

Important Book About Oral History and Families

Mary Louise Contini Gordon, *Family Oral History Across the World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2024), xx + 285 pages, \$39.99 Paperback.

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In 1985, I had a contract with the University of Oklahoma Press to write a history of the Palouse Indians of the Northwest Plateau. An anonymous reviewer demanded that my coauthor, Richard Scheuerman, and I remove all oral histories we had conducted with Palouse people and families for 8 years. The reviewer insisted we also delete mention of ancient oral narratives that tied Palouse people to their homelands, saying “as we all know, these are fish tales that grow with the telling.” We withdrew our book from Oklahoma. In 1986, Washington State University Press published the book, which won a book award for the best non-fiction that year.

Most historians of the past believed all history had to be constructed from written documents, which was and remains folly. The first historical records on earth and for most of the world was preserved through oral histories—such as the Holy Bible. Since the time of creation, Indigenous cultures across the world, including the histories of the first peoples of California and the Western Hemisphere, were preserved through oral traditions. Most families have championed oral histories for generations, passing along memories and stories down through the ages. These accounts are highly significant in Native American history and among other peoples around the world. This is the theme of an important book on family oral histories written by California resident, Mary Gordon, the author of a book in 2013 about Charlie Cook, a California Indian advocate for Indigenous rights.

Gordon provides numerous suggestions on how to conduct family oral histories, preserve and use them, protocols to consider, and recording techniques. The book has a wealth of information that will be of interest and use to all families. Gordon offers many aspects of doing oral histories within families, but my favorite is her section, “Indigenous Families of the Southwest,” which including information on the Mission Context, California Indian Family Histories, and Boarding Schools. This is a book that will be of interest and use to all families, including the First Peoples of California.