Conference Call for Proposals

Witnessing State Violence: Oral History and Liberatory Praxis

OHMAR Conference 2026

Conference Dates: May 7-8, 2026

Location: Arlington, Virginia. The conference will be in person with no virtual/hybrid option.

Deadline for Submissions: Friday, March 27 by 11:59pm Eastern

Theme:

Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR) and The Alexandria Oral History Center invite you to submit individual and session proposals for the 2026 Annual Meeting, themed "Witnessing State Violence: Oral History and Liberatory Praxis." The theme encourages attendees to think critically about the role that oral history has in documenting and resisting state violence, to include municipal, provincial/state and federal forms of violence*—via two key aspects of oral history practice: witnessing and power. Both national and internationally focused proposal topics are welcome, as well as viewpoints from across the ideological spectrum.
**In the context of this meeting, "state violence" refers to state-sanctioned, legal (i.e. policing, prisons, military) and extralegal forms of violence (i.e. vigilante, paramilitary groups) that subjugate vulnerable populations to dehumanization, exploitation, oppression, and/or physical violence. Proposals are welcome to use their own definitions of "state violence."*

First, proposals might address what "witnessing" means today and what it has meant in previous (and ongoing) political and social justice movements. Is witnessing passive or active? Is listening to and recording someone's oral history or watching a video online enough, or does witnessing require additional work by the receiver; and what is that work? What is the relationship between witnessing and empathy? How can oral history as witnessing be used to move from empathy to healing and transformation? What interdisciplinary practices can oral history learn from and/or develop for deeper witnessing? Whose voices are centered in this process?

Second–although intertwined with witnessing–is how power is negotiated in oral history. What does it mean and look like to truly center harmed, targeted, and marginalized communities? What are the responsibilities and care required of oral history to avoid making these communities even more vulnerable without also silencing them? What interdisciplinary practices can oral history learn from and/or develop for more power-building/-sharing?

We encourage proposals that guide us to theoretical understandings of oral history, witnessing, and power as well as proposals that offer pragmatic or process-oriented approaches. These may include projects addressing descendant communities who are advocating for recognition and repair/restoration. Presenters can be community members, transcribers, archivists, educators, oral historians, and more.

While submissions on the conference theme are encouraged, all topics related to the Mid-Atlantic region, or proposals from oral historians active in the Mid-Atlantic region, are welcome and will be considered equally.

Due to the potentially sensitive and difficult nature of presentations, OHMAR will do its best to support participants if needed. Please reach out to us at ohmar.conference@gmail.com with any concerns.

Application Guidelines:

The program committee invites proposals for panels or roundtables, as well as for individual papers and an “ideas development” session. The “ideas development” session is an opportunity for presenters to briefly share their project idea and/or proposal and get feedback from the audience to workshop and further develop the idea presented. We encourage submissions from students, early career oral historians, community practitioners, and people who use oral history in their work but may not self-identify as oral historians. We welcome presentations that feature audio-visual components. We highly encourage oral historians and projects to use this conference to include narrators as co-presenters.

- Individual or co-authored paper/presentation proposals should include a brief abstract of 250-500 words, a one-paragraph biographical summary about each author, contact information, and any accessibility accommodations you anticipate needing at this time.

- Panel proposals should include a broad, 1-2 sentence description of the panel theme, a brief abstract of 150-200 words for each paper, and a one-paragraph biographical summary about each author. **Please provide one point of contact per panel**.

- "Ideas development" session proposals should include a 200-300 word abstract, a one-paragraph biographical summary of the creator, and the creator's contact information. Please make it clear that this proposal is for the "ideas development" session.

- Other submission formats will be considered. Feel free to be creative. Please be as descriptive as possible when submitting your proposal.

The deadline for all submissions is Friday, March 27 by 11:59pm Eastern. All submissions should be emailed with attachments to ohmar.conference@gmail.com. Please feel free to contact us at that email address at any time with questions.

Registration Fees:

Conference registration fees will be kept as low as possible in alignment with previous years. Exact prices TBD. You do not need to be a current OHMAR member to submit a conference proposal.

All registration fees help cover operational costs and our Martha Ross Prize, awarded annually to an undergraduate or graduate student creating original work in oral history. None of our Board members receive any compensation for their work with OHMAR.

Conference Call for Cover Design

OHMAR also invites proposals for the 2026 conference program cover design! The prize for the winning design is free conference registration.

Design Submission Requirements:
Letter size (i.e., 8.5” x 11”)

Include the following:

- OHMAR logo (large)
- Conference title: “Witnessing State Violence: Oral History and Liberatory Praxis”
- Conference dates: May 7-8, 2026
- Social media info: @OHMidAtlantic
- OHMAR’s website: http://ohmar.org

Submission Deadline: Friday, April 3 by 11:59pm Eastern. All submissions should be emailed **as a PDF** to ohmar.conference@gmail.com. Please feel free to contact us at that email address at any time with questions.