

## Teachers College, Columbia University

### **Harlem Stories: Oral History and Digital Tools**

A&HH 5051

Spring 2017

Horace Mann 436

Wednesdays 5:10-6:50 pm (and other times as listed below)

Professor Ansley Erickson

[erickson@tc.columbia.edu](mailto:erickson@tc.columbia.edu)

Office hours Tuesday 4 to 6 pm and Wednesdays 12 to 1 pm

334G Horace Mann

Schedule appointments at [proferickson.youcanbook.me](http://proferickson.youcanbook.me)

### ***Course Description and Purpose***

This course offers a collaborative inquiry into the history of education in Harlem, an introduction to oral history as a method of historical research, and practice with creating digital exhibits as a mode of sharing historical knowledge. This course is one aspect of Teachers College's *Educating Harlem* project, which focuses on the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century Harlem. The course is also part of Barnard College's *Harlem Semester*, which makes Harlem-focused courses available to students across the university.

To encourage collaboration and intensive discussion, as well as public events to share and build on our research, we make two Harlem schools the focus of our work. Wadleigh High School – and the institutions that succeeded it in its grand neoclassical building on 114<sup>th</sup> St. and Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard – offers a microcosm of the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century Harlem. Wadleigh has changed in form and constituency over the decades, from its turn-of-the-century origins as a predominantly white elite academic school for girls, to a high school serving black, white, and Puerto Rican students with a largely white teaching force in the decades around World War II, to a predominantly black co-ed junior high school after 1957, with black leadership and faculty by the early 1970s. In the last 15 years, the school has again shifted in response to broader educational currents in the city and nation, with a new small high school, and now a charter middle school, sharing the Wadleigh building. Our oral histories of Wadleigh alumni and students are made possible via collaboration with the Wadleigh Alumni Association and the school's librarian, Mr. Paul McIntosh.

While Wadleigh was a New York City public school, the Modern School was an independent educational institution in Harlem that operated in Harlem from the 1930s to the 1990s. Influenced by pedagogically progressive educational approaches in circulation in the early part of the century, the Modern School served many middle-class and elite residents of Harlem's Sugar Hill neighborhood. Our oral histories on the Modern School are made possible via a collaboration with While We Are Still Here, an organization documenting the history of Edgecombe Avenue in Sugar Hill.

Wadleigh and the Modern School can illuminate key questions about the crucial public enterprise of schooling in Harlem. What did Harlem residents and community members want from their schools, and how did they pursue these goals? How did residents from different perspectives –middle-class, working-class, and poor residents, teachers, students, parent leaders, of various heritages - perceive their schools and their community, and how did these perceptions change over time? How did schools and community interact? How did citywide education policy and politics affect Harlem schools, and how did they respond? How have various Harlem constituents kept and attached meaning to their schools and their histories, in the context of U.S. racism and inequality?

Our work will be public in two ways. The products of our efforts – both oral history interviews and digital exhibits – may become part of the [Educating Harlem Digital Collection](#), a public repository of primary sources and interpretive exhibits, which is part of the [Educating Harlem](#) project. And we will contribute as interviewers and participants in a day-long event on the Modern School's history (tentatively scheduled for April 21) and in another event for Wadleigh, still in the planning stages.

Doing this work requires building collective knowledge and skill in three areas. These are not separate sections of the course, but instead are interwoven through the course schedule:

- 1) The history of Harlem and of its schools. Schools do not function in isolation, but operate and gain meaning in relationship to the communities they serve. We will read in the existing secondary literature on Harlem, New York City schools, and related areas, to think about Wadleigh, The Modern School, and their contexts.
- 2) Oral history practice. How does learning about the past from oral testimony differ from learning about the past from other sources? What particular opportunities, and cautions, are involved? How do matters of identity and inequality appear in the practice of oral history? How do historians interpret oral history evidence? Using readings in oral history method as well as class exercises to practice preparing for, conducting, and interpreting oral history, we will become familiar with and practice this approach to historical research.
- 3) Digital presentation of historical materials and analysis. Creating digital collections and historical exhibits requires skill with digital platforms, digital archiving issues such as metadata, and writing for broader audiences, all of which we will work on in this course. It also engages core challenges in historical representation – what does it mean to tell someone else's story? What modes or media convey history best? These are issues we will confront and discuss throughout the semester. The Educating Harlem project is working with [Omeka](#) and [Neatline](#), but students with skill (or desire to develop skill) in other platforms or media are invited, with consultation, to design projects in these.

The course does not presume prior expertise in the history of education, oral history, or in digital work in history. There are no prerequisites, although a willingness to read extensively

and critically is required, as is a reflective disposition toward historical sources and a critical attention to the strengths and limits of one's own responses to them.

For future teachers, the main mode of learning about historical inquiry and historical pedagogy in this class is through practice – through the work of conducting historical research and reflecting upon it. However, final project options include opportunities for future teachers to draw on this work to design a curriculum unit they believe will be of use in their own teaching.

*Required texts:*

These texts are available at bookculture, 536 W. 112th St., and on reserve at the Gottesman Library. Additional articles and book chapters are available via Course Reserves, and marked below with an **R**, or are available in our class Google Drive folder, marked with a **G**. Please bring all readings for the week to class.

Barbara Ransby. *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

James Haskins. *Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher* (New York: New Press, 2008, reissue of 1968 original)

Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006)

Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts, *Harlem is Nowhere* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 2013)

***Schedule of Meetings and Readings***

We will use Google Drive as an electronic repository for some course readings and materials (beyond the E-reserve system via the library) as well as for assignments. We have a [folder for our class](#) that will contain this syllabus (and revisions to it) and other relevant readings and links. I will create an individual folder for each student, which can accessed only by you and me. You will turn in work by placing your files in your individual folder; I will comment on them inside the folder.

**Week 1 – Jan. 18      Introduction to the Course**

In class:            Syllabus review and discussion  
Harlem, narratives, and digital presentations of history

In class:            “[Barbara Wilson-Brooks’ Harlem Community](#)”, Educating Harlem  
Digital Collection exhibit  
“We had everything we needed right there” Educating Harlem Digital  
Collection exhibit, in progress

*Please bring your laptop and headphones.*



Due: *Short paper #1, on readings weeks 2-4, due to Google Drive folder*

\* *Narrative opportunity*: “Los Sures,” documentary on Williamsburg, Brooklyn, February 15, 7 pm, Milbank Chapel.

**Week 6 – Feb. 22      Struggles to Reinvent Harlem Schools**

Readings: Back, Adina “The Harlem Nine,” in Theoharis and Woodward, *Freedom North* **R**  
Ransby, *Ella Baker*, Intro, Chapters 1, 3, 5, 12

**Week 7 – Mar. 1      *No class meeting – replaced by walking tour participation.***

**Week 8 – Mar. 8      Synthesizing and mapping Harlem**

Due: *Short paper #2, on readings weeks 5&6, via email before class*

Readings: White, [“What is Spatial History?”](#)

*Light reading week – get a jump start on heavy reading for weeks 9 through 11*

***Spring Break – No class Mar. 15***

**Week 9 – Mar. 22      Oral History as Method**

Readings: Perks and Thomson, Part I, all. **R**  
Columbia Center for Oral History Guidelines at  
[http://library.columbia.edu/content/dam/libraryweb/locations/ohro/CCOH Three-Page.pdf](http://library.columbia.edu/content/dam/libraryweb/locations/ohro/CCOH%20Three-Page.pdf)

In class: Planning our oral history project design  
Thinking about space and oral history

**Week 10 – Mar. 29      Oral History – Group Interview**

Readings: Perks and Thomson, Part II, Introduction and Ch.10 and 12 **R**

One additional, complete transcribed interview of your choice, from Columbia (to read in the library)  
(<http://library.columbia.edu/find/oral-history-portal.html>)

or a digital archive, such as:

<http://oralhistory.nypl.org/neighborhoods/harlem>

[http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/civil\\_rights.html](http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/civil_rights.html)

<http://www.crmvet.org/nars/narshome.htm>

Note that the interview does NOT have to pertain to Harlem.

- In class: “Fishbowl” interview – Conducted by Ansley Erickson with Stephanie Jennings
- Due: Short paper #3 – Critical listening to one oral history interview of your choice, from options above.
- Week 11 – Apr. 5 Oral History – Analysis, Interpretation, Contributions**
- Reading: Perks and Thompson, Part III, Introduction and Ch. 24, 25 **R**  
Perks and Thompson, Part I, Ch. 8 and Part IV, Ch. 27 **R**  
Faulkenbury, T. Evan, and Aaron Hayworth. “The Carolina Gay Association, Oral History, and Coming Out at the University of North Carolina,” *Oral History Review* 43(2016): 115-137 **R**
- In class: Oral history as evidence  
Digital recording equipment – set-up and use
- Week 12 – Apr. 12 Digital Storytelling and Oral History: Planning a Project in Omeka and Neatline**
- No reading: interviews (individually or in community events) conducted this week or next*
- In class: Approaches to presenting oral history in Omeka and Neatline
- Due: Oral history research memo (see additional guidelines in **G**)
- Week 13 – Apr. 19 Oral history clip-sharing and analysis**
- Due: Identify 1 or 2 audio segments from your interview to share with the class. Instructions to be distributed in class.
- NOTE: Please come prepared to share clips if you have completed your interview. If you have not yet, you can share clips on 5/3.*
- Due: Digital storytelling project proposals due AND/OR Curriculum unit proposals due (if relevant)
- NOTE: If you are conducting your interview after this date, please feel free to wait to submit your proposal after your interview.*
- \* Community and final project event – Friday, April 21 The Modern School Intergenerational Reunion and Oral History Gathering, 9 am to 3 pm \**

**Week 14 – Apr. 26**    **No class meeting (replaced by community event participation)**

Due:                    Complete interview transcription

**Week 15 – May 3**    **Final project presentations**

Due:                    Sharing work in progress  
                              - oral history clips for those who have not yet shared  
                              - digital exhibits in progress

Class dinner after presentations.

*Final digital exhibit due by May 10, midnight.*

### **Assignments (due as indicated in schedule above)**

Students enrolled for 2 points must complete assignment 1 and 2 and their choice of ONE among 3, 4, or 5. Grades will be calculated out of 80 possible points.

Students enrolled for 3 points must complete assignment 1 and 2 and their choice of TWO assignments among 3, 4, or 5. Grades will be calculated out of 110 possible points.

- 1) Three short papers (c. 1000 words each) as described on the schedule above. The first two papers will draw on material from more than one week of the relevant readings, develop a theme that connects the readings to one another or relate them to an area of your own professional or scholarly interest. The third paper will focus on a critical reading of an oral history interview. Due on the dates specified on the syllabus above. – 10 points each, 30 points total
- 2) Experiential learning about Harlem – 10 points each, 20 points total
  - a. Walking tour & reflection. *Via Harlem Semester, we are able to participate in a thematic walking tour of Harlem led by [walker and writer Garnette Cadogan](#). There will be tours (at specific times TBD) on Saturday and Sunday March 4 and 5, and Saturday and Sunday April 1 and 2. You are required to attend one of these walks (and you may choose to attend more). Sign-up will be available in a few weeks. [Detailed assignment for reflection on the walking tour here](#). Reflection will be due no more than 2 weeks after the tour.*
  - b. Narrative reflection. *Via the Harlem Semester as well as via our TC and NYC networks, we have opportunities to think about how historians, oral historians, and oral history participants, as well as artists, writers, and others, structure the narratives they tell. To further your thinking in this respect, you are required to view/visit/attend/read at least one of the following “narratives” about Harlem (or other NYC neighborhoods or lives) here. Some are indicated on the syllabus with*

*particular dates and times; some are available throughout the course of the semester.*  
[Reflection assignment details here](#), due no more than 2 weeks after you attend your selected event.

- i. “Palante, Siempre Palante!” (1996) documentary on the Young Lords, screening Jan. 22, 5pm, Maysles Documentary Center (\$)
  - ii. “I Remember Harlem,” (1981) documentary film – screening Jan. 27, Barnard College Held Auditorium and on reserve at Barnard Library. (free)
  - iii. [Kerry James Marshall retrospective at The Met Breuer](#), through Jan. 29 (free with your student ID).
  - iv. “The Harrises of Harlem” photo exhibit - Opens 1/27, Closes 2/28 Gallery Hours: Monday-Friday, 10-5, Saturday, 1-5; [Rio III Gallery](#), 898 Saint Nicholas Ave, Fl 9th, New York, New York 10032  
 “...Documents a Harlem culture that is being gradually displaced, some say erased, by the forces of gentrification... The images [are] quietly jubilant, evidence of endurance in the face of adversity.” — Emily Raboteau, The New Yorker
  - v. Weeksville (Brooklyn) Education Oral History Listening Event - <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/education-as-community-building-a-listening-session-discussion-tickets-31336005837>
  - vi. “Los Sures” documentary film (1984) – screening Feb. 15 at TC, Milbank Chapel (free)
  - vii. “The 1970s” and “Breaking the Wall” exhibits, Studio Museum of Harlem (\$3 with student ID; if you’re planning to attend, let me know and I can arrange a conversation with a museum staff member as well).
  - viii. “[A Sucker Emcee](#),” Workshop production, National Black Theater, TBD 1st week of April - but commitment needed in advance.
  - ix. Home, Memory, and Future, exhibit at the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute, <http://www.cccadi.org/homeexhibition>, through March. (\$?)
  - x. “I am not your Negro” feature film with/on James Baldwin, opening in theaters in February. (\$)
  - xi. *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Struggle: A Radical Democratic Vision* by Barbara Ransby (on reserve at library)
  - xii. *Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher*, by James Haskins. (on reserve at library)
- 3) Oral history preparation, interview, and analysis 30 points (can be completed once or twice)
- Proposal identifying interviewee
  - Research memo – 10 pts

Class sharing (ungraded)  
 Completed transcription – 10 pts  
 Metadata – 10 pts  
 Guidelines for each will be distributed in class.

- 4) Digital exhibited based on oral history, on the Educating Harlem Digital Collection site using Omeka/Neatline . Examples and guidelines will be presented in class - 30 points
- 5) Curriculum unit proposal, incorporating at least one of the course's foci – oral history, history of education and/or Harlem, or digital presentations of historical material. Guidelines will be presented in class - 30 points.

### **Attendance**

Attendance is required at all class sessions. Please inform me in advance if you are going to be absent. More than one absence may impact your class grade; more than two absences may result in course failure.

### **Classroom Civility and Professional Habits**

This is a collaborative course in which students are not only learning about a new history, but engaging in work with new technology. The classroom should be a safe space for students to shape, share, and challenge ideas with both respect and rigor. Please monitor your own contributions in light of this shared purpose.

Technology is a central medium for our work, but can also become a barrier to in-person conversation and collaboration. Please monitor your own use of your laptop or other technology to ensure that it is in service of the work of the class. If you use class time for social media, email, or other communication not related to course work, you will be counted as absent.

Any students with documented need for assistive technology within the classroom are welcome to speak with me about how to enable their full participation.

*Course and College Policies*

### **Academic Integrity**

The Teachers College policy on Academic Integrity can be found in the Student Handbook, available at [tc.edu/administration/student-handbook](http://tc.edu/administration/student-handbook), pp. 76-77.

Plagiarism violates academic integrity. Any attempt to present someone else's work as your own, on papers, exams, transcripts, etc. constitutes plagiarism, a form of theft and fraud. There are various forms of plagiarism of which the following are most common. It is your responsibility to ensure that you clearly distinguish between your words and ideas and those of other authors, and to understand proper ways to give credit to other authors and sources.

1. *Word-for-word plagiarism.* This includes (a) the submission of another student's work as your own; (b) the submission of work from any source whatever (book, magazine, or newspaper article, unpublished paper, or thesis, internet) without proper acknowledgement by footnote or reference within the text of the paper; (c) the submission of any part of another's work without proper use of quotation marks and citation.
2. *Patchwork plagiarism.* This consists of piecing together of unacknowledged phrases and sentences quoted verbatim (or nearly verbatim) from a variety of sources. The mere reshuffling of other people's words does not constitute "original" work.
3. *Unacknowledged paraphrase.* It is perfectly legitimate to set forth another author's facts or ideas in one's own words, but if one is genuinely indebted to the other author for these facts or ideas, the debt must be acknowledged by footnote or reference within the text of the paper.
4. *Self-plagiarism.* Work created for a class may be turned in only for credit in that class. Attempting to receive academic credit for work done for another class is a form of academic dishonesty. Please speak with me if you are considering combining your work for this class with work for another class.

*This statement draws from conversations with colleagues in the Department of Cultural Foundations of Education, Syracuse University, 2011-12.*

### **Accommodations**

The College will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students are encouraged to contact the Office of Access and Services for Individuals with Disabilities for information about registration (166 Thorndike Hall). Services are available only to students who are registered and submit appropriate documentation. As your instructor, I am happy to discuss specific needs with you as well.

### **Incomplete policy**

The grade of Incomplete will be assigned only when the course attendance requirement has been met but, for reasons satisfactory to the instructor, the granting of a final grade has been postponed because certain course assignments are outstanding. If the outstanding assignments are completed within one calendar year from the date of the close of term in which the grade of Incomplete was received and a final grade submitted, the final grade will be recorded on the permanent transcript, replacing the grade of Incomplete, with a transcript notation indicating the date that the grade of Incomplete was replaced by a final grade. If the outstanding work is not completed within one calendar year from the date of the close of term in which the grade of Incomplete was received, the grade will remain as a permanent Incomplete on the transcript. In such instances, if the course is a required course or part of an approved program of study, students will be required to re-enroll in the course including repayment of all tuition and fee charges for the new registration and satisfactorily complete all course requirements. If the required course is not offered in subsequent terms,

the student should speak with the faculty advisor or Program Coordinator about their options for fulfilling the degree requirement. Doctoral students with six or more credits with grades of Incomplete included on their program of study will not be allowed to sit for the certification exam.

**Activation of the CU Network ID**

Teachers College students have the responsibility for activating the Columbia University Network ID (UNI), which includes a free Columbia email account. As official communications from the College – e.g., information on graduation, announcements of closing due to severe storm, flu epidemic, transportation disruption, etc. -- will be sent to the student's Columbia email account, students are responsible for either reading email there, or, for utilizing the mail forwarding option to forward mail from their Columbia account to an email address which they will monitor.

**Policy on Religious Observances**

It is the policy of Teachers College to respect its members' observance of their major religious holidays. Students should notify instructors at the beginning of the semester about their wishes to observe holidays on days when class sessions are scheduled. Where academic scheduling conflicts prove unavoidable, no student will be penalized for absence due to religious reasons, and alternative means will be sought for satisfying the academic requirements involved. If a suitable arrangement cannot be worked out between the student and the instructor, students and instructors should consult the appropriate department chair or director. If an additional appeal is needed, it may be taken to the Provost.