

**Neighbrhd Oral History Wrkshp: Hempstead  
Hist 178A  
Fall 2009**

**James Levy, Instructor  
james.a.levy@hofstra.edu  
Phone: by request  
Office Hrs: by appt.**

## **Overview**

Long Island is a vast collection of neighborhoods - small and large, geographically defined, culturally defined, and sometimes virtually defined. But what exactly defines “neighborhood”?

This workshop is an investigation into the concept of neighborhood, using the Long Island communities in and around Hofstra as our classroom. Its central mission is to encourage you to act in your dual identity as a student in a conventional classroom setting and as an active participant in life and communities outside the classroom, all through the use of digital audio recorders and the collection of stories.

You will work collaboratively with other students using the tools of narrative and personal testimony to access and learn about issues of importance to the neighborhood. This semester’s locality is Hempstead . Each workshop team will choose one compelling neighborhood theme - “home,” “memory and forgetting,” “trash,” “school,” “space,” “night,” etc - and engage with local residents and groups about how this theme helps to define their neighborhood. Through this theme-based work, each group (and the class as a whole) will try to identify three things:

1. Points of Cohesion in the Neighborhood.
2. Points of Conflict and Diversion in the Neighborhood
3. Neighborhood Borders (geographic, cultural, conceptual)

The workshop’s culmination will be an end-of-semester showcase of short documentary pieces that you have created with your team and, in some cases, in collaboration with neighborhood residents. These pieces will be based on the oral histories you have conducted throughout the semester.

The course is organized into three sections:

Phase 1: The theory and practice of oral history / Introduction to neighborhood studies. You will also read key texts about the neighborhood itself, both regarding its contemporary life and its history.

Phase 2: Field work in the neighborhood. During this phase you will conduct oral histories with neighborhood leaders, activists and residents. You will team up in a group of two or three other students and choose one neighborhood theme categories as your group’s focus.

Phase 3: Compilation, Editing and Narrative Production. You will compile, assess, and edit your collections into short (3 to 5 minute) documentary pieces to be presented in a showcase

at the end of the semester. During this final phase, you will also strategize about how your own work (whether the recording of oral histories or the documentary pieces) may be used by any burgeoning campaigns or community work in the weeks, months or years ahead.

### *Final Presentation Formats*

In addition to choosing a specific neighborhood category as your focus, your group will also choose a documentary medium as the basis of your final collaborative presentation. Example mediums include:

- Film
- Audio
- Photography
- Written Journalism
- Web (and other electronic and new media)
- Performance
- Illustration (for example, in the graphic novel form)

### **Course Goals**

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Identify major interpretive methods in Neighborhood Studies
- Have a basic survey-level understanding of Hempstead history (and historical context)
- Have a basic understanding of methods and ethics of oral history
- Script and conduct a short, one-on-one oral history interview
- Transcribe, log and archive an oral history
- Work collaboratively with both students and community members outside the school in a creative and problem-solving setting.
- Produce and showcase a short (3 to 5 minute) documentary piece.

### **Grading**

In addition to attendance and in-class participation, your grade will be based on the following:

- |   |     |
|---|-----|
| - Classroom and Field Work Participation                      | 25% |
| - Readings and Observations Journals (3 @ 5% each)            | 15% |
| - Research/Oral History (scripts, recordings and transcripts) | 35% |
| - Final Doc Presentation and Summary                          | 25% |

**Featured Anthologies and Texts (required in bold):**

Day, Lynda *Making a Way to Freedom: A History of African Americans on Long Island* (Interlaken: Empire State Books, 1997)

Dunaway, David and Willa K. Baum, *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*

Jackson, Kenneth (ed) *The Encyclopedia of New York* (Yale University Press, 1992).

Naylor, Natalie (editor) *The Roots and Heritage of Hempstead Town* (Interlaken: Heart of Lakes Publishing, 1993)

**Perks and Thomson (editors) *The Oral History Reader***

**Richie, Donald *Doing Oral History***

Sanjek, Roger *The Future of Us All: Race and Neighborhood Politics in New York City* (Cornell University Press, 2000)

Terkel, Studs *My American Century* (New Press, 1998)

**Wiese, Andrew *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2004)**

Danzer, Gerald *Public Places: Exploring Their History* (Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1987)

Garvin, Alexander *The American City: What Works, What Doesn't* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996)

Pattillo, Mary *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2007)

## Course Schedule

### UNIT 1: COURSE METHODS AND OVERVIEW

#### Week 1 - Sept 3

Course welcome.

Review course and syllabus. Introduction to Story as a Community Force

#### Week 2: Sep 8/10

The Practice of Oral History.

CLASS: Review online oral history, story, and documentary sites

*Required:*

Portelli, Alessandro "What Makes Oral History Different?" in *The Oral History Reader*

Choose one of following three articles from *Oral History Reader*:

Haley, Alex "Black History, Oral History and Genealogy"

Popular Memory Group "Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method"

Yow, Valerie " 'Do I Like Them Too Much?' Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa"

#### Week 3: Sept 15/17

What is a Neighborhood?

CLASS: The importance of locality. The difference between history and memory. Establish groups.

*Required:*

Jacobs, Jane "The Uses of Sidewalks: Contact" in Glazer, Nathan and Lilla *The Public Face of Architecture: Civic Culture and Public Spaces* (1988)

Danzer *Public Places* (selections from Chapter 4 and Chapter 5)

Garvin *The American City* (selections)

*Recommended:*

Naylor *Roots and Heritage* (Selections.)

**Week 4: Sept 22/24**

Introducing Hempstead on foot.

MEET IN HEMPSTEAD CAFÉ (location TBA)

CLASS: Readings review and discussion at café. Walk neighborhood. Regroup at café for lunch. Group planning work.

*Required:*

Wiese *Places of Their Own* (selection 1)

*Recommended:*

Arendt, Hannah “The Public Realm: The Common” in Glazer, Nathan and Lilla.

Day *Making a Way to Freedom* (selections)

**UNIT 2: FIELD WORK AND ORAL TESTIMONY COLLECTION**

**Week 5: Sep 29/Oct 1**

Field Work Assessment 1: Preliminary Observations and Questions

FIELD: Group visits to neighborhood.

CLASS: Readings and Reading Journals. Discussion on story and community. Themes and approaching residents and neighborhood groups strategies.

DUE: Group Theme selections and strategies.

*Required:*

Wiese *Places of Their Own* (selection 2)

## **Week 6: Oct 6/8**

### Interviewing 1

FIELD: Identify and first meetings with local groups and/or residents (2 or 3 minimum).

CLASS: Readings discussion and journals. Discuss findings, problems and successes.

DUE: Preliminary question scripts. Readings journal.

#### *Required:*

"On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction." in Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face to Face Behavior*.

Sommer, Barbara and Mary Kay Quinlan "Interview Preparation," Chapter 7 in Sommer, Barbara and Mary Kay Quinlan *The Oral History Manual* (AltaMira Press, 2002).

#### *Recommended:*

Finnegan, Ruth *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices* (Routledge, 1992). Selections.

## **Week 7: Oct 13/15**

### Interview 1

FIELD: First set of interviews (by appointment).

CLASS: Readings and field work discussion.

#### *Required:*

"Model Questions" in Thompson, pp. 296-299.

"The Interview." Ch. 7 in Thompson, pp. 196-216.

"Conducting Interviews" and "Equipment, Processing, and Legal Concerns" in Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, pp. 57-83; 34-56.

**Week 8: Oct 20/22 [NOTE: Diverse Suburb Conference, class presentation this week]**

Interview 2

FIELD: Interviews by appointment.

CLASS: Readings and field work discussion.

*Required:*

Diverse Suburbs/Center for Suburban Studies materials (handout)

**Week 9: Oct 27 [NOTE - No class Oct 29]**

Interview Follow-ups.

FIELD: Second interviews with groups and residents.

CLASS: Readings and field work discussion. Neighborhood representatives invited to attend.

*No readings*

**Week 10: Nov 3/5**

Interview Wrap-ups

FIELD: Final Interviews. "B-roll" work. Visual Work (as and if needed). Begin narrative project planning in group.

CLASS: Group summaries. Narrative proposals.

*No readings*

### **UNIT 3: COMPILATION OF FINDINGS AND PRODUCTION OF FINAL PRESENTATIONS**

#### **Week 11: Nov 10/12**

Methods of Storytelling, Part 1: The Art of Narrative

FIELD/STUDIO: Oral history recordings review, assessment and logging. Continue visual, add'l audio, or other media work (as needed).

CLASS: Story Workshop

*Required:*

Gornick, Vivian *The Situation and the Story: The Art of Personal Narrative* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002)

Craig, David *The Ethics of the Story: Using Narrative Techniques Responsibility in Journalism* (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006)

#### **Week 12: Nov 17/19**

Methods of Storytelling, Part 2:

FIELD/STUDIO: Finalize visual, add'l audio, or other media work (as needed).

CLASS: Group status review and discussions. On the Art of Editing

DUE: Oral History Transcriptions.

*Required:*

Button, Bryce *Nonlinear Editing: Storytelling, Aesthetics, & Craft* (CMP, 2002)

#### **Week 13: Nov 24 [NOTE - No class Nov 26 (Thanksgiving)]**

Works-in-Progress and Ongoing Community Campaigns

FIELD/STUDIO: Final meetings with partner community organizations and leaders; Group editing and documentary piece development.

CLASS: Group editing workshop.

*No readings*

**Week 14: Dec 1/3**

Works in Progress and Ongoing Community Campaigns (continued)

FIELD/STUDIO: Final meetings with partner community organizations and leaders; Group editing and documentary piece development (continued)

CLASS: Class crits of in-progress group work. Class assessment on CUNY and community life.

*Required:*

Olson, R. L. "Sustainability as a Social Vision," *Journal of Social Issues*, 51 (1995), pp. 15-35.

Kubisch, A. C. "Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Lessons in Neighborhood Transformation," *Shelterforce*, Jan./Feb 1996, pp. 8-11, 18.

"Private Memories and Public Presentation: The Art of Oral History" in Grele, pp. 242-283.

**Week 15: Dec 8 [Dec 10 reserved for snow day/reading day]**

CLASS: Pre-showcase run through.

**FINAL SHOWCASE (date TBA)**