What changes did World War II make in the lives of the Americans who experienced it? What did the wartime generation think of the conflict's causes? How did they regard the enemy? How did they cope with war's innumerable anxieties, such as military service, the perils of combat, and social and economic changes on the homefront? Since the 50th anniversary of the war, the American public has displayed a new curiosity about the often reticent generation that fought it. Through interviews, memoirs, and contemporary letters, a history sometimes dominated by famous political and military leaders has broadened to make room for the diverse perspectives of ordinary participants. A crucial source of information on the experience of the average soldier, sailor, aircrew, and marine and the people at home has been oral history.

Oral history has become in recent times a vital methodology of the new social history that has sought to recreate and understand history "from the bottom up" instead of simply the history of political, economic, social, and military elites. Oral history is defined as the systematic collection of spoken memories and reflections for the historical record through recorded interviews that are obtained, processed, and ultimately made available for research.

In this seminar, we will explore both the American experience in the Second World War and the methodology of oral history as a technique for learning about the experiences of ordinary men and women in an extraordinary time. This course is taught in conjunction with the Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, a highly acclaimed project sponsored by the Rutgers History Department that gathers, processes, and puts on the web the oral histories of hundreds of Rutgers alumni involved in the Second World War. Students will gain "hands-on" experience with oral history by working with the staff of the Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II. The seminar will provide a sounding board to discuss this work, and assist students in their writing assignments that demonstrate how oral history is done, is evaluated, and is useful in historical inquiry into the American experience in the Second World War. To learn more about the Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, visit the website: http://fas.history.rutgers.edu/oralhistory/orlhom.htm

The final grade will be based on participation in the seminar and in the Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II project and will include class discussion and oral presentations as well as written assignments for class, such as book reviews and an optional term paper, and practical work at the Oral History Archives, such as editing or abstracting oral history transcripts and participating in an oral history interview of a Rutgers alumnus or alumna from the World War II era.