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# CALIFORNIA STORIES: 27 NEW PROJECTS

**Can stories make a difference? CCH believes so strongly that stories can be a catalyst for change in communities that we made stories the linchpin of our California Stories initiative, our multiyear effort to tell the story of today's California.**

The success this past fall of our statewide kickoff campaign to California Stories, Reading *The Grapes of Wrath*, reinforced our belief in the power of stories. Tens of thousands of Californians participated in our unprecedented statewide reading and story-sharing program, gathering at hundreds of venues across the state to dis-

cuss John Steinbeck's novel and their own California experiences.

Now the Council is pleased to announce the second phase of California Stories: three separate umbrella programs that will engage a broad spectrum of Californians in a host of story-based cultural activities designed to strengthen communities. The three programs—Communities

*(right) Missionaries use tape players to evangelize migrant farm workers in The Tailenders, a California Documentary Project film. Photo courtesy of Adele Horne.*

Speak, the California Documentary Project and the California Story Fund—involve more than two dozen California communities and address a wide range of California issues—from the state of the juvenile justice system to the plight of farmworkers and their families. The programs will engage communities in a variety of ways, including through films, photographs, special collection days, town hall meetings, and stage productions.

"What we have found is that when people tell their stories and other people listen, a trust is created that can change community dynamics," said CCH Executive

Director Jim Quay. "But typically people don't have occasions for sharing stories on a community-wide level. It's what's missing in the mix of activities designed to make communities stronger. These California Story projects fill that void, and we believe that they will provide the impetus communities need to solve some pressing concerns," Quay said.

### **Communities Speak: 10 projects designed to inspire change**

Communities Speak, the largest and most far-reaching of the programs, consists of 10 ground

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## GROUNDBREAKING PROJECTS SPAN STATE, ADDRESS WIDE RANGE OF ISSUES



## CAN THE HUMANITIES HELP STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES?

### What we might learn

What's your California story? That's the question CCH will be asking people all over the state over the next few years as part of our California Stories initiative. Our aim is to provide a variety of opportunities for Californians to tell and share their stories.

That means that over the next few years, we Californians are going to learn a great deal about ourselves through the stories we hear and tell. Some stories will

confirm what we've long believed about ourselves. Some will change everything. Together, in their divergence and convergence, these stories will provide us with a rich narrative of contemporary California.

At the Council, we will also be listening for another story, a sort of back story, or understory. We will be paying attention to when, where and in what ways the humanities can be successfully used to strengthen communities.

At the end of the California Stories initiative, we hope not only to tell a compelling story about modern-day California but also to report on the efficacy of our efforts to fulfill our mission, which is to enrich California's cultural life and to strengthen communities through public use of the humanities.

Few argue with the idea that the humanities and the arts enrich our lives much like icing enriches a cake. Intuitively, we in the cultural

community know that cultural activities are much more than just a good

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# WHY STORIES ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

By James Quay  
Executive Director

I fervently hope that by the time you read this column the war in Iraq will have ended. But as I write these words, accounts of fighting and suffering are filling the news media. Journalists “embedded” with American and British combat units are sending images of modern war into our homes, and global satellite networks enable these images to be seen in homes all over the world. This is a new kind of shared experience for the people of the world, though it appears that American, European and Arab viewers are seeing very different images, hearing different commentary, experiencing quite different wars.

This news coverage is unprecedented. No one, including the policymakers who sanctioned it, can know what its effects on the audience will be. I would like to believe that by bringing the experience of war closer to us,



this media coverage will bring the horror of war closer to us all and remind us, again, why war is so much to be avoided.

Humanists believe in the power of speech, of dialogue, of story. When we tell our stories, we reveal ourselves to others, and when we listen attentively to the stories of others, we cannot help but affirm our relationship to them. Nearly 50 years ago,

the philosopher Martin Buber identified this kind of conversation as the opposite of war:

War has always had an adversary who hardly ever comes forward as such, but does his work in the stillness. This adversary is speech, fulfilled speech, the speech of genuine conversation in which men understand one another and come to a mutual understanding. ... The cannons of war easily drown out the word; but when the word has become entirely soundless, and on this side and on that soundlessly bears into the hearts of men the intelligence that no human conflict can really be resolved through killing, not even through mass killing, then the human word has already begun to silence the cannonade.

The “cannons of war” are not firing in California, but we can do much to promote genuine conversation here. Our grants programs are meant to bring the private stories of Californians into the public sphere, where they can be shared, appreciated and pondered. They are meant to support projects that show, community by community, story by story, how strangers become a community. And because the people of so many cultures continue to immigrate and live here—one Californian in four is a foreign-born immigrant—we have the responsibility to show the world how it can be done.

Three decades after I made my own journey to California, I have come to believe that what Samuel P. Huntington wrote about America is profoundly true of California. “Critics say that America is a lie because its reality falls so far short of its ideals,” Huntington wrote. “They are wrong. America is not a lie; it is a disappointment. But it can be a disappointment only because it is also a hope.” California is also a hope, and one, in this time of war, that we all have a responsibility to nurture.

## 27 new projects (continued from page 1)

breaking projects in roughly 10 communities in the state. Communities Speak projects use story to address everything from the relationship between family farms and farmworkers in the San Joaquin Valley to concerns about environmental and social justice concerns along a 200-mile freeway corridor in San Bernardino County.

The projects involve partnerships with a variety of community organizations and reach across ethnic and age lines to gather stories and engage communities. Still in various planning stages, Communities Speak projects will take place over the next two to three years. CCH selected the Communities Speak projects for \$5,000 planning grants in September 2002 and in April awarded the projects implementation grants of up to \$75,000.

Communities Speak grants are made possible by grants to CCH from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the James Irvine Foundation and the William Randolph Hearst Foundation. Four California community foundations—the California Community Foundation, the Marin Community Foundation, the San Francisco Foundation and the Santa Barbara Foundation—are lending significant support to projects in their areas. See page 4 for project descriptions.

### California Documentary Project: Viewing California life through the lens of film, video and photography

The California Documentary Project consists of six projects that document little-known stories of California life either on film or in



Miguel, one of the Latino men featured on a CCH-supported radio project on immigrant day laborers in San Francisco. Photo/Julie Caine, 2002.

photographs. The projects, which were selected from 47 submissions, received up to \$20,000 each in out-right funds this past December.

CCH has a long history of supporting documentary films and counts many award-winning works among the output of its grantees. Included are *Regret to Inform*, Barbara Sonneborn’s film about American and Vietnamese women who lost their husbands in the Vietnam War, and Mark Kitchell’s *Berkeley in the Sixties*.

“The California Documentary Project films are unique in that they use story to address issues specifically of concern to Californians,” said Quay. The following film projects were awarded grants:

- **The Tailenders.** A missionary organization uses low-tech media devices to evangelize Mexican agricultural workers.
- **Juvies.** Young offenders in one of the largest juvenile facilities in

the United States await trial and sentencing in adult court.

- **Brave New Valley.** The rapidly changing character of California’s Central Valley is explored.
- **Los Angeles Film Project.** L.A.’s changing character and culture is chronicled.

This is the first time that CCH has supported photography projects. “What influenced our decision on photography was our experience with our Reading *The Grapes of Wrath* project,” Quay said. “Steinbeck wrote *The Grapes of Wrath* at a time when documentary work was flourishing. In fact, the photographic images by people such as Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor captured the conditions during the Dust Bowl in a very powerful way. With this fund, we wanted to encourage current photographers to focus their cameras on issues of concern in California today.” The following photography projects were awarded California Documentary Project grants:

- **Stories of the City: Sixth Street Photography Workshop.** A photography exhibit about people living in five of San Francisco’s single-room occupancy hotels, as seen by people who live in them.
- **Paving Paradise:** Stories from the Santa Ana Watershed. Photographs document the watershed and its role within surrounding communities.

### California Story Fund: Broadening our view of California

The 11 projects that make up the California Story Fund provide opportunities for individual Californians to contribute their stories to the evolving story of our state.

The projects include a theater work with former female prison inmates; a photography and story project of people on Skid Row in Los Angeles, an urban ecology project about environmental injustice in a San Francisco neighborhood, and an oral history project about the Kashaya Pomo Indians of Northern California and their relationship to Russian, Mexican and Anglo-American colonists.

All the projects aim to expand our understanding of California, its people and the issues the state faces. Each of the 11 projects, which were selected from 36 submitted for consideration, received \$5,000 in award money. The Council will be announcing the projects selected for the second round of funding in May.

# CALIFORNIA DOCUMENTARY PROJECTS

## Six projects document unique aspect of California life

CCH has funded the following projects under the documentary component of California Stories. The six projects will address issues of concern in California today through either film, video or photography.

### **Brave New Valley Bay Area Video Coalition**

A middle-aged secretary for a software firm proudly shows off her dream home in Los Banos, which she never could have afforded in San Jose. While she feels her new house is worth the three-hour daily commute to her job in the Bay Area, she is concerned that she now rarely sees her son, who is a high school junior. This is just one of the stories chronicled in *Brave New Valley*, a documentary film about the rapid rate of urbanization in California's Central Valley. How will this traditionally agricultural area cope with change? How can it manage growth and still keep sup-

plying the nation's food? Who will benefit most from growth? Shot over the course of one year, *Brave New Valley* grapples with these questions and the promises and perils of unchecked growth.

### **Los Angeles Film Project Center for the Study of Los Angeles**

After 100 years, the Anglo culture that built modern Los Angeles is on the wane. More than half the population of Los Angeles County is now Latino, and 40 percent of the city's residents are foreign-born. This is one aspect of a rapidly changing Los Angeles that the Los Angeles Film Project explores in a 90-minute documentary film on America's second-largest city. The film will contain interviews with writers, artists, architects and others who are reshaping the city, as well as readings from classic works of fiction and nonfiction about Los Angeles. The aim is to present a visual portrait of a rapidly changing city and to find a common narrative that will help connect the area's disparate communities.

### **The Tailenders Film Arts Foundation, San Francisco**

Over the past 60 years, Gospel Recordings, a missionary organization in the Los Angeles area, has

recorded Christian messages in dozens of languages. Many of the messages are delivered in languages spoken by only a few thousand people. Gospel Recordings calls these people the Tailenders, people whose geographic and linguistic isolation puts them at the tail end of worldwide missionary efforts. *The Tailenders* is a digitally shot video that documents from start to finish the production of an audio recording for use among California's migrant Mixtec agricultural workers who migrate annually to California from Oaxaca, Mexico. The documentary seeks to create a discussion about the role of the media in intercultural encounters and that of religion in the lives of new immigrants.

### **Paving Paradise: Stories from the Santa Ana Watershed The Foundation for California State University, San Bernardino, and the Water Resource Institute**

The Santa Ana River watershed has undergone enormous changes over the past 20 years, from the erection of two dams on the Santa Ana River to the paving over of acres of flood plains for streets, freeways and housing developments. This project will document

in photographs the current state of the watershed and its relation to surrounding communities. The photographs will cover a number of subjects, including the efforts of organizations working to ensure safe drinking water for the 4.5 million residents of San Bernardino, Riverside and Orange counties.

### **Stories of the City Sixth Street Photography Workshop**

The Sixth Street Photography Workshop has offered free photography classes to residents of hotels and homeless shelters in San Francisco for more than 10 years. *Stories of the City* is an exhibit of photographs, taken by some of the workshop's students, of people living in some of San Francisco's single-room occupancy hotels. The photographs will be accompanied by text excerpted from oral history interviews with the subjects. "The aim of the exhibit is to provide viewers with insight into the lives of people who live in these hotels," said Project Director Tom Ferentz who has been artistic director of the Workshop since its inception. The exhibit will take place in 2005 at San Francisco City Hall.

## IS CALIFORNIA'S JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM A MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE?

### *Juvies* examines what's happening to today's young offenders

Los Angeles-area teenager Michael Duc Ta was 16 when he was arrested for first-degree attempted murder. He is now serving a 35-year-to-life sentence in one of the most violent state prisons in California after being tried and convicted in adult court. Michael had never been arrested before, and the crime for which he was convicted resulted in no injuries.

Arrested when she was just 16, Mayra Figueroa is currently serving a life sentence plus 25 years at a women's state prison. She was tried and convicted in adult court of first-degree attempted murder. Mayra gave birth to a son while she was awaiting trial.

Last year 200,000 juveniles were prosecuted as adults in criminal courts in the United States, and the number of youths doing time in adult prisons has more than doubled in the past 10 years.

*Juvies*, one of four films CCH is supporting under the California Documentary Project, is a portrait of a group of juvenile offenders awaiting trial and sentencing in adult court at Eastlake Central Juvenile Hall in Los Angeles, one of the largest juvenile facilities in the United States.

Award-winning filmmaker Leslie Neale, the film's director and produc-

er, decided to make *Juvies* after teaching a video production class at the Los Angeles facility as a volunteer. "I immediately realized these kids had something to say," said Neale.



Arrested at 14, Anait is currently awaiting trial. Photo courtesy Leslie Neale

Neale's previous film, *Road to Return*, highlighted a successful program in Louisiana that helps inmates adjust to life on the outside after prison. That film, which Neale screened before the U.S. Congress, influenced lawmakers in six states to pass legislation funding similar programs.

Neale's experience with *Juvies* is her first foray into the area of juvenile justice. "From my first film, I knew that there's more to a person than the worst act they've ever committed, but I had read the papers and seen the headlines, and I still had this idea in my head that these kids were like some kind of

hybrid mutant species," she said. "But I quickly found out that they're just kids."

Neale structured *Juvies* around the video production workshop at the juvenile facility. The film shows the kids learning how to use the



Arrested at 15, Liz is serving 11 years in state prison. Photo courtesy Leslie Neale

"The kids in the film made choices on the spur of the moment that tragically changed their lives. They know it's too late for them. But they recognize it may not be too late for someone else."

cameras and taping their interviews, and we see footage of them at work. We also see them at school and in their dormitories at the juvenile facility and later follow them into state prisons.

The individual stories are heartbreaking. Of the 12 kids featured in the film, four received life sentences. We meet Liz, who at age 15 is facing the death penalty for murder. Later we visit her at Chowchilla State Prison for Women and find out she is one of the lucky ones, now serving just 11 years after agreeing to testify against her codefendants.

We meet Peter, arrested at 17 for breaking and entering and assault

with a deadly weapon. A piano prodigy, he had never been in trouble before and is now facing 30 years in state prison.

Then there is Michael Duc Ta. Of Vietnamese and Chinese heritage, Michael is a first-time offender serving a sentence of 35 years to life for a crime during which no one was injured. "It's one of the hardest cases to deal with," said Neale. "He's an amazing kid, not someone who should be thrown away. For the past two years, he's been trying to get his high school equivalency diploma, but due to lockdowns at the prison, he hasn't been able to take the final test."

Neale hopes that the film will cause people to take a second look at the juvenile justice system. "That system was created 100 years ago to keep kids out of adult courts, and we've completely gone back on that. Kids are being trapped in long prison sentences—with no chance of rehabilitation—because of our 'tough on crime' laws. And this is happening despite current research showing that one of the last things a person develops is the ability to control impulses and understand the consequences of actions.

"The question we need to examine," said Neale, "is the ultimate cost to society of what we're doing to juvenile offenders."

Neale also sees the film as a cautionary tale for today's youth. "The kids in the film made choices on the spur of the moment that tragically changed their lives. They know it's too late for them. But they recognize it may not be too late for someone else."

# COMMUNITIES SPEAK

## 10 INNOVATIVE PROJECTS TO BRING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER AROUND STORY

### Harvest Story:

#### Connection to the Land.

##### Fresno Arts Council, Fresno

Agriculture is the lifeblood of Fresno County, where almost half the land is devoted to farming. Family farmers and farmworkers are an important part of the landscape and despite economic and ethnic differences share common aspirations. Today falling crop prices and the increasing value of land threaten the viability of the family farm and the livelihood of farm laborers, most of whom are first-generation Mexican immigrants. This project will enable family farmers and farmworkers in some of Fresno's poorest commu-

*A multiracial troop of Bluebirds meets at the Evening Star Baptist Church in South Los Angeles circa 1950. Photo courtesy of the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research.*

nities to relate their struggles for respect, understanding and cooperation. The stories will be told to the community through exhibits, local forums and radio programs. Project Director Deborah Fant said, "The story of agriculture in Fresno Country consists of thousands of individual stories. We hope that the stories we gather will build upon each other, so that people recognize the vital contributions of each group."

### Living on the Dime: A View of the World Along 1-10.

#### Inland Counties Hispanic Roundtable Association, San Bernardino

This project will tell the stories of people who live in the multiethnic suburban and rural communities along a 200-mile stretch of the Interstate 10 freeway between Blythe and Rialto. The area, known as the Inland Empire, has undergone significant economic and physical changes over the past 100 years, including an influx of immigrants from every part of the world. The project hopes to create a sense of community among the people who live and work along the free-

way and set the stage for a continuing debate over development in the area. Story-collecting activities will provide the materials for a Web site, multimedia exhibit and a community theatrical production. "We hope that these activities will encourage area residents to understand what's happened in the region in the past and realize the role they can play in determining its future," said Project Director Robert Gonzales.

### Finding Marin: Stories of Home and Migration.

#### Marin Arts Council, San Rafael

This project focuses on immigrant stories in a county predominantly Anglo and perceived as wealthy. The stories will be retold through art projects, exhibits, Web sites, publications and community meetings. The goal of the project is to present a more complete picture of the area, break down stereotypes and develop a stronger sense of community among all residents. "Marin County faces a host of problems, including a high cost of living and lack of affordable hous-

ing" said Jeanne Bogardus, project director. "Our hope is that we can build a sense of trust and respect among all residents, so that people can work toward identifying and resolving conflicting values and goals."

CCH has funded the following projects under Communities Speak, the major grants program under California Stories. The projects, which will take place over the next two to three years, will engage peoples across the state in a variety of story-based activities designed to strengthen communities.



### When We Were Young: The Experiences of Stocktonians Across Three Generations.

#### Jacoby Center for Community and Regional Studies

Stockton contains a mosaic of ethnic groups, from African-Americans, Japanese-Americans and Latinos to Chinese-Americans and Hmong. Many Stockton families are struggling to preserve cultural memories and communicate across three or four generations. The city itself faces a number of problems, including increasing ethnic tensions. This project will highlight the experiences of the young and the old by gathering intergenerational coming-of-age stories

*Men from South Los Angeles sign a petition urging the May Company, a Los Angeles department store, to end discrimination in hiring. Photo courtesy of the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research*

from 11 ethnic groups in Stockton. Stories will be presented to the community in a variety of ways, including a photography exhibit, traveling displays and a Web site.

"What we want to do," said Project Director Michelle DiGuilio, "is capture some of the cultural history families have and also provide the older generation with insight into what the current generation is facing. We hope the project will provide a jumping-off point for parents, grandparents and children to talk about important issues."

### Guadalupe Speaks. City of Guadalupe

The once-thriving coastal agricultural community of Guadalupe, more than 80 percent Latino, has undergone significant economic decline since the 1980s and now has the lowest per-capita income in Santa Barbara County. Desperately in need of jobs and economic development, Guadalupe has a rich history and a Main Street that has stayed the same since the 1950s. The aim of this project is to collect stories that reflect the history and culture of the community in such a way that the stories instill a sense

of pride in the city and encourage residents to think about new economic possibilities for their city. Stories will be conveyed to the community through video projects, photo exhibits, dramatic presentations and community meetings.

**Tu Voz! Stories of Migrant Farm Workers and Their Families. Media Arts Center, San Diego**

This intergenerational project will focus on farmworkers and their families in a region that stretches from San Ysidro to Santa Ana. The focal point of the project will be a series of media production workshops for migrant and nonmigrant high school students, during which participants will learn how to document their own stories and those of their communities. The videos will be screened at schools, libraries and other community venues as well as on cable and public televi-

sion. The aim of the project is to empower migrant farmworkers and to create greater understanding between migrants and the greater community.

**The Story Circle Project: Remembering the Past, Creating Our Future. Capital Public Radio, Sacramento**

One of the most ethnically diverse regions in the United States, California's Central Valley is home to scores of immigrant groups. This project will explore the challenges new immigrants face in adapting to California life while struggling to maintain homeland values. At the heart of the project will be a series of workshops or story circles during which immigrant youth and adults—Latinos, Southeast Asians, Indians,

and others—share stories of their former homelands and their new life. In addition to sharing stories, participants will receive training in photography and audio production, acquiring the skills to conduct documentary work in their communities. The project culminates with an interpretive exhibit featuring stories, photographs and audio recordings at the Golden State Museum in Sacramento. The aim of the project is to strengthen relationships across cultural and generational lines both within and between communities.

## UNCOVERING THE REAL STORIES OF SOUTH LOS ANGELES

### Finding common ground in a shared history

The *Los Angeles Times* recently ran an article about homicides in South Los Angeles that included a map titled "The Killing Zone." The use of that term is just one example of how the image of South Los Angeles gets skewed by the media, said Alexis Moreno, program director of the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research (SCL), the organization directing the Los Angeles-based Communities Speak project. "Mention South L.A. to people and the worst things come to mind—drugs, violence, unemployment—but it's a much more complex place than that."

SCL's project, *From Generation to Generation: Making a Life in South Los Angeles, 1940–2005*, will present the real story of South Los Angeles through the stories of a broad range of residents. SCL is a major archive for materials on social change in Los Angeles.



*Charlotta Bass, editor of the California Eagle, California's longest-running African-American newspaper, at her desk. Bass worked to overturn discriminatory hiring practices in South L.A. in the 1940s. From California Eagle Photograph Collection at the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research.*

SCL is planning a number of activities to elicit and present stories, including a photography workshop, a film and discussion series, and special collection days, during which participants can share photographs, high school yearbooks and other materials that reflect community life.

As an introduction to the program, SCL recently arranged for a local radio station to interview three older African-American residents about their lives.

"We got a great response from that program, and a lot of the callers were young people," Moreno said. "One young man told us that his grandmother used to tell him stories

about South L.A., and he was so glad to hear these people on the radio."

The *From Generation to Generation* project is an opportunity for people to come together and talk about their lives and the changes that have taken place over the past 60 years, according to Moreno. Primarily an African-American area for much of the 20th century, South L.A. is now home to an increasing number of Latinos and Asian-Americans. "We want to address the area's changing demographics," she said. "And we also want to explore the complex history of the area that includes the legacy of segregation and a time when people had good-paying jobs at places like Goodyear and Bethlehem Steel that are now closed."

Moreno hopes that the stories of the past will inspire today's residents to start thinking about the possibility of change. People in South L.A. have a history of working through community organizations to address pressing concerns, she said.

As an example, Moreno points to the work of Charlotta Bass, editor of the *California Eagle*, California's longest-running African-American newspaper that ceased publication in the 1960s. Bass banded together with other residents to successfully protest discriminatory hiring practices in South L.A. in the 1940s. "We hope that by examining history, people will understand how things got to be they way they are," Moreno said. "In some cases, people will learn that policy decisions made by people outside the community shaped the way things are today."

Moreno envisions the project becoming an important community resource when it finally wraps up in 2005. "The stories and other materials we gather for the project will become part of our collection at the library," she said. "People are hungry for the history of this community, and here it will always be available to everyone."

**I am OMI. Western Neighborhood Project, San Francisco**

Located in San Francisco's southwest corner, OMI—the area comprising the neighborhoods of Oceanview, Merced Heights and Ingleside—is experiencing a number of problems common to urban neighborhoods, including lack of basic services and increased crime and drug activity. What makes solving these problems difficult are the socioeconomic and physical divisions within the community, including rapidly changing demographics, wide disparities in income and education, and a 500-foot ridgeline

that cuts through the area. The aim of this project is to help this divided neighborhood in San Francisco find a unified voice. Hundreds of stories will be gathered from community residents through a series of oral history workshops and other activities. Stories will be presented to the community through videos, store window displays and a radio drama. "We want longtime residents and recent arrivals to understand each other better. When his happens, OMI will be able to move forward with strengthened purpose," said Project Director S. Woody LaBounty.

**Stories of Faith: Religion and Diversity in San Diego. San Diego Public Library, San Diego**

This project will bring together a number of ethnic communities in San Diego to present and discuss the way they understand and experience religion. The aim of the project is to raise awareness of the multiplicity of religious practices in the San Diego area and enable participants and the general public to learn more about each other's beliefs and values. Stories will be presented to the community through theatrical performances,

writing workshops, art exhibits and community forums. In summing up her aspirations for the project, Project Director Lynn Whitehouse said, "We hope that this project will enable people to face honestly the things that divide us as well as recognize the things we have in common."

# CALIFORNIA STORY FUND

## 11 projects to highlight little-known California stories

CCH has funded the following eleven projects under its California Story Fund. The projects, which will involve a variety of story-collecting and story-sharing activities, aim to increase understanding of pressing California issues.

### **California Stories.**

#### **Sythaxix Theatre Company**

Over the past 20 years, immigrants from Mexico, Central America and Asia have transformed North Hollywood into a vibrant multicultural community. This project will spotlight the area's diversity by weaving together in a theater piece the stories of new immigrants and long-time residents. The stories will be developed in workshops with community members. "One of our goals," said Project Director Estelle Busch, "is to increase understanding across cultures."

#### **Invisible Men: Listening to Immigrant Day Laborers in San Francisco.**

##### **California Audio Arts**

Every day in cities across America, men from Central America and Mexico line up at day-labor sites hoping to obtain work. The men have become an integral part of the underground economy in this country, performing a wide range of physically demanding jobs, from hauling trash to demolishing structures. This project will give radio listeners a chance to hear the stories of immigrant day laborers in the Mission District of San Francisco. "What I want to do," said Project Director Julie Caine, "is give these men a human face. We see them in our cities, but we don't know anything about them. They have come here out of severe economic necessity, and I want their stories to be heard."

#### **Kashaya Oral History Project. The Cultural Conservancy, San Francisco**

The Kashaya Pomo Indians have lived in Northern California for the past two centuries. Beginning in the early 1800s, foreign colonists became entangled with the tribe, starting with the Russians, who established California's first mercantile colony at Fort Ross in 1812. This project will gather oral histories about family experiences with Russian, Mexican and Anglo-American colonists. "The aim is to provide people with a more inclusive history of the time," said Project Director Kent Lightfoot. The stories will be displayed on the California State Parks' Web site and incorporated into a booklet for distribution at Fort Ross State Historic Park.

#### **Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women. Cultural Odyssey**

Recidivism has reached crisis levels in California's criminal justice system, with 75 percent of former inmates eventually returning to prison. This project will tell the story of some former female inmates in a theater piece developed from the stories of the women themselves. The aim is to

including farmers, farm workers, naturalists and political leaders. Stories will be documented on video for display on the Web, and in exhibits in galleries, libraries and schools. The aim of the project is to give people an understanding of the watershed and the impact it has on their lives. "Ultimately what we hope," says Project Director Jennifer Colby, "is that these stories will move people to work

of the park before the public. "We hope the project will give people a sense of ownership of the park and inspire them to work for environmental justice in the area," said Project Director Ed Bedecarrax.

#### **Spinning Tales: Camptonville's Web of Stories.**

##### **Camptonville Community Partnership**

The small rural town of Camptonville in the foothills of the

## USING STORIES TO BRIDGE A CULTURAL GAP IN OAKLAND

### Project hopes to unite Southeast Asian gardeners and African-American kids



*Mien gardeners. Photo courtesy of Holly Alonso.*

Outside the restored Peralta House in a historic park in the Fruitvale section of East Oakland, Mien women from the mountains of Laos tend a small vegetable garden. Close by, African-American kids hang out with their friends. The two groups use the park more

frequently than anybody else in the neighborhood, but, according to Holly Alonso, executive director of Friends of Peralta Hacienda Historical Park, they never exchange greetings or acknowledge each other's presence.

Alonso hopes to change that situation with her project, Common Ground: Mien Gardeners and African-American Youth at Peralta Hacienda Historical Park. The project, one of 11 projects the Council is supporting under the California Story Fund, will bring the two groups together to listen to each others' stories.

The stories will be collected through tape-recorded and videotaped interviews, with members of each group involved in the story-collection process. The project will also include videotaped story circles and gardening sessions, during which the kids will learn about the various types of vegetables the Mien grow. Fruitvale residents will be able to view the results of the project at an exhibit of wall-sized photo panels inside the Peralta House next fall.

Alonso has modest aspirations for the project. "My hope is that two groups will eventually realize what they have in common, despite differences in age, dress, language and background. The kids may learn, among other things, what the Mien endured to get here. And on the other side, the Mien may come to understand something about the history and culture of the African-American community. I don't want to overestimate what one small project can do, but I think it would be wonderful if, one of these days, they begin to say hello to each other."

help the women gain a better sense of their own worth and to educate the public as well as the policymakers about the complex array of issues inmates face upon their release from prison.

#### **1942: Luggage From Home to Camp.**

##### **Japanese-American Museum, San Jose**

What if you were suddenly ordered to leave your home and could only take a small suitcase? What would you take with you? This project tells what six San Jose residents carried in their suitcases to Japanese internment camps during World War II. The former internees will be interviewed by the award-winning artist Flo Oy Wong, who will create a suitcase installation using the actual suitcases the former internees carried to camp. The exhibit will be held at the Japanese-American Museum in San Jose, among other venues. To foster public discussion, the project will include a symposium with historians, former internees and members of the community.

#### **Rumme: Living River: The Pajaro River Watershed Experience.**

##### **Pajaro Valley Arts Council and Gallery**

This project will involve the stories of people who have a connection to the Pajaro River watershed,

across cultural, community and economic lines to preserve this valuable resource."

#### **The Skid Row Project.**

##### **Side Street Projects**

Skid Row in Los Angeles occupies approximately 50 city blocks and contains some 11,000 residents. This project will document the Skid Row community in photographs and stories. The materials will become an exhibit, and a series of public programs will be held in the exhibition space to give the public an opportunity to understand this unique community.

#### **Sowing the Seeds of Change:**

##### **Stories of Urban Ecology.**

##### **City College of San Francisco**

Bayview Hunters Point, a predominantly African-American neighborhood in San Francisco, has less than 4 percent of the city's residents but one-third of the city's hazardous waste sites. This project focuses on a restored wetland in the area, Heron's Head Park, and involves a special course for community members at City College of San Francisco. Course participants will collect stories about the park from people in the community and document the area through photographs and illustrations. The students will learn to digitize their transcripts and images and produce a field guide. A community forum is planned to bring the issue

Sierra has undergone a number of changes since the time of the Gold Rush, including a succession of fires, several severe draughts and, more recently, the decline of the timber and mining industries. This project will collect from town elders the stories and photographs of an earlier time and present the material to the community in town forums, on a Web site and in the town's recently opened museum. The hope is that the stories will give the community a renewed sense of hope and possibility.

#### **Voices of the Valley**

##### **Documentary Project.**

##### **Anderson Valley Unified Schools**

Since 1997, seventh through 12th grade students in Anderson Valley, a small inland valley 200 miles north of San Francisco, have been tape-recording the life stories of elderly residents. This project will help a group of students involved in the story-collecting process turn 32 of those stories into radio documentaries for airing on a local public radio station. The aim of the project is to create a new sense of community among the many ethnic groups in the area.

## SEVEN JOIN CCH BOARD



CCH is pleased to announce the appointment of the following seven people to the Board of Directors: Julie Bornstein, Roy Eisenhardt, Nancy Hatamiya, María Herrera-Sobek, Shelley Kessler, Patricia O'Brien and John Roth.

Julie Bornstein is the founding director of the Keston Institute for California Infrastructure at USC. Previously, she was director of the California Department of Housing and Community Development. A native of San Diego, she holds a B.A. and an M.A. from UCLA and a law degree from USC.

Roy Eisenhardt has served as president of the Oakland Athletics Baseball Company, executive director of the California Academy of Sciences and as an attorney with Farella Braun & Martel. He has also served on the boards of a number of organizations, including the Golden Gate Parks Association. He is a trustee of the San Francisco Symphony and a fellow of the California Academy of Sciences. Eisenhardt holds a B.A. from Dartmouth College and a law degree from UC Berkeley's Boalt Hall.

Nancy Hatamiya is principal consultant for Assemblywoman Wilma Chan, majority leader of the California State Assembly. She serves on the staff of the Assembly's Select Committee on Children's School Readiness and Health and the Select Committee on Asian Trade. Previously, she was senior advisor at Manatt, Phelps & Phillips. Hatamiya served in several different capacities in the Clinton administration, including as chief of staff to the president's Crime

Prevention Council and White House liaison for the United States Office of Personnel Management. Hatamiya attended Stanford University and was a Coro Foundation Fellow.

María Herrera-Sobek is acting associate vice chancellor for Academic Policy and a professor in the Department of Chicano Studies at UC Santa Barbara. She is the author of several books and has published numerous poems and more than 100 scholarly articles. She is currently working on *The Norton Anthology of U.S. Latino Literature* (forthcoming in 2004) and several other projects, including a book on the Chicano/Chicana detective novel. She holds a Ph.D. from UCLA.

Shelley Kessler is executive secretary-treasurer of the San Mateo County Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO. Kessler, a former spot-welder/assembler and mechanic, has worked on many labor issues, including health care for low-wage workers, model childcare, diversity and assistance for displaced workers. She is the recipient of the Bay Area Union Labor Party 1998 Leadership Award and the Coalition of Union Labor Women's Outstanding Leadership Award. In 1993, she was inducted into the San Mateo County Women's Hall of Fame in recognition of her achievements. Kessler is co-founder of *We Do the Work*, a national television series.

Patricia O'Brien is dean of the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at UC Riverside and a professor of history. Prior to her current position, O'Brien was at

UC Irvine, where she was chair of the history department, acting vice chancellor and then associate vice chancellor for research. O'Brien holds a Ph.D. in history from Columbia University and has held fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Humanities Center. She is the author or co-author of several books and scholarly papers, including *The Promise of Punishment: Prisons in Nineteenth-Century France* and is currently working on a new book, *The Political Culture of the French State in the Nineteenth Century*.

John Roth is the Russell K. Ptizer Professor of Philosophy at Claremont McKenna College, where he chairs the department of philosophy and religious studies. In 1998, Roth was named the National Professor of the Year by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. He has also received the G. David Huntoon Senior Teaching Award and the CMC President's Award and is a three-time recipient of the Crocker Award for Excellence. Roth has written, cowritten or edited more than 30 books, including *American Diversity*. Professor Roth served as a member of the CCH Board from 1990 to 1995 and Board chair from 1992 to 1994. He is the third CCH Board alumnus to be re-elected to the Board. Roth holds a Ph.D. from Yale University.

*New Board members, clockwise from top: Julie Bornstein, Roy Eisenhardt, Nancy Hatamiya, María Herrera-Sobek, Shelley Kessler, Patricia O'Brien and John Roth.*



## Can the humanities help? (continued from page 1)

dessert. But because of the nature of creative, reflective and scholarly pursuits, it's not always easy or possible to embody our intuitions in hard data.

In recent years, arts organizations in particular have developed a set of economic multipliers that allow them to calculate the positive economic impact of arts activities in their communities. Many of these same organizations make convincing arguments that the arts can

play a key role in reducing youth violence. We plan to add to the discussion of how cultural activities—especially those that involve telling and hearing personal stories—strengthen communities through a careful, ongoing evaluation of the events and activities of the California Stories initiative.

We already have some preliminary indicators. During our recent Community Heritage initiative, we found that when people tell their

stories and other people listen, a trust is created that can change community dynamics. In addition, participants in Community Heritage activities generally felt that the humanities projects increased their sense of community or rallied them to a common issue.

Over the next few years, working with the same evaluation consultants from Harder + Company Community Research who assisted in the Community Heritage initia-

tive, we will be taking a comprehensive look at our California Stories initiative as the programs and activities unfold. We seek a more detailed understanding of how and under what circumstances public humanities programs help change communities for the better.

We think the results will be as fascinating as they are important. We'll let you know what we learn.

## Who We Are

The mission of the California Council for the Humanities is to enrich California's cultural life and to strengthen communities through public use of the humanities.

The Council is an independent, not-for-profit state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities supported through a public-private partnership that includes funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities, private foundations and corporations. The Council also receives essential support from individuals.

To learn more about the Council and how you can participate in its programs, please visit us online at [www.californiastories.org](http://www.californiastories.org).

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INSIDE A look at 27 new California Stories projects

HUMANITIES

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**INSIDE** What the 27 new  
California Stories projects  
will mean to California

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