

## Title

1. Introduce yourselves and tell me why you are here, I will go last.
  - a. My name is Denise. I teach public history at UMBC. I am here because I want to teach you how to collect stories; think with you about how to integrate these stories into your own projects; and help you shape the history of your city.

## Why Collecting Stories Matters

2. Although I'm a history professor, I studied history because I was interested in stories
  - a. History is a story we tell about the past
  - b. It is not only a list of facts or a timeline
  - c. History is creative; it is much more art than science; it is an interpretation: we tell stories about the past in order to explain and create understanding about who we are now, how we got here.
  - d. We also tell stories about the past in order to learn from them –people in the past solved problems. How? What can we learn from them? People in the past made terrible mistakes. What can we learn from them?
  - e. Stories we tell about the past are based on evidence and grounded in basic truths. We know what happened in the past because we have items that have survived from the past to today
    - i. (journals, objects, legal documents, photographs, letters, etc.) These things might be located in museums, libraries, and archives. Or they might be tucked away in an attic. These are the COLLECTIONS that provide EVIDENCE and from which we build stories.
    - ii. More and more, these materials are digital.
3. I care about collecting and collections. The stories we have told about the past have not always been complete or inclusive or accurate because collections are incomplete AND because collections are not neutral
  - a. decisions about what to collection and what to preserve have historically been made by a very small, elitist, and often racist group of people
  - b. They wanted to protect what they thought was the core of American identity and the American past from being altered by the experiences and actions of people they perceived as “different” and “less important.”
  - c. Today, there are individuals and institutions who are actively working to make sure our collections are inclusive, that they reflect the diversity of the nation, that they include examples of our greatness AND our weaknesses, and that they are assembled by a much wider range of people and communities
  - d. ONLY THEN can collections live up to their potential to be relevant and empowering
  - e. ONLY THEN can we tell stories that represent the a fuller picture of the causes, experiences, consequences, and importance of the past
4. Collections Matter and YOU can play a crucial role by making sure that there are stories, photographs, videos, letters, and other materials that are part of the permanent historical record that tell a bigger, fuller, more inclusive story about our time. (Deveare Clip)

### **Preserve the Baltimore Uprising**

When the Uprising happened in 2015, my students and I could see that a story about what was happening and what it meant was being shaped in the media. The people who were in control of the story were politicians and police and reporters. (PLAY CLIP ONE)

We were worried that the story would be incomplete. Would there be a way to include the voices of people who live in Freddie Gray's neighborhood, the people participating in protests, the people organizing community projects and programs?

We had reason to worry –in the mid-1990s, professors at the University of Baltimore wanted to create some exhibits and public programs about the 1968 Uprising in Baltimore. But they discovered there had been no effort to collect a broad range of voices and experiences. The official records were the only remnants of the event.

SO, we started a collection that ANYONE can shape. (OPEN LINK)

This is a crowd-sourced digital collection managed --but not controlled-- by the MdHS. Anyone can contribute digital material to the site.

After the first few months, after the protests slowed a bit, we began to actively collect oral histories to make sure that the images and other digital documents would be put in the context of firsthand experience

We are still collecting. We want to make sure that we capture not only stories about what happened and what it felt like, but also stories about how the community has responded since the uprising. What has changed in the neighborhood? What new projects or businesses or clubs or art or music have members of the community made?

### **Dialogue and Storytelling**

SO: this year, the Baltimore Uprising and this Collection are a Foundation on which you can build.

First: you can have conversations to help you think about what you know and what you want to know, to learn what witnesses saw, felt, and experienced, and who might want to tell a story for the collection.

you, your friends, your neighbors, your teachers, all have ideas and experiences that can form the basis of a story.

## **Moving from Story to Oral History**

1. General: What Is Oral History?
  - a. Oral history is the careful collection of living people's testimony and stories about their own experiences, feelings, and ideas
  - b. Unlike the more casual conversations in the previous clips, oral history is more formal and structured
  - c. Oral history depends on human memory and the spoken word
  - d. Oral history is collaborative –it depends both on the interviewer and the interview subject. Both are working together to tell a meaningful story about a life, an event, a trend, etc.
2. Why should you Do It?
  - a. Connect you with people in your life
  - b. Help you understand something in the past
  - c. Help you find some ideas or models for problem solving
  - d. Tell a more complete history than the one you read in textbooks or hear from teachers
  - e. Intergenerational Connection
  - f. Provide evidence for your own projects
3. The Value of Oral History for historians now and in the future
  - a. Create a more diverse and inclusive record of the past
  - b. Create a more balanced understanding of the past
  - c. Gather not only representative artifacts and documents, but also voices and experiences; include those asking questions and those answering them
  - d. Help us make better and more informed decisions about politics or policy
  - e. Understand problems more fully
  - f. Explore solutions that have been tried in the past
  - g. Listen to what people need and want
4. You will learn the steps, techniques, and methods for gathering oral histories (FOCUS ON GOALS, NOT NECESSARILY DETAILS OF OUTLINE)
  - a. How to Prepare for an Interview
    - i. BY Conducting Research:
      1. What do you know about your interview subject?
        - a. Did this person witness or participate in protests?
        - b. Did this person establish a business or nonprofit in the aftermath of the protests?
        - c. Do you have a personal connection to this person?
      2. What do you need to know?
        - a. Basics about the event
        - b. Basics about the business
        - c. This helps you ask better questions
      3. Where can you find more information?
        - a. Newspaper or journal articles (I shared three articles that provide a timeline, analysis, and context

- b. How can you assess the value of these?
      - i. Published by a reputable source
      - ii. Author biography
      - iii. Additional search on author
      - iv. Website for the business or nonprofit
- ii. BY Developing Questions
  1. What is the goal of your interview?
  2. An entire life history?
  3. A specific, event focused story?
  4. What kinds of questions are best?
  5. NO yes or no questions
  6. Not so many purely fact-based questions
  7. Ask open ended questions that invite people to share what they saw, what they felt, what they think, what they did, why did they choose that path
- iii. BY Learnin Best Practices for Organizing your Interview and working with your interview subject
  1. Help your interview subject get comfortable and invite them to remember
    - a. Start with general questions
      - i. Tell me about yourself/your neighborhood/your project or business
      - ii. Where did you grow up? What were the most important experiences of your childhood? How did these experiences shape you?
    - b. Move to more specific questions about the event
      - i. What do you remember about the Uprising?
      - ii. What did you see or do?
      - iii. What were you thinking about?
      - iv. How did you feel?
    - c. Finally, get to the focus of your story
      - i. What do you think the Uprising was about?
      - ii. How did you decide to respond?
      - iii. What impact has your project made?
      - iv. What is left to do?
      - v. What would you like to see happen?
  2. A good goal is to have 3-4 basic informational questions (full name, date of birth, occupation, where they grew up, where they were living during the Uprising); 3-4 questions about the events of the Uprising (what did they see, think, feel, experience); 3-4 questions about their post-Uprising projects or business or other response to what happened (how did the Uprising change your ideas, goals, inspire you, harm you)

3. IMPORTANT: Make sure the first thing you record is an introduction: your name, the date, the location of your interview, the name of the person you are interviewing, and the basic topic you hope to cover
    - a. This is Denise Meringolo, I am interviewing Frank Anderson on August 8, 2018 at the Arch Social Club. We plan to talk about graduate school education at UMBC.
  4. IMPORTANT: the questions should be a guide for you if you get lost or the interview slows down, but you should not worry about asking all of them or asking them in order. Instead: listen carefully. Ask follow up questions. Allow time for silence. THIS IS THE HARDEST PART
- iv. BY Learning some Technical skills with digital audio recording
1. CONSENT FORM
  2. EQUIPMENT
    - a. If I use the Video (ignore the stuff about the microphone; we are using the built in microphones) (also, do NOT create independent files. Your oral history should be all in one file.)
    - b. SHARE LINK SO THEY CAN USE
    - c. Test it out
  3. Have them do short interviews with each other –the basics
  4. IMPORTANT: you will need to find a quiet space for oral histories. It won't work to be in a loud, busy space. A quiet office where you will not be interrupted is best.
- v. BY Thinking about how you might use oral histories in your own work

### Oral Histories from the Collection

### Project Possibilities

