

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTIVE HISTORY WITH THE "GREATEST
GENERATION:" ENGAGING WORLD WAR TWO MEMORIES THROUGH FILM
AND ORAL HISTORY

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Active History: History for the Future
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Setting: Magnolia Glen Retirement Community—Raleigh, NC
Ave Age—mid 80s—born early/mid 1920s—many WWII veterans and spouses/widows

Film Series—NVR/NEH—“Rosie to Roosevelt: The American People in WWI”
American Homefront/American Command
Bottom up social history/Top down political history
Other series include WWI, 1950s and Cold War, 1960s, 20th
century US Presidents

Format—Six sessions, each about two hours

- Introduce topic and film—subject, themes, background, visual images
- Film excerpt(s)—usually about 1 hour
- After break, open discussion, Q&A

- Memory/History—events and recollections
- Commemorative Voice/Historical Voice [Linenthal]
- Personal Experience/Scholarly Context: national, international
 - Immediacy and emotional content/Distance in time and place, broader perspective in research
- Discussion/Engagement—not an either/or situation, but a mutual learning experience, a dialogue across generations—piecing together different perspectives, and parts of a greater historical narrative
 - What do we remember, and how much do we **choose** to remember in particular ways?
 - How typical or atypical are those memories compared to others' experiences at the time—what else was going on around us?
 - Can what we experienced and remember be understood in that larger context?

Oral History—[pilot project]

Cross generational—WWII veterans and spouses/widows interviewed by middle schoolers—akin to grandparents or even great-grandparents passing on stories

Linked to middle-school curriculum—state and national history

Middle schoolers get short briefing on interviewing (not formal oral history or life stories)—get one page with key questions to ask and write down responses

App. one hour session—groups of two/three students talk to a resident, rotate about every fifteen minutes

Possible future developments:

- more classes and schools involved, more retirement communities
- follow up projects with retirees: memories of earlier Great Depression, later Cold War [1950s] and 1960s
- oral history presentations in schools and retirement communities: videos and powerpoints, plays and dramatic recreations, students and retirees both participate
- expansion of programs might depend on support from school system, university, retirement communities, private or public funding