On Campus

Obama Oral-History Project Releases First Interviews

Fall 2023



Obama with farmer Joe Del Bosque, who was interviewed for the oral-history project. (Pete Sousa / White House)

A group of Columbia sociologists and oral historians who were chosen by President Barack Obama ’83CC to document his time in the Oval Office have published their first batch of interviews, a series of in-depth conversations with former White House officials, staffers, and others about the Obama administration’s efforts to address climate change.

The interview transcripts, along with accompanying audio and video, are available on the website of the Obama Presidency Oral History project, which is a

collaboration between Columbia University's Incite, a multidisciplinary social-science research institute, and the Columbia Center for Oral History Research.

To date, Columbia researchers have conducted interviews with 470 people who worked closely with Obama and his administration, producing roughly 1,100 hours of recordings. They plan to release additional interviews about Obama's work on health care, civil rights, energy, and other issues in the coming months.

Peter Bearman, a Columbia sociologist and the project's principal investigator, says that his team's work differs from past oral histories of US presidencies in that it incorporates the views not only of high-ranking officials but also those of many ordinary Americans who interacted with Obama and his team on policy issues.

"The theory that guided us reflected what we believe was a key aspiration of the Obama presidency, which was to connect with, and be informed by, the experiences of everyday people," Bearman says.



Guide to school abbreviations

All categories >

Guide to school abbreviations