

How to Make History

Using Oral History in Community Studies and Service Learning Projects

By Kathy Barber Hersh



This guide is based on our experiences in the Miami Dade County Public Schools' Intergenerational Service Learning unit over a period of ten years. Our programs have worked because of the dedicated efforts of fine teachers who believe that students learn best by *doing* and, when prepared and challenged, are capable of extraordinary work.



We hope you are inspired to seek with your students the rich human resources that live around you. The rewards are endless and the lessons priceless.



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Today's students live in the present. The past has little relevance for them except as answers on a history test. Their most common complaint about history – IT'S BORING! How could it be otherwise when so much history teaching relies on chalk and talk?

The learning dynamic changes dramatically when teachers bring real people into the classroom whose lives were altered by historical events. What is history but the study of people and the events which changed them? By looking at the past with older people as their guides, students make the connection that just as these elders were changed by events in their past, so will events unfolding now alter their own lives.

Right in front of them is a walking, talking primary resource, a live person willing to have his/her memory probed. By asking good questions and listening well, students relate the past to a real person with real feelings. Students are encouraged to conduct their own investigations, like detectives, listening, observing facial expressions, learning to skillfully interview their subjects, and noting their subjects' reactions to questions.

Finding subjects is not difficult. Our students started by talking to older relatives or elders in their own neighborhoods. Most older people are flattered to be asked to share their life stories. Those who do are rewarded with a sense of connectedness to the community and a feeling of being valued for their insights. The bond between students and the community elders often leads to further uncovering of information, contradictory evidence, a localized connection to world events, and, occasionally, a service learning* project, such as the formation of an archive for public use.

"The need to belong somewhere is central to all human beings. When elders share their memories with our students who come from other places they are inviting them to take part in preserving the community's legacy. Oral history is really about sharing your hometown with the next generation. Then the youth are willing to care about it."

Chris Kirchner,
Language arts teacher, MDCPS

Uncovering the past can be exciting. Sometimes, during the process, a new historian is born.

**Service learning is an educational method that allows students to learn through active participation in thoughtfully organized service in the community that is integrated into the academic curriculum. Stages of the learning process are preparation, action, reflection, and demonstration. Research has shown that service-learning programs have the capacity to increase student empowerment, to improve attitudes about learning, and to increase commitment to meaningful civic engagement.*

STARTING A COMMUNITY STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Looking at the local community by incorporating several academic disciplines is an effective way to motivate students and provide them a purpose for finding and integrating information. Oral history is a convenient way of tapping into the experience of the entire community by interviewing people from diverse backgrounds and occupations.

For example, students from Homestead, Florida, born during the post-traumatic chaos of Hurricane Andrew in 1992, have grown up hearing about the widespread devastation and the personal upheavals thousands of families experienced by that catastrophic event.

In order to understand the Homestead community today, students need to learn about the impact of “Andrew” from a variety

of sources -- farmers, farm workers, small business owners, local teachers, medical and mental health professionals, biologists, social workers, bankers, and government officials.

Overnight a thriving small town agricultural community turned into a wasteland. Homes and businesses, schools and utilities were severely damaged or destroyed. Who stayed and who left?

How did the people go about rebuilding? What new alliances and partnerships were formed to start over? Which local institutions were able to provide help to people who needed it? The answers to these questions help students understand how their community functions, especially in times of great challenge.



Aerial view of the devastation to Homestead caused by Hurricane Andrew, August 24, 1992.

Think of all the cross-curricular avenues which could be used to study this community:

Civics – Who became the real leaders and how did the town, the county, the state and the federal government interact to bring about the rebirth of the town?

Earth science – How do hurricanes form and what is their total environmental impact?

Economics – How did the local economy change? How did people get loans to rebuild without assets as collateral?

Social psychology – How did families and groups cope with the chaos and ongoing stress? Did it lead to an upsurge of social problems? What are the ongoing social consequences?

Health – How did the event and its aftermath impact people's health? What role did hospitals and clinics play in restoration?

History – How did this community's experience compare to other community disasters in history? Think of Chernobyl, Pompeii, the Great Fire of London, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the collapse of the Twin Towers on 9-11.

To start your own community studies program, we recommend the following course of action:

1. Decide which community or communities you would like to study in depth. Communities with a unique history or those undergoing rapid change are interesting and compelling subjects. Your students may document voices that would otherwise be lost forever.
2. Invite experts to your classroom to speak and network through them to find a partner willing to help set up a Community History Consortium to act as an advisory group. Our group consisted of university professors, teachers from different disciplines, and community members active in civic groups concerned with citizenship, ethics, and civic engagement. Our discussions focused on creating strong partnerships between institutions with similar missions and the cross-disciplinary potential of studying a community through the personal knowledge and experience of its residents.
3. Create strategic partnerships which work on an equal basis with strong mutual missions and participation. The Historical Museum of Southern Florida wanted more visitation from students at all age levels, not only 4th graders studying Florida history. We gave them access to diverse high school students. They received valuable feedback through our evaluations of programs and exhibits. They became active, working partners and were generous in giving free passes to students so they could return on their own.
4. Create a timeline for partnered projects and meetings of the consortium so deadlines are understood by all.
5. Involve the main reference library and other institutions with archives, such as newspapers. Teach the students how to research documents in archives. Internet research should be used only to locate primary source material. An archive is only valuable to the extent that it is used. Students respect the fact that they are entrusted with valuable archive materials and prove to be conscientious of order and delicacy when handling documents.
6. Work with teachers willing to do the necessary paperwork to organize field trips and who are interested in creative ways to enhance classroom instruction. Recruit a colleague in another subject area who can bring a different perspective to the project and be a back-up support with school administration.
7. See what sparks the students' interest. Make a mystery to be solved or a service to the school and community. Let them lead and you may be surprised where they go and how effective they can be.
8. Invite experts to participate in field trips or meetings and incorporate the content in your teaching.
9. Share with the community: create a website, get a student column in the local community newspaper, organize a history swap where information and documents are shared, or produce a book for libraries.
10. Evaluate and share your experiences with other educators.

PROTOCOLS FOR ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

Most historians who employ oral history as a research technique adhere to professionally established rules and protocols for working with their subjects. Some belong to professional associations, which expect compliance in maintaining high professional standards.

Of course, students are not professional historians. But if their material is to have any credibility, some procedures and practices must be followed.

The interviewees must understand that what they say will become part of the public record. They have a right to expect absolute accuracy and audibility in recording their words, and that a full transcript will be made available to them to check for errors. The transcript should be corrected, if necessary, before being put into the archive and becoming part of the public record.

During the interviewing process, the subjects have the right to be comfortable and not unduly pressured to reveal personal details or expound on their statements. Neither do they expect to be contradicted or have their speech or grammar corrected. In other words, they have a right to be respected and appreciated for sharing their story.

If they provide any back up documents, these should be returned to them in a timely manner. If a copy of the taped interview is promised, it should be delivered promptly.

HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

Collaboration between “higher ed” and secondary education can be challenging to arrange but worth the effort. The intense focus on grades and test performance in both high school and college, as well as differing class schedules and structures, makes joint student projects unfeasible, in our experience.

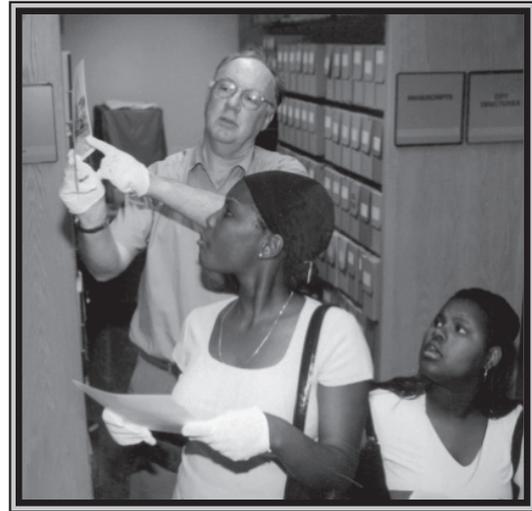
But focusing on the creation of new knowledge is an attractive incentive for professors conducting research, particularly those interested in local community history and issues. Mutually beneficial areas of investigation can bring together professors doing research and high school history teachers interested in stimulating their students to higher-level thinking.

We found archivists and digital librarians eager to collect our information and encourage its widest possible distribution and use.

Our involvement with the University of Miami has centered around the work of



Dr. Gregory Bush, a history professor with expertise in American Studies, who founded the University’s Institute for Public History. Dr. Bush collaborated with MDCPS ini-



Dr. Gregory Bush in the Historical Museum of Southern Florida archive with project students.

tially in giving a summer institute to teachers on oral history gathering and community studies funded with a federal grant.

Once teachers were turned on to the evident pedagogic possibilities, they began to use oral history interviewing not only to teach history but also to motivate at-risk students to learn.

Teachers discovered that once students started exploring their own neighborhoods for potential sources and interview subjects, they became identifiers of good primary resources.

At William H. Turner Technical High School in Miami a student in a civil rights oral history project “discovered” and interviewed an important eyewitness to one of the civil rights era’s most catalytic events – the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. The interviewee was the music minister there at the time. He talked about being present when the bomb went off and how he found the bodies of the four girls whose names and faces became known everywhere. His painful recollections helped students relate to the volatility of the period and its ongoing impact on the people who lived through it.

When empowered to do good work, which gets acknowledged and used, students’ energies and enthusiasm can sustain the most in-depth research projects. They also view their neighborhoods and, by extension, themselves in a more positive way.

Many of our students, who did not think of themselves as college bound, were exposed to the University of Miami campus to attend seminars at the Richter Library’s Department of Archives and Special Collections on how to “read” documents and historical photographs.

Learning was also reinforced by exploratory visits to the Historical Museum of Southern Florida and the Florida Room of the Main Library, where students learned how to conduct primary research. For many, it was the first time they had been in a museum or downtown Miami.

Each participating group was asked to inform in advance the archivist of the desired topic or neighborhood of study. Material pertaining to the teacher’s and students’ area of investigation was pulled and waiting. Students were amazed to discover historic photographs of people and places they knew. By using gloves to carefully peruse the file folders, they learned respect for old documents.

MODEL SERVICE LEARNING COMMUNITY STUDIES PROJECTS

Veterans Oral History Program

Although most World War 2 veterans are now in their 80's and dying daily, some can still be found who were eyewitnesses to the catastrophic events which ushered in the age of the superpowers' struggle for world domination. Priority is given to interviewing the oldest first. But veterans of the Korean War, the Cold War, and the Vietnam War are plentiful.

Veterans' organizations and civic organizations such as Kiwanis, Rotary, and Elks clubs are good sources for locating veterans. There are a number of Vietnam era veteran groups.

We have been fortunate to partner with the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at the University of Miami, an organization of retired professionals who audit classes at the university and arrange their own programs, field trips and speakers.

Students studying history at the Miami Lakes Educational Center, a vocational school, made field trips to the OLLI Insti-

tute to observe the videotaping of interviews with veterans from the group. A media professional conducted the interviews for approximately half an hour, focusing mainly on the veteran's war experiences and re-entry into civilian society. The students were then given the chance to do follow-up questioning of their own, which was part of the videotaped record. Their questions were incisive and, at times, personal, but always respectful.

"From day one when we first heard the veterans talk, we were hooked. We came back to school talking about what a great time we all had. It was amazing to see my classmates so into all of this."

Angela Hernandez
11th Grade American History Student

Veterans also come to classrooms to be interviewed by students prepared with questions derived from their classroom study of the period. Students are sensitized to the emotional aspects of questioning veterans about potentially painful memories during a class period focused on the affective aspects of war, particularly the more politically controversial wars following World War 2.

Students are cautioned to probe gently and respect a veteran's right to avoid painful subjects such as the taking of another's life.

We had not anticipated the depth of personal identification with the veterans. So many vets were the same age as the students interviewing them when they were drafted or enlisted in military service. Their dilemmas and challenges are similar to those faced by today's young people.

Students are instructed to always end the interview on a positive note concerning the present. Often, they ask for a life lesson or words of advice to young people. Most often the advice concerns the importance of getting an education, an crucial message to students who may be considering dropping out of school, as many in South Florida do.

Next the students are asked to write biographical summaries of each veteran they heard speak. Because many of our students speak English as a second language, they are often not proficient in writing. We give small-group writing workshops to assist the students in the process of constructing biographical essays. So not only do these students learn about history and interviewing, they also improve their critical thinking and writing skills.

Students in art classes are asked to create original portraits of the veterans, copying from an old photo in uniform or a more contemporary image if the veteran prefers.

The best essay and portrait of each participating veteran are published each year and the books are distributed to classes and the public. During a luncheon ceremony, students present each veteran with a copy of the book and his or her framed original portrait. The event is a moving experience for everyone, honoring the values of courage, dignity, and sacrifice.

"Not only was it enlightening to actually speak to those who lived through it all, but to watch new friendships and an understanding develop between the generations which was not there before.

John Moffi,
History teacher, MDCPS

When the students were about to interview their first Vietnam veteran, we gave them a contextual lesson on the period, since sufficient background to do a good interview was missing from their history texts. So here is what we told them:

Why the Vietnam War Was Different

There are many similarities in veterans' experiences of military service which transcend time – the exhaustion of basic training, the loneliness of being away from loved ones, the fear of death, the loss of comrades, the stretching of one's physical and mental limits. But World War II and the Vietnam War were very different wars in very different times. Vietnam era veterans' memories are much more recent and complex due to the controversy, which is still an issue in many families.

Most Americans supported the nation's role in World War II after the Japanese attack on the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. Young American males felt obligated to join "the service," while civilians rallied to replace them in jobs vital to the war effort.

U.S. involvement in Vietnam, however, began almost secretly, with career military advisors to the South Vietnamese Army. The war was little noted in America and gradually escalated into a full-scale conflict with U.S. troops fighting for their lives in the jungles of Southeast Asia. Combat was sporadic, the front line shifting daily with enemy combatants hard to distinguish from the civilian population. The military leadership was divided on strategies.

As the war deepened, Americans grew weary watching the gruesome nightly news scenes of carnage and chaos. The death toll became

too high to justify involvement in a country far from U.S. shores.

The war issue polarized the country. A "generation gap" developed between the youth being sent to fight an "un-winnable" war and the generation that had sacrificed its youth fighting in World War II.

There was no victory. The U.S. finally withdrew from Vietnam in 1973. Returning soldiers often encountered hostility from civilians, many their own age, who had resisted, avoided, or escaped the draft.

To this day, the Vietnam War stirs up a great deal of anguish and regret. There are those who feel they served their country honorably and others who turned in their medals in shame.

Whatever their position, if they have one, they are equally deserving of respect and the opportunity to go on the record for posterity.





As part of the veterans oral history project, we published a book of biographical essays and portraits done by student writers and artists. The portraits were presented by the students to the vets at a commemorative luncheon.

“Being so honored after so many years came as a complete surprise. From the presentation of the Colors to the singing of America the Beautiful, it was an occasion that will not be forgotten and brought tears to the eyes of many of us there. Special recognition was given to the Tuskegee Airmen, who served so honorably and were discriminated against because of their race. What a wonderful history lesson for those young students in attendance!”

Beatrice Wasser, World War 2 era military nurse



“A special thanks to Lizzie Gonazlez, who sketched my portrait and to the project for giving the portrait to me. Please let the public know what you are doing! They need to know that there is a lot more going on in our schools besides failing students.

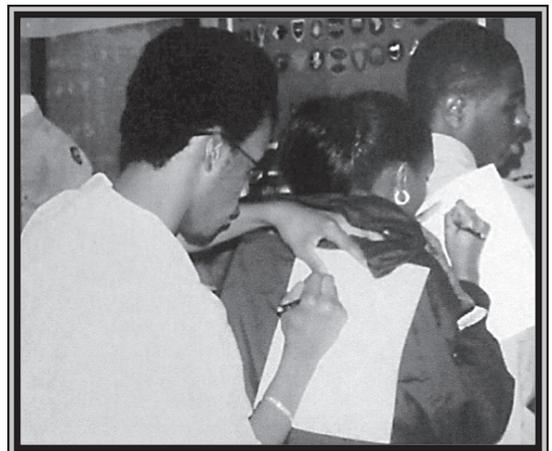
Ruth Elsasser, World War 2 era Military Nurse

Editor's note: This poem was written by Alyssa Fowers "on the spot" as a reaction to the World War 2 exhibit at the Historical Museum of Southern Florida.

Stars

I am an American woman
I said good-bye to my husband, my son,
There are two blue stars in my window.
And each night, I cry and cry, Because I have lived through another day,
And I don't know if they have or not, Because my heart is always with them, And even I
won't know, Should a bullet shatter my heart and theirs.
I am an American child, I lost my brother on December 7,
My life is now a before and after, And there is a gold star in my window.
Each night, I look up at the stars in the sky, And wonder if he is one of them.
I am an American soldier, I have slain, And watched others be slain,
I have pushed and marched and sweated and screamed, I know that all I am fighting for is
right, But still, I don't know if I'll ever forgive myself.
I think of my family, And the star that hangs in their window,
I have given everything that I have, So that those I left behind May live in peace.

Written by Alyssa Fowers - Grade 7 Southwood Middle School



Sample Veterans Questions:

How would you summarize your experiences of the world prior to your entering service?

What were the circumstances under which you entered the military; were you drafted or did you enlist?

How did you and your family feel about your leaving?

What kind of basic training did you receive and what were your living conditions like?

What kind of activities were you good at? What did you do when you were “off duty?”

What challenges were especially difficult for you? Where you ever in combat?

Did you keep any memorabilia or souvenirs?

How did being in the military (the war) change your life? How did you re-adjust to civilian life?

Did your military experience influence your thinking about conflict and/or the military?

Civil Rights Oral History Archive Project

A single, powerful oral history interview was the impetus for the creation of the Turner Tech High School Civil Rights Oral History Archive. The interview was conducted in the Turner Tech Information Center as a demonstration to television production students of the Arts-Related Technology for Entertainment Careers (ARTEC) Academy within William H. Turner Technical High School.

The interviewee was A.D. Moore, who was on the roster of the Speakers Bureau of the Black Archives of Miami. We had little knowledge of Mr. Moore's involvement with the civil rights movement until the interview took place.

Mr. Moore, as became increasingly evident during the interview, was one of the principal organizers of the demonstrations and sit-ins that took place in Miami. Not only was he a key leader locally, he was the national treasurer of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), the major organization dedicated to exposing segregation and racism through non-violent activities which confronted businesses and institutions engaged in discrimination.

Mr. Moore became a close associate of Dr. Martin Luther King's, with whom he met weekly during the height of the civil rights struggle. He was on the scene when the FBI found the missing bodies of James Cheney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman,

the murdered voter rights workers who were killed by Klansmen in Philadelphia, Mississippi.

His memories were sharp and his voice strong and compelling. He recalled hearing Dr. King give an early version of his famous "I Have A Dream" speech at a the Hamp-



Tuskegee Airman Eldridge Williams at Turner Tech Archive with teacher Chris Kirchner

ton House, a black motel in Miami that was CORE's weekly meeting place. This revelation led to a county-wide campaign joined by students to save the motel from demolition by getting it declared an historic site. A student crew from Turner Tech videotaped the meeting of the Miami-Dade Historic Preservation Board at which the Hampton House successfully received historic designation. Several members of the Board remarked upon the presence of the students and the impact it had on their decision.

The students were inspired by Mr. Moore's interview to explore further Miami's unique

experience of the civil rights era. Students had little trouble finding older people in the community, black and white, who had been active in the movement. Their own high school Assistant Principal at the time, Ms. Valmarie Rhoden, was among the first group of black students to integrate Florida State University. She, too, sat in the interview seat and told her story.

When word got out that there were students conducting interviews with elders about the past, the students were asked to do an oral history project for the Virginia Key Beach Park Trust, documenting the usage of the popular park set aside for “colored people,” as a result of a 1945 protest at a segregated beach in North Miami.

By now the students were on fire. Interview days were set up and local leaders in the black community escorted those too elderly to drive to Turner Tech’s studio to go on the record. A complimentary copy of the interview was given to each interviewee so that their families had a record of their memories.

We held workshops focused on interviewing techniques and the importance of listening

and asking follow up questions. Two students were chosen to conduct a mock interview in front of the class. The facilitator, an experienced documentary film maker and journalist, would “freeze” the interview at intervals and ask the students observing for appropriate follow up questions at that moment in the interview. This technique taught the students that an interview was not just a list of questions written out in advance, but a

real conversation involving active listening and critical thinking.

Students grew to enjoy academic research to prepare for the interviews. They explored resources in the Florida Room of Miami’s main public library, as well as the exhibits and archives of the Historical Museum of Southern Florida.

“My students were able to develop their technological skills while learning history. Civil rights [video] interviews brought real faces and stories to this turning point in history. Interviewing our soldiers and seamen added a dimension to World War 2, Korea, and Vietnam, which can not be found in textbooks.”

Jose Ugarte,
History teacher, MDCPS

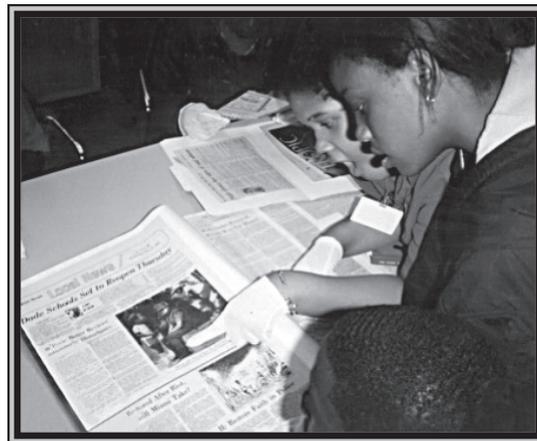
Once the students started conducting their own interviews, the facilitator would sit behind the student interviewer to prompt him or her, as needed, to ask appropriate follow up questions. Students soon got the knack of it themselves as they became less intimidated by the process.

A group of students were inspired to produce their own documentary on Miami’s experience of desegregation and through a small grant were able to acquire archive foot-

age to tell Miami's story. The video made its "premiere" at the Turner Tech Information Center as part of a public commemoration of the sacrifices and accomplishments of the civil rights movement. Previous interviewees were invited to attend and received certificates of appreciation, along with their interview copy. The students told how they had been positively changed by their involvement in the production of the archive.

The Turner Tech Information Center proudly displays the shelves of some 80 interviews, which have been cross-referenced and are in the process of being transcribed and digitized by Florida International University for its Digital Library Collection. These voices, which might never have been recorded, add to the breadth and depth of knowledge of the South's experience of the civil rights era.

Ms. Rhoden, now the Principal at Turner Tech, has been so impressed with the impact the service learning archive project has had on student morale and performance, she has required all academies within the school to develop equivalent projects.



Interviewees are honored at their inauguration of the archive.

Starting Your Own Archive

An archive is a serious undertaking, which is sustainable only with the collaboration and dedication of students, teachers, and media staff on a consistent basis.

Having video production facilities helps but is not a prerequisite. If a simple video recorder is not “in the budget,” audio recording will suffice, provided the subject has an individual, directional microphone to ensure the best voice quality. Accurate transcripts of the interview are a mandatory part of any archive and should be made available in printed form for ease of access.

Your archive may focus on a specific period, like Turner Tech’s focus on the civil rights era. Or you may decide to focus on the general community.

Students must be competent on the equipment, committed to helping seek subjects to interview and willing to do transcripts. If this is a school sanctioned service project, students can be given community service hours credit for doing the transcripts, which is exacting and time consuming work.

The lead teacher must have the time to audit the tapes and transcripts for accuracy and assure that the inventory of tapes is properly organized, classified and maintained. The librarian or media specialists can also play a major role in cataloging and promoting use of the archive.

Students can also be involved in reaching out to the public to solicit people for interviewing. Turner Tech students and their teachers distributed “Leave a Legacy” handouts to visitors to the school and at public functions. The handouts noted that participants would receive a video copy of their interviews.

If you are collaborating with another archive or library which is digitizing your material for the Internet, make sure your interview subjects sign release forms for both archives and understand that their stories will become part of the public record.

The Jones Project

South Dade Community Studies Project

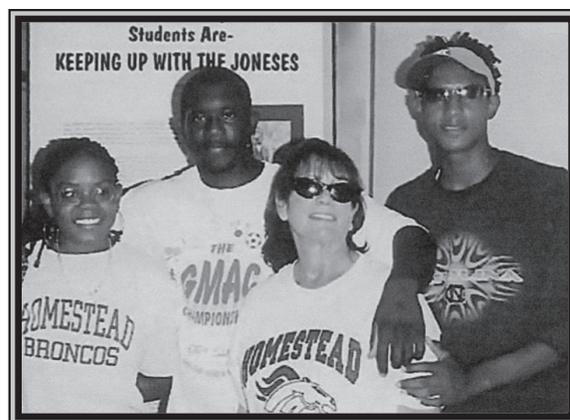
Miami-Dade County is the only county in the United States containing two national parks, Biscayne National Park and the Everglades. Tourists come from all over the U.S. and the world to visit. However, few of those visitors are people of color. The National Park Service has been trying to entice more of a diversity of visitors. Biscayne National Park, largely aquatic with islands offshore Miami in Biscayne Bay, had an interesting history which would appeal to minorities but they had no staff to do research.

What they did know was this: for 100 years an African-American family named Jones owned and inhabited two of the islands in the bay and became one of the first prosperous agricultural families in Florida. Their early environmental consciousness helped preserve the area for posterity.

Brenda Lanzendorf, archeologist and Director of Cultural Affairs at Biscayne National Park, was frustrated. If only they had time to find out more about this Jones family, they could write an interpretive panel for the park that would expand interest in the park's history.

Susan Hopkins, a history teacher at nearby Homestead High School heard about the problem and saw a possible service learning project involving her students. She linked up with Ms. Lanzendorf and Susan's history club went to work.

To prepare themselves with a broad, historical context, the students learned about South Florida history at the Historical Museum, which graciously allowed students to explore their archives under supervision. The museum staff and University of Miami professors gave workshops on how to "read" historic photos and documents.



Teacher Susan Hopkins with students from The Jones Project

Biscayne National Park arranged a boat trip for the students across Biscayne Bay to Porgy Key to explore the ruins of the Jones family home. They were "hooked."

Under Ms. Hopkins guidance, the students jammed the Main Library on Saturday mornings in downtown Miami, a place many had never visited, to search through old records. They became history sleuths and uncovered obscure documents about the history of the Jones family.

Today there is an interpretive panel at Bis-

cayne National Park's Discovery Center called: "Homestead Senior High School Students Are –KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES." The students are credited with doing the research, which has attracted national attention. They were featured in a article in the National Park Service magazine and their work enabled the park to get national historical designation for the Jones Homestead site. The students were proud of the fact that they had learned to do primary research, which focused attention on a national park five miles from their school. They also learned that history can be exciting and clues to the past can be found everywhere.

"My students have engaged in research and active learning, functioning as "historical detectives," on their own time after school and on Saturdays. Pursuing pieces of a local puzzle, they were able to correct a local myth and contribute to getting Biscayne National Park designated on the National Registry of Historic Places."

Susan Hopkins,
History teacher, MDCPS

Ms. Hopkins, Dr. Bush, and Miami Dade County Public Schools are currently working on a project funded by the National Park Service: "Between Two National Parks: The Homestead Community Studies Project." Through oral history interviews, field trips and research, students are learning about

the area's historic legacy and the dynamic and complex intersection of frontier, agribusiness, environmentalism, and ongoing economic development. Students apply what they learn to contribute to the ongoing public policy issues of growth management, providing public space and sustainability of the area's natural resources.

Students in the history club assisted the Miami Dade County Park and Recreation Department in surveying the community's need for more public park space and help re-design as public space a former trailer park which had been destroyed by Hurricane Andrew. The professional planners from the county were sufficiently impressed with the students that they created a summer internship program and hired three of the school's students to help spearhead the project.

It is important when creating service-learning projects to make sure there is ongoing, direct contact between the partners and the students. When students are treated as equals, they rise to the challenge. When partners are involved in face-to-face planning sessions, they witness the students' enthusiasm and willingness to work hard to deliver results. This creates an effective win-win partnership which creates its own synergy. Not only do projects thrive, and new ones evolve, there is also a deepened sense of connection to the community for everyone involved.

A Healthy By-Product: Civic Engagement

The three model programs described in the previous sections had unplanned but very positive consequences. The students in each program took on additional challenges and responsibilities connected to the subject under study and became more involved in their communities. Some were inspired to become advocates for positive social change.

At Turner Tech High School, students became advocates for the preservation of Virginia Key Beach Park, an oceanfront area set aside for “colored people” in 1945. Black families used the beach not only for recreation but also for baptismal services and ceremonies. Once the county parks became integrated, Virginia Key Beach faded into the past.

Turner Tech students participated in a rally to restore community interest in preserving the park and the memories of its past. They interviewed elderly who turned out for a celebration and recorded their recollections of community events and family and church picnics at the park, which in the early days was accessible only by boat.

Students from Turner Tech also videotaped the official proceedings at a hearing of the Miami-Dade County Historic Preservation Board convened to decide whether or not to give historic designation status to the Hampton House Motel, mentioned in the A.D. Moore oral history as the weekly meet-

ing place of the Miami chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality and the setting of a meeting of CORE activists and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., at which he gave an early version of his “I Have a Dream” speech. The students had a positive impact on the preservation board, several of whom commented on their presence.

Students at Homestead High School took a personal interest in Biscayne National Park after doing the research on the Jones family. They joined in environmental clean-ups of the park and participated in fishing line retrieval projects and educating the public about the menace of abandoned fishing line to marine life.

One of the desired outcomes of high quality service learning is the empowerment of students. When students directly apply their knowledge and skills to problem solving in their neighborhoods, they become more motivated to learn and feel more of a stake in the future of the community.

- **Information Sheet**
- **Interview Tips**
- **Tech Tips**
- **Photographic Release Form**

Information Sheet

(One per interview)

Name of Interviewee: _____

Address: _____

Phone and contact information: _____

Date of interview: _____ / _____ / _____

Name of interviewer: _____

General topics covered: _____

Years of military service (if applicable): _____

Summary of interview: _____

Recommended follow up action: _____

Interview Tips

1. Be familiar with the equipment and set-up procedure before you do the interview.
2. Be sure to record the details of the interview: My name (the interviewer) is _____ and I'm interviewing _____. Today is month/day/year. The interview is taking place at _____.
3. Ask short questions with a clear focus. Make sure the interviewee understands. You may interrupt if he/she is not answering your question.
4. Ask the easiest questions first, saving the more difficult ones for later.
5. Avoid prejudicial questions with an obvious point of view. Allow the interviewee the integrity of his/her answer.
6. Avoid questions answerable by "yes" or "no." Ask in a way that will encourage elaboration, such as, "What was it like?" "What happened next?" "Describe how you felt." "How did you react?" Ask for description. Evoking the senses and emotions often stimulates memory.
7. If the interviewee strays from the main focus, gently remind him/her of the question and offer to return to the other subject later. Or, if it's interesting, continue it but come back to the main focus later.
8. If the interviewee becomes emotional or uncomfortable with the topic, offer to stop and allow him/her time to recover.
9. Always thank him/her and make sure the release form is signed! Make sure you have accurate contact information so you can double check points for accuracy when doing transcript and for providing a complimentary copy of the interview.

Tech Tips

Check Your Gear!

- Camera/recorder, mikes, cables, tripod, lights
- All tested and in working order
- Headphones for monitoring sound quality
- Fully-charged spare batteries and power supply

Check Your Location!

- Find a quiet room
- Look for a good background
- Move your subject away from walls
- Set two facing chairs for interviewer and interviewee
- Put microphone on interviewee (not needed for interviewer) and do a sound test listening for background noise or audio interference

Check Your Picture!

- Create a balanced, head and shoulders image in the frame
- If the face is in shadow, position interviewee near natural light from window, a lamp, or a studio
- Set camera on tripod at interviewee's eye level looking for the shoulder of the interviewer
- Do a final microphone check
- Monitor sound during taping
- Check tapes before removing microphone from interviewee

MAKE SURE THE INTERVIEWEE SIGNS A RELEASE FORM!



Photographic Release Form

I, the undersigned, have elected to voluntarily participate in this recording of my words and image by (organization) _____.

I consent to the use by (organization) _____, including its agents, assigns and licensees, of my name, photo, likeness or film, videotape and/ or sound recording of me. I expressly disclaim all rights to all values and benefits from my participation.

I further state that I am eighteen (18) years of age or older, am legally competent to sign this waiver and release, have carefully read this waiver and release, and have signed it as my free and voluntary act and deed.

(Signature) (Date)

(Printed Name) (Date)

If the person signing is under age 18, there must be consent by a parent or guardian, as follows: I hereby certify that I am the parent or guardian of _____, named above, and do hereby give my consent without reservation to the foregoing on behalf of this person.

(Parent/Guardian's Signature) (Date)

(Parent/Guardian's Printed Name)

Websites

www.edutopia.org/montana-heritage-project-history

Students in Montana preserve their community's history by interviewing lifelong employees of the town's lumber mill, mainstay of the local economy.

www.loc.gov/vets/youth-resources.html

Everything you need to know and forms to fill out for the Library of Congress' Veterans History Project.

<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/oralhist/ohhome>

Library of Congress' American Memory website. Has downloadable lesson plans.

Google <peabody.vanderbilt.edu> and click on Center for Community Studies for further research on community studies and education.

Florida Heritage Collection:

<http://susdl.fcla.edu/fh/>

Reclaiming the Everglades is a collaborative digital library project of the University of Miami, Florida International University, and the Historical Museum of Southern Florida libraries and special collections. 10,000 page images of primary source materials relating to south Florida environmental history are accessible here. This digitized documentary evidence spans the years 1884 to 1934 and covers topics such as the establishment of the Everglades National Park, Native American land rights, agriculture, urban development, endangered species, invasive plants, and the role of women in the modern conservation movement.

www.floridacommunitystudies.org

South Florida Community Studies Consortium

www.library.miami.edu/archives/intro.html

University of Miami's Otto G. Richter Library, Archives and Special Collections Department. Source of information on South Florida.

www.historical-museum.org/history/sfhm

Historical Museum of Southern Florida,

publishers of South Florida History Magazine and the Tequesta journal.

www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/oral_history University of North Carolina's website explains oral history usage in depth. Very helpful.

Recommended books:

THE VILLAGES OF SOUTH DADE, by Jean Taylor. Rare. Can be found in the Main Library's Florida Room.

HAVING OUR SAY,

The Delaney Sisters' First 100 Years

By Sarah and A. Elizabeth Delaney,

with Amy Hill Hearsh, G.K. Hall & Co, 1993.

Delightful memoirs of two centenarian black sisters recalling race relations and breaking color barriers during their long lives. Shows the scope of history and changes possible in one lifetime. The sisters points of view are different and they don't always agree on interpretation of their past.

THE GREAT DIVIDE; THE GOOD WAR; HARD TIMES; RACE;

and any others by Studs Turkel – the master of oral history gathering. His books document what actual people think of the times they lived through.

“As a result of our experiences, we have many great ideas and plans for the future to continue learning. We are hoping to install a History Club in school. We are a group of students who want to continue learning history.”

Christine Senke,
student, MDCPS

Thanks.....

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Kathy Barber Hersh is a writer and documentary filmmaker who is a consultant to Miami Dade County Public Schools' intergenerational service learning programming unit.

In memory of

Addie Mae Collins
Denise McNair
Carole Robertson
and
Cynthia Wesley

The four young girls who died on September 15, 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama in the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Their bodies were found by Mr. Earl Davis, who was the music minister at the time. Mr. Davis, pictured on page 21 (far left), was interviewed and recorded by the students at Turner Tech High School. It was one of the few times he has ever gone on the record about this tragedy, which focused the world's attention on the civil rights struggle in America.

