

Oral History Paper Possible Questions

Interview

In the beginning of your interview, get basic information such as name, date of birth, length of time in U.S., generations of family in the U.S., year of immigration, family's homeland, immigration status category (family reunification, professional, refugee, businessperson), and employment.

- A. Avoid "dead-end" questions that will end with "yes" or "no"; strive for open-ended questions
- B. Ask follow-up questions which require your interviewee to be more descriptive or analytical, such as "Tell me more" and "Describe what it was like" and "So why did this happen.." etc.
- C. Be creative with your questions – there are no "bad" or "dumb" questions in oral history

Sample questions:

A. How do you identify yourself? African American? Black? Mixed Race? Did this identification change over time? Is your cultural identity important to you? Why?

1. What is "race" to you? Do you think race is important in today's world? If yes, why? If not, why not?

B. Have you always lived in the same area you do today? How do you feel that has shaped your identity as an African American/ Black person?

C. What did/do your grandparents and parents do for a living? Did they grow up in the city or the country? Were they rich, middle class, or poor? How much education did you/your family have? What kinds of gender roles did your parents promote? How have these shaped your identity as an African American/ Black person?

D. Was there anything you felt you couldn't do because of your race and/or identity? Have you ever experienced racism and how did you react? How have those events affected your life?

E. Why did you choose to settle in the city in which you now live? What job do you have, and is it the job you dreamed of? Did you have difficulties getting a job because of your race?

F. Do you have any children? If no, would you like to have children? Why or why not? What will you tell your children about the concept of race? What will you tell them about being an African American or Black person living in the U.S.?

G. What is the role of religion in your life? What kind of community involvement do you engage in? Has your overall experience been positive?

H. What do you know about the book *Roots* and its author Alex Haley?

1. At this point, feel free to engage in a discussion about the book and author or give some background about each to familiarize your interviewee.

I. What are your thoughts about the idea of "mental slavery"? (You may have to explain this concept).

1. Do you think there are people who are mentally enslaved?

J. What are your thoughts about the state of African Americans/ Black people today and in the future?

1. What is one word that sums up your thoughts on African Americans/Black people?