



April 2020

Dispatches from Physical Distance

From all of us at the Oral History Center, we are wishing you our best in these challenging times. We hope that you and your loved ones are staying safe and healthy.

Director's Column, April 2020

OHC Director Martin Meeker has been thinking a great deal lately about what it means to live a life connected or disconnected or perhaps something in between. Oral history is about many things: listening, documenting, questioning, recording, explaining. The connection is always key to the work that we do as oral historians. But like many other operations, including basically all non-medical research projects that involve humans, our work conducting interviews is largely shut-down while we consider how best to forge ahead.



This month, OHC Director Martin Meeker discusses how we are adapting - at home and at work - and the future of remote interviewing.



Primary Sources with Pizzaz!

We're sheltering in place, the libraries are closed, and we all need to adjust to this new "normal" of social distancing and remote learning and teaching. It may at times feel daunting to shift gears on such a tight timeline. A bit of good news in all this

uncertainty: the UC Berkeley Oral History Center has an online archive of more than 4,000 interviews on a multitude of topics.

Jill Schlessinger has created a guide to using our collection to add some spice to your research papers, lectures, and remote lessons.



Earth Day at 50: Memories from Sierra Club Oral Histories

Earth Day turns 50 this month. A half-century ago, on April 22, 1970, environmental awareness and concern exploded in a nationwide outpouring of celebrations and protests during the world's **first Earth Day**. That first Earth Day drew an estimated twenty million participants across the United States—roughly a tenth of the national population—with involvement from over ten thousand schools and two thousand colleges and universities.

But this April, despite years of planning for **Earth Day's fiftieth anniversary**, the novel coronavirus—itsself a world-wide environmental event—has disrupted Earth Day 2020 plans across the planet. While we cannot celebrate Earth Day's golden anniversary as previously planned, we can commemorate it with recollections and lessons learned by those who attended and organized the first Earth Day events in 1970. The Oral History Center's archives list over seventy interviews that mention Earth Day, according to the “Advanced Search” fields of our collection's **search engine**.

This month, Roger Eardley-Pryor has selected a few memories of the first Earth Day from our Sierra Club Oral History Project, a longstanding collaboration between the Oral History Center and the Sierra Club, which itself originated shortly after the first Earth Day.

Storytelling at a Distance: Staying Connected While We're Apart

There is no doubt we are living through unprecedented times. The threat of COVID-19 and the necessity of social distancing has changed how we work, educate our children, and move through the world. And yet, if there is a silver lining in this public health crisis, it is the opportunity to reconnect and recalibrate our relationships with those we love.



California Governor Gavin Newsom has challenged all of us to “meet the moment.” For us at The Oral History Center, that means sharing our expertise as listeners and communicators with you. With our backgrounds in oral history life interviews, we want to offer tips and question prompts so you can have more engaging and meaningful conversations with the important people in your life – even at a distance.

Amanda Tewes shares some tips on how to get a conversation started with loved ones to document this moment and cultivate connection.

From the Archives - Lucy Sprague Mitchell: Child Education Reformer and Berkeley's First Dean of Women

This month, OHC student research assistant Deborah Qu highlights an interview in our archive with Lucy Sprague Mitchell, who was an advocate for educational reform.



Deborah reviews Mitchell's life, career, and accomplishments, as well as what Mitchell's story has taught her personally.

Advanced Summer Institute Applications are Still Open!

Join us for our week-long oral history intensive from August 10-14, 2020. For our annual Advanced Summer Institute, we will focus on the methodology, theory, and practice of oral history.



We're aware that there is some uncertainty around the global COVID-19 pandemic. Depending on recommendations from the Center for Disease Control, the Department of Health, and the California Governor's Office, we may need to make some changes to the Advanced Institute, including holding it online. Please check our website for updates as they are available.

The institute is designed for graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, university faculty, independent scholars, and museum and community-based historians who are engaged in oral history work. The goal of the institute is to strengthen the ability of its participants to conduct research-focused interviews and to consider special characteristics of interviews as historical evidence in a rigorous academic environment.

Apply Now

For more information, please visit our [website](#) or email Shanna Farrell at sfarrell@library.berkeley.edu.



New Release

Howardena Pindell: Artist, Teacher, and Observer

Howardena Pindell is a painter and mixed media artist, as well as a professor at State University of New York at Stony Brook. She earned a BFA from Boston University in 1965 and an MFA from Yale University in 1967. Pindell worked at the Museum of Modern Art from 1967 to 1979, where she held several positions, including exhibit assistant, curatorial assistant, and associate curator. She cofounded the A.I.R. Gallery in 1972. Pindell has taught in the Department of Art at State University of New York at Stony Brook since 1979.

Pindell's interview is the first in a series of oral histories with prominent African American artists for the Getty Research Institute's (GRI) African American Art History Initiative. These oral histories complement the GRI's ongoing work to collect, preserve, and interpret the art and legacies of these artists.

Read Amanda Tewes's blog post about her interview with Pindell.

Class of '31 Nominations Are Now Open Know someone who's made an impact at UC Berkeley? Nominate them for an Oral History!

Is there a Berkeley faculty, administrator, or staff person — past or present — who's made an impact on campus? This is your opportunity to nominate someone who has made an outstanding contribution to campus life or to the teaching, research, or public service mission of the university — and we'll interview the selected candidate for posterity. This oral history honor has been made possible by a generous endowment from the class of '31.



Nominate a UC Berkeley faculty or staff who has made an important contribution to campus for an oral history

Made possible by the Class of '31

Submit your nominations here.



Dying by Inches: Epidemics and Oral History

Many comparisons have recently been made between COVID-19 and the great Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918-19. There has also been a lot of great research by historians into that pandemic, specifically to discover any lessons that might apply to future pandemics. Remember the graph that was in the news early on in the COVID-19

pandemic which showed the differences in case-fatality rates between Philadelphia and St. Louis? This is where the evidence for the concept of “flattening the curve” comes from. The results were published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Researchers from the same effort then compiled all kinds of information in an online encyclopedia of the Spanish Flu.

We at the Oral history Center at UC Berkeley have our own stories that touch on the Spanish Flu.

Paul Burnett surveys our collection using the “Advanced Search” fields in our search engine, and reports on his findings here.

In Memory of David C. Driskell, 1931-2020

In April 2020, artist David C. Driskell passed away at the age of 88.



Driskell was interviewed by Amanda Tewes and Bridget Cooks for the Getty Research Institute's African American Art History Initiative.

Some words from Amanda Tewes:
In April 2019, Bridget Cooks and I had the honor of interviewing artist and art historian David C. Driskell for the Getty Research Institute's African American Art History Initiative. It was with heavy hearts that we learned of his passing in early April 2020.

Although I only interacted with David in person for a handful of days, they were certainly memorable. He and his wife, Dorothy, opened their home to Bridget and me and made us feel welcome after long days of travel. David was kind, supremely talented and intimidatingly intelligent, and had a knack for making me laugh during filming.

Bridget, who knew David personally and professionally, has written a lovely piece for **Artforum.com** celebrating David's life and legacy, and we wanted to share it with you here.

Driskell's oral history interview is in the process of finalization and will be released in the coming months.

New Special Season of the Berkeley Remix Podcast

Lately, things have been challenging and uncertain. We're enduring an order to shelter-in-place, trying to read the news, but not too much, and prioritize self-care. Like many of you, we, too, are in need of some relief.



So, we'd like to provide you with some, in the form of a podcast. Episodes in this series, which we're calling "Coronavirus Relief," may sound different from those we've produced in the past, that tell narrative stories drawing from our collection of oral histories. But like many of you, we, too, are in need of a break.

We'll be adding some new episodes in this Coronavirus Relief series with stories from the field, things that have been on our mind, interviews that have been helping us get through, and finding small moments of happiness.

Our first episode is from Amanda Tewes.

If you like our podcast, please rate us or leave a comment on our iTunes page!



Podcast

Looking for new podcast recommendations as you shelter in place? Amanda Tewes shares one of her favorite podcasts: *Past Present*.

Past Present is a weekly podcast hosted by a panel of historians who give historical context for a variety of contemporary topics. Fittingly, the show's motto is "Hindsight is foresight." Historians Nicole Hemmer, Natalia Mehlman Petrzela, and Neil J. Young cover topics that range from **Greta Thunberg and youth climate activism** to **the appeal of Marie Kondo** to **the political power of women's rage**. Hosts bring their own academic specialties and personal interests to the discussions, which means I always walk away with different perspectives and new information.

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