

## **HILD 7B - Winter 2018**

### **FINAL PAPER - ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

The purpose of this final paper is to give you the opportunity to delve deeply into a person's life through an oral history interview, and to situate the person's life within the broad contours of Asian American history.

#### **What is an oral history?**

Oral history is a primary source document based on a face-to-face, open-ended recorded interview with an individual. The goal of an oral history interview is to document an individual's own life experiences, memories of an event or of another person.

#### **Who should you interview?**

There are two ways to approach the selection of your interviewee. You may start with a research question. What theme(s) or topic(s) are you interested in exploring more in depth? Figuring out your research question first will help you narrow down your pool of potential interviewees. OR, you may already know who you want to interview. This could be family member, friend, acquaintance, teacher, etc. Remember the person need not identify as an Asian American. Whoever you choose, you must be able to demonstrate how the person's life intersects with the course of Asian American history as presented in the readings and lectures.

To successfully complete this assignment, you must:

- 1) Choose a person to interview and secure permission from the interviewee by **January 30**.
- 2) Before you conduct the interview, you should have a list of questions and/or topics that you would like to cover in the interview.
- 3) Conduct the interview sometime **between week 3 and week 6**. Recording the interview is highly recommended. As soon as you have completed the interview, it is also highly recommended that you jot down notes immediately, while the interview is still fresh in your mind. These notes should help you brainstorm which major themes to highlight in your paper. They should also help you in coming up with your overall argument for the paper.
- 4) Start writing your paper early. I recommend you start your paper no later than week 7—and earlier if possible. Good writing takes time, it doesn't happen overnight. As you write your paper, stay focused on developing and supporting your argument. At least half of your paper should be devoted to discussing the broader history with specific examples from lectures and readings. Be sure to relate them clearly and explicitly to the person's life experiences. You are not expected to research sources beyond the interviewee and the class readings and lectures. Your paper is due **March 15**.

### **General advice for conducting the interview:**

- **Be a good listener.** Don't approach it simply as asking and getting answers to your list of questions. Remember, the beauty of oral history is that it can capture the unexpected. If the interview takes a different direction, follow it, don't simply go to the next topic of your outline. Ask follow-up questions.
- **Be patient.** Don't jump in to ask another question if the interviewee pauses. Give it time. S/he may be collecting their thoughts, and search for the memory. Don't interrupt or change the topic until you are sure s/he is finished.
- **Be polite, but be searching.** For example if something seems to fly in the face of what you know about a period/an event, inquire more deeply to understand why your interviewee's experience doesn't seem to fit, or why there are internal contradictions in their narrative.
- **Respect your interviewee's wishes.** If they ask you to turn off the tape recorder, you must comply. If they tell you something off the record and you think it is important to have on the record, try to negotiate with them. But remember that you should never reveal anything told to you in confidence.
- **Watch for non-verbal cues.** You should keep track of non-verbal behavior that might help you in your analysis. For example, if the interviewee seems to become particularly nervous, or if they laugh, sigh, or seem distracted at specific points in the interview, you might want to take this into consideration in your analysis.