

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

10-19-00

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: TED WIDMER *TW*

*Copied
Widmer
Hernreich
Lindsey
Podesta*

CC: JOHN PODESTA, NANCY HERNREICH, BRUCE LINDSEY

RE: ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

SEPTEMBER 21, 2000

It's important to determine how we are going to proceed with an Oral History Project and whose responsibility it will be. Two leading candidates have emerged: the University of Virginia, which has already carved out a niche in this area, and the University of Arkansas, now in the process of building a strong oral history collection, thanks to the Arkansas Center for Oral and Visual History (established last year after a donation from former Senator Pryor).

My recommendation is that we give Arkansas the chance to make a serious presentation. They are enthusiastic about the Project, and willing to commit however much money and manpower it takes to do the job right. They can easily interview early associates who still live in Arkansas. And they already have collections that are germane, including the Fulbright papers, the Daisy Bates papers, an oral history of the *Arkansas Gazette*, and an interview with Diane Blair.

There is nothing wrong with Virginia. They have done more work in this line than any other university, and are aggressively trying to do more. They compiled oral histories of the Carter and Bush Administrations, and are planning to do one for Reagan as well (to my surprise, their overeager website also indicates they plan to do one for the Clinton Administration). They are also compiling the definitive transcription of the secret recordings made by Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon (the director of Virginia's Miller Center, Philip Zelikow, co-edited the book of JFK's recordings at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis). And they have started a Kosovo Oral History as well. But the Arkansas collection, with its growing emphasis on civil rights, feels closer to home, in every sense.

✓ A thorough Clinton Oral History Project, on the order of those compiled for the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, will take years to compile properly, and cost millions of dollars. But either Arkansas or Virginia will gladly cover these costs in return for the prestige attached to the Project. It's a win/win situation. The Library surrenders nothing, and we can control the process in a number of ways. We can help select the interviewers; we can restrict access to the interviews; and every person interviewed can edit the transcripts of his/her interview before it is put into final form.

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To clarify a point of confusion, an Oral History Project would be distinct from the "Living History" series of interviews that the Foundation is trying to set up. The Living History is aiming for fifty interviews; a credible Oral History should have several hundred. The Living History interviews will be aired at the Clinton Library, for pedestrians passing by television monitors; the Oral History interviews would be far longer, and serve as a permanent resource for historians. The interviewer for the Living History is someone with TV experience; the interviewers for the Oral History would presumably be more academic.

If you approve, I will approach the Arkansas team and ask them to submit a detailed proposal as a preliminary step toward a decision. I can also ask the Virginia team. In any event, it's important to act quickly, because we can get far more done now than we will be able to during the transition, when Administration figures begin to disperse. A great deal of history stands to be lost if we don't make the most of this opportunity.

☒ Ask Arkansas and Virginia both to submit proposals

☒ Ask Arkansas only to submit proposal

☐ Ask Virginia only to submit proposal

☐ Discuss further with Counsel

With 1 or 2
to let go - want
to let them - main
thing is to hurry