

# Oral History: Voice, Memory, Power, and the Recovery of the Past

---

Brenda Sendejo

Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Southwestern University

Co-director, Latina History Project

TrueStories Project Faculty Partner

# Overview

- **Introduction**
- **Oral History: Definitions and Approaches**
  - Feminist Methods
  - Anthropological Approaches
  - Oral History as a Social Justice Tool
- **Oral History as Method: Techniques**
- **Southwestern University Faculty-Student Projects**
  - *Spirit Stories: Narratives of Social Justice and Spirituality, An Intergenerational Oral History Project*
  - *Latina History Project*

# Context

- Personal interests and connections
- *The Women of La Raza Unida Oral History Project* (UT Austin)
  - Led me to pursue deeper questions ...
- *VOCES Oral History Project* (UT Austin)
- Training in oral history methods and theory within cultural anthropology.

**Mujeres Por La Raza Unida**  
**The Women of Raza Unida**

A Tribute to Women's Involvement  
in Texas Politics

La Raza Unida Party was established as a third political party in 1970 in order to bring economic, social and political self-determination to Mexican Americans in Texas. Women were a strong force in the Party, contributing significantly to the formation and advancement of its platform and promoting an agenda which addressed issues that directly affected the family and women.

In 1971, Mujeres Por La Raza (Mujeres), the women's caucus of the Party, was formed and rose to become a political force. Ino Álvarez, Evey Chapa, and Marta Cotera were the founders of Mujeres, active alongside many other committed women. Women ran local offices, worked on the petition to allow the Raza Unida Party on the ballot, and became more politically active and aware. Mujeres organized bilingual conferences to promote issues important to women and Chicanos in general concerning education, health care, sexism, racism, and class inequalities. They provided daycare for mothers, and made alliances with other politically active women's groups.

Although Mujeres Por La Raza ended with the fall of the Raza Unida Party in 1978, the contributions it made are still felt today and many of its members are still active. Mujeres created a space for women's issues to be heard and paved the way for the larger inclusion of Mexican Americans in mainstream Texas politics.

Thanks to the Center for Mexican American Studies, Emilio Zamora and the staff of the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection for their assistance with the production of this exhibit. A very special note of gratitude to all of the amazing mujeres who it seeks to honor.

- Linda Ho and Brenda Sandejo, UT Austin Department of Anthropology  
and Center for Mexican American Studies graduate students, guest curators

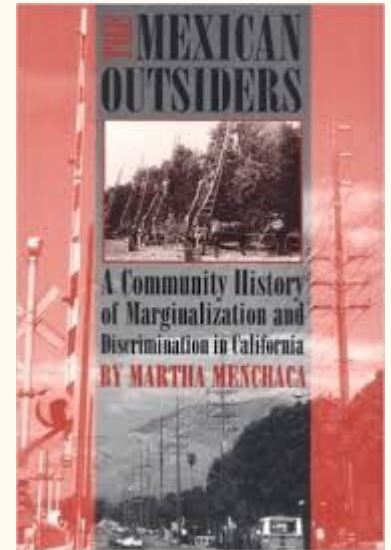
**\*MARIA JIMENEZ**  
WOMAN REPRESENTATIVE  
DALLAS COUNTY  
HOUSTON TEXAS 77001  
800-555-7467

Four photographs are included: 1. A group of people at a table. 2. A portrait of Maria Jimenez. 3. A group of women sitting together. 4. A woman speaking into a microphone.

# Oral History: Definitions and Approaches

*Oral history is a method of collecting information about the past and preserving that past by way of interviewing a person or group of people about a historical event, era, place, and/or time.*

- Interdisciplinary
- Anthropology
  - Valuable sources of information that transmit and generate messages. Examining them allows for the illumination of those questions that need to be further pursued, such as how and why the construction and transmission of attitudes and belief, have occurred and under what historical circumstances (Vansina 1985).
- Feminist Methods
  - Oral history allows opportunities for new spaces to be created and theory to emerge, and for the consideration of the ways in which class, race, ethnicity and gender affect the construction of memory (Sangster 1999).
- Oral History as a Social Justice Tool
  - Filling historical gaps and empowering individuals and groups.
  - Acknowledgement of past wrongs: the power of voicing the past.



# Oral History as Method: Techniques

- Pre-Interview Preparation
  - Doing the homework
  - Consent forms
  - Developing strong questions
- During the Interview: What to Expect
  - Equipment
  - Taking notes
  - Active listening
  - Ethical concerns
- Common Concerns:
  - What if the interviewee does not like to talk?
  - What if the interviewee goes off on a tangent?
  - What if they do not answer the question?



# Southwestern University Oral History Projects



---

Spirit Stories: Narratives of Social Justice & Spirituality  
An Intergenerational Oral History Project  
Southwestern University Faculty-Student Research Project (2012-  
2013)





## The Latina History Project

Southwestern University

---

THE LATINA HISTORY PROJECT  
Feminist Studies & Anthropology  
Southwestern University (2013-present)





# Bibliography & Other Resources

Delgado Bernal, Dolores. 1998. Grassroots Leadership Reconceptualized: Chicana Oral Histories and the 1968 East Los Angeles School Blowouts. In *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Varieties of Women's Oral History, pp. 113-142.

Gluck, Sherna. 1988. *Rosie the Riveter Revisited*. Albuquerque: Plume.

----- and Patai, D. 1991. *Women's Words: the Feminist Practice of Oral History*. New York: Routledge.

Rosie the Riveter/WWII Homefront Oral History Project, UC Berkeley, <http://vm136.lib.berkeley.edu/BANC/ROHO/projects/rosie/>

Sangster, Joan. 1994. Telling our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History. In: *Women's History Review* (3):1, 5-28.

Sendejo, Brenda. 2009. *Mother's Legacy: Cultivating a Chicana Consciousness in the War Years*. In *Beyond the Latino War Hero: The Social and Political Legacy of Latinas/os & WWII*, edited by Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez and Emilio Zamora. Austin: UT Press.

Tejano Voices Oral History Project, UT Arlington, <http://library.uta.edu/tejanovoices/>

Vansina, Jan. 1985. *Oral Tradition as History*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Visible Lives: Oral Histories of the Disability Experience, <http://oralhistory.nypl.org/neighborhoods/visible-lives>

Voces Oral History Project, UT Austin, <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/voces/index.html>

# Oral History: Voice, Memory, Power, and the Recovery of the Past

---

Brenda Sendejo (sendejob@southwestern.edu)  
Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Southwestern University  
Co-director, Latina History Project  
TrueStories Project Faculty Partner