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"In the Pines where the Sun don't ever Shine:" Oral History, Community and Race in Nacogdoches, TX

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***“In the Pines, Where the Sun Don’t Ever Shine”:
Oral History, Community, and Race in Nacogdoches, East Texas***

BY

PAUL J. P. SANDUL, LAURA BLACKBURN, LISA BENTLEY, JESSY K.
HANSHAW, AARON MARSH, AND KAITLIN WIESEMAN

*In the pines, in the pines
Where the sun don’t ever shine*

—“In the Pines,” American Folk Song, ca. 1870s

“In the Pines” is an American folk song also known as “Black Girl” and “Where Did You Sleep Last Night” and dates back to the 1870s. Perhaps the most familiar version is by Huddie William Ledbetter (Leadbelly) in 1944, but other notable covers include Joan Baez, Pete Seeger, Bill Monroe, Chet Atkins, Connie Francis, and Seattle grunge gods Nirvana. Researching the song for a 1970 dissertation, Judith McCulloh found 160 different versions, a number that has certainly grown since.¹ With so many versions spanning three centuries, a fundamental question is raised: Why does “In the Pines” endure? The answer, according to one journalist in 1994 following Nirvana’s version, “may be that its essence is not a specific story or even a musical style but the kind of intensely dark emotion that, as is the case with much in American music, survives longer in popular memory than does treacly [*sic*] sentiment.”² Depending on the version you hear the storyline of the song usually traces the exploits of an unfaithful wife, almost always a “Black Girl” or “Gal,” a “long train,” or decapitation, or all. And the setting: the eerie pines where the sun don’t ever shine. The story is dark, mysterious, and irrefutably enconased within historical anxieties dealing with race, gender, and class.

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“In the Pines” is thought to originate from the Southern Appalachia. But East Texas, of course, *is* “the pines” (sometimes called the “Pine Curtain” just to prove the point). East Texas is also a place where the historical anxieties dealing with race—not to mention class and gender—have incontrovertibly been dark, often mysterious, and a place where many wished the sun would never shine again. “[T]he kind of intensely dark emotions” felt by many African Americans and others living in East Texas, such as Nacogdoches, are palpable and ongoing. This is exactly the kind of emotion pervading the words of an African-American barber of many decades in Nacogdoches who, in 2010, responded to a public history graduate student who asked him about Klan activity in Nacogdoches in the 1950s and 1960s. With a shop full of patrons and co-workers he said, “Klan. No we didn’t have a big Klan. Many of them are up there now. They don’t put the hood on no more. Them Tea Party, what do you think them is? Yeah, you know. They got a different way of telling about the Klan now. They ain’t got no more hoods. They’ll drag you a different way now.”³³ His response actually generated much laughter in the shop. While certainly amusing in the context of which he shared, the barber’s short response about Klan activity in the past juxtaposed to more modern national political movements bespeaks the uneasiness in which many African Americans, at least in Nacogdoches, perceive the racial landscape and the state of present race relations. Concerning race relations, many African Americans and others regardless of race living in Nacogdoches, it seems, see life in the pines as a place where historically, and for many presently, the sun proverbially never shines.

During the summer of 2010 the Nacogdoches African American Heritage Project (AAHP) agreed to work with graduate students enrolled in a Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA) public history graduate seminar on oral history taught by Paul J. P. Sandul. Despite impressive efforts by AAHP before, not to mention other local organizations like Jere L. Jackson’s Center for East Texas Studies and the East Texas Research Center, much more is still needed regarding Black history in Nacogdoches. All groups have expressed lament over the current dearth of information. Unsurprisingly, then, AAHP actively supported the class and were collaborative partners. The project complemented efforts by the AAHP and other organizations to gather new information and materials, as well as to identify and preserve resources important

to African-American organizations and residents in Nacogdoches. Because African Americans, their resources, and their history have been, and is, largely underrepresented in Nacogdoches and Deep East Texas the class project helped, if only in a small way, to correct that. Moreover, the project represents a unique opportunity for oral history to play a role in fostering a broader community identity for the Nacogdoches African-American community in general, African-American organizations specifically, and for all Nacogdoches residents regardless of race. Oral history, as many historians have claimed, can thus be a device of cohesion in Nacogdoches.

This article is both a report of findings from the class concerning the oral history project and rumination on the promise of oral and public history to play a role in building community, with a particular emphasis on community building in East Texas as it concerns race. Looking first to the history of AAHP and race relations in Nacogdoches, attention turns to the history of oral history and its potential, particularly as a public history project, to chronicle the history of traditionally underrepresented and marginalized groups. Students Laura Blackburn, Lisa Bentley, Jessy K. Hanshaw, Aaron Marsh, and Kaitlin Wieseman highlight some key themes evident in the oral histories and some of their meanings, while the ending remarks highlight an understanding of oral history as a keen public historical tool for fostering community in addition to aiding the more robust and diverse preservation of history in East Texas. Considered altogether, in the face of a long history of racial injustice and marginalization in Nacogdoches concerning African Americans, oral history has the potential to help create a stronger, more unified Black community in Nacogdoches that can subsequently work better to help effect deeper positive change in the present for the betterment of all local citizens regardless of race.

AAHP and the History and Consequences of Race Relations in Nacogdoches

Nacogdoches is a community invested in its past. It represents the local packaging of place dating back to at least the 1920s when the local booster club began crafting an image of Nacogdoches as one of the oldest towns in Texas. Accompanying the usual booster subjects of old churches, schools, and so-called leading pioneers, the investment in the past is undeniably an investment in the present and, by implication,

future.⁴ Put differently, the production of narratives about the past are often put to service of capital and the construction of local identity that simultaneously works to forge a useable past and affirm local power hierarchies.⁵ Thus, when we examine the dominate narrative of a locality and its public history works we get a snapshot of both the cultural worldview of the inhabitants and the local power structure.⁶

Nacogdoches has a plethora of museums, statues, and heritage groups that work to literally impact the memorial landscape of the region. Prominently, the Old Stone Fort Museum is on the campus of SFA, which is a curious reconstruction of a fort; but not just any fort: a trading post, private home, church, jail, and saloon—but never a fort. The fort is associated with a so-called pioneer founder and was re-built for the centennial celebration of Texas Independence in 1936.⁷ In connection with the Stone Fort are the historic homes of other so-called founders, none actually Caddo Indians who would likely take exception with who founded and settled what, but those of European and Anglo-American roots. Six statues of these same founders and other leading figures dot the landscape as well. Nacogdoches also has an historic village (Millard's Crossing), which is a broad sampling of the nineteenth-century East Texas architecture relocated to the site in the 1970s and 1980s.⁸ While additional local and state-recognized historic structures exist, which we do not have time to mention in full detail, all speak to a European and Anglo-American past. The historic homes, structures, statues, and architecture all lionize a distinctly Anglo-American, even European, past. Yet, for all this, what is not currently present taints the memorial landscape of Nacogdoches.

In Nacogdoches very little captures the history and contributions of African Americans. The memorial landscape and most history texts feature a dominant narrative and public memory employed and most useful for Whites. Conversely, a memorial marker at the County Courthouse to William Goyens, an African American pivotal in securing a treaty with Cherokees during the Texas Revolution, gathers moss and few visitors. Zion Hill Baptist Church, the most historic Black church in the community, has been somewhat protected and preserved, but it now stands empty, waiting in line for funding and a clear purpose. Historic gravesites of African Americans have been protected and, thanks to efforts by Perky Beisel and many of the faculty at SFA, receive an annual cleanup.

By far the most significant effort at remembering the past comes from AAHP, founded by Birdie Wade in 1999. She put together and ruled over what she called a “salon” of people interested in preserving African-American history. Born in a segregated community in the 1920s, Wade had a distinguished career with the Texas Department of Human Services and the Nacogdoches Independent School District. She additionally helped establish such services as the Telephone Reassurance Program, the Nacogdoches Clean-Up Program, and the Sharing Post.⁹ Indeed, Birdie Wade very closely approached what sociologist Max Weber labeled “charismatic authority.”¹⁰

AAHP itself is a non-profit organization. In the early 2000s, AAHP gathered over twenty oral history interviews and began to make presentations at the regional East Texas Historical Association Conference in Nacogdoches. Unfortunately, with Wade’s death in 2005, AAHP lost its charismatic authority and largely—not completely—became inactive till just recently. This reveals both the pros and cons of charismatic authority embodied by Wade. She forged an organization about and for African Americans where no one had before. Yet, upon her death, the organization floundered. Without dismissing the loss of such a charismatic figure to the recent failures of preserving the African-American past in Nacogdoches, a long history of racial violence, intimidation, and the lack of spreading and sharing resources in the present also helps explain the failure to include African Americans in the memorial landscape and dominant historical narrative of Nacogdoches.

To get to the punch line first, we want to suggest that, in connection with the death of Birdie Wade and perceived racism and apathy in the present, the lack of remembering the African-American past in Nacogdoches stems from several reasons. One is the lack of any sustained media in Nacogdoches, which enables the public to forget and/or never learn about past racial violence and attitudes. The second is the lack of any known event as hideous and atrocious as, say, Tulsa in 1921, the brutal death of Emmitt Till in the 1950s, etc. This is not at all to suggest the racial violence of Nacogdoches is not atrocious. Rather, it might even be more tragic because with no historic event capturing the attention of a larger audience, Nacogdoches whitewashed its history and, more disturbingly, maintains an environment in which African Americans feel uncomfortable discussing the vicious past publicly to this day.

Nacogdoches, as a Texan and Southern town, had a history of

slavery and subsequent segregation. Regrettably, we have little to go on for information about the turn of the twentieth century outside reports of a lynching in the 1880s, right at the start of what historians have referred to as the “lynching era.”¹¹ Of course, given Nacogdoches’ Southern character and cotton production, we can reasonably assume the picture looked much like other Southern areas where violence and intimidation likely comprised the reality of everyday life for African Americans. Still, thanks to AAHP’s early oral histories, we have vignettes into the long reign of terror dating as early as from the 1920s, such as Arthur Weaver’s accounts of life in the 1920s and 1930s. Born in 1915, Weaver emerged as a civil rights leader in the 1950s and 1960s and founded the Nacogdoches NAACP chapter and Voter’s League.

We could share some rather appalling stories from Nacogdoches’ past, but the point is clear: the African-American population of Nacogdoches suffered a long reign of terror that, besides a few oral histories, few in the community seem to publicly acknowledge. Rather, they turn it on its head. The dominant White narrative in the twenty-first century says things were “not too bad.” Of course some bad things occurred, to be sure, but not like Selma, Tulsa, or Rosewood. Moreover, talking with faculty at SFA, many students, usually local, propose research projects on the relative smooth transition of integration and the peacefulness of race relations throughout Nacogdoches’ history. This false narrative is a major obstacle to current attempts at remembering the Black past in Nacogdoches. The Nacogdoches memorial landscape therefore speaks to who has power locally, revealing and propagating a lopsided dominant historical narrative that is irreducibly White and irrefutably incomplete. To compound the situation, a long history of racial violent behavior has been swept under the rug. Violence that Birdie Wade said “was a hush hush thing. You’d better not talk about it or you’d get killed.”¹²

The African-American community today, not surprisingly, is publicly timid. The long reign of terror makes this understandable. But as witnessed in other Southern and Texan communities with violent pasts against segments of its community, the lack of memorialization and historical remembering concerning African Americans is striking. A large part of the problem is that Nacogdoches has rarely publicly recognized nor, of course, reconciled with its past. Not experiencing an event that brought about a larger regional or national spotlight

has allowed them to nonchalantly forget the past and, in the process, reinvent what happened. Coupled with understandable mistrust, the African-American community shows little desire to step forward and champion a more stout and accurate historical remembrance.

As said before, the African-American community in Nacogdoches seems weak, at least according to oral history interviewees and the community's resolve to come together as a unified bloc to counter and correct the dominant historical narrative. We can trace a long history of racial violence as a root cause. We can trace the continued neighborhood segregation and the minute allocation of capital as a root cause. We can contribute it to the lopsided memorial landscape as a root cause. We can cite many things, in fact. But our concern now is how to best facilitate community building from within and the promise of oral history to not only more fully round out the local historical record, but also how it can help correct these larger problems.

The Promise of Oral History

Oral history is a term that invokes many images and ideas. Oral history, for some, is an intimate conversation between two or more people designed to conjure up events, meanings, and factual details about the past. For others, oral history is an historical source like any other that contains vital information about the past. Still, some claim oral history is a dubious source fraught with inaccuracies and subjective biases that hinder and limit its usefulness. Oral history, in Zen-like fashion, is none but all of these things. Oral history is an academic field of study, a tool for historical research, a tool for social advocacy, and a medium whereby individuals seize control of historical information concerning their own lives and create and control their own interpretations of history. Oral history hence means many different things for many different people and has many and varied uses.

Oral history is as old as history itself. Indeed, in preliterate societies, all history was oral history. The first professional historians were, in fact, the tradition-bearers of non-literate societies. Moreover, ancient Greek historians Thucydides and Herodotus, who is also known as "the Father of History," for example, relied on oral histories and traditions to compile some of the first known written histories in the world around 400 BCE: *The Histories* and *The Peloponnesian War*. Works such as the ancient sacred Indian text, the *Rigveda* (ca. 1,700 BCE), the Greek

classic by Homer, the *Iliad* (ca. 800 BCE), and the Hebrew *Proverbs* (ca. 500 BCE), are all works that were finally written down after a long history of oral transmission. In fact, oral histories were highly valued and regarded as a more reliable path to knowledge than documents alone by almost every major historian up to the eighteenth century: from Herodotus, to the famous English historian Bede in the seventh century CE, to the renowned Italian historian and statesman Francesco Guiccardini in the sixteenth century, to even the eminent French skeptic and historian Voltaire in the eighteenth century.¹³

A more modern practice arose in the twentieth century. From 1936 to 1938, for example, the New Deal commissioned the Federal Writer's Project to collect more than 2,300 oral histories from former slaves. New York publisher Joe Gould collected interviews during the 1940s while historian Allan Nevins formed an oral history group at Columbia University. Nevins's group usually receives kudos as beginning the modern oral history movement in the US. By 1967, the Oral History Association formed and the *Journal of Oral History* began in 1971. Today, hundreds of local, county, and state-wide oral history organizations exist, let alone national groups and international institutions, to collect, preserve, and present oral history.¹⁴

These more recent trends have also been paralleled by efforts to professionalize the craft. In efforts to recognize that oral historians face some very challenging issues, particularly questions of objectivity and memory, oral historians have tried to identify and improve interview strategies and standardize guidelines to professionalize the craft. In short, oral history is a method of historical documentation that uses interviews with living survivors of the time being investigated. Oral history is not something journalists do. Oral history is a history that has been recorded, made available to others, and stored safely. In part to address issues of objectivity and memory, oral historians have worked hard to establish common goals and guidelines and articulate the basic responsibilities of practitioners. A major concern for oral history is the degree to which accurate recall or recollection of the past is possible. Thus, oral historians have developed, refined, and occasionally rejected rules to ensure oral history practices, from taping to transcribing, do not themselves complicate the matter even more.¹⁵

Despite any rules and guidelines, oral history has, to say the least, faced a host of challenges and attacks concerning its legitimacy and

authority as a historical source. Oral history largely fell out of favor back in the eighteenth century, which lasted well in to the twentieth century, primarily because of the professionalization of history as an academic discipline. Famed nineteenth-century German historian Leopold van Ranke's influence has cast a long shadow over the study of history. Ranke is notable to most modern students of history because he helped to usher in the age of source-based historical research, the standard bearer of the professionalization of history itself that strictly adheres to the merits of rigorous training, acute research, and quality of writing. Merits, of course, that are deserving of respect despite some consequences of professionalization. Ranke, and hence later historians, primarily favored written documents found in archives. Related to this are the types of documents he found in archives: Those largely of the elite, and not of the so-called common people. The elite, of course, had access to archives when the common person did not. Not to mention the elite also controlled a political and cultural system that favored the preservation of their records in the first place. So Ranke, who favored political history (based on the available sources he could find in the archives of his day), influenced the next century's worth of historical research that favored the so-called great men of history (not women), the great classes (not the every person), and the political (not the contours and happenings of everyday life).¹⁶

Fortunately, the rise of the new social history in the 1960s and 1970s, following the great social and cultural upheavals of the era, ushered in demands for a history that included oral histories of those people previously perceived as on the "margins." That is, yes, many at the time were calling not only for a more equalitarian society, exemplified by the modern civil rights movements, but also for a more equalitarian history of a very diverse society. The desire to do and collect oral history exploded, as evident by the enormous popularity of such works as Studs Terkel's *Hard Times* and Alex Haley's epic family story in *Roots*. Social history and oral history found common ground in both purpose (giving voice to the underrepresented and marginalized) and, to a point, a seeming opposition to mainstream academia. Not coincidentally enough, starting at the University of California, Santa Barbara in the late 1970s, public history also grew as an academic discipline or track of study in many universities.

Oral history unquestionably provides an opportunity for historians

and others to investigate new areas of inquiry, as well as to more fully investigate events or people already well studied. It has increased and spread the number of informants and broadened the information gathered, whether new or little explored areas, or amplifying older areas of inquiry. It allows researchers get to the so-called "ordinary," to move beyond heroics, leaders, issues dominated by the news and media, and get to the more rank-and-file of society. Oral history can allow researchers to document those who typically do not have access to recording, nor interest in, their memories and their lives. This can be because of oppression and discrimination or from a failure to value importance or appreciate significance in a group, culture, or even aspect of everyday life. This is particularly true regarding those of the working class and women, whose stories have traditionally been glossed over or undervalued and underappreciated.

Oral history can simply help us understand better. It helps us understand, for example, work routines in both the factory and the home. It helps us understand better culture, again in the home and on the shop floor. It helps us understand work behavior, and, of course, gender behaviors, attitudes, and norms. This is also true of the intimate and extremely personal, say what most would agree is the most treasured and intimate of all social relationships, the family. Oral history can allow families to piece together genealogy, to be sure, but it can also allow families to understand how the family, historically, has dealt with change and where they fit in history and society. Oral histories allow us to explore the unknown, whether an extremist group, or the atrocious and unbearable, like genocide, or the nearby and often overlooked, such as local history. Oral history provides us with information on farm laborers, rural peoples, ethnoracial minorities or other traditionally marginalized groups, urban neighborhoods, local civic clubs, and many more.

All these things, unfortunately, are all too often absent in other historical sources, particularly those written documents that make their way to most archives and are what most historians and researchers use when constructing an understanding of the past. Oral history, then, is a necessary, though not always perfect, way of collecting and documenting the history of the marginalized, oppressed, and undervalued. It is, in many cases, a welcomed, needed, and corrective turn. This is certainly the case with the Black community in Nacogdoches. With a dearth of

written and other documents to elucidate a more accurate historical understanding of the African-American experience, oral histories provide some of the richest sources historians can muster in Nacogdoches and, in reality, much of East Texas. The content of such oral histories, as evidenced by students who interviewed African Americans in Nacogdoches, are highlighted below and, we think, demonstrate the great value of oral history.

The AAHP Interviews

The acquisition of oral histories with the Nacogdoches African-American community provides insight into the practice and perceptions of segregation leading up to, and after, the classical Civil Rights era. To be clear, AAHP set the agenda for the line of questioning. Each interviewee shared a personal history of the culture of local segregation that enhances the public's understanding of the process of integration in the late 1960s and 1970s, as well as the status of the Nacogdoches African-American community today. The interviewees included current and former community activists, educators, business owners, and servicemen. Ranging in age from 38 to 77, each interviewee shared experiences of segregation and integration based on their own personal journey of growing up in the African-American community in Nacogdoches before and after integration. While the interviews uniquely conveyed individual experiences, they also provided several overarching themes surrounding life in a segregated society, and the slow, but steady, process of integration. Students Lisa Bentley and Kaitlin Wieseman share first with a focus on the condition of the segregated school system in Nacogdoches on the eve of integration. Student Jessy K. Hanshaw then delves into the theme of community as expressed in the interviews, while students Laura Blackburn and Aaron Marsh spotlight the differences between the older and younger generations in the African-American community as it concerns integration and the theme of community. These are just a few of the highlights. Topics and themes as diverse as economic and cultural history are shared throughout all the oral histories, as are feelings about the so-called establishment in Nacogdoches and the blatant racism and violence of the police. So while just a snapshot of the quantity and quality of the information gathered by students in the oral history class, these small vignettes into the content of the oral histories collected provide evidence of their obvious historical value.

To listen to all the interviews the students did in 2010, visit <http://www.sfasu.edu/heritagecenter/422.asp>.

The Segregated School System of Nacogdoches and Integration

Nacogdoches during the 1970s had just begun the integration of schools. Teaching resources in most classrooms, like those around the country at the time, were limited to textbooks and chalk.¹⁷ Still, E. J. Campbell High School, the historic Black school in the area, perhaps emblematic of secondary status and citizenship, received hand-me-down textbooks and athletic uniforms from the White school (Nacogdoches High).¹⁸ The interviewees describe integration as an awakening to the inequalities within their school compared to Nacogdoches High. Marion Upshaw, one of the first Black teachers to transfer from E. J. Campbell High to Nacogdoches High after integration, described the inaugural experience of being a Black teacher in a newly integrated school. The inequality within the school system seemed undeniably obvious to him when he transferred to Nacogdoches High as a science teacher. Expressing a sense of shock, and reflective disappointment, he received teaching resources he never had at E. J. Campbell High, such as microscopes and dissecting equipment. He then used the metaphor of ice cream to describe the cold stark differences between the schools: "You don't know how vanilla ice cream tastes until you get to strawberry."¹⁹

The facilities at Black schools compared to White schools before integration were considerably different from one another. Interviewee M. L. Glenn, one of the Black students that went through integration, discussed E. J. Campbell High's lack of facilities for Black students and lamented that the school did not have air conditioning or even a cafeteria.²⁰ Charlotte Stokes, a student from E. J. Campbell High, said the "schoolyard playgrounds were always inferior."²¹ She continued, "I think in some ways as a result of not getting all of the books, all of the resources that we could have got that other children did get, it might have made a difference in what we decided to pursue as a career."²² Other interviewees agreed. Facilities and teaching resources limited the teacher's ability to educate students beyond seemingly basic skills. Sciences, history, fine arts, and performing arts were among a few of the courses not available at Black schools. Maye Ham recalls her education as being the three Rs (Reading, wRiting, aRithmetic) since Black

schools focused on teaching students to read, write, and do remedial math.²³ Upshaw recalled, "I went into the science classroom for the first time and I had never seen a test tube, microscope, dissecting set. And I started from scratch in science in college."²⁴ Stories similar to these are not uncommon when listening to the interviewees describes their experiences with formal education before college.

If African Americans from Nacogdoches did go on to college, as Archie Rison puts it, it was a difficult challenge because "the tools just weren't there."²⁵ Theme writing, test taking, and study skills were not considerations in local East Texas African American schools because for most Black students, none anticipated to go on to college. In fact, college rarely seemed a viable option for most African American high school graduates in Nacogdoches. Rison referred to his first few years of college as being, well, "tough."²⁶ While many Black high-school students were encouraged by the Black community to attend college, most were simply unprepared for the course load. Moreover, Taylor Whittaker recalled that Black students usually failed to graduate from college as, too often, colleges recruited Black students "to play football and basketball," which, in the process, helped to stigmatize Black males as physical athletes and not intellectual students.²⁷ Still, Black students' desire to succeed prompted the self-motivation required to usually become the first college graduates of their community.

For the most part, the Black community in Nacogdoches supported integration within the school system. Black community leaders knew that integration would create new opportunities for future generations. Maye Ham, for example, discussed how integration built a larger and more diverse community within the East Texas area. She described each generation as being more receptive of integration than the next, which made integration more successful. Ultimately, the interviewees seemed to express the desire to hold onto a slipping sense of tight-knit community they grew up with while being optimistic about the future.

Community

Perhaps the most prominent theme to come from the entirety of the interviews is the importance of community past and present. Rison, like many interviewees, lamented the loss of the close-knit African-American community with the coming of integration.²⁸ Several interviewees described a community of helpers and friends that looked after one an-

other. Similarly, Ham recalled how community grew from the support of families, teachers, and neighbors, but noted the support system broke apart after integration. Furthermore, she highlighted the recent economic changes in the African-American community that forced families out of the community.²⁹ M. L. Glenn also cited increased mobility for young African Americans during the 1970s as the reason many left the community for greater opportunities.³⁰ During his interview, Glenn pointed out several buildings and vacant lots in Nacogdoches that once housed a doctor's office or restaurants that folded after the end of segregation, signaling the dissolution of valuable, vibrant, and needed local social and cultural institutions often at the heart of holding communities together.

The interviewees suggested the close-knit relationships in the Black community stemmed from the need to protect each other in a segregated society.³¹ Nacogdoches, like many towns across the US, remained deeply segregated into the 1970s and the Black community conveyed to their children the rules and traditions of living in this type of racist world. The openness and warmth of the African-American community highlighted the injustices of segregation when young people met restrictions outside the boundaries of the community. Several local businesses in the city center, including Strickland's and Smith Brothers, did not permit African Americans to enter the establishment. Rison, Glenn, and Whitaker recall ordering from the backdoor so that they did not interact with White patrons at the front of the store.³² All public facilities were segregated during this time, including movie theaters, water fountains, buses, and schools.

The brutal, and sometimes violent, methods used to "control" the African-American community dominated several of the interviews in this project. The local law enforcement agencies often resorted to intimidation under the rule of M. C. Roebuck, the longtime Chief of Police in Nacogdoches. Whitaker and Glenn each described a frightening man who garnered respect through fear in both the White and African-American communities alike.³³ The police department often arrested African Americans, especially "out of towners," to make money from unnecessary fines. The police often removed young African Americans from downtown for walking around or hanging outside businesses. Still, despite altercations and protests, Nacogdoches did not experience intense levels of prolonged violence, according to the interviewees, and

integration developed through community involvement and activism. Several interviewees agreed that Nacogdoches managed to bypass chaos and catastrophe through a basic understanding and respect of community boundaries. While a few White-owned businesses shut down to avoid forced integration, which is still a few too many, others rose to the challenge and hired African-American workers and supported the integration of the schools. Ultimately, they took great pride in their participation in community activism during integration. Interviewees in Whitaker's barbershop, for example, spoke proudly of hosting civil rights activist Mickey McGuire and contributing monetarily to political protest and marches throughout East Texas. Charlotte Stokes also spoke with great reverence for her father, Arthur Weaver, a principal local civil rights leader.

Following integration, Nacogdoches High became the new school, and African American students were bused onto campus from across town. Many interviewees questioned the closing of E.J. Campbell High and the decision to use the much older Nacogdoches High School building as the integrated school. Upshaw and Glenn each noted that E.J. Campbell High, the newer building, made more sense to accommodate the new school community. The White community, forced to accept integration, refused to allow their children to attend school in the so-called black side of town and E. J. Campbell shut down.³⁴ There remains a sense of loss over this facility for the African-American community. Nevertheless, the importance of a shared history is beginning to bring the community together in the preservation of sites and stories.

Other interviewees, long removed from the school system, viewed integration as the end of young people's reliance on their community for support. The selection of Nacogdoches High highlighted a belief of the White community cast superior to theirs.³⁵ Other interviewees saw a breakdown in the new school system that overlooked African-American students and negatively affected their success rate.³⁶ Each interviewee expressed a desire to see a stronger Black community and stricter discipline in schools. They fear a complete collapse of the community if young people today do not realize the importance of learning and understand the struggle it took to get a fair and equal education.

Oral History, Community, and Advocacy

At the heart of working with groups like AAHP and the African-

American community in recent years is a cadre of professionals, mostly from SFA. Yet, as many scholars have pointed out, concerns can be raised over the involvement of professionals with local communities as establishing an unequal relationship whereby the professionals, knowingly or not, dismiss local interpretations and, even worse, contribute to the continued subjugation of oppressed groups. From this came "shared authority." For Michael Frisch, "what is most compelling about oral and public history is a capacity to redefine and redistribute intellectual authority, so that this might be shared more broadly in historical research and communication rather than continuing to serve as an instrument of power and hierarchy."³⁷ Shared authority concerning oral history and public history thus embodies collaboration between professionals and community members about interpreting the past, what and who to interpret, and how. This is exactly the approach employed in working with the African-American community in Nacogdoches. But critiques abound. Most are theoretical concerns leveled by academics. Our remaining remarks then are to address these critiques and to establish what, we think from our oral history experience, shared authority looks like in practice and its centrality to fostering a unified community.

Reservations concerning shared authority are many, but a few stand out.³⁸ First, a bevy of critiques are advanced that essentially focus on how sharing authority can push too much in one direction. Specifically, community affirmation can too easily tumble over into uncritical and celebratory "monumental history."³⁹ Too relentless a focus on race or ethnicity overlooks very real internal divisions, particularly along class and gender lines. A determined emphasis on history from the bottom up can neglect the top-down influences and actions of the rich and powerful. Second, shared authority too often results in too narrow of a vision; that localism too easily leads to provincialism that slights big-picture developments. A third critique is that a too narrow or even unidirectional focus can actually contribute to the further marginalization of minority groups traditionally left out. For example, in Nacogdoches, this argument manifests itself in critiques that, say, erecting a statue to civil-rights leader Arthur Weaver in the historically-segregated neighborhood signals his and, by implication, the African-American community's continued second-class citizenship by the mere fact he, and they, are not well represented in more prominent or official city spaces and histories.

All these arguments have merit, without doubt, but fail to recognize how important each small step truly is. That is, after all, what shared authority looks like and how it contributes to creating an “historic bloc.” As members of an aggrieved community, AAHP and sharing authority with SFA are beginning to function as what theorist Antonio Gramsci referred to as “organic intellectuals.” Gramsci felt that dominant social groups exert power as much through ideological hegemony (dominance over others) as through physical force (say a long reign of racial intimidation), and he charged that traditional intellectuals reinforce social hierarchies by serving as “experts in legitimation.” But Gramsci pointed out that subdued groups have their own intellectuals who attempt to pose “counter-hegemony” by introducing narratives subversive of existing power relations. Organic intellectuals, in contrast to traditional, attempt to build a “historic bloc”—a coalition of oppositional groups unified around counter-hegemonic ideas.⁴⁰

The recent attempts at sharing authority and collecting oral histories, while imperfect and just small steps, reflect the struggle to assemble a “historic bloc” capable of challenging the ideological hegemony of White cultural domination in Nacogdoches. Yet, these are necessary first steps in building a strong community needed to overcome the larger problems of shared authority and dearth of prominent public history works and memorials about and for African Americans.

The problems inherent in shared authority therefore do not outweigh the benefits! The problems of too narrowly focusing in one direction or in vision, of concentrating on so-called minor oral history projects that supposedly risk marginalizing oppressed groups further, overlooks their importance in establishing community in the first place. In lieu of a charismatic authority like Birdie Wade, in light of a long history of racial tensions, in spite of a lopsided existent historical landscape, attention needs to center on the construction of an historic bloc more than on any one particular outcome. Moreover, we risk dismissing another vital component to the creation and maintenance of a more accurate, diverse, and meaningful historical narrative in Nacogdoches: the real power of oral history. Borrowing from oral historians like Paul Thompson, Michael Frisch, Alessandro Portelli, and many others, oral history is often a viable tool in the inaugural formation of unified communities.⁴¹ Conducting oral histories with AAHP, members of an aggrieved and oppressed group, will aid in the formation of a unified com-

munity as they will have both participated in the creation of historical narratives and dictated the terms in which it they would be recorded. So whether or not any particular effort at shared authority is fraught with problems that critics like to tout, the real concern is on the formation of a community in the first place. When we are dealing with an oppressed and timid population, work toward community building is the first step to better challenging hegemony and dominate narratives.

(Endnotes)

¹ Judith McCulloh, "In the Pines': The Melodic-Textual Identity of an American Lyric Folksong Cluster," Ph. D. dissertation, Department of English, Indiana University, 1970.

² Eric Weisbard, "Pop Music: A Simple Song That Lives Beyond Time," *New York Times*, November 13, 1994, accessible online at <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/11/13/arts/pop-music-a-simple-song-that-lives-beyond-time.html?pagewanted=1>.

³ Taylor Whitaker, interviewed by Stephen Delear, June 29, 2010, African American Heritage Project. Oral Histories, East Texas Research Center, Ralph W. Steen Library, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, Texas (hereafter referred to as ETRC), 37-38.

⁴ For an example of a few Nacogdoches booster clubs and their collections, see Booster Club, Nacogdoches, Texas, B-31, ETRC; Daughters of the Republic of Texas, Stone Fort Chapter, B-32, ETRC; and Texas Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Nacogdoches Chapter, B-30, ETRC.

⁵ For more on the power of local history to affect identity, community, and local power hierarchies, see David Glassberg, *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 126; Carol Kammen, ed., *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings on Theory and Practice* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 1996); Michael Kammen, *Selvages and Biases: The Fabric of History in American Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press,

1989), 156; Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life* (Sioux Falls, SD: NuVision Publications, 2007), 23-24; Lydia R. Otero, *La Calle: Spatial Conflicts and Urban Renewal in a Southwest City* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2010); and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

⁶ For sources elucidating the power of narrative to affect behavior and shape beliefs, see Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 130; David Carr, "Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity," *History and Theory* 25, no. 2 (May 1986): 117; Fredrick Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 216; L. O. Mink, "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument," in R. H. Canary and H. Kozicki, eds., *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 129-49; James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 57; and Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *On Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1-23.

⁷ Stone Fort Collection, A-154, ETRC; and Stone Fort Museum website, Stephen F. Austin State University, <http://www.sfasu.edu/stonefort>.

⁸ See Millard's Crossing Historic Village, Inc. website at <http://www.millardscrossing.org>.

⁹ Jere L. Jackson, "Birdie Wade Tribute," African American Heritage Project, Collections webpage, ETRC, <http://libweb.sfasu.edu/proser/etrc/collections/manuscript/personal/aaahp/index.html>.

¹⁰ Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 215. Weber determines charismatic authority as "resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order

revealed or ordained by him" (*Economy and Society*, 215). Charisma is hence a quality of an individual personality considered extraordinary and followers consider this quality endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or exceptional powers or qualities. Whether such powers actually exist or not is irrelevant; the followers' beliefs that such power exists is powerful.

¹¹ Gary B. Borders, *A Hanging in Nacogdoches: Murder, Race, Politics, and Polemics in Texas's Oldest Town, 1870-1916* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

¹² Birdie Wade, interview with Earnest Sexton by Birdie Wade, July 11, 2000, African American Heritage Project Collection (hereafter referred to as AAHP), Oral Histories, OH-132, ETRC.

¹³ For more on the history of oral history, see Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History, Third Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 25-81.

¹⁴ Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 63-66.

¹⁵ For discussions of guidelines and rules, see Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 222-45; Robert Perks and Alistar Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2005), especially "Part II Interviewing," 101-82, and "Part IV Interpreting Memories," 269-356. For critical developments concerning oral history addressing issues of objectivity, subjectivity, memory, authorship, and much more, see Michael Frisch, "Oral History and *Hard Times*: A Review Essay," *Red Buffalo* 1, nos. 2-3 (1972): 217-31; Ronald J. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History* (Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1985), 127-54; Luisa Passerini, "Work Ideology and Consensus Under Italian Fascism," *History Workshop* 8 (1979): 84-92; Alessandro Portelli, "The Peculiarities of Oral History," *History Workshop* 12 (1981): 96-107; and Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 173-89.

¹⁶ Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, & Modern*, Third Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 232-34; and Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 55-56.

In the Pines, Where the Sun Don't Ever Shine

¹⁷ Marion Upshaw, interviewed by Chris Wilkins, June 23, 2010, AAHP, Oral Histories, ETRC, 5.

¹⁸ Whitaker, interviewed by Delear, 5-6.

¹⁹ Upshaw, interviewed by Wilkins, 7.

²⁰ M. L. Glenn, quoted in interview with Taylor D. Whitaker, M. L. Glenn, and Lonnie Wells, interviewed by Jessy K. Hanshaw, June 30, 2010, AAHP, Oral Histories, ETRC, 14.

²¹ Charlotte Stokes, interviewed by Kaitlin Wieseman, June 29, 2010, AAHP, Oral Histories, ETRC, 11.

²² Stokes, interviewed by Wieseman, 17.

²³ Maye Ham, interviewed by Lisa Bentley, June 24, 2010, AAHP, Oral Histories, ETRC, 11.

²⁴ Upshaw, interviewed by Wilkins, 2.

²⁵ Archie Rison, Jr., interviewed by Matt Tallant, July 7, 2010, AAHP, Oral Histories, ETRC, 11.

²⁶ Rison, interviewed by Tallant, 10.

²⁷ Whitaker, interviewed by Delear, 42.

²⁸ Rison, interviewed by Tallant, 3.

²⁹ Ham, interviewed by Bentley, 6-8.

³⁰ Glenn, interviewed by Hanshaw, 31.

³¹ Whitaker, Glenn, and Wells, interviewed by Hanshaw, 13.

³² Whitaker, Glenn, and Wells, interviewed by Hanshaw, 14.

³³ Whitaker, interviewed by Delear, 7-9.

³⁴ Upshaw, interviewed by Wilkins, 21, 26; and Glenn, interviewed by Hanshaw, 42.

³⁵ Upshaw, interviewed by Wilkins, 21, 26; and Glenn, interviewed by Hanshaw, 42.

³⁶ Ham, interviewed by Bentley, 11-12; and Rison, interviewed by Tallant, 6.

³⁷ Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), xx.

³⁸ For critiques, and praise, of shared authority, see "Special Feature: Shared Authority," in *The Oral History Review* 30, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2003): 23-113.

³⁹ Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations: On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (1874; repr., New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 67-77. Monumental history is history, which is celebratory, romantic, congratulatory, and exceptional in a positive context. Monumental history serves life since in its proper amount it inspires or encourages the striving of individuals to better themselves because it celebrates, "through which alone greatness goes on living" (68).

⁴⁰ *Culture, Ideology and Social Process: A Reader*, eds. Tony Bennett, Graham Martin, Colin Mercer, and Janet Woollacott (London: The Open University Press, 1989), 210-14.

⁴¹ Frisch, "Oral History and *Hard Times*, 217-31; Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*, 127-54; Passerini, "Work Ideology and Consensus Under Italian Fascism," 84-92; Portelli, "The Peculiarities of Oral History," 96-107; and Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 173-89.