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Listening to history: David Cecelski explores North Carolina's history, one person at a time [1]

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Listening to History

David Cecelski explores North Carolina's history, one person at a time

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Eddie McCoy, Carl Lamm, Alice Eley Jones, Pota Vallas.
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Historian David Cecelski wrote a popular oral history series called “Listening to History” for the Raleigh *News & Observer* from 1998 to 2008. With the support of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Dr. Cecelski traveled across the state listening to, recording and preserving stories that spoke to the state’s history throughout the 20th century. “Listening to History” appeared monthly in the newspaper’s “Sunday Journal,” a special section of the Sunday edition of the newspaper that focused on the state’s cultural life. A central component of the series was the photographs taken by Chris Seward, a veteran *News & Observer* photographer who took nearly all the portraits that ran with the stories.

A few of the stories featured nationally renowned individuals, such as the writer Allan Gurganus from Rocky Mount, civil rights activist Mabel Williams from Monroe, and the saxophonist Maceo Parker from Kinston. However, most featured a broad cross-section of the state's older citizens, including sharecroppers, mechanics, a firefighter, a book mobile librarian, a quilter, tobacco factory workers, a midwife, a gravedigger, and the proprietor of a beauty shop. Major historical subjects discussed include the influenza epidemic of 1918-19, the Great Depression, the Second World War, hurricane *Hazel*, the African American freedom struggle, post-WWII labor activism, the experience of Chinese, Greek and other immigrants in small-town North Carolina, the Ku Klux Klan, and the early history of the AIDS epidemic, among many others.

"Each is only one voice," Dr. Cecelski wrote in the*Carolina Alumni Review* in the summer of 1999, "but together I hope they shape a mosaic of memories as rich and diverse, as sweet and as tragic, as thought provoking and as entertaining, as the North Carolina past itself."

Read David Cecelski's reflections [2] on the "Listening to History" series from 2008.

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