# Part I

## Creating Heritage

The chapters in this section get to the very heart of the volume: each considers the ways in which oral history has informed the creation of cultural heritage, understood broadly as a socially sanctioned, institutionally supported process of producing memories that make certain versions of the past public and render other versions invisible. Within this process, oral history might be understood as culturally neutral: interviews can be conducted and used in ways that support quite conventional views of the past; they can introduce voices that counter those views; they can complicate our understanding of what happened and what it means.

Cultural heritage is often associated with the preservation of landscapes, sites, and structures that have been deemed significant by an official, often state, body. And given oral history's value for, in Alessandro Portelli's resonant phrase, "amplifying the voice" of those who have been historically silenced, it is no accident that interviews are frequently used to expand the scope of preservation initiatives. Thus we begin with David Neufeld's discussion of the way Parks Canada, a federal heritage agency responsible for the preservation of Canada's natural and cultural resources, has used oral history to expand the interpretive reach of heritage sites to include the history of First Nations, as well as to draw upon Native ecological knowledge to inform land management practices. Neufeld's essay is distinguished by the broad intellectual and political context within which he places this discussion. He begins by identifying the hold a progressive, Eurocentric narrative has had over Canadian historiography for more than a half-century, creating a powerful conceptual

framework—and informing a network of historic sites—with which new narratives must contend. He then links efforts at developing a more inclusive public history to the broader politics of Native activism for justice, redress, and recognition. At the heart of his chapter are three case studies of cooperative projects between Parks Canada and First Nations. In each case, Parks Canada used oral history in an attempt to get the Indian "side" of the presumably national story it was trying to tell at a national park; Indians, on the other hand, used it to cultivate cultural identity, facilitate intergenerational communication, support prior claims to the land, and, finally, enter into a long-term relationship with Parks Canada in order to alter the dominant narrative. The interviews, often taking the form of traditional, deeply metaphorical stories, did not provide information that could be integrated seamlessly into the existing site interpretation; rather, they offered a parallel narrative, sitting alongside, as opposed to folding into, the dominant story. Neufeld offers no final resolution to this disjunction; he leaves the conclusion open-ended by posing several provocative questions about the ability of official heritage agencies to serve as a middle ground for disparate histories.

In contrast, Kevin Blackburn's chapter shows how Singapore's state-run Oral History Centre has explicitly served the goal of nation building by deliberately excluding voices that challenge—or even complicate—a relentlessly progressive, nationalist narrative. Established in 1978, thirteen years after Singapore became an independent nation-state, the Oral History Centre quite predictably began its work by interviewing the ruling political and business elite; this was followed by projects documenting the experiences of more ordinary Singaporeans. Of particular interest is Blackburn's discussion of the ways in which an oral history project's goals and interviewing methodology—not the social position of the narrator—shape what is said in an interview. While it is perhaps predictable—if regrettable—that interviews with the elite would conform to a nationalist narrative, the fact that interviews with non-elites also do so challenges simplistic notions of oral history as an inherently democratic practice. Similarly, Blackburn's explication of the way exhibits celebrating Singapore's recent history have used highly selective quotations from the Centre's collections to support a nationalist perspective gives a critical edge to the presumed "authenticity" of the first-person voice.

Whereas Chapters 1 and 2 draw upon multiple oral history projects to reflect broadly on the process of heritage production, the next two chapters focus on very particular heritage-oriented projects designed to develop new narratives about old places. Like Neufeld, Maria Nugent discusses the use of oral history to integrate Aboriginal history of the post-European-contact period into the activities of a government heritage agency, in this case the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Australian state of New South Wales.

Explicating the biases of traditional heritage preservation practices as well as the politics underlying current efforts at a more inclusive cultural practice, Nugent details how interviews with Aboriginal people revealed three layers of their association with the landscape beyond the reserves, or historically segregated settlements: places Aboriginals shared with white settler Australians that nonetheless held different meanings for them than those held by settlers; spaces, often out of doors in what she terms a "backyard zone," where Aboriginals enjoyed activities among themselves; and the spaces in-between—that is, the routes Aboriginal people used as they moved over the landscape, negotiating both social and geographic obstacles. Of particular interest is the method Nugent and her colleagues developed: when they found that explicit questions about "the places that have been significant to you" resulted in awkward silences, they reverted to a life history approach, which seamlessly incorporated references to meaningful places. To make their work useful for heritage preservation, they then used maps to determine the spatial dimensions of everyday life recounted in the interviews, sometimes asking narrators to locate places talked about. Nugent and her colleagues refer to this method as geo-biography, a term that signifies landscape plus life story, as well as, when mapped, the reverse: the biography of a landscape.

Focusing on two specific heritage sites, Işıl Cerem Cenker and Lucienne Thys-Şenocak demonstrate how oral history can open up possibilities for multiple narratives, even about national monuments saturated with a national—and nationalistic—history. They had initially intended to use interviews to supplement what the written record could tell them about the physical features of two seventeenth-century Ottoman fortresses at the entrance to the Dardanelles, currently under development by the Turkish government as national parks. However, like many oral historians, they found that interviewees did not answer the questions they posed, but instead wanted to talk about subjects not part of the original research agenda. So they redirected their inquiry, learning that those living near the forts connected their personal histories to the sites in practical and symbolic ways that both confirmed and countered the dominant historiography. They learned, for example, that twentieth-century immigrants to the region indiscriminately linked their own sacrifices in immigrating to those made by Turkish soldiers during World War I and by the Ottoman queen who used her personal wealth to construct the forts; that narrators made little distinction between the Ottoman empire and the Turkish Republic, a distinction central to Turkish historiography; and that residents displaced from a fort community compared their present circumstances unfavorably with life in the fort village. The authors urge a harmonization of diverse narratives in heritage development; yet, reflecting their informants' concerns about the impact of such development on their current communities,

Cenker and Thys-Şenocak open up questions about the politics of contemporary heritage projects.

Finally, Selma Thomas, anticipating chapters in the next section, broadens our understanding of cultural heritage to include not only landscapes and sites but also museum exhibitions, well recognized as a powerful form for codifying a perspective on the past. Drawing upon more than two decades of experience and recognizing the impact of video technology on museum exhibits, Thomas argues that interviews are not "edited" for inclusion in an exhibit but rather are "curated," much as artifacts are: they must be preceded by careful research, assessed within the context of current historiography, and placed appropriately within the broader intellectual and spatial frame of an exhibit. Much of her chapter is thus given over to a discussion of the decisions she made while curating video interviews for several exhibitions, most notably the Smithsonian Institution's "A More Perfect Union: Japanese Americans and the United States Constitution," which depicts the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Thomas understands that museums—and especially the Smithsonian, as the national museum of the United States—confer a certain legitimacy on the particular stories they choose to tell. She further understands that museums' cultural authority derives in large measure from the authenticity of the objects they present, an authenticity that is enhanced—indeed embodied—by the immediacy and intensity of first-person accounts. While Thomas is not critical of the museum's authoritative voice, she does not take it lightly either, recognizing the oral historian's responsibility both to conduct interviews in a manner that allows narrators to tell their stories in depth, in their own way, and to present these stories in ways that do not violate their integrity. Thomas concludes with a thoughtful discussion of the ethics involved in transforming private memories into public accounts.

One might conclude from these chapters that oral history used within the context of cultural heritage programs responds to a broader cultural politics. In Australia and Canada, as elsewhere, the inclusion of Aboriginal voices in heritage activities has become politically imperative. Similarly, in the United States and many other parts of the world, a half-century of social movements and a responsive social history have moved cultural practice toward a more inclusive, less sanguine view of the past. In Turkey, recent immigrants understand national icons in light of their own experiences, undercutting a dominant narrative. In post-colonial Singapore, on the other hand, a new nation's need to create a new identity silences dissenting voices.