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# Oral History and the History of American Foreign Relations

Jonathan Soffer

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United States foreign relations history and oral history were made for each other. At least one would think so, given the public and private funding of numerous oral history collections in the field. So why are they so little used in leading works of diplomatic history?

While oral histories are consulted regularly and show up in many bibliographies of major works, they seldom make it to the footnote; arguments and conclusions are rarely based on oral history evidence, as an examination of two leading works on the history of the Cold War reveals. Of the copious citations in Melvyn P. Leffler's *A Preponderance of Power*, the most comprehensive work on the foreign policy of the Truman administration, there are only about ten citations to oral history in over 116 pages of endnotes. Michael J. Hogan's book *The Marshall Plan* is a masterpiece of in-depth, multiarchival research; it pioneered both corporatist interpretations of foreign policy and an international approach. A scan of the book's footnotes, however, shows no references to oral history; the bibliography lists only two interviews. This is particularly surprising because the Marshall Plan was one of the main focuses of the Harry S. Truman Library Oral History Project (completed in 1971), which contains 371 interviews and over 42,282 pages of interview transcriptions.<sup>1</sup>

Since both these works are justly considered paragons of archival research, their relative neglect of oral history sources bears some examination. This article will attempt to explain why some of the best diplomatic historians ignore or dismiss oral history sources and to suggest how new ways of reading those sources could increase their value to the field. Finally, the article will briefly survey some of the

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I have received invaluable assistance in the preparation of this article from the section editors, Michael Frisch and Linda Shopes, from Ronald Grele, and from Pamela Allen Brown. I would also like to thank Michael Sherry, Anders Stephanson, Emily Rosenberg, and Melvyn Leffler, as well as Lloyd Gardner, for their generosity in discussing with me the problems of using oral history in this subfield.

<sup>1</sup> Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, 1992); Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947–1952* (New York, 1987). Oral history material that would be of interest to foreign policy historians in the Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri, includes transcripts of substantial interviews with State Department officials such as Theodore C. Achilles (139 pp.), Donald C. Blaisdell (247 pp.), Loy Henderson (239 pp.), and Assistant Director for Mutual Security George M. Elsey (nearly 500 pp.). See Harry S. Truman Library, *Historical Materials in the Harry S. Truman Library* (Independence, 1984).

more interesting and relevant oral history collections available in the United States and abroad.

To find out why this abundance of resources seems so underutilized, I interviewed a number of leading diplomatic historians by telephone and e-mail. Several agreed with Professor Lloyd Gardner of Rutgers University: "Oral history interviews are pure memory—they have to be checked two or three different ways." Gardner observed that while he used published collections of oral histories in the classroom, he used oral history interviews "primarily for color, not for revelations." He was concerned that oral history interviewing, if not properly conducted, might be much like poll taking, in which "the interviewer gets the result he wants." Despite his skepticism, Gardner puts the John Foster Dulles oral history collection at the Mudd Library, Princeton University, to good use in his *Approaching Vietnam*.<sup>2</sup>

Another foreign relations historian, Professor Anders Stephanson of Columbia University, has been among the most receptive in the profession to new techniques of reading texts, and his book *Kennan and the Art of Foreign Policy* has dozens of oral histories in its bibliography. He observed, however, that "too much oral history is done badly and is therefore not interesting. It all depends on how well informed the [interviewer] is and how energetically he or she pursues difficult things."<sup>3</sup> In short, historians have two major kinds of doubts about oral history: first, they suspect the accuracy of the interviewee; second, they are skeptical about the skill of the average interviewer.

Only one subgenre of foreign relations history regularly makes use of oral histories: biography. Biography is the exception that proves the underlying rule of suspicion of oral history sources. Historians of American foreign relations whose interest is policy tend to focus on the collective acts of the national security bureaucracy; they gravitate toward the primary source generated by that bureaucracy—its documents. Biography, and quasi-autobiographical enterprises such as oral history, are focused more on the individual subject than on the collective state subject, the government. Biographies, therefore, make much more use of oral history than do policy histories.<sup>4</sup>

Biographers of twentieth-century figures are expected to fill in gaps in the official records with narratives and anecdotes from living memory. Biographers who have used oral histories, however, say that they can do far more than that. Walter Isaacson, the biographer of former secretary of state Henry A. Kissinger, based his work largely on 150 interviews, which he conducted himself. Isaacson considered the interviews to be a corrective to the documentary record, which he characterized as "misleading." Certainly contemporaneous documents and published memoirs *may*

<sup>2</sup> Lloyd Gardner telephone interview by Jonathan Soffer, Jan. 1, 1995 (notes in Soffer's possession). Lloyd C. Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam: From World War II through Dienbienphu, 1941–1954* (New York, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> Anders Gunnar Stephanson, *Kennan and the Art of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989). Stephanson to Soffer, e-mail, March 1, 1995 (printout in Soffer's possession).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York, 1992); Herbert S. Parmet, J. F. K., *the Presidency of John F. Kennedy* (New York, 1983); and Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower* (2 vols., New York, 1983–1984).

be as self-serving as oral history interviews. Kissinger himself is quoted as saying, "What is written in diplomatic documents never bears much relation to reality." He continued, "I could never have written my Metternich dissertation based on documents if I had known what I know now."<sup>5</sup>

Kissinger's statement implies that unsupplemented documentary records can be as misleading as some consider wholly oral ones to be. This brings us to Stephanson's objection: that few interviewers are knowledgeable or skillful enough to produce solid, usable interviews. Why is so much oral history "done badly," as Stephanson puts it? In conducting foreign relations interviews, there are particular difficulties. If the interviews are done soon after a subject leaves government service, when memories are freshest, the documentary record may be largely classified, and the motives for self-serving statements may be the strongest. Closing the interview to readers for a number of years may partially mitigate those problems. Another major difficulty in interviewing high-profile public officials is getting them to break out of the "canned" narratives that they have so often repeated to the public, to the press, or in the classroom. Some former officials stick to such habits even years after the need for such public relations management has lapsed. There are interviewing techniques for chipping away at such a facade, such as polite or provocative confrontation with contradictory facts and interrupting the narrator's customary sequence with pointed questions.

In a different way, financial and career considerations can affect the gathering and maintaining of oral history collections. It is expensive to have historians do the intensive research necessary for good oral history, and assistant professors are rarely given publication credit toward tenure for their interviewing skills. Some of the best interviews are conducted by authors in the course of researching books. Tapes of their interviews are routinely donated to repositories, in accordance with canons requiring scholars to make these interviews available to the public, but there are seldom funds for transcribing and indexing them. The journalist Clay Blair conscientiously donated the tapes of his interviews for his books *Ridgway's Paratroopers* and *The Forgotten War* to the U.S. Army Military History Institute. They sit in a locked room, because the budget for the institute's audio archives was cut. Even if they were available, the task of listening to hundreds of hours of untranscribed tape is a daunting one for the researcher.<sup>6</sup>

How can historians of American foreign policy make better use of existing oral history? They need to *read* oral histories differently to get the full benefit of the information they contain.

Scholars commonly read oral history for snippets of quotable fact and experience, and, at least for the history of United States foreign relations, as supplementary

<sup>5</sup> Isaacson, *Kissinger*, 827.

<sup>6</sup> Jon Wiener, "The Alger Hiss Case, the Archives, and Allen Weinstein," *Perspectives* (Feb. 1992), 10–12. American Historical Association, "Statement on Interviewing for Historical Documentation," *Perspectives* (Oct. 1989), 8; reprinted in *Journal of American History*, 77 (Sept. 1990), 613–14. Clay Blair, *Ridgway's Paratroopers: The American Airborne in World War II* (Garden City, 1985); Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War: America in Korea, 1950–1953* (New York, 1987).

narrative providing general background. Oral histories, however, may also be read symptomatically, to reveal the ideologies used to construct the narrative. As Columbia University Oral History Research Office director Ronald J. Grele has pointed out, the final product of oral history is an interview "which contains, within itself, its own system of structures, not a system derived from within the narrow conventions of written history."<sup>7</sup> In this sense, even "bad" interviews, which may be unreliable sources for policy making, may be excellent for detailing the mentalities and assumptions on which a policy is based.

Symptomatic reading attempts to understand the structural relationship between the mind of the informant and the outside world in which he or she is enmeshed. If the informant is silent or hesitant on key issues, or the interviewer has failed to anticipate the questions that a later historian wants answered, much can be discovered by interrogating the text for its problematic. Grele defines the problematic as "the theoretical or ideological context within which words and phrases, and the presence or absence of certain problems and concepts is found." This sort of reading can transform a seemingly banal interview into a rich source for producing narratives on ideological, cultural, and epistemological trends.<sup>8</sup>

A collection that is ripe for such examination is the Iranian-American Relations Project, a series of nineteen interviews covering relations between the two countries through the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>9</sup> Of course, one major question for historians is whether American support for Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi was properly justified or a monumental diplomatic bungle. Some historians have argued that, before the 1953 coup that installed the shah in power, there was a "missed opportunity" for better relations between the two countries. Even after that period, it is not clear that the makers of American foreign policy fully comprehended the costs of their support of the shah's regime.<sup>10</sup>

The collection contains substantial material bearing on this question. An interview with Gen. Ellis Williamson, who headed the military mission in Iran 1971–1973, is worth quoting at length:

The only trouble is that the masses are unsophisticated, and they have a character that is true to some extent in Japan and Korea, basically they crave excitement. . . . They've often been described as a Cinderella mentality, just take life as it

<sup>7</sup> Ronald J. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History* (Chicago, 1985), 135. For a method of oral history analysis based on the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, see Eva M. McMahan, *Elite Oral History Discourse: A Study of Cooperation and Coherence* (Tuscaloosa, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> Grele, *Envelopes of Sound*, 138.

<sup>9</sup> The Iranian-American Relations Project is jointly administered by the Foundation for Iranian Studies in Bethesda, Md., and the Columbia University Oral History Research Office, Columbia University Library, New York, N.Y. The interviews are available at both locations.

<sup>10</sup> For a summary of the literature on this point, see Linda Wills Qaimmaqami, "The Catalyst of Nationalization: Max Thornburg and the Failure of Private Sector Developmentalism in Iran, 1947–1951," *Diplomatic History*, 19 (Winter 1995), 1–31. For an example of the emphasis of the discipline of history on source criticism, a major book on the Iranian revolution was taken to task by a historian for its overreliance on oral history interviews; it had been written by a political scientist. See the review of Mark J. Gasiorowski, *U.S. Foreign Policy and the Shah: James Goode, "The United States and the Shah: Checkmating the Opposition,"* *Diplomatic History*, 17 (Fall 1993), 645–49.

comes. Poor little Cinderella sits by the fire, she's in the ashes, and she's just not doing much at all, but all of a sudden there's a possibility that that glass slipper might fit, here they go! They're pitched off, they're excited! And it's extremely dangerous, because so many of them are so unsophisticated that they will believe anything that a stranger tells them. The last story that they hear is true in their minds. I hate to call them children, but many of them are. When I say that, I am excluding the top five or six percent. The top five or six percent are extremely well educated, they're cultured. You would be extremely happy to have them in your home, in your church, in your university. The top five percent of Iranians are wonderful, wonderful people.<sup>11</sup>

It is easy to see this passage merely as a bit of "color" illustrating Williamson's westernized view of most Iranians and to dismiss him as merely a bumbling imperialist. The interviews in this collection, however, show that his views differ profoundly from those of the people who served on the diplomatic side. One important way of reading the entire collection would reveal the ideological cleavage between American military and diplomatic personnel in Iran.

It is also possible to read the interview on its own. Military aid officials such as General Williamson may have used a certain set of ideological assumptions to bridge the gap between the liberal democratic principles held by most Americans and the United States government's support for the profoundly undemocratic monarchy of the shah. This can only be revealed by analyzing what Williamson does not say.

Williamson sets up a binary opposition between the "top five or six percent" who are "brilliant" and the 95 percent who are "children." The elite may be admitted into the real world or the home or university; the rest of the people are crowded into a half-lit fairy realm, almost Disneyesque, marked "Cinderella." They must be diminished, made childlike, and feminized so as not to threaten the justification for Williamson's mission: to establish the shah as a prototypical regional policeman in the global game of superpower chess.

Indeed, his analogy comparing rebellious members of the Iranian public with Cinderella only works by bending the plot of the fairy tale. The only way he can make the story work is to change Cinderella from a virtuous heroine into a fool. But the poor are not the only ones Williamson assigns to fantasy land. Even Iran's military elites cannot be exempted from Disneyfication. Later in the interview, the general compares the Iranian army's military parades to "a three act play, Mickey Mouse style."<sup>12</sup>

Given that the interview was conducted well after the Iranian revolution of 1979, it is also astonishing that the two-hundred-page transcript contains only a few confused and contradictory references to religion. The word *Islam* does not appear. On the one hand, Williamson says that the Iranians "believe in their religion to

<sup>11</sup> Gen. Ellis Williamson interview by William Burr, Feb. 10–April 13, 1988, transcript, p. 13, Iranian-American Relations Project (Columbia University Oral History Research Office).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

such an extent that they are looking forward to dying for their country." On the other hand, he secularizes the conflict between the shah's modernization program and its religious opponents as "created at least 85 % through one major point and that is land reform." One emerges from reading his descriptions, especially his repeated use of percentages to describe qualitative matters such as culture and religion, with the image of a man doggedly trying to utilize managerial ideas to explain unmanageable events.<sup>13</sup>

The pregnant absences of the Williamson interview were necessary preconditions for ideological closure. In other words, the silence on Islam and the derogation of the beliefs of millions of non-elite Iranians were not merely "mistakes"; they were assumptions needed to make the Nixon Doctrine ideologically coherent and to justify the administration's continuing support for the shah's rule.

Traditional diplomatic history has come under increasing criticism in the last fifteen years for limiting itself to "the view from Washington." New approaches have emerged to account for structures of culture, ideology, and gender, as well as the emerging transnational economic market and power structures that may be challenging older notions of national sovereignty.<sup>14</sup> Though the use of oral history in work embodying these new approaches has been limited, the potential is tremendous.

One aspect of this new foreign relations history has been to shift the objects of study from the Pentagon and Foggy Bottom, sometimes to focus on foreign chanceries, but even more important, on nondiplomats—a sort of foreign relations history from the bottom up.<sup>15</sup> Gender is becoming an important issue, in terms both of the symbolic feminization of countries that fail to do Washington's will (for example, Frank Costigliola's *France and the United States*) and of the participation of women in social movements that have influenced the history of United States foreign relations. Historians of gender and American foreign relations will find invaluable the Foreign Service Officers' Spouse Oral History Project, carried out by Foreign Service Spouse Oral History, Inc., in cooperation with the Association for Diplomatic Studies in Washington, D.C. The collection, which is also available to readers at Radcliffe College's Schlesinger Library in Cambridge, Massachusetts,

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 9.

<sup>14</sup> For an excellent survey of new trends in the history of American foreign relations, see "A Round Table: Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations," *Journal of American History*, 77 (June 1990), 92–180.

<sup>15</sup> For a sampling of relevant articles, see Marcelino A. Foronada Jr., "Oral History in the Philippines: Trends and Prospects," *International Journal of Oral History*, 2 (Feb. 1981), 13–25; Daniel Bertaux, "L'Histoire orale en France: Fin de la préhistoire," *ibid.* (June 1981), 121–27; Peter J. Sehlinger, "Oral History Projects in Argentina, Chile, Peru, and Bolivia," *ibid.*, 5 (Nov. 1984), 168–73; Theresa Meade, "Sandinistas and Contras in Nicaragua: A Review Essay of Four Books of Interviews," *ibid.*, 7 (Feb. 1986), 57–63; Daniel Chew, "Oral History in the Republic of Singapore," *ibid.* (Nov. 1986), 206–10; Susan B. Sweeney, "Oral History and the Tonkin Gulf Incident: Interviews about the U.S. Navy in the Vietnam War," *ibid.*, 211–16; Eva Salgado Andrade, "Oral History in Mexico," *ibid.*, 9 (Nov. 1988), 215–20.

includes transcripts of interviews with more than fifty spouses of diplomatic officials.<sup>16</sup>

Other species of analysis, such as world systems theory, leave the chancery behind for a study of the large, impersonal forces that shape the world capitalist economy. Both the feminist and the world systems approaches can benefit from oral history projects that interview lower-level or regional personnel rather than top governmental officials.

The Institute of Inter-American Affairs Project, interviews conducted by James T. Williamson 1984–1989 and donated to the Columbia University Oral History Research Office in the late 1980s, is another example of a collection of interviews of lower-level foreign aid administrators and their families. There are two memoirs in this collection, those of Betty Brooks Bell and Evelyn Pineo, which will be of interest to historians of gender and United States foreign relations. The other interviews present a gritty nuts-and-bolts view of aspects of American foreign policy. For example, the project interviewed an American sanitary engineer who worked in Mexico and Costa Rica; he described the aversion of the villagers to the new privies he was trying to install. Another interview details the corruption of Argentine road contractors. These stories of foreign policy in action are missing from the history of foreign relations as seen only at the presidential or even ambassadorial level.<sup>17</sup>

Though projects applicable to bottom-up studies are beginning to accumulate, the bulk of oral history material in the field concerns the elites. Some of the best and most complete oral history work pertaining to foreign policy has been done for the Eisenhower administration. The Dwight D. Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas, conducted an extensive project of interviewing Eisenhower administration officials up through 1973 in conjunction with the Columbia University Oral History Research Office. Those interviews are available both at Abilene and at the Columbia University Library in New York. Since 1973 the Eisenhower Library has added more interviews; those are available only in Abilene. The interviews at Columbia, along with all of Columbia's collection, are cataloged and described on-line on RLIN (Research Libraries Information Network). Princeton University's Mudd Library houses another important Eisenhower administration resource—the John Foster Dulles Oral History Collection, comprising over 275 transcripts of tape-recorded interviews concerned with Dulles's foreign policy career, many of them conducted by eminent historians such as Richard Challener and Philip Crowl.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps because of their high quality, oral histories for the Eisenhower period show up more often in works on the administration than do those from other

<sup>16</sup> Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance since World War II* (New York, 1992). Part of the Foreign Service Officers' Spouse Oral History Project has been published; see Jewell Fenzi with Carl L. Nelson, *Married to the Foreign Service: An Oral History of the American Diplomatic Spouse* (New York, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> On the Costa Rican villagers and privies, see the testimony of the American sanitary engineer Charles Pineo; on Argentina, see the interview with foreign aid adviser William Lowenthal. Both are in the Institute of Inter-American Affairs Project (Columbia University Oral History Research Office).

<sup>18</sup> See Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, *The John Foster Dulles Oral History Collection: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Princeton, 1994).

presidential oral history projects. It may also reflect the greater maturity of Eisenhower historiography, compared to work on later presidents. Stephen G. Rabe's *Eisenhower and Latin America* uses oral history to good effect illustrating the desires and concerns of middle-level policymakers. Blanche Wiesen Cook's *The Declassified Eisenhower* makes extensive use of the thousand-plus pages of interviews with Gen. Lucius D. Clay available at Columbia. Other books on the Eisenhower administration that use oral history in a limited fashion, but to good advantage, are Robert J. McMahon's *The Cold War on the Periphery* and Diane B. Kunz's *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis*. Yet none of these works uses the interviews in a systematic way as artifacts of ideology. Moreover, many other recent works, such as Isaac Alteras's *Eisenhower and Israel*, do not use the Eisenhower oral history collections at all.<sup>19</sup>

The presidential libraries of Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson also maintain significant relevant oral history collections. The Gerald R. Ford, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan libraries, however, do not yet have significant oral history holdings (excepting the short exit interviews given by departing members of the White House staff).

Other projects at Columbia deserve mention. There is an extensive set of interviews with former Chinese foreign minister J. Wellington Koo, detailing his service as an ambassador to Paris, London, and Washington and as foreign minister and premier of the Republic of China and his tenure on the International Court of Justice between 1932 and 1967. The International Negotiations Project includes over 2,000 pages of interviews on the subject of negotiating international differences; it includes interviews with former president Gerald R. Ford, W. Averell Harriman, Arthur Goldberg, Norman Cousins, and Charles Yost. The Ethnic Groups and American Foreign Policy Project has over 2,600 pages of interviews conducted from 1974 to 1986 to "document the impact of American ethnic groups on the formulation of American foreign policy and their interaction with Congress in the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations."<sup>20</sup> The collection, which is strongest in its study of attempts to mobilize support for Israel, includes interviews with Morris B. Abram, Jonathan Bingham, Daniel K. Inouye, Vernon E. Jordan, Sol M. Linowitz, Norman Podhoretz, Eugene Rossides, and Carter administration White House aide Mark Siegel, among others.

A relatively new but potentially important collection is the Association for Diplomatic Studies Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection, established in 1988 at Georgetown University. It contains over 550 interviews with retired senior diplomatic personnel, mostly career foreign service officers. Some of these interviews, mostly

<sup>19</sup> Stephen G. Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America: The Foreign Policy of Anticommunism* (Chapel Hill, 1988); Blanche Wiesen Cook, *The Declassified Eisenhower: A Divided Legacy* (Garden City, 1981); Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York, 1994); Diane B. Kunz, *The Economic Diplomacy of the Suez Crisis* (Chapel Hill, 1991); Isaac Alteras, *Eisenhower and Israel: United States-Israel Relations, 1953-1960* (Gainesville, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> RLIN (Research Libraries Information Network, online bibliographic database), s.v. (title) "Ethnic Groups and American Foreign Policy Project: Oral History, 1974-1986," summary.

conducted by other retired foreign service officers, may focus on the career experiences of the officers. The interviews can also be valuable for illuminating politics and ideology within an embassy or mission. One must also praise the lengths to which the project has gone to make its material available to scholars. Excerpts from the interviews are being organized according to country into "readers" on the experiences of foreign service officers in that country, and full interview transcripts are available cheaply on computer disk. Another institution that has widely disseminated its interviews is the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College, which is placing the full text of its collection of interviews with missionaries onto the Internet.<sup>21</sup>

The armed services also maintain oral history collections that may benefit students of American foreign relations. For one, the U.S. Army Military History Institute in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, offers an extensive collection of one hundred interviews in the Senior Officers Oral History Program. These interviews were conducted by army officers. Many are excellent; some are less useful. Understandably, junior officers can sometimes be overly deferential to retired four-star generals, even though it is often clear that the interviewers worked hard to be well informed.<sup>22</sup>

The Company Command in Vietnam series is another major collection at Carlisle Barracks, with 250 interviews, and there is a 30-interview collection on Combat Leadership in Korea. Smaller collections of interest at U.S.A.M.H.I. include Battalion Commanders in Vietnam, and three interviews on intelligence and special operations in Vietnam. Specialists in gender and American foreign relations may be interested in the collection's World War II Army Nurse Corps prisoners of wars in Japan, and Army Nurses in Vietnam.

The army is not the only service to maintain extensive oral history collections. The Naval Historical Center at Washington Navy Yard has a major project of autobiographies of senior naval officers and civilian researchers, as well as approximately twenty volumes of interviews with naval chaplains, over one hundred interviews from the oral history program of the Naval Ordinance Training Station at China Lake, California, between sixty and seventy interviews with the members of the Naval Security Group, and bound copies of interviews with members of the Naval Institute. The Marines Historical Center and Museum, also located at Washington Navy Yard, holds over 350 transcribed career interviews with officers of the Marine Corps, in a series begun in 1965, and approximately 350 more untranscribed tapes of interviews with officers. Other smaller transcribed collections include interviews with officers involved in action in Beirut, Grenada, and the Gulf War. The Air Force Historical Center at Maxwell Air Force base in Alabama also has a collection.

Clearly, the amount of oral history material available to foreign relations historians is vast. This survey only scratches the surface of oral history collections in the United States and elsewhere that can help historians better understand foreign policy using a variety of approaches.

<sup>21</sup> The Graham Project can be found on the Wheaton College (of Illinois) gopher or with the following URL: [gopher://gopher/wheaton.edu/11/wheaton\\_archives/BGC/OralHisTranscpts](http://gopher/wheaton.edu/11/wheaton_archives/BGC/OralHisTranscpts).

<sup>22</sup> See Martha Gravois and Martin W. Andresen, "The Senior Officer Oral History Program: There's More to It Than 'Have Tape Recorder, Will Travel,'" *International Journal of Oral History*, 9 (Nov. 1988), 227-33.

Many historians almost instinctively mistrust oral histories, knowing the role of the interviewer in creating them. Often oral histories fail to address the detailed workings of foreign policy bureaucracies, which comprise an important component of the subdiscipline of assessing the history of American foreign policy. Policy historians have tended to dismiss oral histories because they are imprecise in some respects. Yet if they are read in new ways, the very contours of that imprecision can reveal new insights.

## APPENDIX

Finding aids for the oral history collections of the Franklin D. Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson library oral history collections and for what is available at the Gerald R. Ford, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan libraries are accessible on the Internet. Such easy desktop access should help inform scholars about their contents, thereby removing one of the principal obstacles to their use.

There are several ways to get to the presidential libraries on the Internet, depending on the type of software you are using. Many universities now offer access to the part of the Internet known as the World Wide Web by using "web browsers" such as Lynx (text only) and Mosaic or Netscape (text and images). The easiest way to view the oral history finding aids at the presidential libraries is to "travel" to their universal resource locator (URL) which is the address for the resources the libraries place on the Internet: `gopher: // gopher.nara.gov / 11 / inform / library`. (The period at the end is for punctuation; it is not part of the URL.)

If your university or Internet provider is using older "gopher" software, you can get a list of gopher servers broken down geographically by choosing the option for "other gopher and information servers (U. of Minn)." (The wording may vary slightly from university to university.) Follow the geographic designations as they get successively more specific. The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) gopher can be found in Washington, D.C., and will connect you to the "sites" of the presidential libraries.