

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT GUIDELINES¹

Purpose: Through this hands-on research project, we will learn and utilize oral history methodology to develop original research projects which analyze the unique experiences of contemporary artists of color.

Selection of your subject

1. Find an artist of color to interview. It would be best if your subject is over 30 years old.
2. Conduct an **autobiographical** interview (look at the entire life history of the subject) or **topological** interview (focus on a specific topic or event in his/her life, for example how the subject's racial identity and culture, gender/sexuality, has impacted her work).

Preparation

1. Read up about racial/ethnic history and the specific topic you wish to explore with the interviewee.
2. Arrange for an interview *early*. Be sure to explain the purpose and importance of your interview, how long the interview will take, your plans to tape the interview, and your willingness to keep the interview anonymous if necessary. Set a time and place convenient for the interviewee. Get a brief chronology of his/her life if possible. (Fill out the **data form**, including a life chronology).
3. Prepare a list of questions to be covered, arranged chronologically and topically (see sample). Make a separate list of questions on a specific topic you wish to explore with the interviewee.
4. Check out your equipment before you go.
5. Consider bringing a small gift.

The interview

1. After you have established rapport with your interviewee, ask permission to tape the interview. Respect his/her sense of privacy.
2. Set up your tape recorder in an unobtrusive place but close enough to record everything said. Test the recorder. During the interview, periodically check to make sure the tape is running normally.
3. Proceed with your questions but be ready to be flexible. Allow for deviations in order to follow the natural flow of the conversation or to follow up on certain responses.
4. Allow the interviewee to dwell on subjects they know well.
5. Jot down notes as you tape, especially names, places and dates mentioned. Ask the interviewee to help you define terms and spell names on tape.
6. Ask to see artwork, family photographs, documents and any writings.
7. Stop if the interviewee gets tired. One and a half hours is usually the maximum for the first session. Set a date for a second interview if necessary. Be sure to inform the interviewee of how the interview will be used. Have him/her sign the **consent** form.

Tips for a good interview

1. An interview is not a dialogue. Let the interviewee tell his/her story. Communicate your interest without speaking. Establish an emotional rapport but maintain a neutral stance.
2. Ask questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer.
3. Ask one question at a time and keep the questions simple and direct. Try to be culturally sensitive in your line of questioning.
4. Avoid using abstract terms or jargon. Instead of "Did you experience sexism?" try "Were you treated differently because you were a girl or woman?"
5. Refer questions concerning dates to concrete events whenever possible. Instead of "Did you buy your first car in 1998 then?" try "Did you buy your first car after the birth of your second child?"
6. Give the interviewee time to think of what s/he wants to add before you go on to the next question. A little bit of silence is okay.
7. If your interviewee strays into non-pertinent subjects, try to pull him back as quickly and gently as possible. A simple "Getting back to..." will usually work.
8. Ask about the negative aspects of a situation in order to provoke an answer but don't overdo it: "Didn't your grandfather go bankrupt during the Depression?"
9. Be cooperative rather than confrontational. Do not challenge accounts you think might be inaccurate. Say you read or heard otherwise and get a response. Check other sources for corroboration of facts later.
10. Try to interview your subject alone.

Post-interview procedure

¹Based on the document "Oral History with an Asian American Woman" by Dr. Judy Yung, UCSC.

1. Review your notes and add details, including the content of the interview, the character of the interview, and off-the-record remarks.
2. Note the date, interviewee, number of files.
3. Do an index summary of the entire interview (see sample) or transcribe the interview, keeping true to the original speech (see sample).
4. Call the interviewee if you have just a few follow-up questions; otherwise prepare follow-up questions for a second interview. Send a thank you letter and a copy of the consent form to the interviewee. Send a copy of the index summary, transcript, or paper if you wish or if s/he requests.

5. Write a 8-10 page research paper (typed, double-spaced) about your subject's life history or some significant topic in his/her life.

- a. Do not merely summarize your subject's life!
- b. Be sure to place your subject's life in a sociohistorical context; i.e., demonstrate how his/her life was affected by historical circumstances as well as the intersection of gender, race, class and sexuality. Strive to present a strong theoretical argument, as in the following examples:
 - 1) "Flo Oy Wong's work and family life supports Evelyn Nakano Glenn's theory that for women of color the struggle against outside oppression takes precedence over struggles within the family."
 - 2) "Kip Fulbeck's films strive to illuminate the complex intersections of racial, gender and sexual identities that mixed-race people face in America today."
- c. You may choose to tell the interviewee's story first and then contextualize or interpret it, or you may integrate the interpretation into the text of the story itself.
- d. Allow the interviewee to speak for herself. Quote from the interview if s/he was particularly descriptive and articulate, and footnote the interview as the source: for example:

Flo Oy Wong, interview with the author, 15 April 2018.
- e. Footnote any sources used in interpreting or verifying details in the subject's life. *Be sure to incorporate at least three scholarly sources in your Works Cited* (they may be from our course readings).
- f. Utilize clear, persuasive and interesting prose. Be sure to write an introductory or appendix note to explain the context and significance of the interview and your role and perspective as interviewer.
- g. Be sure to proofread!

6. Project Due Dates:

April 19th in class: Oral history/research paper prospectus (including a theoretical abstract, working interview questions and bibliography).

May 3rd: Completed data and consent forms, interview files, index summary or transcript, and final paper. **Absolutely no late papers will be accepted** so plan accordingly.

History of U.S People of Color
Spring 2018
Dr. Melinda de Jesús

Interview Data Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: home _____ work _____

Occupation: current _____

past: _____

Birthplace: _____ Date: _____

Schooling: _____

Year of immigration or generation: _____

Chronology/Notes:

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Consent Form

I agree to allow information from this interview to be used in a research paper by _____ for his/her "A History of U.S. People of Color" class, Spring 2018. Furthermore I agree to the following use(s) of my interview (please check):

Inclusion of my interview in future archive of student projects about artists of color.

Use my true identity.

Do not use my true identity.

Other stipulations:

Print name: _____
(interviewee)

Sign name: _____ Date: _____
(interviewee)

Agreed: _____ Date: _____
(interviewer's signature)

Sample Interview Questions

Where and when were you born?

What do your parents do? How would you describe their class/educational status?

What values and lessons did you learn from your parents?

What was your childhood like?

Where did you go to school?

Tell me about your educational background and employment.

Most immigrants speak of coming to the US to fulfill the American Dream--is that why/how your family came to the US? What made the US so attractive to them?

Has your family "made it" in the US?

What values/lessons did you learn from your parents?

How do you identify yourself--Filipino? American? Filipino American? Why?

Is it important for you to practice Filipino cultural values in your home? To instill them in your children?

How do you do this?

What are your memories of/how did this event affect your life and work: the Civil Rights movement, AIM, the Chicano movement, the Asian American movement, the Third World Student Strikes, Movement for Black Lives, Trump's election, Parkland?

Tell me about your arts training.

Tell me about your work today.

How does culture/heritage/identity impact your work?

Does Filipino American history play a role in your art?

Is there a Filipino American aesthetic? Describe it.

Do you consider yourself an artist of color? Why or why not?

What are the most pressing issues facing artists today?

What advice would you give to a young artist today?