"Oral History" is a maddeningly imprecise term: it is used to refer to formal, rehearsed accounts of the past presented by culturally sanctioned tradition-bearers; to informal conversations about "the old days" among family members, neighbors, or coworkers; to printed compilations of stories told about past times and present experiences; and to recorded interviews with individuals deemed to have an important story to tell.

Each of these uses of the term has a certain currency. Unquestionably, most people throughout history have learned about the past through the spoken word. Moreover, for generations history-conscious individuals have preserved others' firsthand accounts of the past for the record, often precisely at the moment when the historical actors themselves, and with them their memories, were about to pass from the scene.

Historians generally consider oral history as beginning with the work of Allan Nevins at Columbia University in the 1940s. Nevins was the first to initiate a systematic and disciplined effort to record on tape, preserve, and make available for future research recollections deemed of historical significance. He conducted his first interview in 1948 with New York civic leader George McAneny, and both the Columbia Oral History Research Office--the largest archival collection of oral history interviews in the world--and the contemporary oral history movement were born.

Early interviewing projects at Columbia and elsewhere tended to focus on the lives of the "elite"--leaders in business, the professions, politics, and social life. But oral history's scope widened in the 1960s and 1970s in response to both the social movements of the period and historians' growing interest in the experiences of "nonelites." Increasingly, interviews have been conducted with blue-collar workers, racial and ethnic minorities, women, labor and political activists, and a variety of local people whose lives typify a given social experience.

To summarize: oral history might be understood as a self-conscious, disciplined conversation between two people about some aspect of the past considered by them to be of historical significance and intentionally recorded for the record.

**Questions:**

1. What is Oral history? (create a definition in your own words)

This brief exercise demonstrates some of the ways that historians interpret oral history and the questions they ask about this source. Of course it is important to consider these interviews in light of other research. The interviews underscore the complexity of history—how each individual, even if from the same region of the country and the same ethnic group, may experience events in different ways. Oral history reminds us that there is not just one true story about the past. At the same time, the narrators share some common stories that tell us about a community’s experiences, beliefs, and struggles and reveal how people over time can develop a collective story about the past.

**Fighting in WW2**

**How do the men interviewed describe the various aspects of their experience?**

Take notes below as you watch the interviews. What larger topics are discussed? (for example, why they join the paratroopers or their experience of boot camp…). What stands out to you during the interview about some of the individual accounts? What common traits stand out to you?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Topics/ Group | Individual Accounts/ Summation  (what stands out to you about the video?) | Common Traits |
|  |  | What did these interviews have in common? |
|  |  |
|  |  |

**Background on the Holocaust**

**Phases of the Holocaust**

1. **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
2. **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
3. **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
4. **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Shoah - Holocaust survivors**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Topics/Person Talking | Individual Accounts/ Summation  (what stands out to you about the video?) | Common Traits |
|  |  | What do these interview have in common? How do these stories help you understand the Holocaust better? |
|  |  |
|  |  |

**Survivor Stories – MAUS II**

1. Describe what happens to the prisoners immediately after arriving at Auschwitz.

* (what is the process that the Germans put the prisoners through?)

1. How do the German’s dehumanize (take away the individuality) the prisoners?

Train conductor interview

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c2I9Ccb520A>

Margaret Henderson

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvdUidtFxAc>