

International conference:

**Testifying what happened. Holocaust Testimonies and the Future of (Digital) Memory.
Twenty years of Visual History Archive at Freie Universität Berlin.**

Organized by:

- Digital Interview Collections, University Library, Freie Universität Berlin
- FNR-DFG Project [VOICES FROM AUSCHWITZ. Unlocking Collective Memory with the Multimodal Analysis of Survivor Testimonies](#), Selma Stern Center for Jewish Studies Berlin-Brandenburg

Location: Berlin, Freie Universität Berlin, Henry-Ford-Bau

Date: December 2–3, 2026

Twenty years ago, Freie Universität Berlin became the first institution outside the United States to establish full access to the Visual History Archive (VHA) of the *USC Shoah Foundation – The Institute for Visual History and Education*. Since then, working with digital oral history interviews has developed into a significant field of research. Freie Universität Berlin has played a leading role in this area, pioneering innovative research into and with these unique sources.

To mark this anniversary, we are hosting a conference dedicated to the significance of this remarkable archive and its sources, the testimonies of Holocaust survivors, for engaging with Nazi crimes in research, teaching, and historical-political education. We will reflect on the achievements and developments in this field over the past two decades.

The conference will address the current phase of profound technological transformation that coincides with the end of firsthand survivor testimony of the Nazi era. This shift poses complex strategic and ethical challenges for Holocaust research, education, and remembrance. How should we respond to the fact that survivors can now share their experiences in person only in exceptional cases? What significance do videotaped testimonies hold in this context? And how should we assess new digital formats, such as interactive testimonies that simulate dialogic encounters with survivors?

The dynamics of the current AI transformation further intensify these challenges. On the one hand, AI-generated content demands a more precise reflection on authenticity, source criticism, and digital provenance. On the other hand, innovative analytical methods are emerging in the Digital Humanities that enable the automated indexing, exploration and analysis of extensive interview corpora. This allows us to examine themes, narrative structures, and the dynamics of memory culture with a breadth and level of detail that was previously unattainable. However, critical engagement with the epistemological implications of algorithmic processes that model, filter, and weigh survivor testimonies – and thereby shape our perception of memory and history – remains essential.

On December 2–3, 2026, we will bring together approximately 70 participants from a range of disciplines and educational fields. Together, we will reflect on the past twenty years, share insights into current research and educational projects with and about survivor testimonies, and discuss future perspectives for working with digital oral history archives.

We invite proposals for conference contributions on three central topics “Historical Research and Lived Experience”, “Learning with Interviews: Educational Practices in Historical-Political

Education”, “Testimonies and Digital Humanities: Current Projects, Trends, and Perspectives”.

Historical Research and Lived Experience

- The significance of testimonies for research on the Holocaust and National Socialism.
- The potential, challenges, and limits of using interviews as historical sources.
- Perspectives of oral history research in times of increasing authoritarianism, eroding democracy, and social polarization.

Learning with Interviews: Educational Practices in Historical-Political Education

- Current questions in educational practice: What expectations do educators and young people bring to interviews, and what irritations do they provoke? Is skepticism toward working with interviews growing, and how is this being addressed?
- Impact research on historical-political education with survivor testimonies, as well as on changing media habits and reception conditions for audiovisual testimonies.
- Challenges of historical-political education with testimonies in times of increasing right-wing populism and the growing influence of authoritarian ideologies worldwide.
- AI-generated Holocaust images and videos as a challenge for culture of remembrance and educational work.

Testimonies and Digital Humanities: Current Trends and Perspectives

- New research perspectives on testimonies through Digital Humanities methods.
- Close reading versus digitally supported qualitative research approaches: How can computerized research methods allow for qualitative research into large scale corpora without distorting or determining them?
- Ethical and legal challenges in the use of AI technologies.

Additional Information:

The conference will be held in person at Freie Universität Berlin and will consist of 20-minute presentations in English. Catering will be provided during the conference. Contributors without institutional funding may apply for a subsidy.

Submission Guidelines:

Please submit individual or joint abstracts (max. 300 words) and a short bio in German or English by **June 15, 2026**, to vha@ub.fu-berlin.de. You will be notified about the status of your submission by **July 15, 2026**.

Conference Website: <https://www.vha.fu-berlin.de/vha20/index.html>

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