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The American Indian Oral History Manual: Making Many Voices Heard.
By Charles E. Trimble, Barbara W. Sommer, and Mary Kay Quinlan.

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REVIEWS

The American Indian Oral History Manual: Making Many Voices Heard. By Charles E. Trimble, Barbara W. Sommer, and Mary Kay Quinlan. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2008. 160 pages. \$65.00 cloth; \$22.95 paper.

This manual is long overdue, or perhaps its publication is timely. Tribal communities, friendship and urban Indian centers, and non-Indians wishing to engage a project that requires interviewing one or a group of persons should consider *The American Indian Oral History Manual: Making Many Voices Heard* indispensable. Although more than five hundred tribes have been federally recognized, these tribes, hundreds of others with state recognition who pursue federal status, and other groups who, particularly in the eastern United States, seek to reconstitute their fragile cohesiveness sooner or later (if they have not already begun to do so) will have to interview narrators of tribal community history, memory, and culture. For interested readers and oral history project coordinators, this manual succinctly offers soup-to-nuts guidance on the full range of oral history protocol and management and should be on the reference shelf of tribal offices, cultural preservation repositories, indigenous studies endeavors, and lay individuals and the agencies they work with.

Oral historians have benefited from several books of modest length and articles providing advice about how oral history and life history interviews can be conducted and how the ensuing records should be processed. Pertaining to interviewing in Native communities and with individuals, components of the basic procedures will assist any interviewer and project director, yet culturally specific adjustments rarely taken into account by practitioners make vulnerable the interaction with narrators, resulting in a colonialist environment surrounding the exchange. Barbara W. Sommer and Mary Kay Quinlan are experienced oral historians who have been associated with the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and Nebraska Wesleyan; they are active members of the Oral History Association (OHA), a national organization with state and regional chapters that publishes its own periodical, and they have collaborated on Web sites and the useful guides, *The Oral History Manual* (2000) and the *Native American Veterans Oral History Manual* (2005). It is fitting that Charles E. Trimble (Oglala) should join them for the current volume after having been a liaison for the development of the veterans manual. He brings a deep and sensitive knowledge to his tireless advocacies and expertise; among other activities he was the main founder of the American Indian Press Association, a former director of the National Congress of American Indians,

and a board member of Indian community institutions, civic associations, and Nebraska and US associations for history, folk life, and historic preservation. *The American Indian Oral History Manual* is a culmination of his long interaction with Native people encountering modern institutions, technologies, and procedures. This guide's somewhat intricate genealogical origins lie in Sommer and Quinlan's *The Oral History Manual* as that project informed *Capturing the Living Past: An Oral History Primer*, which can be accessed through the Nebraska State Historical Society Web site (http://www.nebraska-history.org/lib-arch/research/audiovis/oral_history/index.htm, 2005); the three authors follow closely its organization and layout but have fleshed out its outline structure. *The Oral History Manual* and Trimble's subsequent collaborations facilitated the creation and abiding spirit of this new guidebook.

The American Indian Oral History Manual is not a "personal journey with stories" like William Schneider's *So They Understand: Cultural Issues in Oral History* (2002) or a collection of critical discourses like David Dunaway and Willa Baum's *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (1996). Perhaps its nearest counterparts are *A Guide for Oral History in the Native American Community* (2000), issued by the Suquamish tribe to its members, and Donald A. Ritchie's *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (2003). Occasionally cited are David Henige's *Oral Historiography* (1982) and Julie Cruikshank's *The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory* (1998). Because a casual attitude prevails that just about anyone can be an oral historian, the actual responsibilities project managers and interviewers must observe might seem too dependent upon keeping paper records. The authors thus leave little guesswork about procedures, the selection of interviewers, ethical and legal parameters, record keeping, transcribing, and storage that tribal communities engaging in or thinking about conducting oral history interviews should not take for granted. The narrative attitude and tone resonates not simply with encouragement but also as a kind of workshop in which cultural values and archival procedures come together. A collaborative authorial nature is evident throughout, and even if it builds closely upon the instructions of previous manuals, Trimble's invaluable contributions orient this manual's users toward being patient and respectful about Native protocols and discrete tribal community ways of speaking and listening. Thus, this book summarily addresses all issues important to an indigenous interview, which to the unwary may seem intangible, such as cultural protocols, tribal values, questions about the protection of cultural property, and what not to ask during an interview. For as slender as *The American Indian Oral History Manual* is, it provides instructions on addressing tribal worldviews that are often resistant to Euro-Western academic values and colonial practices.

Eight chapters comprise the book. Three appendices include one each for sample release, agreement, and correspondence forms; evaluation guidelines derived from criteria established by the OHA; and various bibliographies. Succinctly defining distinctions between oral history and life history, and identifying storytelling genres as encoded in tribal memories constitute the important first chapter, "Indigenous Oral History." Trimble, Sommer, and Quinlan convey a need to appreciate the ongoing conflicts and discussions

in Native communities regarding the appropriateness of relating particular knowledge; they write compassionately about what happens to the language of interview exchange, the various interactive layers affecting narrators and listeners, and the preservation of context for a tribe's future.

Though the second chapter involves us with the tribal equivalents to intellectual property rights, its underlying concern is establishing the standards interviewers should follow during the entire process; release forms and related documentation contribute to the ethical and legal dimension, with the authors recommending that John Neuenschwander's OHA pamphlet *Oral History and the Law* (1985) be read prior to developing a project. Chapter 3 encourages oral history coordinators to formulate a game plan: develop a mission statement, identify protocols, create an advisory board, agree upon project topic or topics, create lists of prospective participants—including Native and non-Native interviewers—and keep records. Using reliable equipment and the matter of changes in recording, media, and storage technology affect the successful start and completion of any oral history exchange. Chapters 5 through 7 advise how to prepare to conduct an interview, recommending pre-interview visits to establish rapport, conducting background research, and combining unobtrusive direction for what can become an organic informational process.

Oral history, as the authors affirm, becomes an extension of tribal oral traditions, and as we find in chapter 6, the process of curating what is recorded is as big a responsibility as gathering the information. When scarce funds affect the budget for purchasing new recorders, microphones, and recording media such as tapes and CDs, project directors and interviewers face having to improvise. "Pursue the objective" is what the authors encourage, using the best available equipment. Tribal communities and Indian centers often keep up with state-of-the-art equipment changes. Don't allow the inability to transfer a taped interview to the CD format or the lack of equipment that will permit direct recording to a CD stymie a project. Another important matter addressed in chapter 7, "Processing the Interview," concerns storage conditions for media—temperature and humidity—and the filing and accessibility of tapes and documentation. We are reminded in chapter 8, "Using Oral Documentation," of the inexplicable value of oral traditions and personal experiences to oral histories as pertinent documents. "Stories about the past are important because they have meaning for what they *say* and what they can *do*, not for chronologies" (102). Contextual inclusion of tribal stories and legends means extrapolating that information to appreciate the fully narrated circumstances.

The American Indian Oral History Manual is a deceptively simple read, yet anyone engaging in this kind of interaction with Native people, no matter how intimately they may be known as neighbors, will benefit by having it at hand when an interview is being planned. It is also useful after the interview, because the "real" activity is not just the meeting and discussion for recording but also the archival duties now unavoidable for preserving an indigenous future.

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