Using Stories to Bring the Immigrant and Ethnic Past to Life: A Practical Introduction

By Florence Mae Waldron

As numerous essays on the scholarship of teaching have argued, storytelling offers a highly effective means of drawing students at all age levels into intellectual pursuits. Storytelling can therefore be a particularly useful tool in college history classrooms, especially those in which students are largely non-majors seeking to fulfill general-education requirements. In illustrating my points with examples from this semester’s teaching, I will focus primarily on two categories of firsthand narratives produced by immigrants and ethnic minorities themselves: oral histories or “life stories,” and letters. At present I am teaching a once-weekly introductory survey, “Concepts in U.S. History,” covering U.S. history from 1492-present in thirteen class sessions; and a twice-weekly junior-level course that spans American Indian history from the dawn of time to the present in fourteen weeks. While oral histories and letters are critical in helping to make such broad swaths of the past comprehensible to the students, the pros and cons of using stories in history classes are also relevant to other types of immigrant and ethnic “stories” with which IEHS members may be more familiar, from autobiographies and memoirs to novels and other fictional materials.

Stories are pedagogically useful in teaching history for several reasons. First, stories can make the past come alive. They can “hook” otherwise disinterested students, and often provide engaging illustrations of principles and concepts, illustrations that students frequently remember far longer than the rest of what they may learn. My “Concepts in U.S. History” students are largely there to fulfill a requirement, keeping them interested for three hours a week while maximizing their understanding of the past would be impossible without stories. Through my own scholarly work on French Canadian and Italian immigrants to the U.S., I have worked closely with numerous collections of extant oral histories, from Tamara Hareven and Randolph Langenbach’s Amoskeag (1978) and Mary Blewett’s The Last Generation (1990), on factory workers in Manchester, New Hampshire and Lowell, Massachusetts, respectively, to the 2006 volume I edited entitled Italian Voices: Making Minnesota Our Home. When studying the shift in immigration patterns in the late 1800s, or what immigrants’ lives were like in American cities during this era, students often have a hard time understanding – for example – why parents would allow children as young as eleven to work long hours in factories, or how it was that native-born Americans looked down upon southern and eastern European ethnicities, whose descendants in my classes think of themselves as “white.”

Second, stories offer an ideal opportunity to create what education experts call “expectation failures.” Instructors can select and use particular stories to challenge students’ preconceptions about the past, or teach students to analyze the past by presenting stories with conflicting conclusions or points of view. In all their discussions of the gradual rise of industrialization in the United States, U.S. survey textbooks are more likely to include positive firsthand accounts of mill life from such antebellum “Lowell Girls” as native-born Lucy Larcom and Harriet Robinson, than they are to portray the darker side that many immigrants experienced in the postbellum era. Nor, as a rule, do they offer firsthand portrayals of life in the coal mines, iron mines, and other settings that helped fuel America’s industrial growth. Here, too, oral histories such as those in the collections cited above are immensely useful in helping students to build a more complicated understanding of how industrialization affected workers.

So can more targeted collections available online; for example, Cornell’s excellent site on the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Fire (http://www.trianglefire.org) includes a number of oral histories about survivors’ experiences working in sweatshops, taken from Leon Stein’s Out of the Sweatshop (1977). Likewise, despite the extensive descriptions in my students’ textbook of Japanese relocation during World War II, when I ask them in class to describe women’s wartime experiences, they still focus on the “Rosie the Riveter” stereotype of white middle-class housewives in temporary wartime work. World War II-era letters from the home front in Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith’s Since You Went Away (1991) leave students with a much richer and less “Rosie” picture of women’s lives during the war. Among those I regularly assign for in-class analysis are letters by Sonoko Jwata to her husband, already in an internment camp and awaiting her arrival, and by Maria Lousa Hernandez, a Chicana from a rural enclave of migrant agricultural workers, whose future husband was off fighting overseas — and who was fearful of losing Maria if she left their tight-knit bracero community for a wartime factory job in the city. Student feedback at the end of class reflected this deeper understanding: of twenty-four students in class that night, five students mentioned enjoying the letters for their firsthand perspectives of life during the war, noting that they now “better understand” how “different types of women” experienced the war; another five specifically mentioned better understanding the lives of bracero workers; and three were awed by their new understanding of anti-Japanese racism during the war.

Third, using stories in the classroom helps enable students to tell their own stories. Stories are a critical tool in diversifying and problematizing the dominant historical narrative (a process called “counter-storytelling”); they have the power to make the past relevant and recognizable to students in a way that few other...

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News from Libraries, Museums and Research Institutes...

The Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota offers grants of up to $500 to assist scholars traveling to conduct research at its facility. Awards are available for travel to the IHRC at any time between July 1, 2009, and June 30, 2010. The grants are available for graduate students, faculty, and independent scholars who live more than a day’s drive from the Twin Cities and need to research in the IHRC collections. The grant requires a minimum five-day residency at the Center. Applications for the 2009-2010 year are due by June 1, 2009. For further information, see the IHRC website at http://www.ihrc.umn.edu/index.php?entry=178755

Densho—The Japanese American Legacy Project in Seattle, Washington, offers an extensive web-page presentation of major issues in Japanese-American history, including many files on Japanese internment during World War II. Their archives include 10,000 images, over 600 hours of video interviews, and documents, as well as links to other archives and lesson plans for use by teachers. Densho’s resources are entirely online; there is no physical museum or archive. The web pages are available at http://www.densho.org

The National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia is making headway toward opening its new facility in mid-2010. On Jan. 21, 2009, the museum held a “topping off” ceremony with the placing of the last beam on the new structure. The new museum will face Independence Mall at 5th and Market streets, about a half-block from the museum’s present location. A capital campaign is being carried on for the $130 million facility. Information at http://nmajh.org


The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database has made significant advances in recent years. It has developed a searchable open-access database called “Voyages.” One can search for individual slave ships, characteristics of slaves, specific voyages, and other variables. Development of the database was supported since 2006 by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, with supplementary funding from the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research at Harvard University. The project is based at Emory University. Information and access for the database: http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/index.faces

NEW IEHS OFFICERS

In the 2009 elections, the IEHS elected three members to three-year terms on the executive board: Alan Kraut (American University), Josh DeWind (Social Science Research Council), and Nancy Carnevale (Montclair State University).

Hasia Diner (New York University) was elected to the office of vice president/president elect. She will succeed to the IEHS presidency after three years.

Vice President Barbara Posadas (Northern Illinois University) became president when Ronald Bayor (Georgia Institute of Technology) completed his three-year term as president.

The IEHS board named Timothy Dean Draper (Waubonsee Community College, Illinois) as the IEHS secretary.

Cheryl Greenberg (Trinity College) was named by the board as treasurer of the IEHS.

Former JAEH Editor Bayor Given 2008 Distinguished Editor Award

At the meeting of the Council of Learned Journals at the Modern Language Association convention in San Francisco, Dec. 27, 2008, IEHS president Ronald Bayor was awarded the Distinguished Editor Award for his work as former editor of the Journal of American Ethnic History. The judges’ comments follow:

The 2008 Distinguished Editor Award is presented to Ronald Bayor, who in 1981 founded the Journal of American Ethnic History. One judge praised Dr. Bayor, saying: “Bayor is the very long-serving founding editor of a successful journal, responsible for all aspects of the journal design and procedures as well as for quite a few special issues. He and his [award] recommenders effectively communicate the nature of his success such that the accomplishments are evident and admirable.” The judges were unanimous in selecting Professor Bayor, commending him for editorial work that “defined the field (of Ethnic History) generously and broadly, and provided scholars working in areas often neglected by other journals with a publication venue.” The judges honor Dr. Bayor for his loyal and inspired leadership of the Journal of American Ethnic History: during those 17 years, he “led a major scholarly effort to define, clarify, and analyze the most important issues in ethnic history broadly defined”—and during that time, “the quality, scope, and vision of the publication have significantly evolved. His achievements not only show a profound commitment to the disciplines of history and US ethnic studies, but also an incredible commitment to service in the profession more generally.” Dr. Bayor’s work, they observed, has made an impact on a broad group of scholars in many areas of interest. The judges further noted that Choice has praised JAEH as “a core journal of American historical studies” that “provides a wealth of important research that complements and encompasses many disciplines.”

We extend our warmest congratulations to Professor Bayor!
Greetings from the IEHS President...

Hello! I’m very pleased to write to you as president of the Immigration and Ethnic History. I look forward to serving you as the Society’s president during the next three years.

Let me begin by thanking some of you for your service and welcoming others into important positions in the Society. First, we all owe an immense debt of gratitude to our outgoing president Ron Bayor for his executive leadership during the past three years, as well as his many years of service as founding editor of the Journal of American Ethnic History. Ron’s fierce commitment to the Society and to the Journal enabled us to weather the almost two-year storm that resulted in moving the Journal to its new home at the University of Illinois Press and preserving the financial integrity of the Society. In this regard, thanks for their tireless efforts are also due Elliott Barkan, our outgoing immediate past president, and Journal editor John Bukowczyk. As they leave the posts in which they have ably served for a number of years, I also wish to thank Betty Bergland for her service as our secretary and Eric Arnesen for his work as our treasurer, as well as outgoing Executive Board members Hasia Diner, Russell Kazal, and Ray Molti, who served from 2006 to 2009.

I look forward to working with Hasia Diner, our incoming Vice President/President-elect; Tim Draper, our new secretary; Cheryl Greenberg, our new treasurer; and our new Board members Nancy Carnevale, Josh DeWind, and Alan Kraut. And, of course, we are always indebted to John Bukowczyk and Allan Austin, our Journal editor and book review editor, and Jim Bergquist, the editor of this Newsletter, without whose tireless work our publications would not flourish as they do.

Much has happened since historians of immigration first began exploring a professional organization during the 1960s. As past president Victor Greene vividly reminded us at our recent annual meeting in Seattle, where he accepted the Society’s Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award, most of those helping organize what became the Immigration History Society in 1972 were primarily interested in the “new immigration” of Eastern and Southern Europeans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and many were the descendants of those immigrants. By contrast, as we approach our fortieth anniversary in 2012, our subjects, our methodologies, and the composition of our membership have become more diverse, as has American society. The expansion of our scope has become apparent in the articles and reviews that appear in the Journal, in the content of the sessions that we co-sponsor at the American Historical Association and the Organization of American Historians, in the awards we present to senior and junior scholars, and in our special efforts to support and recognize graduate students as they prepare to enter the historical profession. What continues unchanged is our firm commitment to promote the study of immigration and ethnicity in North America.

As my tenure begins as IEHS president, I am encouraging the following initiatives:

- An effort to upgrade our website, www.iehs.org, led by Board member Rachel Krasnow, IEHS secretary Tim Draper, and our webmaster Denise Rautmann.

- The inauguration of a Rudolph J. Vecoli annual prize for the outstanding dissertation in immigration and ethnic history. A working group has been asked to bring a description of and procedures relating to this award to our 2010 Executive Board meeting, and will also examine possible funding sources for this prize.

- An informal reception for graduate students working in immigration and ethnic history, to take place at the next Organization of American Historians meeting in April 2010 in Washington, D.C.

- An effort to inaugurate electronic communication with the Society’s members, especially with respect to voting in our annual election and arrangements for our annual meeting and dinner.

We have a busy year ahead of us, and I welcome your suggestions. You may reach me at bposadas@nlu.edu

Best wishes,

Barbara M. Posadas
President, IEHS

IEHS Lifetime Achievement Award

At the annual dinner of the Immigration and Ethnic History Society in Seattle on March 28, 2009, the Lifetime Achievement Award was given to Victor Greene, Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The citation which follows was read by IEHS President Barbara Posadas:

The Immigration and Ethnic History Society is honored to present its Lifetime Achievement Award to Victor Greene for his contributions to the Society and to the field of immigration and ethnic history. Victor has published a number of books and articles that have illuminated the immigrant experience, most notably the Polish American saga. He has pioneered the study of Polish Americans as well as immigrant and ethnic music. He has given us books, articles, essays, and reviews on Slavic workers, ethnic leaders, ethnic identity, and the music of the immigrant communities, all of which have added immeasurably to our knowledge and understanding of immigration history. He was the recipient of the Polish American Historical Association’s prestigious Haiman Award for his contribution to the study of Polish Americans.

Beyond his scholarship (which continues to offer significant insights on our immigrant past), Victor has been a leader in our field. He has played a major role as one of the founders and later president of the Immigration and Ethnic History Society, a longtime supporter of the Journal of American Ethnic History, an active participant in the Polish American Historical Association, and a founder of the ethnic studies program at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Victor has been an inspiration to his many students and colleagues in regard to service, scholarship, and intellectual commitment to historical studies.

For all he has done for the field, Society, and historical profession, it is my pleasure and honor to present this Lifetime Achievement Award.
Conferences and Meetings...

The Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America will hold its 67th annual meeting at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Jersey City, New Jersey, on June 12-14, 2009. Information on the web at http://www.piasa.org/news.html

The Boston Seminar in Immigration and Urban History invites proposals for sessions for its 2009-2010 series, beginning September 2009. Programs take place at the Massachusetts Historical Society, usually on a Thursday evening. Paper presentations are not limited to Massachusetts subjects. For consideration, submit a curriculum vitae and a one-page abstract of the paper to Conrad Wright at the Mass. Historical Society. E-mail: cwright@mass.history. Further information at http://www.masshist.org/events/call_for_papers.cfm


The University of Pennsylvania and its McNeil Center for Early American Studies will hold a conference on October 23-24, 2009: "The Industries: Bee, Francis Daniel Pastorius, His Manuscripts, and His World." Pastorius (1651-1719) was a German-born polymath, a founder of Pennsylvania's German settlements in the 1680s, and author of the first anti-slavery tract in America. Information about the conference at: http://www.mnceas.org/pastorius/

The American Italian Historical Association will hold its 42nd annual conference Oct. 29-Nov. 1, 2009, at Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Theme: "Southern Exposures: Locations and Relocations of Italian Culture." Proposals for papers and panels may be sent to Joseph Ricapito at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge; e-mail ricapito@lsu.edu. Deadline for proposals is July 1, 2009. Further information at http://www.aihaweb.org/conferences.htm


The Social Science History Association will hold its annual meeting in Long Beach, California, Nov. 12-15, 2009. The 2009 conference will be held in Long Beach, California on the historic Queen Mary ocean liner. Theme of the conference: "Agency and Action." Information on the web at http://www.sshba.org/

The 124th annual meeting of the American Historical Association will be held January 7-10, 2010, in San Diego, California. Theme: "Oceans, Islands, Continents." Information at http://www.historians.org/annual/2010/

The Polish American Historical Association will hold its annual conference in San Diego, Jan. 7-10, 2010, in conjunction with the AHA. Information on the web at http://www.polishamericanstudies.org/


The Immigration and Ethnic History Society will hold its annual meeting in conjunction with the OAH in Washington, April 7-10, 2010.

The Center for Great Plains Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln plans a symposium, "Czech and Slovak Americans: International Perspectives from the Great Plains," to be held April 7-10, 2010 in Lincoln, Nebraska. The symposium will address the experiences of Czech and Slovak immigrants and their descendants in the Great Plains region, as well as the relationships of these citizens with other Czech and Slovak Americans. Abstracts of proposed papers and a short curriculum vitae may be sent by e-mail to cgps@unl.edu. Deadline for proposals: November 1, 2009. Further information at http://www.unl.edu/plains/seminars/seminars.shtml


The 34th Annual Symposium of the Society for German-American Studies will be held in New Harmony, Indiana, April 22-25, 2010. New Harmony was founded by German pietists under George Rapp in 1814. Proposals for papers or sessions on any area of German-American studies are welcome. Proposals with abstracts are due Dec. 1, 2009. Contact: Dr. J. Gregory Redding, Department of Modern Languages, Wabash College, Crawfordsville IN 47933. E-mail: reddingg@wabash.edu

Minutes of the Annual Business Meeting
Immigration and Ethnic History Society
Seattle, March 28, 2009

President Ronald Bayor opened the Annual Business Meeting at 4:30 p.m. with nineteen IEHS members present. (The Editorial Board Meeting of the Journal of American Ethnic History preceded the Annual Meeting.) The Minutes of the 2008 IEHS Meeting were approved. Bayor began his presidential report by thanking the IEHS officers that completed their terms of service: Executive Board members Hasia Diner, Russell Kazal, and Raymond Mohl (serving 2006-2009); IEHS Treasurer, Eric Arnesen (serving 2006-2009), and IEHS Secretary Betty Bergland (serving 2002-2009). Bayor announced that outstanding issues with Transaction Publication resulting from the transfer of the Journal are settled and reported that IEHS received $50,000 in that settlement. Bayor acknowledged and thanked the lawyers who worked with IEHS on a pro-bono basis: Henry M. Schaffer and Russell J. Hoover of Jenner and Block in Chicago. Bayor also thanked the individuals who worked on the two IEHS special awards this past year—the Lifetime Achievement Award and the Distinguished Service Award.

Bergland gave the Secretary’s Report, announcing the results of the 2009 election. The Vice-President/President Elect is Hasia Diner of New York University. New members elected to the Executive Board that will serve a three-year term from 2009-2012 are Alan Kraut, Joshua Dewind, and Nancy Carnevale. On behalf of the Society, Bergland congratulated these individuals and thanked other members that agreed to run for election: Nora Faires, Kirsten Ferragigli, Mark Bauman and Sarah Cornell. She noted that 95 ballots were cast, approximately 31% of the 304 individual members.

John Bukowczyk gave the Business Report for the Journal of American Ethnic History. He reported that the issues have been published on time in each quarter. He noted that the new Book Review Editor, Allan Austin, is in place and that approximately thirty book reviews appear in each issue. Some decline in the manuscript submissions has been noted. Bukowczyk announced that two special issues were planned in the near future: one on “Homosexual, Lesbian and Gay Ethnic and Immigrant Histories,” guest-edited by Horacio Roque Ramirez, and a second on cold war politics and American ethnic groups, to be guest-edited by Ieva Zake. Another planned special issue on music is on the permanent back burner. He noted that the Qualay Award would be announced this evening at dinner (see notice in this Newsletter). He reported that the Council of Editors of Learned Journals recognized former editor Ronald Bayor in December with the CELJ Distinguished Editor Award. Reporting on circulation of the Journal, Bukowczyk noted that back issues are available as a subscription add-on and that the back-files of the journal also are now available via JSTOR. This year the Journal also instituted electronic subscriptions for individual members.

Jim Bergquist gave the newsletter editor’s Report. He noted that a total of eight hundred (800) Newsletters are sent out in May and November to individual members and institutions. The cost of publishing an issue is about $700, but there has been a rise in the mailing costs. He added that he continues to seek articles for the front page of the Newsletter articles focused on pedagogy, theory, or historiography.

The Treasurer’s Report of Eric Arnesen circulated among members and Bayor commented on key elements. The balance as of April 1, 2009 was $41,551.65; expenditures in the past year totaled $63,916.00 and revenues totaled $135,302.12, leaving a total balance as of March 26, 2009 at $112,937.37. Ron Bayor added several comments. He noted that the principal of the Pozzeta Prize endowment is decreasing; however, the Saloutos Prize funding is sound. He also noted that the IEHS now carriies liability insurance for officers and board members.

Barbara Posadas gave the Program Chair’s Report. She announced that five sessions were proposed for the forthcoming American Historical Association annual meeting in San Diego, California in January, also, four sessions have been proposed for the 2010 Organization of American Historians in Washington, D.C. in April. In addition, Posadas noted that an informal session memorializing Jon Gjerde at the OAH meeting is being planned by David Gerber and David Hollinger.

Russell Kazal announced that the Pozzeta Dissertation Prize had been awarded to Hidetaka Hirota of Boston College for his project, “To any place beyond [the] sea where he belongs”: Nativism, Citizenship, and the Deportation of Paupers in Massachusetts, 1848-1877.”

The meeting then turned to the proposed amendment to the IEHS By-Laws. The proposal, drafted by Vice-President/President Elect Barbara Posadas and mailed to IEHS members with the meeting announcement in February, recommends a one-year interval (as opposed to the current three-year interval) between terms of service on the Executive Board. Posadas moved to accept the proposed amendment; Alan Kraut seconded the motion. Bayor opened the discussion. Victor Greene asked for the rationale for the proposal. Posadas argued that the three-year interval was counterproductive to the functioning of the Society; that the IEHS is losing good people who seek leadership roles in other organizations; that the Executive Board is a primary route to active involvement in the Society; and that if members must wait a three-year interval for service, the Society limits possibilities for members. Bergland cautioned against the proposal. She noted the Society’s efforts in the past years to recruit and engage new members, and the reduced interval carried the risk that familiar names and persons rather than new members would be recruited; she also noted that the issue had been previously discussed by the IEHS and the three-year interval had been upheld. Further, she added, that in current election cycle for the Executive Board, the initial nominees four were ineligible, but three of these were because of expired membership, reasonably a result of the shift from Transaction Publication. Consequently, the frustration of this year’s nominating committee may have contributed to the desire for change, rather than a systemic problem. Posadas offered that the Society should count on the good sense of the Nominating Committee to seek folks for the Executive Board and that it behooves us to get new people, but the society should avoid recruiting individuals

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THEODORE SALOUTOS BOOK AWARD, 2008

The annual Theodore Saloutos Book Award for the outstanding book of the year in American immigration and ethnic history was made to Allison Varzally (California State University, Fullerton), for her book Making a Non-White America: Californians Coloring outside Ethnic Lines, 1925-1955 (University of California Press). The committee consisted of Diane Vecchio (Furman Univ.), chair; Robert Rockaway (Tel Aviv University); and Maria Cristina Garcia (Cornell University). The award was made at the annual dinner of the Immigration and Ethnic History Society in Seattle on March 28, 2009. The citation follows:

Allison Varzally’s ambitious study challenges readers to consider how race and ethnic formation is influenced by interactions with multiple groups. Using a wide range of sources, including oral histories, interviews, memoirs, newspaper accounts, legal records and census data, Varzally examines the interactions of immigrants and their children—Mexican, Black, Asian, European, and Native American—in California in the first half of the 20th century as they came together in the workplace, schools, churches and other institutions of American society.

Despite occasional ethnic conflict, the lives of California minorities intersected, and, according to Varzally, shaped local politics and culture in a coalition that helped break down the legal barriers that separated them from the spaces occupied by white ethnics.

Varzally joins a growing list of scholars who offer a broader conceptual framework for understanding how race and ethnicity is conceived and articulated in American society.

Other New Publications Noted...


Kampthofer, Walter. “Chain Migration and Diaspora: The Settlement Patterns of Immigrants from ‘Greater Westphalia’ across the USA,” in Josef Raab and Jan Wirrer, eds. Die Deutsche Prasens in den USA/The German Presence in the USA (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2008), 139-163.


Immigrant and Ethnic Stories...
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Sources can, and they are especially useful in illustrating the past as a terrain of individuals who made choices, versus a series of predetermined outcomes against which the disempowered are powerless.

Moreover, given the historical importance of storytelling as a means of passing on one's own personal history—whether in indigenous or African American communities, among women or recent immigrants—including stories from these populations in classroom teaching is critical to any efforts to teach the history of these groups to our students. For example, in teaching American Indian History, I have long relied upon the Major Problems series (formerly published by Houghton Mifflin, which Cengage acquired last year). Major Problems in American Indian History (2nd ed., 2001) contains transcriptions of oral accounts from native peoples in every chapter, offering indigenous insights on every major event and era in their history on this continent, as well as a number of letters written by Indians.

Depending on the subject, I sometimes supplement these accounts with materials from the Bedford Reader series, whose short, affordable case-study volumes include oral accounts in several of their volumes on native history, or with material from Peter Nabokov's Native American Testimony (2nd ed., 1991). Students taking American Indian history for the first time often want to know “what 'Indians' thought” of a given historical event or U.S. policy. The conflicting views that American Indians present in their own words serve as a critical corrective both to the dominant narrative of U.S. history students have learned before, and to the notion that there is a single “Indian” perspective on anything. Including stories from native peoples or immigrants also encourages students—such as the African Americans with Cherokee ancestry in my American Indian course this term, or the first-generation college students from nearby reservations in my classes when I taught in the Midwest—to share the personal histories they have learned from their own families; as such, it validates their own past in a way they may not have experienced previously in a classroom setting.

Stories are particularly well-suited to teaching the history of international migration to the United States and of minority populations living in the U.S., because the voices and experiences of individuals in these groups are less frequently a part of the dominant narratives in college classrooms. Moreover, efficacy stories for teaching both content and critical thinking skills while engaging students’ interest is, I would argue, unparalleled. But for storytelling to be an effective pedagogical tool, we must keep the stories we use grounded in a larger historical context, and maintain an emphasis on substantiating the stories to the same critical analysis we would expect of other primary sources. I explain to my students that their in-class primary source work is comparable to a lab component in their science classes. Because I spend a significant amount of time early in the semester teaching students how to analyze primary sources in our “history lab,” I tend to assume that students have internalized these lessons as deeply as I have, and sometimes forget that even the most advanced undergraduates need regular reminders of the need to connect the sources we read to the larger context whence they came. Hence it was a revelation to all of us when a senior history major in my American Indian course asked whether the 1830 speech by Speckled Snake on Indian removal perhaps contained more than a hint of sarcasm. Reminding students to go beyond the literal meaning of the words on the page, and connect firsthand accounts to the larger context that surrounded their creation, is critical if they are to understand, for example, that Speckled Snake’s seeming deference to the “Great White Father” in Washington, D.C. on behalf of fellow “red children” was more tongue-in-cheek than anything else.

The collections noted above are just a few examples of where one might look for immigrant or ethnic letters and oral history transcriptions. Works such as Jim Bergquist’s Immigrant Life in Daily America, 1820-1870 or June Alexander’s Daily Life in Immigrant America, 1870-1920 (both 2008) cover a wide range of topics. Keyword searches such as “immigrant correspondence” or “immigrant oral history,” in your library’s catalog or on WorldCat will yield additional sources, as will writing down the call numbers of items you find and browsing nearby library shelves. When studying earlier waves of immigration, letters such as those collected in Kerby Miller’s Irish Immigrants in the Land of Conna (2003), David Gerber’s Authors of Their Lives (2006) on nineteenth-century British immigrants, or Walter Kamphoefer’s collection of German immigrant letters entitled News from the Land of Freedom (1991), will be more readily available than transcribed oral histories. Furthermore, keyword searches targeting a particular population will bring you more rapidly to such collections as Joann Fanug Jean Lee’s Asian Americans: Oral Histories of First to Fourth Generation Americans (1992) or Marilyn P. Davis’s Mexican Voices/American Dreams: An Oral History of Mexican Immigration to the United States (1990). The Internet is also fertile ground; for example, the Library of Congress’s online collections include transcripts from Works Progress Administration interviews of former slaves, first-generation Americans, and Depression-era migrant workers (www.loc.gov).

Finally, don’t neglect your own institutional archives and local historical societies. Check with the archivist to see if anyone has conducted local oral histories, or if their collections contain letters from members of immigrant or minority groups. The Bates College Archives includes a super collection of student interviews with local French Canadian immigrants, conducted under the auspices of former visiting professor Yves Frenette. Likewise, colleagues at Millersville University and their students have interviewed women of color and immigrant women in the university community as part of a university-wide commission on the status of women. While my students have enjoyed and learned from all the stories I share with them, the most effective are often those closest to home. The students in your classes today include your region’s future secondary teachers; stories from the local past will not only help them learn today, but also help them to reach their own students tomorrow.

Florence Mae Waldron is Visiting Assistant Professor of History at Millersville University of Pennsylvania, and a Research Associate at Franklin and Marshall College.
New Publications Noted...
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Annual Meeting Minutes...
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with only half-hearted interest. John Bukowczyk noted that memberships for some nominees expired during the IEHS nominating process. Rachel Kranston pointed out that renewals were technical matters. Walter Kamphoefner wondered about other issues. Ron Bayor called for the question. The motion carried: sixteen in favor and two abstaining. The proposed By-Laws Amendment passed.

[The amended IEHS By-Laws now read as follows—the italicized phrase is the adopted change: “Article VII EXECUTIVE BOARD Sec. 1 Election and Term of Office. The Executive Board shall consist of six (6) current officers and nine (9) additional members, three (3) of whom will be elected in each year. Such additional members shall be elected for three-year (3-year) terms in the same manner as prescribed for the officers. Service on the Executive Board shall be limited to one three-year term and incumbents should not be re-nominated until after an interval of one year. All past Presidents of the corporation shall be considered “ex-officio” members of the Executive Board entitled to attend all meetings of the Executive Board and entitled to vote during the three (3) years immediately succeeding their Presidency.”]

Under New Business, Ron Bayor proposed a new IEHS Award for the “Best Dissertation” in honor of Rudy J. Vecoli and suggested a committee for this purpose. Victor Greene seconded the motion. Ron Bayor appointed an ad hoc committee for the Vecoli Award: Rachel Kranston, Alan Kraut, and Ron Bayor.

Bayor asked for other New Business. Walter Kamphoefner raised the matter of videotaping IEHS sessions, prompted by a request at the 2009 AHA. Bergland explained the context. As the IEHS contact person on record at AHA, she received a telephone call the day before the session from a C-Span correspondent wishing to tape the IEHS-sponsored session chaired by Walter Kamphoefner. She informed the correspondent that the usual academic protocol is to secure permission from speakers in advance. She attempted unsuccessfully to speak with Kamphoefner, but reached Bayor, who concurred that permissions must be secured. When re-contacted by Bergland the journalist expressed disappointment and asserted that AHA permitted him to tape all other sessions; however, he was only interested in the IEHS one. Discussion of the matter followed. Bayor moved that IEHS generate a form for taping sessions with an opt-out clause. Elliott Barkan suggested that such a move would open a Pandora’s box, the conclusion that this had been examined in the 1970s. Alan Kraut noted that C-Span often tapes at bookstores for signings, so the issues involve who is doing the taping and why. Russ Hoover (visiting attorney) stated that in some states taping without consent may be a crime. Jim Bergquist recommended that the Program Chair routinely ask session participants for their consent to be taped. John Bukowczyk offered that there are intellectual property issues involved in taping as scholars often present works in progress. Victor Greene raised the question of what transpires if session participants resisted taping. Bayor proposed that the matter be tabled for further study.

Elliott Barkan moved to thank President Ron Bayor for his years of service as IEHS President and Vice-President/President Elect. All agreed.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.
Respectfully Submitted,
Betty Bergland, IEHS Secretary

John Higham Awards

Three John Higham travel grants to attend the 2009 Organization of American Historians Convention, jointly administered by the IEHS and the OAH, were awarded to graduate students Hidetaka Hirota (Boston College), Donald W. Maxwell (Indiana University, Bloomington), and Etaine Nelson (University of New Mexico).

Carlton C. Qualey Award

The winner of the 2009 Carlton C. Qualey Memorial Article Award, named in honor of Professor Carlton C. Qualey, distinguished historian, newsletter editor, treasurer, and a founder of the Immigration and Ethnic History Society, is Sam Erman, for his article “Meanings of Citizenship in the U. S. Empire: Puerto Rico, Isabel Gonzalez, and the Supreme Court, 1898 to 1905,” which appeared in the Summer 2008 (27:4) issue of the Journal of American Ethnic History. In the words of the committee, Dr. Erman’s article “addresses an important trend in contemporary American ethnic and immigration history,” by linking “issues of race, gender, transnationalism, imperialism and the law.”

With sound research and innovative analyses, Erman demonstrates not only the significance but also the wide-ranging implications of a single court case, Gonzales v. Williams. The issue is a skillful blend of legal, political, cultural and immigration/ethnic history. In particular, Erman places the Gonzales case in a historical context that underscores the ramifications of U. S. imperialist policies. He focuses specifically on the assertions that these policies generated about the status of colonized peoples. The essay achieves far more. In addition to explicating the case, and legal decisions, Erman reveals underlying social, cultural, political and historical forces shaping concepts of citizenship.

Overall, this is a well-organized, cogently argued essay, rooted in a broad array of primary sources, that underscores the multi-dimensional nature of immigration/ethnic history and situates migration and allied issues within the broader context of U. S. history.
Activities Report for the Immigration and Ethnic History Newsletter

Mail your information for the next Newsletter to:
James M. Bergquist, Department of History, Villanova University, Villanova PA 19085-1699
or FAX a copy to (610) 519-4450 or send information via E-Mail to: James.Bergquist@villanova.edu
Your name and affiliation:

IHS News Notes...

THEODORE SALOUTOS BOOK AWARD

Closing date for submissions for the annual Theodore Saloutos Book Award is December 31, 2009. To be eligible, a book must be copyrighted 2009. A book may be nominated by the author, the publisher, a member of the prize committee, or a member of the Immigration and Ethnic History Society. Inquiries and nominations should be submitted to the chair of the Saloutos Prize Committee, Maria Cristina Garcia, Department of History, 450 McGraw Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853-4601, e-mail mcg20@cornell.edu.
Copies of the book must be received by all three members of the committee by Dec. 31, 2008. Send books to Professor Vecchio at the address above, and also to Eiichiro Azuma, Department of History, 208 College Hall, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA 19104-6379, eazuma@sas.upenn.edu, and Alan Kraut, 6013 Sonoma Road, Bethesda, MD 20817, akraut@american.edu. The 2009 award will be presented at the annual dinner meeting of the Society in 2010.

JOHN HIGHAM TRAVEL GRANT

Applications are now being received for the 2010 John Higham travel grants, which provide three $500 grants for graduate students to attend the 2010 meeting of the Organization of American Historians in Washington, D.C. OAH and the Immigration and Ethnic History Society have created a fund to award these grants in memory of John Higham (1920-2003), past president of both organizations, and a towering figure in immigration, ethnic, and intellectual history. The successful candidates will have a preferred area of concentration in American Immigration and/or American Ethnic and/or American Intellectual history. Applications should be received by December 1, 2009. For full information and guidelines for application, see www.oah.org/activities/awards/higham/

GEORGE POZZETTA DISSERTATION AWARD

At the annual dinner meeting of the IEHS in Seattle on March 28, 2009, the George Pozzetta Dissertation Award was given to Hidetaka Hiruta, a doctoral candidate at Boston College. His project title is "To Any Place beyond the Sea where He Belongs": Nativism, Citizenship, and the Deportation of Paupers in Massachusetts, 1848-1877.

The Immigration and Ethnic History Society invites applications for the 2010 George E. Pozzetta Award. Eligible are Ph.D. candidates who will have completed qualifying examinations by Dec. 1, 2009, and whose thesis focuses on American immigration, emigration, or ethnic history. The award provides $500 for expenses to be incurred in researching the dissertation. Applicants must submit a 3-5 page descriptive proposal in English, discussing the significance of the work, the methodology, sources, and collections to be consulted. The application must also include a proposed budget, brief curriculum vitae, and a supporting letter from the major advisor. All materials must be received by each committee member by December 15, 2008, which is the submission deadline.

Send materials in hard copy (no FAXes accepted) to Raymond A. Mohl, Department of History, University of Alabama, Birmingham, Birmingham, AL 35294-0001, rmohl@uab.edu; to Nancy Green, 32a Bis, Rue Lacepede, Paris, FRA F-75005 FRANCE; and to Professor Nancy Carnevale, Department of History, Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ 07043. Inquiries may be sent to the committee chair, Prof. Mohl, at rmohl@uab.edu.

Visit the IEHS web pages at www.iehs.org
THE IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC HISTORY SOCIETY

...was founded in 1965 as the Immigration History Group. It was chartered in 1972 as the Immigration History Society. In 1998 the Society, which had traditionally dealt with ethnicity as well as immigration, changed its name to the Immigration and Ethnic History Society.

The purpose of the Society is to promote the study of the history of immigration to the United States and Canada from all parts of the world, including studies of the background of emigrant in the countries of origin; to promote the study of ethnic groups in the United States, including regional groups, native Americans and forced immigrants; to promote understanding of the processes of acculturation and of conflict; to furnish through the Immigration and Ethnic History Newsletter information as to research, organizations, meetings and publications in the field of immigrant history; to help organize sessions on immigration and ethnicity at meetings of learned societies; and generally to serve the field of immigration/ethnic history with special reference to professional scholarship.

MEMBERSHIP

Annual dues: Individual (print or electronic), $45, $55 (Canada & Mexico), $80 (other foreign addresses); Student (print or electronic), $25, $35 (Canada & Mexico), $60 (other foreign addresses); New member (print or electronic), first year $35, $45 (Canada & Mexico), $70 (other foreign addresses). Institutional members (print or electronic), $200, $210 (Canada & Mexico), $235 (other foreign addresses). For print and electronic delivery, add $10 to individual rate, $25 to institutional rate. Electronic subscribers may have access to archives of all issues of the Journal of American Ethnic History for an additional $10 for individual subscribers, $20 for institutional subscribers.

New memberships and membership renewals should be sent to Journals, University of Illinois Press, 1325 S. Oak St., Champaign, IL 61820. They may also be sent via the web-page: http://www.press.uillinois.edu/journals/jach.html

OFFICERS OF THE IEHS

President: Barbara Posadas, Northern Illinois University, Dept. of History, DeKalb IL 60115. E-mail: bposadas@niu.edu
Vice-president: Hasia R. Diner, New York University, Dept. of History, New York NY 10012. E-mail: had1@nyu.edu
Secretary: Timothy Draper, Waubonsee Community College, Division of Social Sciences and Education, Sugar Grove IL 60554. Tel. (630) 466-2566. FAX (630) 466-5795. E-mail: tdraper@waubonsee.edu
Treasurer: Cheryl Greenberg, Trinity College, Dept. of History, 300 Summit St., Hartford CT 06106. Tel. (860) 397-2371. E-mail: Cheryl.Greenberg@trincoll.edu
Editor, Journal of American Ethnic History: John Bukowczyk, Dept. of History, 3094 Faculty/Administration Building, Wayne State University, Detroit MI 48202. Tel. (313) 577-2799. FAX (313) 577-6987. E-mail: jdb2092@wayne.edu
Editor, Immigration History Newsletter: James M. Bergquist, Department of History, Villanova University, Villanova PA 19085-1699. Tel. (610) 687-0838. FAX: (610) 519-4450. E-mail: James.Bergquist@villanova.edu

Inquiries about the Society should be directed to the appropriate officer. Newsletter submissions and questions about editorial matters should be sent to the newsletter editor at the address above. Requests for back issues of the newsletter should be sent to the editor; add $2.00 per copy (by check made out to Villanova University).

Subscriptions to the Immigration and Ethnic History Newsletter and the Journal of American Ethnic History are part of membership in the Society. Members' changes of address should be sent to Journals, Univ. of Illinois Press, 1325 S. Oak St., Champaign IL 61820, or via the web at http://www.press.uillinois.edu/journals/jach.html

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