

Tearing Up the Master's Narrative: Stetson Kennedy and Oral History

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Abstract: Stetson Kennedy (1916–2011) was one of the premier dissident writers in the United States in the generation before the emergence of the modern civil rights movement. Yet, despite his extensive work in oral history as a former supervisor of the Works Progress Administration unit on folklore, oral history, and social-ethnic studies in Florida, surprisingly little has been written on Kennedy's oral history methods. This essay connects Stetson Kennedy's radical politics with his experience interviewing generations of narrators who lived on the margins of the New South. Kennedy's classic works, such as *Palmetto Country*, *Southern Exposure*, and *Jim Crow Guide*, had deep social impact because they were based on an intellectual approach that privileged the voices of ordinary people.

Keywords: Civil War, forced labor, slavery, Stetson Kennedy, Works Progress Administration (WPA)

Well, if one really wishes to know how justice is administered in a country, one does not question the policemen, the lawyers, the judges, or the protected members of the middle class. One goes to the unprotected — those, precisely, who need the law's protection most! — and listens to their testimony. Ask any Mexican, any Puerto Rican, any black man, any poor person — ask the wretched how they fare in the halls of justice, and then you will know, not whether or not the country is just, but whether or not it has any love for justice, or any concept of it.¹

James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*

Stetson Kennedy did not believe that the United States of America worked as advertised. This belief defined Kennedy's interpretation of the nation's past, and

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¹ James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street* (1972; repr., Vintage: New York, 2007), 149.



Fig. 1: Stetson Kennedy. This photo accompanied the Oral History Association's webpage, posted in 2011, that memorialized Kennedy's death. (Photograph by Judith Getner.)

it determined his approach to oral history. Stetson believed in the core values of the Declaration of Independence, and he revered the sacrifices made by the foot soldiers of the modern civil rights movement. At the same time, however, he proved through decades of writings based on oral history fieldwork that the nation's democratic promise had been repeatedly hijacked by racists, corporate interests, and unjust laws. These were convictions born of harsh experiences. Born in 1916, Stetson came of age in the Deep South. The Florida of his youth had been dubbed "the American Siberia," a state notorious for convict labor, lynching, and debt peonage.² Early in his career as an investigative journalist working to expose the crimes of the Ku Klux Klan, Stetson had to face the life-threatening fact that the KKK and elements of the Federal Bureau of Investigation were in cahoots with each other.³

Life in the Sunshine State in the twentieth century was painful for anyone who had a conscience; for Stetson, it was infuriating. In the 2009 afterword to the oral history and folklore gem *Palmetto Country* (originally published in 1942 as part of Erskine Caldwell's *American Folkways* series), Stetson took aim at corporations that scarred the environment and undermined human rights.⁴

² J.C. Powell, *The American Siberia* (Chicago: Donohue, Henneberry & Co., 1892).

³ Michael Newton, *The Invisible Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Florida*, foreword by Raymond Arsenault and Gary R. Mormino (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2001); Stetson Kennedy, interviewed by Paul Ortiz, June 13, 2011, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program Collection, P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida.

⁴ Stetson Kennedy, *Palmetto Country* (1942; repr., Cocoa: Florida Historical Society Press, 2009).

Palmetto Country was based in large part on the fieldwork produced by the Florida Writers Project unit on folklore, oral history, and social-ethnic studies for the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a unit that Stetson directed between 1937 and 1942.⁵ In the book's original edition he characterized the state's turpentine industry as "repulsively medieval" while demonstrating that modern-day slavery was a pervasive fact in Florida.⁶ *Palmetto Country* features interviews with individuals who wielded great power in the Sunshine State, including cattle ranchers, cigar manufacturers, and naval stores managers. However, Stetson privileged the voices of the forgotten workers whose labor was building the state. Everywhere he looked, the young oral historian discovered that labor relations—as well as humanity's relationship to the state's ecosystems—were marked by cruelty and deprivation. "The institution of private property," Stetson wrote, "with its symbol and guardian, the fence, has had a bloody career in the Deepest South."⁷

Stetson lived a life of dissent because conformity meant the destruction of nature and the desecration of human life. His writing became the embodiment of Norman Jacobson's endeavor to establish a "politics without solace," an enduring battle against oppression and a pursuit of a political life "inconsolable yet undaunted in spirit."⁸ Stetson found this strength through his narrators. *Palmetto Country* concludes with one of the most stirring passages in mid-century American literature, an interview with Gerardo Cederorina y Piñera. Born in Havana in 1912, Piñera had been a *lector* or reader in the Gradiatz Annis & Company cigar factory in Depression-era Ybor City, Florida. The *lectores* were lodestones of radical labor culture; they read world news and political events to the tobacco workers during their shifts in the mills.⁹ The bosses despised the readers, and Piñera lamented: "The manufacturers actually abolished the readers for a reason, which they lack the moral courage to publicly admit: the readers were a powerful force in maintaining the unity of the workers in labor unions."¹⁰

The destruction of the *lector* system and trade unionism in Florida revealed the heartbreaking contours of life in the South. Unlike the North, where the sit-down strike movement ushered in industrial unionism, there was no breakthrough in the South and no sanctuary from the speed-up for the region's hard-pressed workers. Stetson Kennedy may have chosen Piñera to be his final

⁵ "Palmetto Country," accessed September 18, 2013, <http://www.stetsonkenedy.com/palmetto.htm>.

⁶ Kennedy, *Palmetto Country*, 275.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁸ Norman Jacobson, *Politics Without Solace* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), x.

⁹ Louis A. Pérez Jr., "Reminiscences of a *Lector*: Cuban Cigar Workers in Tampa," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (April 1975): 443–449; John C. Appel, "The Unionization of Florida Cigar-makers and Coming of the War with Spain," *Hispanic American Historical Review* XXXVI (February 1956): 38–49; Nancy A. Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort: Women's Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s–1920s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

¹⁰ Kennedy, *Palmetto Country*, 351.

narrator to remind his readers that the Progressive chronicle of New Deal improvements in American life was illusory in his state. Before he had been purged from employment, Piñera had used his position in the factories to teach his fellow workers “that all mankind should benefit from what the earth produces, and that man should not be enslaved. In the present system, so inappropriate, man finds himself worse-off than the beasts; but a day will arrive in which justice shall be done, and I trust this will not long be delayed.”¹¹ *Palmetto Country's* coda is a line by Dolores Ibárruri (known as “La Pasionaria,” the passionflower), a Republican hero of the Spanish Civil War who vowed even in retreat from Spain: “This pain cannot be cured with resignation.” It was Kennedy’s way of saying that the battle was far from finished.¹²

Because Kennedy believed that injustice was a pervasive element of the nation, he arrived at the doorsteps of his narrators as a dissident and this allowed him to stay in genuine contact with the people who existed on the margins of the society. *Palmetto Country's* chapter titles depict elements of the national experience still missing from American history textbooks: “Slave-Breeding for Profit,” “The Rising Tide of Demockkkracy,” “Shotgun Shacks,” and “I Destroyed the Cigarmakers’ Union.” Stetson Kennedy posited that America’s history was tragic, because he experienced this history through interviewees who shared with him stories of deprivation, cruelty, and a loss of dignity in places from which most of the nation’s writers had safely insulated themselves.

Kennedy’s experiences in the WPA’s Florida Writers Project in the Great Depression put him in contact with grim realities of American life. Kennedy’s interviews with the people who toiled in phosphate mines, turpentine camps, and orange groves taught him that “American Exceptionalism,” the belief that American society is uniquely democratic and exempt from tyrannical practices, was a fraud. In the landmark *Southern Exposure* (1946), Kennedy wrote that in the wake of the Civil War, “The problem confronting the slavocrats was how to establish a new order which would be as profitable to them as had been the old. Their whispered battle cry became, ‘Chattel slavery is dead; long live wage slavery!’”¹³ The subjects of this book included convict laborers, evicted tenants, and mothers who were unable to feed their children properly because of a miserly economic system dominated by northern capital. A generation later, these hard-pressed individuals would become the protagonists of the New Social History, and their struggles would occupy the pages of numerous scholarly and activist publications, including an aptly named oral history magazine titled *Southern Exposure*.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Stetson Kennedy, *Southern Exposure* (1946; repr., Boca Raton: Florida Atlantic University Press, 1991), 21.

Stetson Kennedy drew his sharpest insights on American society directly from plantation workers, sharecroppers, and fisherfolk who lived their lives—to paraphrase theologian Howard Thurman—with their backs against the wall.¹⁴ Stetson's philosophy of oral history was grounded in a working-class sensibility. As he put it, "It's being there and telling history from the bottom up. Of course history, it's the little man that makes history and not the generals, and so I like to hear from the little man."¹⁵ This careful attention to working-class life is evident in a remarkable interview that Kennedy conducted with Zora Neale Hurston on African American work songs. Throughout the interview, Stetson asked Hurston questions about how railroad workers interspersed their singing with the grueling work of hammering and laying track lines. Hurston astutely answered Stetson's questions by singing verses from the track lining songs, and Kennedy responded in turn with skillful questions about work rhythms, the number of men on the line, and the relationship between the song leader and the crew.¹⁶ This discussion between two of the great students of American folk-life in the twentieth century demonstrates the centrality of working-class experiences in much of what we call "American culture." Reflecting on an observation made about him by longtime friend Woody Guthrie, Stetson noted, "I recall Guthrie saying it one time: 'Stetson's not exactly a folklorist, he's a po-folkist,' by which he meant I suppose a champion of the poor. One of the folk, and not writing from some other point of view."¹⁷

Chapter Nine of Kennedy's *Jim Crow Guide*, titled "Who Are Subject to Forced Labor," is a devastating indictment of human rights abuses of workers and the poor in America. It is based on a mixture of primary documents (including government reports) and oral histories that Stetson conducted with men and women reduced to slavery in Florida, Georgia, and Mississippi in the years after World War II. Kennedy highlighted his fieldwork with workers who candidly state that they will be shot if they dare leave their plantations and labor camps. (He gained access to the camps by telling owners that he was interested in recording folk songs.) Kennedy drew humility and moral courage from narrators who urged him to tell the world about their plight. "'They can't do no more than kill us,' a turpentine worker at Fruit Cove, Florida, said. 'I have heard a few of the old men say the only way out is to die out, but I have also

¹⁴ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1949; repr., Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

¹⁵ "Stetson Kennedy," narrated by Ben Brotemarkle, *Florida Frontiers*, WUFT, August 12, 2009, <http://myfloridahistory.org/frontiers/shows/052>.

¹⁶ Audiocassette mislabeled "Bobby Billie—spiritual leader of off-reservation Seminoles," n.d., Box AV2 (pre-processed Audiovisual Materials), Stetson Kennedy Papers, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.

¹⁷ "A Tribute to Stetson Kennedy," narrated by Ben Brotemarkle, *Florida Frontiers*, WUFT, September 4, 2011, <http://myfloridahistory.org/frontiers/shows/096>.

heard it said that the truth shall make you free!”¹⁸ The crusading writer presented these narratives to the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee on Forced Labor in 1951 in Geneva, Switzerland. He excoriated not just employers but the entire framework of American criminal justice and labor jurisprudence that implicated federal and state authorities in maintaining a vast system of forced labor throughout the Sunbelt. In recent years scholars have confirmed Stetson’s thesis that unfree labor was a pervasive element of life in the Jim Crow South.¹⁹

Kennedy’s politics were grounded in his fieldwork and in his commitments to his narrators rather than an adherence to any ideology. His informants were the great mass of people on the losing side of many of history’s titanic conflicts. In the 2011 preface to the recent reissue of the Florida WPA ex-slave narratives, titled *The Florida Slave*, Stetson explained the “transition” from slavery to freedom in the US thusly: “Essentially, the transition was not from slavery to the full-fledged citizenship ‘guaranteed’ by the hard-won 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments of the Bill of Rights, but from chattel slavery to debt slavery and second-class citizenship.”²⁰ This was an insight based on decades of oral history interviewing. Traveling down the South’s back roads and collecting stories with his Magnetophon recorder in the middle decades of the twentieth century, the young investigator had discovered the enormous disjuncture between the idea of equal justice before the law and the realities of the Jim Crow South: “One of the most notorious cases was that in which a 30-man KKK firing squad executed two Negro war veterans, George Dorsey and Roger Malcolm, and their wives, because one of the women had refused to sleep with the white planter for whom they were forced to share-crop.” The book this story was published in, *Jim Crow Guide*, could not be published in the United States; it had to be released in France in 1959.²¹

The fact that Stetson Kennedy arrived at the doorstep of his narrators as a dissident from society—and not as an apologist, defender, or “neutral observer” of the system—was integral to his success as an oral historian of the oppressed. His embrace of tragedy and his avoidance of maudlin sentimentality about working-class life contributed to the dramatic, literary quality of Stetson’s writings.

¹⁸ Stetson Kennedy, *Jim Crow Guide: The Way It Was* (1946; repr., Boca Raton: Florida Atlantic University Press, 1990), 137.

¹⁹ Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (London: Verso, 1996); Matthew J. Mancini, *One Dies, Get Another: Convict Leasing in the American South, 1866–1928* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996); David M. Oshinsky, *“Worse Than Slavery”: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: The Free Press, 1996).

²⁰ Stetson Kennedy, *The Florida Slave: Interviews with Ex-Slaves WPA Writers Project, 1930s and Testimony of Ex-Slaves Joint Congressional Committee Jacksonville, 1871* (Cocoa: Florida Historical Society Press, 2011), 6.

²¹ Kennedy, *Jim Crow Guide*, 141.

The literary power of *Southern Exposure*, *Jim Crow Guide*, and *Palmetto Country* flows from Kennedy's willingness to travel to isolated labor camps, his keen listening skills, and his hatred of injustice. In his journals, field notes, and books, we witness unbearable scenes: a mother watching her family starve, a turpentine worker blinded by sulfuric acid, men flogged and murdered by their bosses for five-dollar debts. Whereas most academic historians in the twentieth century taught US history—to borrow Lawrence Goodwyn's phrase—as a “purposeful and generally progressive saga,” Stetson wrote more in the style of Mark Twain's narrator in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, who realizes that American civilization is made up of an indivisible mix of grit and catastrophe.²² *Huckleberry Finn* has taught generations of readers that the fate of the republic is in the hands of an outcast white boy and a fugitive slave by the name of Jim. As literary critic Shelley Fisher Fishkin reminds us, Twain's ability to create lifelike dialog in *Huckleberry Finn* stemmed from listening carefully to African Americans talk about their travails during slavery and taking copious notes.²³ Stetson Kennedy retraced Twain's path in his approach to interviewing and he was concerned above all with highlighting the narrative voice of ordinary people. In one of Stetson's oral history workshop guides he instructed novice interviewers to avoid bludgeoning interviewees with academic jargon or with cumbersome interview guides. He admonished: “DON'T show up with a long or short list of prefab questions. Tailor your questions to fit the flow. Wing it! Avoid census-taker or Mr. District Attorney Q&A format at all costs. Otherwise, *spontaneity, continuity, literary and poetic qualities will be lost.*”²⁴

Stetson had witnessed the damage that clumsy interview guides inflicted on the oral history process during his WPA days in Florida. He ruefully recalled that one of his supervisors in Washington, DC, drafted a guide “to get the Negro thinking and talking about the days of slavery.”²⁵ Some of the questions were farcical. “Reflecting many of the white mindsets of the time, in use this well-meant form often led to friction between interviewer and interviewee. For example, the question ‘When did you see ice for the first time?’ provoked one ex-slave to respond indignantly, ‘About the same time you did, I reckon!’” “What was worse,” Kennedy noted, “over-zealous adherence to the Questionnaire resulted in a great deal of redundancy, as each interviewee recited the familiar details of how food was cooked in a hearth with a three-legged skillet called a

²² Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 314.

²³ Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, introduction by Shelley Fisher Fishkin (New York: Signet Classics, 2013), xiv.

²⁴ “Collecting Oral Histories and Folklore, Some Stetson Kennedy ‘Do’s and Don’ts’ [emphasis added], n.d., Box Number 8, Folder: Oral History Workshops, Stetson Kennedy Papers, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.

²⁵ Kennedy, *Florida Slave*, 6.

spider, how soap and candles were made, and how ‘coffee’ was brewed from parched corn.”²⁶ So many stories were lost. These included the story of the Underground Railroad (in Florida this ran from the Bahamas to Mexico), slave rebellions during the Seminole Wars, and the fact that black Florida fielded over one thousand troops to fight for freedom during the Civil War. These remarkable narratives were sacrificed in favor of mundane—and uncontroversial—details that would not challenge the social hierarchy of Jim Crow and black disenfranchisement. White WPA officials had robbed the ex-slave interviews of drama and human agency. “White as well as black writers and editors were keenly aware that ‘Editor-in-Chief’ Jim Crow was looking over their shoulder—and governed themselves accordingly.”²⁷ This is likely the reason that Stetson insisted that the 2011 publication of the Florida ex-slave interviews be accompanied with the 1871 Ku Klux Klan hearings that featured African American testimony on many details of life missed or glossed over in the original WPA interviews.

In 1995, Stetson Kennedy co-taught an oral history course in the University of North Florida (UNF) Undergraduate Honors Program with the distinguished journalist Dr. Paula Horvath-Neimeyer. Titled *Telling Tales: Recording Oral History*, the class gathered, preserved, and promoted the voices of Florida’s oft-forgotten fisherfolk including “inland and coastal net fishermen, offshore shrimpers, crap trappers and processors, clam and oystermen,” and others who relied on the sea for a living.²⁸ “From these very special instructors,” the syllabus promised, “you will be taught to collect oral history from the residents of Northeast Florida, learning how to observe, interpret and record human social behavior. You will use anthropology’s holistic approach to place individuals within their culture and society; you will use the techniques of the journalist to probe within the individual to elicit oral histories.”²⁹

Stetson prepared several “folk culture” and oral history interviewing workshop handouts for the *Telling Tales* seminar that open a window onto his oral history interviewing methods. Above all, Kennedy attempted to instill in his students a deep respect for the cultures of their future narrators, and he urged them to leave their academic baggage at UNF as they traveled to do their interviews. He advised his students to use their initial meeting with their narrators in order to get acquainted (“preferably arriving at first-name basis”) and to emphasize that “everyone has an important life story to tell.” Once the interview

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁸ “Gonna Fish Til’ the Day I Die,” n.d., Box Number 8, Folder: Oral History Workshops, Stetson Kennedy Papers, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.

²⁹ Syllabus, *Telling Tales: Recording Oral History*, Box Number 8, Folder: Oral History Workshops, Stetson Kennedy Papers, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.

session started, the master oral historian taught his students to “Be RESPONSIVE to what informant is saying (the more ANIMATION the better). Use eye-balling, facial expression, body language, and your spoken words to encourage informant to ‘tell it like it was.’”³⁰ Early in the seminar, Kennedy distributed a work sheet with a number of rules, including:

DON'T:

1. Do or say anything that might give the impression that you are hot-shot college students out on a lark to see “how other folks live,” etc.
2. Say anything that might even imply that the person being interviewed and their communities are of interest as “curiosities,” “odd pockets,” “sub-cultures,” “far-out,” “superstitious,” “unread,” or anything of the sort.
3. Let your expression or anything else suggest that an informant is silly to believe in any given superstitions, myths etc. (think of your own [superstitions] instead).
4. Act like an OJ prosecutor cross-examining a defense witness.
5. Do or say anything off or on-mike that would lead your informants to feel any of the above.³¹

Stetson prepared his students for fieldwork by challenging their ideas about the connections between culture and class. In a handout distributed early in the seminar, Kennedy began by questioning the idea of “primitive” and “complex” cultures. He went further to interrogate the propensity of some scholars to create dichotomies between “high,” “popular,” and “folk” cultures: “The distinctions between these ‘categories’ are more apparent than real, and the dividing lines between them are often obscure.”³² The mark of the egalitarian interviewer with half a century of experience in the field is clear here. Stetson’s theory of culture was tied to his broader views on social justice, and he incorporated this into the interviewing methodology for the seminar: “Mutual cultural esteem and equity cannot be built upon foundations of economic, social, or political inequity (Wherever one people are riding upon the back’s [*sic*] of another),” he counseled.

Repeatedly, Stetson urged apprentice oral historians to cede as much authority as possible to their narrators. This did not mean that the interviewer

³⁰ “A FEW OFF-THE-CUFF DO’S & DON’TS ON TAKING ORAL HISTORIES,” September 11, 1995, Box Number 8, Folder: Oral History Workshops, Stetson Kennedy Papers, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.

³¹ “A FEW OFF-THE-CUFF DO’S & DON’TS ON TAKING ORAL HISTORIES.”

³² “Handout for UNF Honors Program course ‘Telling Tales’ 3rd Session, 6 September, 1995. From Stetson Kennedy,” Box Number 8, Folder: Oral History Workshops, Stetson Kennedy Papers, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.

faded completely out of the picture. Stetson urged his students to “steer and phrase interviews gently,” in order to garner family, occupational, and community history along with “things NOT IN THE BOOKS,” such as ceremonies, festivals, work rituals, and other aspect of folk culture. The interviewer should be guided by an attitude of mutual respect and be open to spontaneity and unexpected turns in the narrator’s story: “When informant is ‘on a roll,’ DON’T interrupt or seek explanations or elaborations, or get off on some tangent. Wait until informant has ‘finished’ the story. Then you can ‘flash-back’ to whatever it is you want to pursue.”³³

Stetson also encouraged his students to consider asking their interviewees to invite friends or relatives to interview sessions in order to “turn monologue into dialogue about happenings.” Borrowing from his own field experiences, as well as from ethnographic practice, Stetson urged oral historians, “when circumstances permit,” to place “two or more informants in a setting where they discuss and perhaps argue about some events or period which they both witnessed or participated in.”³⁴ By fading out of the picture altogether, the interviewer might encourage a group of neighbors, comrades, or family members to share intimate stories. Kennedy was a big fan of the StoryCorps approach to interviewing that proceeds along similar lines of thought.³⁵

In the fall of 1993, I started doing oral history fieldwork as a graduate student at Duke University on a research project titled “Behind the Veil: Documenting African American History in the Jim Crow South,” based at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke. I read Stetson Kennedy’s *Southern Exposure* as an introduction to the region and quickly came to rely on the investigative magazine by the same name, which had been published by the Institute for Southern Studies since 1973. The names of the early contributors to *Southern Exposure* read like a who’s-who of activist oral historians: Studs Terkel, Lee Smith, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Denise Giardina, and many others.

When I joined the board of the Institute for Southern Studies in 1999, I came across the following statement by former institute director Bob Hall that sums up the importance of Stetson Kennedy to oral historians as well as to any individual or group pursuing the truth: “At the birth of our magazine in 1973 . . . *Exposure Exposure* emerged as the obvious choice [for a name] . . . to carry on the tradition of Stetson Kennedy’s original *Southern Exposure* . . . a tradition that

³³ “Collecting Oral Histories and Folklore,” n.d., Box Number 8, Folder: Oral History Workshops, Stetson Kennedy Papers, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.

³⁴ “Collecting Oral Histories and Folklore: Some Stetson Kennedy ‘Do’s and Don’ts,’” n.d., Box Number 8, Folder: Oral History Workshops, Stetson Kennedy Papers, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.

³⁵ “A Tribute to Stetson Kennedy.”

links analysis to action, that tells the truth and makes clear the imperative for change. We chose the right person to follow. He is a freedom fighter, patriot and rebel, investigator and truth-teller, a foot soldier and leader in the larger movement for a human planet."³⁶

Stetson Kennedy was one of America's foremost dissident intellectuals. His dissent was rooted in his analysis of the insights of individuals that he talked with over the course of six decades of oral history fieldwork. Stetson measured the distance between the rhetoric and the realities of his society by going straight to the people with a recorder and a notepad. He wanted to hear what they had to say about America. Edward W. Said observed: "Exile for the intellectual in this metaphysical sense is restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others."³⁷ Kennedy's faith in the power of the stories of society's most marginalized groups made him an unsettling presence to the status quo his entire life. Students of oral history and social action research will benefit greatly by studying Kennedy's published works as well as his oral history methodology. The present essay is only a preliminary step in this process.

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³⁶ "Reviews," accessed September 3, 2013, <http://www.stetsonkenedy.com/southern.htm>.

³⁷ Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 53.