

Sample Rebirth Grant Narrative

Excerpts

Panel Discussion/Publication/Radio/Digital Humanities: Oral Histories of Desegregation

Project Abstract

please provide a condensed (2-3 sentence) description of your project.

The “Oral Histories of Desegregation” project will create an hour-long radio documentary for broadcast on Red River Radio, a web-based collection of oral histories from alumni of four high schools with distinct transition stories during Caddo Parish’s move from segregated to desegregated facilities, a curriculum/user guide for the general public, and a framework for documenting similar stories on a statewide and national level.

Project Description*

Describe your project, including its measurable goals, format and humanities content. 300 word limit.

The “Oral Histories of Desegregation” project will create an hour-long radio documentary for broadcast on Red River Radio in August 2020. We will collect oral histories from alumni of four high schools with distinct transition stories during Caddo Parish’s move from segregated to desegregated facilities.

Our project will explore the dichotomy of a region that supported (1) annual Thanksgiving Day football games between the two “white” high schools (Fair Park and Byrd) that drew twenty thousand fans, (2) funding a state of the art campus for “blacks” (Booker T. Washington) which was singled out by Life magazine in 1950 as an example of the new American schools designed “to serve the whole community, a place where adults and young people can see movies, hear lectures or dance when the children are safe at home,” (3) the repurposing of Herndon High (the school funded by a black philanthropist to end the long bus ride for rural Negro students attending Booker T. Washington High School) into a magnet school where white students are willingly bussed, and (4) Herndon High students becoming North Caddo High “Rebels” despite community outcry at the mascot’s connotation.

We will use the twenty collected oral histories (approximately eighty hours of raw material) and the explanatory statements from humanities scholars in a radio documentary that encourages listeners to (a) reconsider the relationship of regional history to state and national history and (b) become aware of the powerful role of rhetoric in shaping socio-political reality.

LSU Shreveport students (who volunteer for extracurricular, non-credited practice) will serve as interviewers for the Desegregation project. LSUS History and English professors will help construct a rigorously researched framework for the radio documentary.

The documentary will be produced by Red River Radio, which reaches the largest geographical region of any community radio station in the U.S., with a weekly carriage of 150,000. While the impact on this audience cannot be directly measured, we will use quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the impact on both interviewees and interviewers. Additionally, we will host a special presentation where we welcome public discussion and collect audience evaluation forms. Our project will be available via website accompanied by a curriculum/user guide for the general public.

Humanities Content*

List which HUMANITIES DISCIPLINES relate to your project and describe the critical, analytical, and/or historical application of these disciplines, illustrating by specific example. How will these humanities disciplines be used to address the important cultural topics in your community and throughout the state? Click here for a list of humanities disciplines. 500 words max.

History

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While much has been written about desegregation, textbooks tend to focus on watershed moments, bypassing entire communities. The curriculum for Grade 8 Louisiana History, for example, limits its discussion to events in Baton Rouge and New Orleans. Moreover, statistics, while essential in conveying the impacts of desegregation on a nation or a region, work to conceal the vast complexity of individual response. [See Yonghee Suh and Brian J. Daugherty, "Oral History as Inquiry: Using Digital Oral History Collections to Teach School Desegregation," *The History Teacher* 51.4 (2018), 700.] Ann McLaurin's history of Byrd High School notes that five thousand students from Caddo Parish marched in protest of desegregation in 1970. [McLaurin, Ann M. et al. *Glimpses of the City of Byrd: 1925-1995*. n.d., n.p.] The statistic establishes the general mood at segregated white schools but denies us access to the individual experience, implying a case.

Philosophy and Linguistics

George Orwell once suggested that "if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought." The demonstrable truth of this suggestion informed much political rhetoric during desegregation, as those who shaped and wielded language did so to promote particular beliefs among their audiences. While the Citizens Council appropriated the historically significant term "citizen" to define an all-white anti-desegregation activist group, individuals on both sides of the debate held politically-fraught and often contradictory definitions of terms like "freedom," "equality," and "access."

The deliberate use of language to shape perceived reality persists. The Louisiana Board of Education's Student Standards for Grade 11 US History, for instance, confuses the terms "desegregation" and "integration," repeatedly using "integration" to mean the simple physical placement of a student of one color within the campus of a school formerly designated for the other. Oral histories collected from students who experienced such events, however, testify to the fact that desegregation and integration are very different things, with the latter being a long and often painful process, resolved not by military presence or duress but only by a willingness to understand and respect cultural differences.

The informed participation of the individual is fundamental to democracy. Nevertheless, the world in which we live discourages critical thinking, preferring a docile citizenry that can be led by billboards, commercials, advertisements, traditional media, and social media to comply with the business and political interests of an elite minority. Our project aims to challenge audiences to think critically about the use of language and its capacity to deny, as well as to reveal, the truth.

Sustainability*

Please state any plans to replicate this project in the future, and/or any related initiatives for the project director and sponsoring organization. 500 word limit.

The Bishop Foundation plans to use this pilot program as the framework for an ongoing relationship with LSUS and the Northwest Louisiana Archives to build an extensive and representative collection of oral histories.

With LSUS now offering a course in oral history collection, we anticipate having trained collegiate student volunteers and expanding our work to high school students interested in extracurricular exposure to documentary production and archival techniques. We plan to share our program template with other communities in the region, state, and nation.

The Northwest Louisiana Archives has long recognized the need for an ongoing project to record local oral histories. In fact, they received grants from the Community Foundation and the NEH in the mid-1970s to establish an Oral History Program involving graduate student interns. Sadly, the project ended with that round of funding, leaving the region essentially as impoverished in terms of its archived

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history as it was before. Bishop Blue similarly has a longstanding concern with the documentation of regional history, particularly as it affects education.

Our collected desegregation stories and the radio documentary will be available to the general public at www.HARKfestival.com. HARK, which stands for History of the Ark-La-Tex, is a community festival and a competition for regional students from elementary to university level. It challenges them to experience history not only through academic engagement (research and writing) but also through a practical hands-on approach that allows even those who might not excel in the classroom to appreciate the rich traditions of their region. With this goal in mind, the competition is divided into four categories – writing, visual arts, handcrafts, and entertainment – with a variety of subcategories, including music, cooking, photography, woodwork, and animation.

The inaugural HARK Festival will be held on the LSUS campus on October 12, 2019 in conjunction with the Pioneer Heritage Open Day. It is funded by Bishop Blue, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Noel Foundation, and LSUS.

Target Audience*

The LEH is committed to maintaining a statewide impact and geographical considerations factor into each of these partnerships. Priority is given to projects that reach audiences in multiple parishes. Please estimate total audience size, projected demographics and location. 300 words max.

Collaboration with Red River Radio provides a diverse audience for “Oral Histories of Desegregation.” Red River Radio covers the largest geographical area of any community radio service in the USA: with five stations, located in Shreveport, Alexandria, and Grambling (LA), El Dorado (AR), Lufkin/Nacogdoches, and Overton (TX), it serves a population of over two million, with average weekly carriage of 150,000. The demographics of this region vary widely, with three urban centers (Shreveport and Alexandria, LA, and Tyler, TX), two college towns (Lufkin/Nacogdoches, TX, and Grambling, LA), and a vast rural audience. The General Manager of Red River Radio has suggested a broadcast time of 6:00 p.m., which would allow the documentary to reach the listening public attracted by informational programming such as All Things Considered and Health Matters.

Based upon the Desegregation project subject matter and interview sources, we anticipate drawing a socio-economically diverse audience of senior citizens listening to the story they lived and youngsters learning more about the schools they attend. Due to the enthusiasm of Caddo Parish high school alumni associations, we conservatively estimate an audience of 10,000 for the initial radio broadcast. We will organize a public reception at the LSUS University Center where the documentary will be aired and members of the Project Team, including student volunteers and interviewees, will answer questions. The audience will be encouraged to participate in a survey and engage in an open discussion of project themes. We anticipate an audience of 250 for this special presentation.

Outreach*

How will you publicize the project to audiences? Please detail any public relations and/or social media strategies. 300 words max.

Red River Radio has its own publicity mechanisms, including on-air promotions and a website that includes upcoming events/programs, live-streaming, and archival materials. We also plan to take advantage of the Spring Fund-Drive, offering volunteer hours in exchange for an informal on-air discussion of the project.

Beyond advertising on the Bishop Blue and HARK Festival websites, we will leverage the publicity mechanisms available to us via our association with LSUS, including press releases to the Office of Media and Public Relations, the LSUS Foundation, and the LSUS Alumni Association.

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Through our HARK Festival programming, we have developed cross-promotional relationships with LSUS, Caddo Parish Schools, Shreve Memorial Library and Bossier Parish Libraries. We anticipate expanding these relationships to include poster and social media support for the Desegregation project.

In addition, we will promote the documentary on social media (via the Bishop Blue Foundation accounts, HARK Festival accounts, and the LSUS MLA [Master of Liberal Arts program] accounts). Our marketing plan will be guided by advice from [scholar name], whose area of expertise is social media and big data analytics.

