Chad S. A. Gibbs*

Holocaust Legacies and Oral History in the Classroom

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Abstract: Survivor oral histories have helped determine research questions in Holocaust studies and propelled the field's largest archival efforts. With those storytellers now passing at an ever-quickening pace, however, some oral historians are turning to descendants as the faces of memory. These researchers work with descendants to individualize the enormity of Holocaust history in classrooms and for wider audiences. Historians recognize that succeeding generations are not eyewitnesses to the Holocaust, though they can give voice to the lived legacies of genocide. I seek to bring these experiences into my teaching in a way that also produces indelible sources for future research. To this end, I recently began teaching a course called "Holocaust Legacies and Oral History." Students in this class each conduct a recorded interview with a descendant of survivors. Students and professor work as a team to define the historical purposes of our interviews, draft questions, and prepare. This article the results of this class in terms of pedagogies, successes, areas for improvement, and connections created between classroom and community. The methods employed in this class are affordable and usable at virtually any interested institution.

Keywords: oral history; pedagogy; Holocaust Legacies

In many ways, Joe Engel personified Holocaust history and memory for the small American city of Charleston, South Carolina. Over the years, Joe visited classes, gave speeches, made recordings and a documentary film, and even regularly sat on a downtown park bench ready to answer questions wearing a nametag that read "Joe Engel Holocaust Survivor."[1] Engel's tireless work in Holocaust education and his

1 *To Auschwitz and Back: The Joe Engel Story*, DVD/Streaming (Synagogue Emanu-El and Anchor Media Group, Inc., 2017); Adam Parker, "Charleston's Joe Engel, a Holocaust Survivor Who Spread Hope Message in SC, Dies at 95," *The Post and Courier*, November 26, 2022, https://www.postandcourier.com/news/charlestons-joe-engel-a-holocaust-survivor-who-spread-hope-message-in-

***Corresponding author: Chad S. A. Gibbs**, PhD, Assistant Professor and Director, Zucker/Goldberg Center for Holocaust Studies, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC, USA, E-mail: gibbsc@cofc.edu. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0933-7430

wonderful example of love for community and students are legendary in his city. As testament to his impact, Engel's recent funeral attracted hundreds of mourners, nearly every local civic or political leader, and press from near and far. For those at his service and many more who could not make it that day, it was clear that Joe Engel's passing held a significance beyond the lamentable loss of a beloved man who persevered so much and devoted the autumn years of his life to the education of others. For Charleston, Engel's passing also signaled the end of an era.

Though Engel and his fellow survivors leave behind the downtown Charleston Holocaust Memorial, local teaching initiatives, and funds for education, his presence on that park bench remains as irreplaceable for this community as his presence at the dinner table is for family. Steel and concrete cannot hold a conversation. The city's memorial and its street named in Engel's honor are powerless to humanize and individualize the enormity of the Holocaust for those who did not know Joe or other survivors personally. The passing of Engel, and the fact that Charleston's remaining pair of survivors can no longer narrate their experiences, effectively ends the era of the witness in this city. A moment many Holocaust educators, historians, and community organizations have long discussed has now arrived in Charleston.

Myriad books, articles, presentations, and artistic works dealing with the "era of the witness" and the coming age of "post-memory" are testaments to proactive work to envision teaching and research in the absence of survivors and witnesses to the Holocaust.[2] These preparations include initiatives to record survivor histories, to take in their artifacts, and extensive work on technologies that will allow future generations to keep asking survivors questions about their experiences of Nazi genocide for years to come.[3] Despite all of these endeavors, however, the emotional toll inflicted by the passing

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sc-dies-at-95/article_6c5df83a-6dce-11ed-8e50-d33ca9832d93.html; Leonard Pitts, Jr., "We Owe Them Much Better Than This," *The Dominion Post*, November 30, 2022, https://www.dominionpost.com/2022/11/30/we-owe-them-much-better-than-this/.

2 For a sample of the growing body of works on the end of the era of the witness and the coming of post-memory, see Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2006); Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

3 "Last Chance Testimony Collection Initiative," USC Shoah Foundation: The Institute for Visual History and Education, n.d., https://sfi.usc.edu/last-chance; "Dimensions in Testimony," Museum Webpage, Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, accessed January 5, 2023, https://mjhnyc.org/exhibitions/new-dimensions-in-testimony/; Stan Ziv, "How Technology Is Keeping Holocaust Survivor Stories Alive Forever," *Newsweek Magazine*, October 18, 2017, https://www.newsweek.com/2017/10/27/how-technology-keeping-holocaust-survivor-stories-alive-forever-687946.html; "Gathering the Fragments," Museum and Archive Webpage, Yad Vashem: The World Holocaust Remembrance Center, accessed January 6, 2023, https://www.yadvashem.org/gathering-fragments.html; the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is hosting a series of localized artifact collection drives through public events highlighting the importance of donations, for sone example see

of witnesses can only be dealt with once it arrives. As in so many other regards, working with descendants as storytellers of family Holocaust history is one way to deal with the transition to a new era and the leadership of succeeding generations. Descendant involvement in memory work not only seems to help them with the passing of loved ones, in many ways it is also the best path forward for educators seeking to humanize and individualize Holocaust history in their classrooms.

Descendant oral histories offer the voices and means to understand the impact of our transition to the post-memory landscape as just one of their many potential lessons. Furthermore, I find that the inclusion of descendants in Holocaust teaching motivates students to learn this history in ways that are not possible in the standard interface of professor and student. In a course called "Holocaust Legacies and Oral History," students receive brief basic instruction in Holocaust history, training as oral history interviewers, assistance building a rapport and sustained conversation with a descendant of survivors, as well as help conducting their own recorded and permanently archived interview. The following pages describe the goals, course design, materials used, and outcomes of this class.

Existing scholarship and prior oral history projects conducted by others provide a solid basis for this course. Henry Greenspan's article, "The Humanities of Contingency: Interviewing and Teaching Beyond 'Testimony' with Holocaust Survivors" details parts of his long career in teaching and interviewing Holocaust survivors.[4] Greenspan notes that he has consistently sought to get beyond one sided "testimony"—a term he is not entirely comfortable with—and humanize the stories of witnesses, or make them real and interactive. He seeks to create methods of teaching that can turn a survivor monologue into a conversation, or a process of what he calls "learning together" with the interview.[5] As Greenspan notes in his article, many of his interviewees have now passed on. As such, he has used his existing recordings of survivors in his most recent teaching. The Holocaust Legacies and Oral History course described here offers a different path and a turn to new voices with whom students can still "learn together" today.

In this class, learning takes place on both sides of the interview as all involved come away with a greater understanding of the legacies of persecution and genocide and a greater appreciation if the lasting importance of Holocaust history. The interviews students create further preserve this knowledge for interested researchers. While these recordings do create what most scholars will call a testimony, students

"Preserving Holocaust History: Collecting Artifacts and Researching Fates," Museum and Archive Webpage, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d., accessed January 6, 2023.

4 Henry Greenspan, "The Humanities of Contingency: Interviewing and Teaching Beyond 'Testimony' with Holocaust Survivors," *Oral History Review* 46, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2019): 360–79.

5 Greenspan, "The Humanities of Contingency," 363–4.

and their interviewee also go "beyond," as Greenspan suggests, through the learning process outlined in this article. Conversations between student and interviewee are sustained, initially quite informal, driven by what the class decides it wants to know, and motivated by peers and relationships built between interviewer and interviewee.

This course took as its original guide several local interviews created by Lucas Wilson.[6] Wilson conducted audio interviews with survivor descendants as part of his then-ongoing dissertation research. Building on his brief local project, I set out to design a recurring course that would center student creation of lasting, archive-quality oral history interviews while bringing our community members into the class. In this area, the course follows in the footsteps of the Montreal Life Stories project, though on a much smaller scale in comparison.[7] In that effort, Steven High and colleagues conducted hundreds of interviews with genocide and atrocity survivors in Montreal, Canada. Their work moved beyond the tried-and-true academic collection of oral histories to include community members both as interviewers and as the primary agents in dissemination of recordings.[8] In its modest way, this course also moves beyond the standard academic mold by making students the interviewers and granting to them what High calls "shared authority" in the process of question writing and interview preparation.[9] In this same vein, this course project also shares authority normally held by the professor with its community member interviewees as co-learners and co-teachers of Holocaust legacies and the importance of the inherited past.

The stories told by the descendants of survivors and the process of meeting a real person beyond the walls of the campus are the greatest motivators for students. Students take that relationship quite seriously and relish the opportunity to contribute to research as opposed assignments they might think have no lasting significance or role. In these ways, the Holocaust Legacies and Oral History course

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6 Lucas Wilson, "Transmission of Trauma: Legacies of the Holocaust," *Studying the South: College of Charleston Program in Southern Studies* (blog), May 28, 2019, https://blogs.cofc.edu/southern-studies-minor/2019/05/28/transmission-of-trauma-legacies-of-the-holocaust/; Wilson's oral histories are available digitally through the Lowcountry Digital Library (LCDL) at https://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/. The LCDL is a project of the College of Charleston's Addlestone Library Special Collections. Using his name as a search term will retrieve all the interviews.

7 For information on the Montreal Life Stories project, see Steven C. High, *Oral History at the Crossroads: Sharing Life Stories of Survival and Displacement*, Shared, Oral & Public History Series (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014); "About, COHDS-CHORN: Center for Oral History and Digital Storytelling," accessed July 13, 2023, https://storytelling.concordia.ca/about-us-2/.

8 High, *Oral History at the Crossroads*, 9–12.

9 High credits the historian Michael Frisch for coining this term, see High, *Oral History at the Crossroads*, 7; Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990).

fulfills the dual goals of educating enrolled students and simultaneously building a new archive capable of contributing to academic work in fields related to memory, generational knowledge, and historical legacies. The outcomes of this course are inexpensively replicable at other institutions interested in creating new oral histories, finding novel ways of teaching the Holocaust, and for educators seeking to demonstrate the lasting impacts and importance of historical events. At the top level, the goals of this course are several and my intent is always that they will be useful to students inside and outside the disciplines of history or Jewish studies.

1 Intended Student Learning Outcomes

Student learning outcomes focus heavily on communications skills, historical content knowledge, and self-management of a single large project. The course develops tools well beyond the scope of Holocaust history, even though learning in that area remains the core goal. Means of delivering content knowledge start in a standard lecture format for a brief period at the very beginning of the course. This opening has its rewards and drawbacks, though it cannot be avoided at my institution. As a smaller school with limited class offerings, a prerequisite is not possible. Because of this, I need to begin with a historical content introduction comprehensive enough make the class accessible to students who have not taken a Holocaust history course.

The syllabus states four course objectives, starting with the intent to teach students the techniques of oral historical practice.[10] The second objective centers the archival process by stating the goal of metadata preparation and transcript creation. This signals to students that the work they are creating has a lasting impact—their interviews will be archived and remain useful long after our class ends. The final pair of objectives, or student learning outcomes, center the interpersonal relationship between interviewer and interviewee and preparation for their final assignment, presentation of their interview to the class and a description of what they learned as well as the process.

These last two objectives highlight intent to help develop student skills in areas beyond the historical discipline and content-specific knowledge in Holocaust studies. Good presentation skills and the ability to provide post-analysis of one's own work are valuable in a myriad of post-collegiate careers. This same versatility is present in the goal of interpersonal growth through the building of rapport and comfortability between interviewer and interviewee. Of course, all four of these goals follow the

10 Chad S.A. Gibbs, "JWST 300: Holocaust Legacies and Oral History Syllabus," Spring 2022, https://holocaustcenter.cofc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/JWST-300-Holocaust-Legacies-and-Oral-History-V4.pdf.

statement that this class starts from the topic-specific learning priorities of a class focused on the legacies of the Holocaust. These narrower subject-based priorities are not specifically stated, though they become readily apparent through the content of the course, assignments, readings, and the core subjects of student interviews.

2 Course Organization, Class Management, and Materials Assigned

From the first meeting of this course, I stress that I want to develop a responsive, collaborative environment for students. We sit in a circle, eschew formality, and I make it clear that the syllabus, interview process, and scheduling will be entirely open to their input and ideas for change. In this, I am attempting to build with them the sort of shared authority Steven High suggests. The attempt to develop such an environment, however, is the reason I call the early lecture portion of this course a drawback. Though the lectures deliver the content knowledge needed as a starting point for those who have not taken a Holocaust history class, this phase of the course also sets the unfortunate precedent of the professor doing most of the talking in the earliest meetings. Getting beyond that precedent and motivating equal discussion co-ownership of the directions of that course thereafter can be a challenge.

In the first iteration of this course, meetings took place for one hour per day on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday of a 15-week semester calendar.[11] In the early weeks, there is little difference between these days, though this changes greatly as students get further into the interview process. As they work on pre-interview discussions with their assigned interviewee, Fridays become a space to talk about what they are learning and to workshop any issues with peers and professor and learn together from the process. During the actual interview phase of the class, two of the three weekly class meetings are canceled as a means to give students back their time to conduct the interview and provide them additional scheduling flexibility. The course meets once a week during the interviewing phase for students to provide progress reports to the class and discuss any issues. Thereafter, the final weeks focus on archival preparation, instruction on final presentation requirements, and then the presentations themselves.

Reading assignments are light in this course, but they are quite important for student development and discussion. Assigned texts in the early on cover basic Holocaust history, survivor lives after the Holocaust, and the voices of the second and

11 We have a sixteenth week, but it is only one day long and generally used for finals preparation or summation of course discussions.

third generations after the Shoah.[12] Excerpts from a pair of texts truly helped get discussions moving in the course and set an engaged, cooperative tone. Esther Jilovsky, Jordana Silverstein, and David Slucki's edited volume *In the Shadows of Memory: The Holocaust and the Third Generation* provide important context for our discussions of what to expect and what to ask in interviews with the grandchildren of survivors.[13] Following this, our best roundtable discussions emerged from use of Alan L. Berger and Naomi Berger's edited volume *Second Generation Voices: Reflections by Children of Holocaust Survivors and Perpetrators.*[14]

Second Generation Voices allowed the course to discuss examples of possible stories and personal attachment to Holocaust history that might emerge in student interviews. In use of both volumes, individual students read and represent their own individually assigned section in class. This helps students prepare to speak about their interviewee and their process later on. In Berger and Berger's text, at least two students read each descendant story so that our discussion of these sources could feature differing reader points of view. I should also note that I did not assign any portions of the book written by the descendants of perpetrators as that is beyond the scope and intent of the course. After these preparatory readings and opening discussions, the course focuses on the practice of oral history and interviewing guidelines created by the USC Shoah Foundation.[15] At this same time, students are assigned interviewees and we turn toward the tasks of question creation and rapport-building.

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12 Other course readings include excerpts from Christopher R. Browning, "The Nazi Empire," in *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 407–25; Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, Third edition, Oxford Oral History Series (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015); Françoise Ouzan, *How Young Holocaust Survivors Rebuilt Their Lives: France, the United States, and Israel*, Publications of the Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center, Book 193 (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, Office of Scholarly Publishing, Herman B Wells Library, 2018); Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Rebecca Clifford, *Survivors: Children's Lives after the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).

13 Jordana Silverstein, David Slucki, and Esther Jilovsky, eds., *In the Shadows of Memory*, First published in paperback in 2021 (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2021). Though we have never met and did not collaborate on the use of this text or creation of this course, David Slucki is coincidentally my predecessor at the College of Charleston.

14 Alan L. Berger and Naomi Berger, eds., *Second Generation Voices: Reflections by Children of Holocaust Survivors and Perpetrators*, 1st ed, Religion, Theology, and the Holocaust (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 2001).

15 "Interviewer Guidelines" (USC Shoah Foundation – The Institute for Visual History and Education, October 2020), copy in possession of the author; Joan Ringelheim et al., "United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Oral History Interview Guidelines" (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1998), USHMM, http://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20121003-oral-history-interview-guide.pdf.

3 Interviewee Volunteers: Identities, Strengths, Silences, and Building Relationships

After a period of two weeks acquainting students with a broad overview of Holocaust history and the types of victim-survivor family experiences they may encounter, the course next moves to a week on the history of Holocaust oral histories. This area of the class helps students understand when movements to record histories began, and why as well as when people tend to become interested in telling their own stories. This exploration begins with Holocaust survivors, or the first generation, and the earliest interviews conducted by Vasily Grossman while the war was still raging.[16] Gaining an understanding of how practitioners have and have not employed oral history from wartime to the present helps students see where their interviews fit in this timeline and the importance of their work. This should be a motivating portion of the course where students can start to see themselves as professionals working toward a necessary purpose.

As the class next prepares to meet interviewees, discussion turns to identities, bias, and our own archival silences.[17] In this area it is most important to develop understandings of what might be lost history through the absence of those who chose not to participate. All interviewees are, and always should be, persons who volunteered to take part. As such, we can be almost certain that they are motivated to tell the story of their families and to talk about their own connections to Holocaust history. Of course, this means that we lack stories that might be told by those who are not interested in this task or do not have any desire to take it on publicly. By addressing these facts, it is possible to support an "active engagement [with] and questioning of silences," as Alexander Freund suggests in his chapter of *Oral History*

16 My own work on Treblinka acquainted me with Vasily Grossman's pioneering role in the collection of oral history interviews as he assembled the first history of that place in 1944, see Vasily Grossman, *The Hell of Treblinka*, Reprint Edition (Lexington, KY: Martin Zwinkler, 2015); Tony Kushner's article from *Oral History* summarizes the late turn to survivor oral histories in the field of Holocaust studies after Grossman, see Tony Kushner, "Oral History at the Extremes of Human Experience: Holocaust Testimony in a Museum Setting," *Oral History* 29, no. 2 (Autumn 2001): 83–94; Lynn Abrams also discusses the history of Holocaust survivor oral histories, see Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 154.

17 In this area I am particularly inspired by Ann Laura Stoler's analysis of how the Dutch colonial archive itself can reveal the priorities of its creators. In the case of who does and who does not come forward to tell a descendant story, communities can in some ways reveal what is valued and what is considered taboo. Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

Off the Record.[18] Fruitful class discussions center on who takes part in such a project, who does not, and why. Though we cannot replace the voices that do not enter the conversation, this part of the course prompts a confrontation with what is left out of the class and the archive it creates.

As a component of these discussions, students should examine the biographies and demographics of all interviewees and try to offer their own understanding of what experiences, ages, genders, identities, and other characteristics are not present. Part of this conversation hinges on understanding why volunteers skew older, and what this will mean for the archive. One important takeaway for students, here, is the knowledge that their interviews can only tell the stories of those who decided to take part. Opening this discussion with students offers space to examine why the survivors themselves were also older by the time many took on the task of writing or otherwise narrating their own histories. As oral historians and theorists point out, people tend to confront these tasks in their later years as they look back and conduct their own "life review," or personal narration and evaluation of the life they have lived to that point.[19] These later years are also when many find the urge to leave behind a message or contribution to future generations. Of course, while the phase of life may be the most important factor in when people choose to give an interview or write a memoir, time and scheduling are also important. Retirees have more time to take calls and Zoom sessions with college students.

In the first run of this course, the networking help of an active community member[20] who sought volunteers helped push the average age younger than expected. Their help also meant that we did not only interview individuals with a long history of speaking publicly about the Holocaust. Some, in fact, had never told these stories at all and even reported learning more about their own families as they prepared to be interviewed. One of my goals for this class was to give students the chance to compare interviews and narratives of persons well prepared to speak about their family past and others who were not so ready for the task. This is why I did not only fill the class with interviewees from a local group of

18 Alexander Freund, "Toward an Ethics of Silence? Negotiating Off-the-Record Events and Identity in Oral History," in *Oral History Off the Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 223–38, 235.

19 Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, Third edition, Oxford Oral History Series (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 27; in Holocaust studies particularly, the age of interviewees can tend to be older as individuals delay the telling of such difficult family stories until motivated at a later age to "tell before it was too late," just as did the survivors themselves, see Nolan Reilly, Alexander Freund, and Kristina R. Llewellyn, eds., *The Canadian Oral History Reader*, Carleton Library Series 231 (Montreal; Kingston; London; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 243.

20 I would like to thank Keren Ayalon for her help finding interview volunteers for this class and her general support of the project.

survivor descendants who were, and remain, very eager to help with this work.[21] The inclusion of novice speakers also allows the process of learning to better reflect the two-way dynamic favored by Greenspan. The 15 interviewees of the first run of the course were about evenly divided between experienced storytellers and new voices. Students were not told which interviewees were experienced storytellers so that their preparation would not vary on account of this difference.

That very preparation through sustained conversation with the interviewee also began at this time in about the fourth or fifth week of the class. As we discussed the history of oral history in class, each student was assigned an interviewee. In general, these pairings were random though, when possible, students and the interviewee were of the same sex.[22] For a few students, I was also able to assign matches that contained like interests or similar backgrounds. In one case, for example, a student studying to be a nurse and already commuting between a hospital job and campus life was assigned to interview a medical professional. In another, a prelaw student matched with an interviewee in the legal profession.

4 Pre-Interview Rapport and Relationship Building

Once assigned their interviewee, students begin a conversation with them and learn whatever biographical information they can as a means to write targeted interview

21 The Charleston Jewish Federation's Remember Program Speakers Bureau helps connect teachers and community organizations with survivors and their descendants as visitors to schools in person or via Zoom. The group maintains a list of prepared speakers from the second and third generations after the Holocaust. As practiced members of this organization, their storytelling is quite different from someone first discussing family history as the interview unfolds. "Holocaust Education Speakers Bureau" (The Remember Program, Charleston Jewish Federation), accessed January 8, 2023, https://cdn.fedweb.org/fed-54/2/Speaker%2527s%2520Bureau%25202022.pdf.

22 In my own work, I have come to believe interviews between individuals of the same sex can be more fruitful. I believe this is less likely to be an issue in descendant interviews than I discovered it was in my work with survivor interviews, though I elected to continue the practice of assigning same sex interviewer/interviewee pairings as a matter of course when possible. A recent fellowship presentation at the USC-Dornsife Center for Advanced Genocide Studies charts the Shoah Foundation's history and interviewer training on this question, see Carli Snyder, "Questions of Gender and Sexuality in Interviewer Trainings and Testimonies" (Katz Fellowship Presentation, University of Southern California, January 2023); for my own work regarding interviewer/interviewee gender, see Chad S.A. Gibbs, "Locating Women in the Revolt: Gender and Spaces of Resistance at Treblinka" (Fellowship Presentation, University of Southern California, September 29, 2020), https://dornsife.usc.edu/cagr-news/news/2020/10/29146-chad-gibbs-lectures-women-and-spaces-resistance-treblinka.

questions. This practice also helps undergraduate students gain a bit of confidence and self-assuredness for the interview itself. If they go in cold, so-to-speak, the interview exchange can tend to be awkward, especially at first. The notable drawback of pre-interview conversations is what this can do to the interview itself. Inexperienced interviewers could say things like "as we talked about before" and leave out a part of their story on the day of the recorded interview. Covering this danger in class did work, however, and while interview recordings do occasionally mention previous conversations, they did not leave out the content of those earlier discussions.

For younger undergraduate students conducting their first oral history, the benefits of the pre-interview discussion process far outweigh the drawbacks. Instructors might also prepare students to say things like, "could you please hold the rest of that story for the day we record," and have them ready to ask "could you please tell us the story you told me last week," when they notice something from prior conversation being left out. Though one rarely hears evidence of prior conversations like this in the major oral history archives, this aspect of the class is an added strength overall. The comfortability of both people shows in the interview and helps the student conduct the process with less anxiety.

The pre-interview series of conversations not only helps with student nervousness, it also forms the strongest basis for the creation of individualized questions. In interviews for the USC Shoah Foundation, this same goal is accomplished by a lengthy form called the Pre-Interview Questionnaire (PIQ).[23] The PIQ tells the interviewer about the interviewee's experiences and allows them to take the basic questions asked of any Holocaust survivor and mold them to the person's unique path. In this course, student notes taken in their conversations before the interview fill the same role. Throughout the time students are building their rapport outside of class, they are—as a group—building their list of questions in-class, practicing the art of the interview in classroom, mock interviews, and discussing interview ethics.[24] An assignment around this time also asks students to critique one of the interviews already in the archive.

All of these activities help students prepare for the interview and settle into their role. Every Friday of our weekly schedule in this period centered on short presentations by each student about what they had most recently discussed with their interviewees. After each student spoke, classmates could then make suggestions that

23 "Survivor Pre-Interview Questionnaire" (USC Shoah Foundation – The Institute for Visual History and Education, October 12, 2012), https://sfi.usc.edu/collecting.

24 In our ethics portion of the course, we review the Oral History Association' Principles and Best Practices in class and an article by Valerie Yow, see "Principles and Best Practices," Oral History Association, October 2009, https://oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices-revised-2009/; Valerie Yow, "Ethics and Interpersonal Relationships in Oral History Research," *The Oral History Review* 22, no. 1 (Summer 1995): 55–66.

might help formulate interview questions or drive the topics of further talks with their interviewee. Devoting all of our Friday sessions to this process helped build a class-wide teamwork ethic that allowed all students to feel involved in the interviews done by others. At the same time, these Friday report back sessions also helped keep students motivated to have new material to deliver each week, thus helping along their pre-interview conversations.

5 Creating and Ordering Questions and "the Charleston Method"

Our Friday conversations and pre-interview relationship building largely determined the design of the standard questions. Students became deeply involved with this work and took ownership of what we, at first in jest and later seriously, began to call the Charleston Method. That method builds from the process of pre-interview familiarity and asks first about the individual being interviewed. Questioning only moves to an interviewee's family Holocaust history after they have been asked to talk about their own life, how and when they learned about the Holocaust, and where they see its influence in their path and choices. The Charleston Method, or asking about present lives and legacies before asking about family histories, helps draw out the experiences of descendants and focuses the majority of interview time on the lived legacies of the Holocaust. This is not what most interviewees expected of the recording.

This method does not mean concealing the actual focus of the interview from participants. Subjects are informed in advance that the oral history will center on their life and their lived experiences of growing up in a family with a Holocaust survival history as well as how this has or has not been a part of their adult years. Still, Holocaust survivor descendants are at least somewhat conditioned to believe that the most important thing they can relate to an archival project is not their own life story, but rather that of their survivor ancestor. As such, descendants tend to come to interviews expecting to tell mostly, if not entirely, family history with little emphasis on their own lives and relationships to Holocaust history. This, in and of itself, is a finding of this class.

Flipping the order of expectations, as we came to call the Charleston Method, helped emphasize to survivor descendants that they were the person and the story of interest. As one might expect, those with more experience telling the family story were the ones most surprised by the order of questions. Students spent the majority of interview time and questions on the life of the descendant face to face with them (be that physically or by Zoom) and only went to the family's history before and

during the Holocaust toward the end of the recording. Another benefit of this method is that interviewees talk more about themselves when questions are given in this order before any fatigue sets in. Naturally, the desire to tell family Holocaust history for the archival recording also helps push back against this normal wane of the interview when that part of the story is held for later in the process.

Completed interviews averaged 1.5 h in length, with outliers at 45 minutes and almost 3 h at either end of the scale. Our course came back together after students had completed their interviews to teach transcript creation, archival formatting, and to prepare for final presentations. The last major task of the class for each student was a seven-minute talk on their interview with their suggestions for improvements in the next round of the class. Each and every student was so excited to share their results that they went well over time and extra days were needed.

My students were highly motivated—beyond anything I have seen before—by the idea that their work would not result in just another paper to gather dust in a professor's drawer. As they put it, it was work that mattered. They produced the bulk of their interviews over three weeks in which we met only once per week. As many students interviewed younger working adults with busy schedules—and because long interviews can get stale—they were asked not to go beyond one-hour sessions at a time. The one class meeting each week during the interview timeframe again consisted of the short presentations mentioned above, where students could workshop issues or tell us about the things they were learning.

On the last day of our course, it was clear that the relationships students built with their interviewee would, in some cases, go on long after our class. It was also evident that many had gained greater motivation as students of this material and learned more about the Holocaust in discussions with their interviewee than I could ever hope to deliver in a standard lecture course. I plan to regularly repeat this offering and continue building the oral history archive it helps create into a destination repository for student-centered descendant oral histories. If researchers come to these sources with the right questions, there is every reason to believe these student interviews will prove valuable to the evolving understandings of Holocaust legacies and their impacts upon the present generations of survivor descendants.

6 Conclusions

Even as the era of the witness and efforts to record survivor testimonies near an end, none of the major Holocaust oral history archives has yet turned its efforts toward the recording of second and third generation narratives. While that does stand out as something of a missed opportunity and unmet need, there are many initiatives working to bring second and third generations into the work of Holocaust memory

and education. Avinoam Patt's "In Our Own Words" project interviewing descendants is of importance in this area as are programs that center the children and grandchildren of survivors at museums and local Jewish organizations.[25] Educators and community groups clearly see a need to bring in the second and third generations as co-teachers and co-learners as a means to individualize, or personalize the enormity of Holocaust history. At this point, however, descendant oral histories are comparatively and, perhaps surprisingly, few.

As an oral history practitioner and Holocaust historian, I recognize that the sources created by students in this course will not often be the best material to research the events of the Shoah itself or of the lived experiences of survivor ancestors. No attempt to represent these interviews as such should be read in this article. I would hope that other sources exist such as an interview recorded by the survivor ancestor or other documentation to support the familial recollections of descendants would exist for these purposes. This archive is not an attempt to ventriloquize survivors after their passing. Instead, these interviews record what descendants know of their survival inheritance, how they came to learn that knowledge, and how the history of the Holocaust remains an important formative element in their own lives and identities. This course is also novel in that it simultaneously records the curiosities and priorities of students in this generation. As each cohort of the course will have the same shared authority to help write their own questions, build their own relationships, and begin conversations, this archive will always reflect the priorities of descendants and undergraduate students in the moment of recording.

It is my hope that such classes might appear at other institutions and that wider projects in the recording of descendant oral histories take shape. The Holocaust Legacies and Oral History course, as designed, is inexpensive and easier to implement in the new world of Zoom communication. At colleges and universities that have subscriptions to the Zoom, there is effectively no equipment purchase

25 "Avinoam Patt, Literatures, Cultures, and Languages," University of Connecticut, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Literatures, Cultures and Languages Department, https://languages.uconn.edu/person/avinoam-patt/; In Our Own Words Interview Archive, Greenberg Center, University of Hartford; for Patt's description of his own work creating this archival collection, refer to his chapter in a forthcoming volume co-edited by Boaz Cohen, Wolf Gruner, Thomas Pegelow-Kaplan, and Miriam Offer, see Avinoam Patt, "And You Shall Tell Your Children: Memory, Post-Memory, and the Future of Holocaust Testimony," in *Future of Holocaust Testimonies*, Forthcoming (pre-press copy of this chapter graciously provided to the author by Avinoam Patt). For one example museum effort to place the voices of second and third generation descendant at the forefront, see "2G/3G," Holocaust Museum LA, accessed January 10, 2023, https://www.holocaustmuseumla.org/2g-3g; for a list of second and third generation initiatives, see the materials gathered by 3GNY, a major New York area organization of survivor grandchildren. "Resources," 3GNY, accessed January 10, 2023, https://www.3gny.org/resources.

necessary. We recorded all of our interviews in this manner, retaining only the audio file to cut server costs. Another benefit of this manner of recording is the fact that students need not actually sit with their interviewee. As a small city, we will eventually run out of local descendants to interview, and the Zoom format will allow us to continue further afield when we do.

The benefits of the course and archive to students, the college, our local community are immense and replicable in other places. This class offers the chance for one-on-one learning about the Holocaust and its legacies in the present in ways the professor alone cannot accomplish. Student course evaluations indicate the relationship with their interviewee and the lasting contribution their discussions would make were highly motivational. Outside the classroom, this course made it possible for our Jewish Studies program to include community members as co-teachers, something they greatly appreciated. Of course, the archive itself can contribute to understandings of Holocaust legacies, descendant lives, and how students relate to these topics.

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