

Oral History Project
Ethnic Studies Department
Prof. James Sobredo

Oral History Interview Questions: a Guide

This is a "guide" to your oral history interview. Feel free to add or subtract more questions when you believe it necessary. Make sure you take advantage of asking "follow-up" and "open-ended" questions when the answer the interviewee gives is interesting and you believe it needs to be examined further.

Intro: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this Oral History project. I want to remind you that this may be published as part of the Oral History Archives Project for Dr. James Sobredo in my Ethnic Studies class at California State University, Sacramento, and I need your permission to publish this transcript in part or in its entirety.

Part I: Basic Biographical Data

Please state your full name and please spell your full name

Where were you born?

When were you born?

What is your current occupation?

What is your educational background?

Please tell me the full names of your parents.

What did they do for a living?

What was their educational background?

How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Where are they living and what do they do?

What was it like growing up?

If he or she is an immigrant, ask the interviewee to describe life in their country of origin.

If they were born in the US, ask what their neighborhood was like. How did they get along with other non-Asians?

Part II: Migration and Settlement

Why did they come to America?

How did they come to America? (That is, who sponsored them for immigration?)

Who made the decision to immigrate?

How was the decision made?

How long did the decision take? (Note: political refugees must make the decision to immigrate in a much shorter time, often in a few minutes, hours, or a day.)

By what means did they immigrate to America? (Via airplane or across Canada or Mexico?)

Who provided the money for the transportation?

Did they travel together as a family or separately?

How was the health of everyone? Was anyone pregnant during the journey?

Where did they arrive in America?

Who greeted them when they arrived? Was it a relative or a friend or an agency representative?

Where did they go and live once they arrived?

What were their financial resources like when they arrived?

Did they immediately find housing to rent or buy?

What was their neighborhood like?
How did they get along with their neighbors and the community?
How long did they stay in their first home?

Did they find a job immediately? Was there a job waiting for them?
Who helped them find a job?
Did they like their job? What were their working conditions like?
What happened to the rest of their families?
Do they live close to other family members?

Part III: Race/Ethnic relations, Identity, and the Future

Of what ethnicity are their friends?
How did they get along with white people?
Did they experience any racial discrimination? (If yes, please describe.)
How did they get along with other ethnic groups, e.g., African Americans, Mexican Americans?
How did they get along with other Asian Americans?

What kinds of social or professional organizations do they belong to?
What kinds of traditions and practices did they keep?
Why do they continue to practice these traditions and customs?
Which did they decide to change or stop practicing?
What do they see as their "identity"?
For example, do they see themselves as Asian Americans, as Vietnamese Americans, as simply Vietnamese or as Americans?
How would they feel if their children married outside their ethnic group?
What kinds of traditions did they pass on or would like to pass on to their children?
Which traditions do their children practice?

What do they see as their "place" in America?
What are their feelings about America?
How did these feelings change from when they arrived in America?
How did these feelings change from when they first arrived in the US?

What was the most important and meaningful event or experience in their life?
What was the happiest moment in their life?
What are their dreams and visions for their future?

Is there anything they would like to add to the interview?

Thank you for participating in this oral history project.

