida Smith is Director of the Regional Oral History Office and Professor of History, University of California, Berkeley. He is the author of many essays on oral history method and the cultural, intellectual history of modern America. His books include Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California (1995) and Mallarmé's Children: Symbolism and the Renewal of Experience (2000), both published by the University of California Press.



“As we pored over the interviews, we were struck time and again—as we had been in our personal encounters—by the grace and authenticity of these seldom-heard voices. We knew that memory does not provide a direct window on the past, but we had learned from experience to trust the interpretive authority of ordinary people. We also assumed the moral and intellectual value of listening to those who lacked access to power, and, thus, the means of influencing historical debate. . . . Workers’ testimonies, in combination with other sources, revealed a broad process of cultural, technological, and managerial change. The textile industry, like all institutions, was shaped by struggle—sometimes bloody and dramatic, sometimes quiet and nearly imperceptible. Neither mill hands nor employers fully achieved their goals; for each, industrialization had mixed and unexpected effects. The effort to capture this story, in all its historical contingency and human detail, took us on an intellectual journey more circuitous—and more compelling—than any we could have imagined.”

-Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, from the preface to Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World

Opposite: student transcribers Sam Schramski and Kirstin Jackson at work at ROHO. Photo: Gerald Stone

ROHO AS A LABORATORY FOR THE STUDY OF FOOD, WINE, AND CULTURE:

Historian Victor Geraci and Undergrad Paul Redman

By Linda Norton

"I see these great institutions of medicine and research and education as very critical to creating in America an attitude towards wine that took thousands of years of acculturation in Europe. In a sense, this is the moral equivalent of trying to bridge centuries of what became known as folk wisdom, the ancient secrets of modern nutrition, but in a shorter span with different institutions. We don't have the Roman Army and its garrisons to take thousands of years to plant grapes as they settled the Roman Empire. They were the first society of wine educators because they needed to have a guaranteed supply that wasn't poisoned by the tribes, for their soldiers. We don't have the Catholic Church over a thousand years making wine a central part of the Catholic Mass."

John DeLuca, Executive Vice-chairman, The Wine Institute.
From an interview on November 11, 2003

"I think people are watching their diets more. They are more concerned with what they are eating even though this obesity thing has gotten out of hand. I think an awful lot of that is in the Middle West and not so much on the coast. I don't think there is much of it in this area, but there is in others, and it is a serious problem. It is too bad, and we have to do something about it. I think cooking-wise, I think it hasn't gone away completely."

I would like to be known for introducing Americans to good cookware, good tools, to encourage them to cook."

Chuck Williams, Founder, Williams-Sonoma. From an interview on March 8, 2004

Paul Redman is an English major at Cal. He is also a professionally trained chef. Last year, when he took a history class with ROHO director Richard Cándida Smith, Paul learned about the Undergraduate Research Apprenticeship Program (URAP) and about ROHO's new food and wine historian, Vic Geraci. Now Paul is working with Vic to interview some of the most interesting chefs in the Bay Area. Paul brought to his experience at ROHO a background in restaurant kitchens in Germany and in New Orleans (where he worked at Emeril's, a major tourist destination because of the chef's television fame). Vic says that Paul's hands-on experience has been very helpful as the two prepare for interviews and then videotape chefs at work. Vic's directed readings in the history of food and wine have helped Paul to bring a scholarly perspective to the interviewing process. Paul's final paper for his independent study



Vic Geraci and Paul Redman at work. Photo: Gerald Stone

was, Vic says, one of the best student papers he has ever read. (See ROHO's Web site for examples of student work.)

Thus far, Paul and Vic have interviewed Justine Miner (who made scallops and asparagus in a mushroom sauce the day they interviewed her and filmed her at work; yes, the interviewers got to taste the finished product). In 2003, when she was 30, Miner opened her dream restaurant, RNM, in San Francisco, and just a year later she was honored as a "rising young chef" by the *San Francisco Chronicle*. They have also interviewed Heidi Krahling, chef-owner of Insalata's in San Anselmo, who is at the pinnacle of her career. She is an expert on Mediterranean cuisine and a renowned teacher. Vic notes that Heidi's classes are "geographically challenging," as she draws on traditions from all around the Mediterranean to prepare her meals. The interviews show that both Miner and Krahling are influenced by their families, their travels, and the availability of local meat, fish, dairy, and produce in ways that make their cuisine particularly Californian and cosmopolitan.

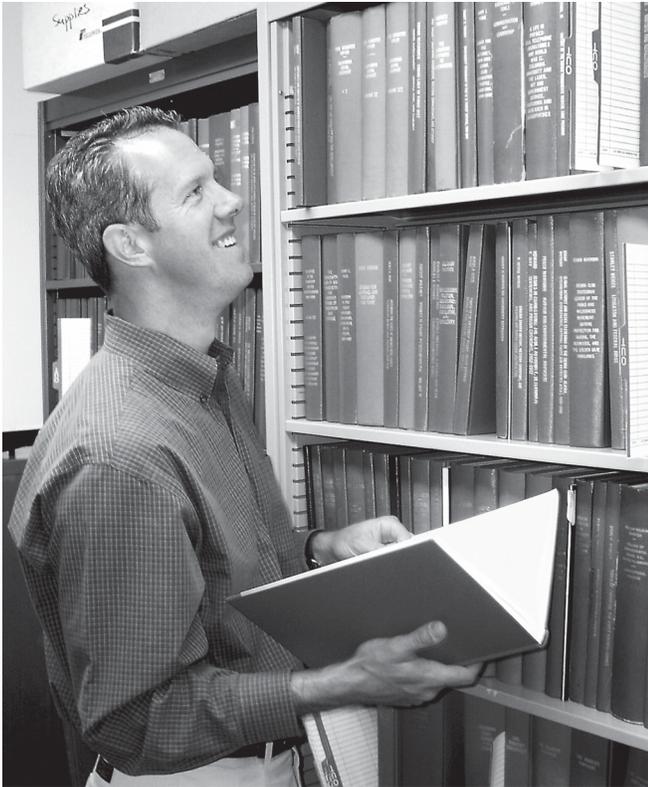
The video aspect of these oral history interviews is key, Paul notes, because a chef is almost like an athlete, moving around the kitchen and bringing things together in ways that are hard to define with words alone. The language of kitchens, like the jargon of any profession, is special, too. Paul's experience as a chef allows him to engage with the interviewees and to negotiate the translation of culinary jargon for a more general audience of historians and students. Redman notes that he and Vic, with the help of ROHO videographer David Washburn, taped their subjects "as they flipped, sizzled, chopped, pointed, smelled, and tasted some of the dishes that were closest to their hearts."

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THE HUMAN VOICE IN A SEA OF PAPER: Bringing Order to the History of Biotechnology

By Eric J. Vettel

Eric Vettel and his wife and three children moved to the Bay Area from the University of Virginia so that he could accept ROHO's offer of its first postdoctoral fellowship. Eric earned his PhD in US history at the University of Virginia, and is revising his dissertation, "Making a Biotechnology Industry," for publication.



Eric Vettel in the ROHO archive.
Photo: Gerald Stone

If my voice sounds muffled, it is because I drown in a Niagara of historical evidence that has spilled out of the biotechnology industry since its inception in 1971. The confluence of this material flows out of corporate America, government bureaucracy, and science – perhaps three of the greatest producers of paper in this admittedly paper-heavy age. Writing about the biotechnology industry in historical perspective has led me to a vast archive. Such a flood of documents can be intimidating, and almost inhumane. I searched in vain for a human voice, a historical pivot.

Out of desperation, I turned to an oral history about William Rutter, a pioneer in the industry, produced by ROHO's Sally Smith Hughes. From these interviews I found out more about the industry than I had any right to expect. I immedi-

ately gained a better sense of what the documents were trying to tell me. Simply put, not all the archival records I had seen were created equal; ROHO's oral history collections helped me identify hidden motives, intents, and consequences that I could not see in the inanimate archival records. The oral histories in the field of biotechnology helped bring order to the documents and played off of each other in interesting ways, sometimes setting the record straight, other times prompting me to ask new questions.

Oral history has its own rationale and methodology, and is an extremely labor-intensive practice. To me, at least, not all the oral history techniques practiced by ROHO are easy to grasp, and there may be some other scholars in the same boat. Nevertheless, I have become a devoted proponent of ROHO's oral histories, because this program has helped me deepen and sharpen my own knowledge of the past. I now find myself telling colleagues how this resource can help them illuminate their own topics, for themselves and for each other. 

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INTERVIEWING THE INTERVIEWER: Caroline Crawford on Music and Oral History

Caroline Crawford has degrees from Stanford University and the University of Geneva in linguistics, and a keyboard degree from the Royal College of Musicians, London. She worked on cultural programs for the US State Department and the Peace Corps in Latin America for ten years, and has served in San Francisco as an editor with Saturday Review magazine, Canfield Press, and HarperCollins, and as editor/writer with San Francisco Opera. She writes music reviews for periodicals. She has been a ROHO interviewer in music history since 1986.

Norton

Caroline, would you tell me when you first came to ROHO?

Crawford

In 1986 I came to work on the oral history of Kurt Herbert Adler, who was the director of San Francisco Opera. I had been a staff writer at San Francisco Opera for almost ten years, which were his last ten years as a general director.

Norton

What did being a staff writer involve?

Crawford

Oh, writing broadcast material, writing all the materials that went out of the house, writing for the program, program notes of all the singers and the repertoire.

Norton

What's your own academic background?

Crawford

I have linguistic degrees from Stanford and the University of Geneva and a keyboard degree from the Royal College of Musicians.

Norton

I know you've lived in Haiti and that you spend a lot of time in Paris. Can you tell me a little bit more about your travels?

Crawford

I love to travel. I spent my junior year in Paris, and then I took my graduate work at the University of Geneva on a Swiss government scholarship. And that kind of launched me into travel. When my husband and I were first married, we went to South America. One of my children was born there and both were Wpretty much raised in South America. And then, years later, we went into the Peace Corps as Peace Corps directors, my husband and I, in the Eastern Caribbean.



Caroline Crawford rehearsing triumphal march from *Aida* for a summer wedding, 2003

Norton

You are the music historian for ROHO, which has an emphasis on regional history, California history; I wonder about your interest in world music, ethnomusicology, and so on.

Crawford

I'm particularly interested in eastern music, and I've developed a project to document the American blues, especially Oakland and Bay Area blues.

Norton

Would you tell me more about ROHO's music program?

Crawford

A major grant from Phyllis Wattis makes much of our program in oral history possible. I did Mrs. Wattis's oral history, and I think I was assigned to this project because we shared a love of contemporary music. Later I wrote to ask her for \$50,000 to document five or six American composers of the twentieth century with significant California connections. And she called me up right away and said, "No, no dear. \$50,000 isn't nearly enough. I'm giving you twice that much." I don't know if that's ever happened to another oral historian, but that was a happy day for me. So with this gift from Phyllis Wattis, I've been able to focus on composers and their mentors and influences. Some of the connections are surprising.

For example, I worked with Dave Brubeck, who studied with both Schoenberg and Milhaud, who was a very important influence on Brubeck's life and music. I've also interviewed

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David Sheinfeld, an independent composer who was with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. And Andrew Imbrie, Olly Wilson, Joaquin Nin-Culmell, UC faculty composers; and Pauline Oliveros, who co-founded the famous San Francisco Tape Center in the 1960s. I'm interviewing a range of composers with very distinct voices and musical languages and distinct backgrounds.

Norton

And in the American blues program?

Crawford

The blues program was started about ten years ago when I heard the blues for the first time. I'd always loved the black quartets as a child. My father listened to the music, so I did, too. I listened to a lot of this music, but I didn't really know the blues. And I found this vibrant scene in Oakland, including several clubs still open from the 1940s and 1950s: Eli's Mile High Club and Sweet Jimmy's. This is a story that hadn't been told, so I embarked on oral histories of the blues scene and the great musicians in Oakland.

Norton

I know that funding for oral history is always a challenge, and I want to ask you what you might do with additional funding for the music history program.

Crawford

Well, funding varies. There's more money to underwrite classical music, but funds for oral histories of the blues and contemporary music can be scarce. That's why Phyllis Wattis's love of the new has meant so much to our program.

There's an exciting development in the blues project. When I was in Cuba, I met a filmmaker who wants to make a film about the blues. The Eastman Fund will help us make a pilot about that, and we'll try to prepare something for PBS.

Norton

Have you used the video camera yet for interviews?

Crawford

Oh, yes. I've done several composers and blues histories with video. Nin-Culmell insisted on wearing a formal black velvet cape and flourishing it on camera. He is Anais Nin's brother, and colorful. Teddy "Bluesmaster" Watson wore an emerald green fedora and suit, and sang "The Thrill is Gone." Wonderful! Video can demonstrate music technique in important ways, too. Video works well with dramatic subjects. All the blues subjects I've interviewed in the last year, I've done on video. Kronos Quartet

All of my interviewees are performers, and I think they really respond to the camera.

Norton

Are there performers you'd like to document, or composers, if you could come up with the money?

Crawford

Yes, particularly John Adams and Terry Riley. I have just finished interviewing David Harrington for the composers' series, because of the huge number of composers he has commissioned to write for the Kronos Quartet, and we have documented a number of composers like Riley and Adams in those interviews. Kronos is astonishing. *Musical America* estimates that the ensemble has given the world a new string quartet every three weeks for thirty years! And in every conceivable genre, from blues to the sounds from space—solar winds, electromagnetic waves, and other signals collected by NASA spacecraft over time. So this interview with David Harrington is very exciting.

I've interviewed orchestral composers, academic composers, and electronic composers, and I'm going to talk to a film composer this summer. I try to figure out what their approaches are, what they have to say about who they are as composers, what their language is.

I would like to do a whole series of young composers, people in their twenties. I have in mind about ten young composers who are doing fabulous work here in San Francisco.

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Kronos Quartet

INTERVIEWING THE INTERVIEWER: Lisa Rubens Talks About the Oral History of the Free Speech Movement

Lisa Rubens is ROHO's newly appointed academic specialist in the fields of University history and the history of social movements, but she has worked at ROHO for many years, most notably as the manager of the Free Speech Movement oral history project. Lisa has a doctorate in US history from UC Berkeley and taught history for many years in the Peralta Community College District. She has published monographs on California women and labor. Several academic presses are considering her dissertation on the 1939 Golden Gate International Exhibition. Lisa created and is the program director for ROHO's Advanced Oral History Summer Institute.

Norton

Lisa, when did you start working at ROHO?

Rubens

When I was a junior in college, in 1966. I worked under Chita Fry, and that was thrilling for me, because she had interviewed Alice Paul, who had headed the National Women's Suffrage Association, and I was interested in feminism and politics. I got to know Willa Baum, and much later she brought me in as an interviewer in the field of labor history. I was among the organizers of the United Federation of Teachers at Laney College. This was in the Jerry Brown era, and the advent of collective bargaining for teachers. My husband worked for the Longshoremen's Union and knew many of the key people in San Francisco labor. There were people Willa was interested in taping, so we advised her, and I think starting in '87 I was hired officially as a labor editor.

Norton

When and how did the Free Speech Movement oral history project start?

Rubens

Steve Silberstein is the benefactor who made the project possible. Mario Savio died in 1996, and Steve wanted to find a way to honor him, because he had admired him. In 1999 he gave three and a half million dollars to the university. A million and a half went to building the Free Speech Movement Café, which is one of the most popular places on the campus, and he also gave a million dollars to upgrade the library's humanities collection. Then he donated \$500,000 to document the Free Speech Movement, through the collection of oral histories and documents.

Norton

You've done quite a few interviews since then.



Photo: Gerald Stone

Rubens

I've done about forty-five. Most are audio interviews; there are ten video interviews. Most of the interviews will be available on our web site in October in coordination with the rest of the festivities around the fortieth anniversary of the Free Speech Movement.

Norton

Can you talk about designing and planning the FSM project?

Rubens:

We created an advisory board, and met with Liz Stephens, the Bancroft archivist who put together the documents collection. We looked at the documents and we considered what had been discussed in previous interviews and what questions remained. We wanted to bring to light issues that hadn't even been identified as issues during the FSM, for instance feminism and homosexuality. And we aimed to cover areas that seemed

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to be integral to the FSM, like race, but that hadn't been addressed specifically.

Norton

You mention the documents archive. Could you talk a little bit about how your oral histories could work with the documents?

Rubens

Oral history is a way to discover and open up documents. I'll give you two examples, one not my own. One was when Edward Strong, the beleaguered chancellor of the University during the FSM, was having his oral history done years later. His interviewer kept asking him very specific questions and he would look down in his lap and turn pages, apparently checking some notes to help him recollect. And she finally asked, "What are you looking at?" He said, "It's my diary—my daily log of what happened." So here was this primary document. Who knows if that document would have seen the light of day, if not for the interview process?

The same thing happened with me during an FSM interview. I was very eager to get the legal story told. No one had really told the story of how lawyers came to represent the students. When they were first charged with violating campus policy, there was minimal legal representation. After the arrests on December 2, 1964, many lawyers volunteered. This was the largest mass arrest in California history. From there, a legal strategy was fashioned which went through the court system up to its rejection by the US Supreme Court. No one had told that story, so I was keen on interviewing the five or six key attorneys. And one of them, Malcolm Burnstein, had this cache of letters that students had been asked to write to the sentencing judge to explain why they had chosen civil disobedience as a form of protest.

Once we began his oral history he donated them to the FSM archives. These are some of the most authentic voices about the rationale and motivations behind the movement, even though they were written two or three years after the actual event. There were about 250 students involved. It's one of the collections that Robby Cohen uses in his terrific essays in the Zelnik and Cohen book on Free Speech at Berkeley. I think that's a great example of traditional archival documents made available through, and illuminated by, oral history.

Berkeley had a very good social protest collection—Bill Roberts, and before him Jim Kantor, the university archivists, had been collecting material. Once the press published news of Silberstein's grant, people started contributing more things. It really is a very fine collection of materials that are really begging to be gone through now.

Norton

In addition to posting your oral histories online, how will you be celebrating the FSM's fortieth anniversary this fall?

Rubens

The independent Free Speech Movement Archives, a group of veterans of FSM, has invited Molly Ivins to come and speak. Every year they give a Mario Savio Young Activist Award, and they bring a politically active person to come and speak.

Norton

Who else have you interviewed for the project?

Rubens

So many people, but since we are talking about the legal aspects of the story, I'll mention Richard Buxbaum, who was the University's representative to the legal team, and, again, Malcolm Burnstein. I think those two are wonderful interviews. And then I was interested in two other people who were law students at the time, but by the next year they were embarked on stellar careers: Michael Tigar and Donald Hopkins. Hopkins was the first African American administrator at UC Berkeley, just an amazing fellow. He had been a Yale undergraduate, and then came to Boalt. In the course of his interview, he talks about going to pick up Martin Luther King at the airport. This was in the spring of '67, and King was going to speak at Berkeley. And Hopkins has King for the hour alone in the car, and he says to him, "If you don't talk about Vietnam you're going to lose every one of us." Wow! That was a real eye opener for me.

The Free Speech Movement was a training ground for some lawyers and activists and academics that went on to have very interesting careers. They constituted a community and they really retained lifelong friendships. And they have had time to think about the movement in relation to other developments of the 1960s and 1970s. Michael Tigar, for instance, has had an extraordinary career as a corporate and criminal defense lawyer.



Art Goldberg and other students on top of police car, Sproul Plaza, CA. Photo: Steven Marcus, courtesy of The Bancroft Library

Norton

Did the FSM stay just on this campus, or did free speech movements appear on other campuses?

Rubens

It's a great question, because that's where work needs to be done. One of my interviews shows that a phone call went out to the friends of SNCC at Harvard the night of the Sproul sit-in at Berkeley. And the Harvard students, wanting to demonstrate support, went to the president of Harvard the next day and said, "Berkeley students are demanding free speech, and we demand free speech here at Harvard." And the president said, "Sure, you got it." He was smart! And there were sympathy demonstrations at Santa Barbara and UCLA. And much of this organizing across campuses was



October 1, 1964.

folded into the much larger antiwar effort by the next year.

Norton

I'm wondering if we have any television coverage of the movement in the FSM archives.

Rubens

Oh, yes. Excerpts are available at the Media Resource Center Web site (www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC). Gary Handman has always been in the vanguard of collecting radio and TV news clips, a CBS documentary, whatever he could find. But you have to remember this was not the era of 24-hour news. This was the era when broadcasting just ended at midnight or so, and there were black and white bands on the screen until broadcasting resumed in the morning. News was ten minutes, fifteen minutes, max.

Norton

How do you see the students of today interpreting the FSM, or renewing traditions of student movements?

Rubens

In every generation there are students who are interested in the social movements of the past, students who have this sense that the political rights that they have, or the openness that they experience on campus, are not just a given. They know these freedoms were hard won. I think our job is to let various departments know that this oral history project, and supporting documents, are here at the Bancroft and can be used in a variety of ways.

But of course the era of student activism continues. Students are interested in different things: Palestinian rights, sweat shops, fair trade, globalization. Students are very interested in food and health and politics. They had a big hand in getting the FSM Café to sell fair-traded coffee.

Norton

It's interesting to think about different spaces in which to teach history. The FSM Café has the plaques and the signage and so forth.

Rubens

I don't know how many people actually read the materials there, but it's still a gathering place where students talk about things, and that is crucial to the spirit of the Free Speech Movement and all social movements. There were those who thought that the bulk of money, given to the University for a café, was not a fitting tribute to Mario. But his widow said at the opening of that café, that he loved coffeehouses. When he was teaching up at Sonoma State and he wouldn't be home in time, she'd call one or two or three of the local coffee houses. "Oh, yeah, Mario's here." Of course the American Revolution was bred in the coffeehouses, teahouses of the colonies, as well as in England. It's a place where people can gather, meet, and talk. The Terrace served that function during the FSM.

Norton

You are founder and director of ROHO's annual Summer Institute in oral history. Any advice for oral historians in training?

Rubens

Well, Larry Levine, my academic advisor, always said to me, "Let your material tell you where it's going." You go into an oral history with your questions, but you have to listen to what the subject is telling you and adjust your questions to that story, because that's your material telling you where to go, what to ask next. 

For more information, go to the Free Speech Movement Digital Archive, <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/FSM/>

GIVING DEATH ROW INMATES A LEGAL STATUS

An Oral History of *Thompson v. Enomoto*, 1979-2004

By Simon Grivet

Simon Grivet is a PhD student at the Centre d'Etudes Nord-Américaines at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris. He spent the year 2003-2004 at ROHO on a Fulbright Fellowship.



This project is part of my dissertation, which deals with the history of capital punishment in California from the end of the nineteenth century to today. My primary sources are the California Department of Corrections archives, held at the California State Archives, Sacramento. But the archives relevant to this period are sealed, and thus oral history serves to fill in the blanks. From my office at ROHO, I designed a project that would allow me to understand the development and erosion of human rights for prisoners on condemned row at San Quentin.

Before the 1970s, condemned inmates at San Quentin State had no rights *per se*. They enjoyed privileges at the total discretion of the prison staff and warden. However, it is safe to affirm that this harshness was somehow mitigated by a tradition of relative benevolence toward prisoners who, at the time, were facing almost certain death in less than eighteen months after their arrival at the prison. In this context, visits, mail, and self-expression of all sorts had to be negotiated with the warden and other prison officials. Prison officials predictably rewarded good behavior, while refusing privileges to those prisoners who contested the absolute authority of their jailers.

During the twelve years of Caryl Chessman's detention (1948-1960), this system was strained to the breaking point. The famous "Red Light Bandit" tried to write his way out of death row, and protested every rule imposed on him. The prison became a kind of *panopticon*, where mail was systematically read and censored. A key and perplexing element of the fight for prisoners' rights is its relative obscurity. One can chart two parallel chronologies: one for death penalty politics, which made headlines regularly, the other for litigation on behalf of the

rights of condemned prisoners, which developed (for the most part) outside the bright light of media coverage. But in the 1970s, the prisoners' rights movement mounted successful prison litigation, and for the first time a Federal District Court Judge (Stanley Weigel) intervened in favor of prisoners in harsh lock-up units. In the late 1970s, two former students of UC Davis Law School, Peter Comiskey and Michael Satris, founded the Prison Law Office right at the gates of the prison. Their goal was to help inmates with any legal matters. In July 1979, with the death penalty back on the law books and condemned row filled again, they launched a massive civil rights law suit called *Thompson v. Enomoto*. To their surprise, prison officials deemed most of their demands reasonable and agreed to a consent decree. With this agreement (the *Thompson* decree, granted on October 23, 1980), a heavily divided California Supreme Court definitively upheld the California death penalty statute, while granting to death row inmates the right to visits, mail, healthcare, et cetera.

But at the beginning of the 1980s, with no executions scheduled and more and more inmates arriving at San Quentin, crowded conditions made the consent decree practically impossible to implement. The prisoners went back to court. Judge Weigel refused to sanction the prison officials immediately. The impasse ended when, in 1985, Judge Weigel named one of his clerks, a young attorney from Stanford, Robert Riggs, as special monitor. For ten years, Riggs monitored the negotiated application of the decree. Both parties agreed to two different classes of death row inmates (A and B) which would be granted differentiated levels of rights. The inmates agreed to be handcuffed when moved out of their cells in exchange for an improvement of their yards. Though the process appears chaotic, my interviews indicate that this experiment in consensual rights was a success.

By the late 1990s, the national mood had grown increasingly conservative and punitive. Congress adopted the Prison Litigation Reform Act (PLRA), and President Clinton immediately signed it. The PLRA was aimed at curbing the "frivolous" claims of prisoners who, it was believed, were harassing prison authorities around the nation with unnecessary lawsuits; it also dealt a blow to federal judges for playing too big a role in managing prisons. Theoretically, the PLRA ends the *Thompson* decree, and most observers I interviewed believe it has already accomplished this in fact. But recent court decisions have not clarified the matter.

Meanwhile, with some 640 condemned row inmates crowding its cell blocks, San Quentin faces both legal confusion and financial problems as its administrators and correctional officers try to grant prisoners at least some of the rights secured by the *Thompson* decree. ∞

From the Archives

REVISITING THE EARL WARREN ORAL HISTORY SERIES in the Fiftieth Anniversary Year of ROHO and the *Brown v. Board of Education* Decision of the US Supreme Court

By Linda Norton

Fifty years ago, Earl Warren was chief justice of the Supreme Court that unanimously overturned “separate but equal” racial segregation in education with its decision in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. In this anniversary year of that 1954 decision, we are reminded of one of ROHO’s most ambitious undertakings ever, the Earl Warren Oral History Series. From 1969-1979, approximately 150 interviews were recorded, focusing on the years 1925-1953, especially on the years when Warren was attorney general and then governor of a state racked by changes due to the Depression, World War II, and the post-war boom. Many of the interviewees speak of a dark time in American history after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, when Earl Warren and others supported the internment of Japanese Americans in California, Washington, and Oregon. (Though, as several interviewees note, there was never one act of either sabotage or espionage among the civilian Japanese population in the US during World War II.)

Two of the volumes in the series focus on this major breach of constitutional rights in a time of war. Attorney general Earl Warren was an important proponent of the evacuation; several years later, as governor, he signed the bill restoring Japanese American citizens’ rights. Some historians, biographers, and interviewees in this series consider the possibility that Warren’s work on the Supreme Court against racism and on behalf of civil liberties (in rulings like *Brown* and *Miranda*) was a kind of atonement for his part in the decision to send almost all Japanese Americans on the West Coast to camps during World War II, just because they were Japanese or of Japanese descent (a wholesale resettlement not undertaken in Hawaii, for example). The arc of race and justice seems as central and paradoxical in Warren’s life and career as it is the history of our nation.

Some of the issues discussed in the 150 interviews in this series are once again matters of concern in the United States. How do we balance the rule of law and civil liberties with security concerns in a time of war? Edward J. Ennis, director of the US Justice Department’s Enemy Alien Control Unit in 1941, speaks in his interview for ROHO of his opposition to the relocation of Japanese Americans in concentration camps on the West Coast, noting that the Japanese “were prohibited from



Governor Earl Warren signs bill restoring Japanese American citizens’ rights. Photo courtesy of The Bancroft Library.

becoming citizens of the United States solely because of their race. In fact, it may be that racist bar in the naturalization laws which was part of the reason that the Japanese and Japanese-American were so roughly treated. They had been prohibited from becoming citizens and becoming politically assimilated even though I think that most of them were emotionally and socially assimilated to the United States.”

Ennis also speaks of the principled attempt to stem the tide of public opinion against innocent Japanese Americans after the attack on Pearl Harbor: “[James] Rowe, who was the first assistant attorney general, and myself and [US attorney-general Francis] Biddle felt that we should avoid, to the extent that public opinion, which is exercised in times of war, would permit us, some of the excesses of the First World War, when sauerkraut was called ‘liberty cabbage’ and many people were pushed around.”

The oral histories illustrate how the drive to evacuate the Japanese from California after the attack on Pearl Harbor overrode constitutional protections and common sense. Rowe, Ennis and others clarify how the chain of command worked in practice, if not on paper, to make this breach of civil liberties possible (see volume 1 of the Japanese evacuation interviews, online and in manuscript at the Bancroft Library). This is just the sort of ephemeral but crucial information that oral history makes available to historians. The scope of the

continued on page 12

project offers many and sometimes conflicting perspectives on California and US history at a critical juncture, and the interviews remain a crucial resource for historians and biographers. In this fiftieth anniversary year at ROHO, we are reminded of the vision (and the funding) that it took to execute such an extensive series in oral history. Amelia Fry was director of the project and Willa Baum was the director of ROHO when the interviews were conducted. Amelia Fry, Rosemary Levenson, and Miriam Feingold Stein did the interviews included in the two volumes pertaining to the Japanese evacuation.

In this issue of *Living Memory* we offer a section from one of the interviews in volume 2 of the oral histories of the Japanese evacuation in the Earl Warren series. Carey McWilliams tells Amelia Fry, “There were not very many people in this state who would take a position against the mass evacuation of the Japanese.” But there were some, and Ruth Kingman was one of them. She was the executive secretary of the Pacific Coast Committee on American Principles and Fair Play. Here she speaks to interviewer Rosemary Levenson about her efforts to mitigate the difficulties for Japanese Americans in Berkeley once President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. After the decision was made to send Japanese Californians to concentration camps, Kingman notes, those interested in their welfare had no recourse but to “try to do an inhumane thing in a humane way.”

This entire interview, and many others, are available online at <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/warren.html>. Much more information about the relocation of the Japanese Americans in California is available at <http://jarda.cdlib.org/>, the Japanese American Relocation Digital Archive that draws on collections in the Bancroft Library and others.

Humanizing the “Processing” of Evacuees

Levenson

How did you become actively involved with the evacuation?

Kingman

I didn't like the idea of our Berkeley people being *processed*, as they say, by the Army in the big warehouses where they had thought they were going to have to do it. And, because it was a large group, and they had to have physical exams, and have their personal property evaluated, they had to have all sorts of things done before they were sent to Tanforan. So they all had to spend one or two days in the processing place before they were ready to go in the big buses that took them away. So I got in touch with the civilian group that was arranging this for the Army. It was the United States Employment Service, the California Employment Service at that time. Margery Walker was the director of it here in Berkeley. I got in touch with her, and through her with Richard Neustadt who was the overall supervisor of the whole area. I asked him if it wouldn't be possible for us to find a place that was a little bit warmer — a little bit less im-



A Japanese-American family awaits evacuation. The father had been held as a “dangerous enemy alien.”

Photo: Dorothea Lange, courtesy of The Bancroft Library

personal, a little bit less brutal than a warehouse. So many of the women and children had to be there for long hours. He said, “Well yes, if you can find any such place. If the War Department, if the Army doesn't mind, I don't mind.” So that meant that I had to get in touch with the Army people. Which I did. And they said, “What do you have in mind?” I said, “Well as far as Berkeley is concerned, how about getting the part of the First Congregational Church that is not the sanctuary, the part that has the Sunday school rooms and where they have their church dinners?” They asked, “How many doors are there?” They wanted to know about security. And I said, “Well, come and look.”

Meantime, I had to get permission from the Church, which was not easy. The pastor, the Rev. Vere Loper was fine. He had to put it up to his board of trustees, and I understand that while it was not unanimously supported permission was definitely given, with the understanding that everyone would stay out of the sanctuary. This, of course, made good sense. And there was nothing discriminatory about it, it just made good sense, that's all. So, it was arranged that it was to be done there.

Then the Army took over and it was really hectic because they had to divide the place up into little cubicles and put up walls and tables and all sorts of things — temporary of course. One whole corner was given over to the Nisei doctors and nurses who were giving physicals to everybody before they left. Giving shots — no, they didn't give shots to everybody — we had to have that done down at Herrick Hospital by Nisei doctors and nurses.

But anyway, it became obvious when the thing was getting set up, that there were going to be hours and hours of sit-

ting. Hours and hours of waiting around. And what the young mothers were going to do, I didn't know. Then we got the happy thought of having nursery schools set up. . . .

It was always a bit startling for us to come up to the door of the church, the entry of the processing place, because there were always two uniformed men on guard duty just outside the door with a big flag and carrying guns. It seemed rather strange but it was interesting because around them little Japanese youngsters were playing. And the guards would play with them as much as they could without losing their dignity.

. . . almost all of the evacuation was carried out in less than the distasteful way it might have been. And this is where we got the expression — we were trying to do an inhumane thing in a humane way. This is where that expression started.

When the Berkeley people left, in October, November—I remember the last person to leave Berkeley, on the last bus, the last person to get on. It was a man, a middle-aged man, a businessman, who carried his crippled mother over his shoulders—like a baby—carried her on to the bus leaving for Tanforan. And that was the last person of Japanese ancestry to leave Berkeley.

Tanforan

Kingman

Those were the first things I got involved in. Then the next thing was when the evacuees were down at Tanforan and had hardly anything to work with. The Tanforan situation was, to say the least, disgracefully uncomfortable.

Levenson

It was a race track, wasn't it?

Kingman

It was a race track and these people lived in the horses' stalls. And all of the remaining vestiges of the horses' occupancy were not necessarily gone. There would be a family, say of three, or four; father, mother, two small children, maybe a tiny baby. And, of course, one couldn't help but be a little ambivalent about this. You felt so sorry for them. I mean having to live that way when they were American citizens who'd never done anything but go to school — that sort of thing. I mean while we weren't worried about them we felt sorry for them.

On the other hand, this was a job that the Army had been given to do and in American history there had never been anything like this. They were not equipped to handle men and women and babies. On a large basis like this, all in a hurry. They were not accustomed to providing for the needs of women and children. One of the things that bothered the older women down there more than anything else and also when they got to Topaz, was that, as the Army calls them, latrines had no dividing curtains at all. Now this, for a Japanese woman, was just about as hard as anything

she could ever be asked to undergo. So as soon as they could they tried to better this. The Army did try, and even in the face of criticism from people who were reading of the cruel treatment of American civilians who had been placed in prison camps by the Japanese in Singapore and elsewhere. They really tried, but they weren't equipped to do it. So the whole thing was pretty bad.

Well, anyway, they tried to set up schools, of course, immediately for the children. Both to keep them busy and to keep them up with their school work. School work being very important to them all. Of course, they had some accredited Nisei teachers there. They had some good art teachers. I remember Professor Obata was there. From the University of California Art Department.

Harvey Itano, Valedictorian, Class of '42

Levenson

You told me about Commencement ceremonies in 1942.

Kingman

Oh yes. That was a beautiful thing. It certainly gave some intimation of how Robert Gordon Sproul felt about the evacuation. I remember we were all delighted when, at Commencement, in May or June I guess, 1942, he made a statement. Evacuation from Berkeley had taken place very recently and the evacuees had gone from here to Tanforan and were still there.

At the University Commencement, which was held on the football field in the stadium, they had several student speakers as usual. As you know, they always keep the valedictorian to the end, and when it came time for the valedictorian, Dr. Sproul simply stood and said that the valedictorian of the day, whose record had been—I don't know what it was, it was probably straight A's—a science major, was Harvey Itano. That was recognizable to *anyone* who knew anything about Japanese names, Harvey Itano. He said, — I'm not quoting this precisely, this first part—"the valedictorian Harvey Itano." But this next is a direct quote. "I'm sorry he cannot be with us today. He is serving his country elsewhere."

Levenson

Yes.

Kingman

The interesting part of it was not just that he said it but that actually every member of the graduating class and most of the people in the stadium, stood up.

Levenson

It must have been a very moving sight.

Kingman

Oh, it was. 

ROHO, continued from page 3

Vic Geraci is a public historian and teacher who earned his doctorate at UC Santa Barbara and is the author of several publications, including *Salud! The Rise of Santa Barbara's Wine Industry* (Nevada, 2004). As he charts a new course for oral history in food, wine, and agriculture at ROHO, he draws on a wealth of material archived here at the Bancroft. He notes that James Gablers' *Wine Into Words*, a guide to resources in the field, features more than one hundred references to ROHO's interviews. His recent interview with John De Luca, former president and CEO of the Wine Institute in California, adds a new chapter to an earlier series with this same interviewee. The updating is crucial, as the wine industry in California grows at an amazing pace. Vic, who coined the term "vintibusiness," is committed to documenting the global impact of this regional industry with ambitious oral history projects. California and ROHO are laboratories for the study of this history in the twenty-first century. ∞



Vic Geraci with his latest work. Photo: Gerald Stone

Crawford, continued from page 6

And a lot of the blues people are dying; we're losing them. We've been so lucky to be able to document them. But there are a lot of jazz players who are relatively young who played with all the great jazz figures, and I'd like to embark on interviews with them, if funding becomes available. They will have a lot to add to the historical record about the great American art form, jazz in the twentieth century.

Norton

And my last question, Caroline: I know that you sing. What do you like to perform? What do you like to play?

Crawford

Oh, I sing with the San Francisco Lyric Chorus, and I play piano with Bread and Roses, a volunteer organization started by Mimi Farina, Joan Baez's sister.

Norton

Thank you, Caroline. ∞

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The work of the Regional Oral History Office is funded through the generous support of individuals, private foundations, the University of California, and donors with a commitment to research at the intersection of memory and history. For more information about how you can support ROHO, please contact Shannon Page, Assistant Director, at (510) 642-7395 or spage@library.berkeley.edu.

STAFF AND AFFILIATE NEWS

Laura McCreery directs ROHO's program in politics and government. In 2004 she initiated a series of interviews with the former law clerks of US Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren, a project complementary to ROHO's substantial holdings on the Warren gubernatorial era. Her recent solicited publications include an article for *California Historian*, the journal of the Conference of California Historical Societies, and a book review for the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*. She is president of the Northwest Oral History Association.

ROHO interviewer **Eleanor Swent** received the Rodman W. Paul Award for outstanding contributions to mining history from the Mining History Association at the annual meeting of the group in June. She has been invited to present a paper at the Australian Mining History meeting in Bendigo in 2005.

Esther Ehrlich applied for and received a Heritage and Preservation grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to launch the Artists with Disabilities oral history project. Esther is a member of the Disability Rights and Independent Living (DRILM) team at ROHO. For the first phase of this new national project, we will conduct videotaped oral history interviews with leading artists and dancers with disabilities, capturing artist-interviewees engaging in impromptu demonstrations of art practice and sharing works-in-progress. The artists' interviews, along with their archival materials, will join the nearly 100 oral histories in the DRILM project collection and will be accessible on the project Web site, <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/collections/drilm>

We are seeking matching funds for the NEA grant. For more information about the project, please contact Esther at eehrlich@library.berkeley.edu or at (510) 643-4788.



Ann Chen is a ROHO research apprentice and a history major at UC Berkeley approaching her senior year. This summer, with funding from SURF (Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship), she is conducting a series of interviews in China with participants of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Ann is looking to document the personal stories

and experiences of survivors for a more vivid illustration of the emotional atmosphere and tensions of that turbulent era (1966-1977) and for a greater understanding of how those who lived through it remember the Cultural Revolution.

Sarah Wheelock has spent the past several years researching aspects of the history of the fire service in California, including the desegregation of the Oakland Fire Department in the 1950s. This project grew out of her student apprenticeship at ROHO. She graduated from UC Berkeley in 2002, and that year she was awarded a fellowship to trace the development of paramedic services in Santa Clara County. As part of the WWII National Home Front group at ROHO, she was active in researching and interviewing public safety officers who protected Richmond, California, during the Second World War. Sarah writes, "Working with ROHO has been a real eye-opener in terms of the craft of history."



Fred Pelka, a member of the DRILM team at ROHO since 2000, was named a Guggenheim Fellow in April. He is working on a new book, *An Oral History of the Disability Rights Movement*, to be published by the University of Massachusetts Press, and to be based in large part on the oral history interviews collected by the DRILM project.

Fred's work has appeared in *America's Civil War*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Disability Edge*, *The Humanist*, *Poets and Writers*, and *Mouth: The Voice of the Disability Nation*. His first book, *The ABC-CLIO Companion to the Disability Rights Movement*, was published in 1997. His second book, *The Civil War Letters of Charles F. Johnson, Invalid Corps*, will be published by the University of Massachusetts Press this year. Also forthcoming is an 8,000 word entry on disability rights in *Social Issues: An Encyclopedia of Controversies, History, and Debates*.

ROHO academic specialists **Lisa Rubens** and **Beth Castle**, assistant director **Shannon Page**, and editor **Brendan Furey** presented papers at the International Oral History Association meeting in Rome in June. 🌸



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