

Guidelines for book review submissions in the *Oral History Review*

Because readers of the *Oral History Review* come at oral history from a variety of approaches, backgrounds, and interests, reviews must consider both the substantive content of the work, as well as its use of oral history and/or its value to oral historians. The following guidelines are intended to assist authors in fashioning their reviews. Authors, however, are urged to adapt them as necessary to the work under consideration and to exercise their own imagination and judgment.

Content:

A review is 750-1,000 words and should be a critical analysis of the text, focusing both on its historical relevance and its usefulness as a book that directly or indirectly uses oral history methodology. There are some journals interested in publishing only reviews of books that are seen as contributing directly to their discipline; while that is significant for practicing scholars and researchers, the *Oral History Review* believes it is also important to publish reviews about books that appear on the surface to have disciplinary or methodological relevance but turn out not to when looked at in depth. Doing so will help inform those interested in learning from these texts or using them in a course, whether or not there is material valuable to understanding the use and interpretation of oral history.

A review is not simply a summary of the book, detailing what the author or authors wrote in each chapter; reviews are more like literary criticism, looking at the content of a book and discussing its style, substance, and merit. Did the author unweave an old historical analysis, add oral history testimonies, and then thread a new, more powerful, and more compelling history? In what ways, if any, has the author influenced oral history methodology or how such a methodology is used? On the other hand, is the published work a collection of excerpts from oral histories without any context for why the excerpts were chosen or how the author derives meaning from them? Does the author mention extensive interviewing as a core component of the book, but then make it unclear where such interviewing informs the historical analysis? Reflections on questions such as these are useful for those who want to know if they should use the book in a course, or if they should visit the archive at which the interviews are housed to use the interviews in their own research.

Some additional things to keep in mind when writing a review:

1. Although reviews are not simply summaries, you should include an overview of the content of the book, as well as indicate the extent to which it is shaped by oral material.
2. You should locate and critically evaluate the book within the context of existing literature on both the subject matter and oral historiography. You can ask how the work opens new questions or adds new insights to the subject at hand or what new and interesting historiographical questions or ideas the use of oral materials itself suggests—for example, about memory and historical consciousness, about the relationship of the author to his/her subject, about the social and political context of oral history work, and/or about the interpretive complexities of language.
3. A further consideration is the skill with which the author has mastered the methodology and technical skills of oral history—indeed, the extent to which he/she

- has discussed the methodology. Possible important points here include the provenance of the interviews; how interviewees were selected and the representativeness of the selection; how interviews were conducted and the possible impact on content; the extent to which interview material was edited and the criteria used in making editorial decisions; the extent to which interview material has been processed, its location, and provisions for access to the recordings and/or transcripts.
4. You might also appropriately comment upon the author's organization of his/her material as well as his/her style and use of language.
 5. Please be judicious in evaluating books. Do not write a review that reads like a litany of complaints about minor methodological points, or is a digressive essay that does not address the book under consideration in a forthright manner, or focuses on listing typographical or other minor errors (unless they substantially detract from the book's quality).

Format:

1. Please use the Times New Roman typeface at twelve-point font size for all text in the review and ensure the page layout uses one-inch margins.
2. Details about the book should be at the top of the first page (but not in a header), the review follows, and then the document ends with the reviewer's name and institutional affiliation. The institutional affiliation appears underneath the reviewer's name and is italicized. If the reviewer is not affiliated with an institution, use "Independent Scholar."
3. Details about the book and the review are left-justified and double-spaced; the reviewer's name and affiliation are right-justified and single-spaced.
4. Details about the book are in the following format: *Book title*. By author. City of publication, abbreviation of state of publication: Name of Press, Year of Publication. If the book has three authors, please list all authors; if it has more than three authors, list the first author and then use et al. If the book is an edited volume and has a single editor, use (ed.) following the editor's name; if the book is an edited volume and has two or three editors, use (eds.) following the last editor's name; if the book is an edited volume and has more than three editors, use et al. (eds.) following the first editor's name.
5. There is one carriage return between the details about the book and the body of the review, and there is one carriage return between the body of the review and the reviewer's name.
6. The first paragraph of the review is not indented; subsequent paragraphs are indented. There are no additional carriage returns between paragraphs.
7. Cite direct quotations from the book under review but do not cite other references to materials within the book. Citations for direct quotations appear in parentheses at the end of the sentence within which the citation is made; use commas to separate the citations to multiple quotes from different pages in the same sentence. The following are a few examples:

- a. Citation:
 - i. The main thrust of the author’s theory is that “oral history is a methodology that opens the door to many unknowable stories,” which do not appear in the traditional written records historians use but are “essential for truly understanding how individuals navigated” important historical events (12, 15).
 - b. No citation:
 - i. The author uses this text to explicate the multifaceted experiential framework within which, for example, these presumed outsiders were intricately woven into the fabric of this fractured culture.
8. Do not use footnotes or endnotes in the review. References to works other than the book being reviewed generally follow format rules for footnotes of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, with the exception that square brackets are used instead of parentheses around the facts of publication (place, publisher name, and publication date) when the title of the referenced work is included inside the citation. The following are a few examples:
- a. In Michael Frisch’s *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990). . . .”
 - b. As Michael Frisch (*A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* [Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990]) already made clear. . . .”
 - c. “Beyond the litany of inspiration, one is struck by how the reviewers so inspired seem to share a particular notion of the nature of the book, almost apart from its contents and meaning,” as Michael Frisch (*A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* [Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990], 6) notes in his analysis of review blurbs of Studs Terkel’s *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970).
 - d. Valerie Yow (“Ethics and Interpersonal Relationships in Oral History Research,” *Oral History Review* 22, no. 1 [1995]: 51-66) discusses this very issue.
 - e. Thinking about the relationship between oral history and biography, Valerie Yow (“Biography and Oral History,” in *Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Thomas Charlton, Rebecca Sharpless, and Lois Myers [Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006], 425-464) notes that. . .
9. Do not number the pages of the document.
10. Below are two examples of reviews, giving a sense of content and formatting.

Example 1: Review of a single book

Knowing History in Mexico: An Ethnography of Citizenship. By Trevor Stack. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012.

In this book, anthropologist Trevor Stack presents some of the insights gained during over twenty years of intermittent fieldwork in a small town, Tapalpa, and a neighboring village, Atacco, both a few hours from Guadalajara, Mexico. What began as a microhistory of the 1926 Cristero rebellion, in which Catholics rebelled against the new postrevolutionary Mexican government, became an inquiry into much larger questions: What kind of knowledge is history? And what does it do for people?

Oral historians have long wrestled with these questions. One of the foundational arguments of our field, that what people misremember is important because it tells us about their desires and dreams, is based on the idea that history is something people make use of to describe and shape their social worlds (see, for example, Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991]). Stack's work further explores this idea through ethnographic research, integrating the study of oral history with research on other forms of history making, such as archival research, history writing, and informal discussions of the past.

In *Knowing History*, Stack focuses on the relationship between history and citizenship, particularly urban citizenship. While citizenship has long been thought of as a legal relationship between a person and a nation, more recent scholarship has focused on cities as crucial arenas in which people participate and make claims about society. For many, including some of Stack's

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informants, belonging to a city is more significant than belonging to a nation, especially in terms of everyday life.

History, Stack argues, is an important coin in the transactions that produce urban citizenship. Stack finds, first, that part of what defines a town is that it is both a place whose history can be known and a place in which history can be produced. Having history, however, is of course more than simply having a past; it is having a past that can be articulated in certain privileged ways. For example, during the period of Stack's fieldwork, the village of Atacco was smaller and poorer than the neighboring town of Tapalpa, but the popular historical narrative in the area was that Atacco had once been the town—even the county seat—and Tapalpa the backwater, a lone hacienda. Atacco residents trying to reclaim their village's lost status attempted, as one part of their campaign, to document Atacco's long history. With few written documents upon which to draw, they began conducting interviews with local elders. Stack found, however, that they struggled to turn these interviews into an authoritative historical narrative. Lacking the skills and social capital required to analyze and legitimate their interviews and, in effect, turn them into the powerful primary source documents we call oral histories, the would-be historians floundered.

This brings us to another key argument of the book: knowing history both produces and requires what the residents of Tapalpa and Atacco call *cultura*, which we might call “being cultured.” Those with *cultura* have a greater capacity to produce histories that both the public and expert historians will recognize as *history*, while producing histories (especially writing books, but also telling about history) can lend a person *cultura*. Having *cultura* is part of being a good citizen, and is a prerequisite for assuming a public leadership role. Telling stories about the past is not sufficient to produce *cultura*; the stories must be told in a particular way and be

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particular types of stories to count as history. History, here, is a public genre explicitly in contrast to the less-prestigious private oral genre of gossip or the entertaining stories of legend. Tapalpans understood history as an authoritative account of a sealed-over past, as opposed to the still-raw stories of gossip.

Stack's description of the status hierarchies and different historical practices of academic historians, local historians, so-called municipal chroniclers, and Atacco's failed historians is one of the highlights of the book; he found that many local historians harnessed the power of written documents, primary and secondary sources alike, by simply copying them into their texts. Stack also found that it was rare for local historians, either orally or in writing, to incorporate the history of their region into national historical narratives. For example, the story of the Cristero rebellion was understood as local history, not as a challenge or complement to hegemonic state history of the Mexican Revolution.

Anthropologists studying how history is produced have long called for research that examines in close detail how power shapes the creation of historical sources and narratives (see, for example, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* [Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995]). While Stack does not primarily situate his work in this tradition, his description of the people of Atacco struggling to transform stories into oral histories is an excellent account of the production of sources. He also provides a rare analysis of the long history of a particular narrative: that which asserts that Atacco was the town back when Tapalpa was just a hacienda. Using archival sources, Stack shows that both Atacco and Tapalpa began as indigenous communities, refuting the popular claim that Creoles and Spaniards settled in Tapalpa recently. Beginning with an 1879 account of the region's history, Stack shows both how this narrative has changed and how it has stayed the same. Crucially, he does not take

Example 1: Review of a single book

consistency for granted, making the staying power of the popular narrative an object of study. He finds that both local power dynamics and changing understandings of national history shaped the story of Atacco and Tapalpa. In one example, the story gave the people of Atacco a long history that they could leverage to plan a renaissance, while Tapalpans reveled in their town's great progress in overtaking Atacco; the story of the Tapalpa hacienda being overtaken by a town also fit with national narratives of democratization of land and power.

Trevor Stack's book is brief: he writes that he has left much of the academic argumentation to four published articles. At times this strategy leads it to feel thin or rushed, as each argument is framed with the bare minimum of context, and the multiple short chapters and subheadings make the pace seem ever quicker. However, the many parts do build to a whole, and this slim book makes several arguments of importance to oral historians. Those interested in who tells stories and why, and in particular in the power dynamics surrounding the transformation of personal stories into oral histories, will find Stack's work of particular relevance.

Amy Starecheski
Columbia University

Example 2: Review of two books simultaneously

Apprenticeship in Critical Ethnographic Practice. By Jean Lave. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Returns to the Field: Multitemporal Research and Contemporary Anthropology. By Signe Howell and Aud Talle (eds.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012.

Apprenticeship in Critical Ethnographic Practice and *Returns to the Field*—while valuable anthropological texts in their own right—offer a number of relevant insights for oral history practitioners. In their efforts to highlight the value of long-term ethnographic engagement with host communities and individual research participants, the authors reveal the importance of the bonds that form between researchers and their subjects over extensive periods of time for influencing fieldwork and subsequent analysis; the value of documenting the researchers’ changing relationships to their discipline and to their research participants, as well as their own personal lives, over time; and the value of a deepened understanding of cultural resilience, continuities, and transformations as garnered through sustained, firsthand ethnographic documentation and analysis.

That ethnography—the keystone of cultural anthropological fieldwork that relies upon “direct and sustained contact with human agents within the context of their daily lives (and cultures), watching what happens, listening to what is said, and *asking questions*” (Karen O’Reilly, *Key Concepts in Ethnography* [London: Sage Publications, Inc., 2009], 3, emphasis in the original)—can be used to enhance oral historical practice and analysis is by no means a new observation, as evidenced by the plethora of oral historians who regularly rely on ethnographic methods to supplement their research methodologies (for a recent example, see Anna Sheftel and

Example 2: Review of two books simultaneously

Stacey Zembrzycki's edited volume, *Oral History Off the Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice* [New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013]). Beginning with Lave's *Apprenticeship in Critical Ethnographic Practice*, readers enjoy a thorough analysis of one ethnographer's long-term efforts to comprehend how Vai and Gola tailors in Liberia maintain and reproduce their specific skill sets. In doing so, Lave addresses three interrelated themes. First, the book offers an in-depth overview of Vai and Gola tailoring apprenticeships from 1973 to 1978. Second, the book documents Lave's shifting theoretical, ethical, and methodological frameworks to reveal a second kind of apprenticeship—the anthropologist's process of learning how to build relationships with interlocutors, conduct fieldwork, and analyze the data that results. Finally, the book advocates critical ethnographic practice whereby ethnographers undertake fieldwork with the intention of pursuing some form of activism against social injustice, broadly defined.

As the book progresses, Lave shifts from a positivist theoretical framework to a critical ethnographic practice aimed at promoting an appreciation and respect for indigenous modes of transmitting knowledge outside formal institutions, such as schools. Her introduction critiques Western tendencies to privilege “formal education”—that which was learned in schools—over “informal education”—that which was embedded in everyday activities and learned via socialization, a form of knowledge more common among nonliterate cultures (16-17). In doing so, Lave identifies the underlying purpose of her original fieldwork in Liberia as based in “a desire to pursue change in the theory and practice of research on learning and thinking, the bailiwick of experimental psychological research,” and then proceeds to “lay out a (long, slow) process of breaking with a commonsense positivist problematic and moving toward relational social practice theory” in which the perspective of the researched could be presented with equal authority (32, 33). Lave then introduces Happy Corner, her fieldwork site, and the social

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conditions that influence tailoring apprenticeships, describing the apprenticeship system that underpins the institution of tailoring and the lengthy learning processes through which apprentices become masters. Learning transfer is revealed through a series of experiments she designed to evaluate the effectiveness of informal education models practiced among tailors when training their apprentices. Lave's penultimate chapter delves further into arithmetic problem-solving processes common among tailors, using the example of a shared transaction in which several tailors worked together to create a suit and then divided the profits according to division of labor and interpersonal politics. Lave returns to the subject of critical ethnographic practice in her conclusion, exploring the processes of apprenticeship that have intertwined throughout the book as a series of relational problematics "produced in and through the other—research on apprenticeship, research as apprenticeship" (156). She concludes by making a final case for social practice theory in which "persons are always embodied, located uniquely in space, and in their relations with other persons, things, practices, and institutional arrangements" (152).

There are several aspects of *Apprenticeship in Critical Ethnographic Practice* that are significant for oral historians. For those interested in education, Lave's book provides a theoretically and empirically rigorous defense of indigenous ways of maintaining and transmitting knowledge beyond those formal institutions that are typically privileged by Western scholars. More generally, it provides a fascinating account of one researcher's shifting theoretical and methodological framework over three decades of multidisciplinary analysis. In particular, chapters 2 through 5 conclude with commentary sections that articulate Lave's apprenticeship as an ethnographer, demonstrating her overarching argument that as much as theory informs practice, practice influences theory, particularly as the researcher establishes meaningful relationships with her participants and the wider community in which she is embedded. And

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certainly this reflective documentation of the practice of doing fieldwork is something that is rarely included in oral historical studies, despite its ability to enhance understandings of the processes underlying the cocreation of oral histories.

This latter point is perhaps better demonstrated, however, by *Returns to the Field*, in which an impressive group of senior anthropologists reflect on lengthier fieldwork engagements with their host communities—engagements that often involved multiple field visits over several decades, sometimes among multiple communities. The volume’s editors label this phenomenon “multitemporal fieldwork” and argue that this method allows practitioners to achieve “a semblance of the Malinowskian aim of understanding the ‘native’s point of view,’ and, in addition, makes it possible to follow social processes at close range” (3). The outcome is a unique form of ethnographic analysis that has benefited from a broader lens of observation, “due as much to the empirical situations [the ethnographers] have participated in as to changes in their own personal life cycles, and to changes in the discipline” (15). The contributions to the volume are organized into two parts: the first focusing on change and continuity and the second addressing expansions in time and space.

Beginning with part 1, Terence Turner’s chapter on forty-five years of fieldwork among the Kayapo documents a once “pauperized marginal minority” as it transforms into “the most culturally dynamic and politically effective indigenous people in Brazil” (25). Turner argues that his ability to “always come back” allowed him to maintain good relationships within the communities where he worked and assist the Kayapo in their struggle to defend their traditional lands against a range of social, political, and military incursions. Frances and Howard Morphy’s chapter on thirty-five years spent studying Yolngu mortuary rituals in Australia have allowed them to document important transformations and continuities in Yolngu religious beliefs and

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funerary practices, allowing their analysis to “escape from the simple dualism of ‘tradition’ versus ‘change’” (67). Aud Talle reflects on over thirty years of fieldwork among the Maasai of Kenya and the realization that just as “multiple returns to the field allow the anthropologist to gain valuable insight into cultural processes over time, it is also a risky project that poses specific challenges and carries considerable responsibility,” primarily due to the complex relationships that form between researchers and their participants when addressing challenging subjects, such as genital cutting (91). David Holmberg then draws on thirty-five years of ethnographic research among the Tamang of Nepal to support the argument that “as long as the social and cultural mediations at play in the production of ethnography are integral in analysis, ethnography produces empirical knowledge produced nowhere else” (119). Finally, Peter Metcalf’s analysis of the various forms of nostalgia he has experienced surrounding his work among the people of central Borneo—his nostalgia for the classical ethnography of his teachers, his participants’ nostalgia for the golden age of pre-World War II Borneo, and so on—highlights the long-term social, cultural, and environmental legacies of colonialism and neocolonialism.

Part 2 addresses the inevitable territorial and thematic expansions that emerge in the course of multitemporal fieldwork. Signe Howell’s chapter compares fieldwork sites in Malaysia and Indonesia, where she conducted ethnographic research for over thirty years, in order to demonstrate how multitemporal fieldwork gives rise to “a more sophisticated attitude to knowledge; not least, paradoxes become less of a problem and are instead accepted as part of normal life” (176). Piers Vitebsky draws upon his relationships with two men from vastly different cultures and regions of the world whose lives and histories he feels have become intertwined with his own, creating in him a “deep emotional urge” to contribute to their “future-oriented program of reform” for a new social order (200). Edvard Hviding then addresses the

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impact of globalization on the peoples of the Solomon Islands since 1986, demonstrating the potential for comparative analysis “within places: in the field itself, in a multitude of ‘ethnographic presents,’ encountered most meaningfully during regular returns to the field” (224). Alan Barnard’s reflections on multitemporal fieldwork among Khoisan peoples in Botswana and Namibia—the volume’s singular example of returning to a region, rather than returning to a particular community or series of communities—reveals “the rewards of decades of accumulated knowledge, analysis, and reanalysis in a regionally focused framework” (247).

Finally, Bruce Knaft’s afterword ties together a series of common themes among the various chapters. Of particular relevance, given Lave’s support for critical ethnography practice, Knaft notes the “*structural* worsening plight of marginalized peoples in many places,” even as “the personal resilience, adaptability, and potential of persons as individuals” emerges (254, emphasis in the original; 255). Taken as a whole, *Returns to the Field* provides support for Lave’s argument that the firsthand historical perspective gained through multiple visits to the field and sustained reflection on the process of doing ethnography can greatly enhance our understandings not only of the host communities, but, more generally, of how “local experiences and sensibilities are or may be refractory to plans or ideologies of wider modernity” (251).

Ultimately, many of the contributions offered by *Apprenticeships in Critical Ethnographic Practice* and *Returns to the Field* will be familiar to oral historians, though the disciplinary language in which they are couched may be at times foreign. For example, oral historians have often contemplated the idea that research participants must be understood in relation to the wider temporal, historical, political, and social contexts in which their narratives are produced, as well as the idea that researchers and their participants collaborate or “share authority” to determine the final form and understanding of a story (Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the*

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Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990]). Where these texts can perhaps contribute to oral historical discourse is in their thorough documentation and analysis of the researcher's personal, theoretical, and methodological trajectory in shaping the data that is collected and its subsequent analysis as informed by over a century of anthropological theory and practice. Furthermore, the various contributors discussed in this review also highlight that valuable insights can be gained by returning to the field—whether physically or intellectually—to reflect upon the inevitable shifts in the researcher's intellectual transformation, disciplinary trends, and even popular understandings of key events and narratives that have been documented.

Erin Jessee
The University of Strathclyde