

HIS 3308: War and Society in the 20th Century

Spring 2019

ORAL HISTORY LAB

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Over the course of the semester, we will study oral history as a tool for recording and understanding the experiences of wartime. Each Thursday, we will meet for ‘Oral History Lab,’ where we will learn about and practice the methods of oral history. We will learn how to prepare and conduct interviews, and how to operate technologies such as recording and transcription equipment. We will also learn to see oral interviews as a collaborative relationship between interviewer and interviewee. We will also discuss the legal and ethical issues tied to interviewing human subjects as well as the impact of memory on oral histories.

Attendance to Oral History Lab is mandatory, and counts toward the Attendance/Participation grade listed above.

The Oral History Project

As part of this training, you will complete a Group Oral History Project. This project will culminate with students conducting and analyzing an oral interview with a Miami resident who has experienced conflict. This project will require both individual and collective work in groups.

To spread the burden of the project across the semester, the Group Oral History project will involve several smaller assignments over the course of the semester, detailed below. The weight of these assignments breaks down as follows:

Pre-Interview Materials	10%
Recorded Oral Interview and Written Evaluation	25%
Final Presentation of Research	5%
Total	40% (of your Final Grade)

These various assignments will be submitted in rough draft throughout the semester on the due dates listed above, and then again as part of a final portfolio containing all the materials from your project.

Pre-Interview Materials (10%). These pre-interview materials will consist of three separate documents, written collectively as a group:

- a) A 3-page description of your research question and the historical context needed to understand its significance
- b) A set of ten to fifteen questions you intend to ask during your oral interview

- c) A consent form that your interview subject will sign

Recorded Oral Interview and Written Evaluation (25%). The heart of the oral history project is the oral interview itself, as well as your analysis of it. As a group, you will find an interviewee, conduct one or more interviews that add up to at least an hour in length, and write an evaluation. All members of each group should be present for the oral interview, and all members must contribute to the final written document. Transcribing the interview is not required, but you must draw substantively on the interview in writing your evaluation.

The written evaluation will be 10-15 pages in length, and include the following elements:

- a) A 1-page information sheet: the title of your project, the narrator's name (or pseudonym, if preferred), the date and place of the interview, the names of the interviewers, and some brief contextual information about the interview
- b) An analysis of your research question that critically assesses your interview
- c) A reflection on the interview experience and the process of conducting an oral history
- d) Paperwork including the basic factual information and metadata about your interview as well as the consent and copyright forms
- e) A digital copy of your interview and your interviewee's signed consent form.

Final Presentation of Research (5%). During the final week of class, each group will give a 20-minute presentation on their research question, the interview process, and any insights they gained.

Finding and Contacting an Interview Subject

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For your oral history project in this class, you will need to find someone to interview. For a typical long-term oral history project, this would involve both rigorous networking to locate potential subjects and a careful effort to select and vet subjects who fit the criteria of your project. For the purposes of this class, however, our requirements are a bit looser.

Choosing your subject

Being an oral historian is a bit like being a detective. To make contacts, you need network – word-of-mouth referrals often yield more reliable contacts than cold-calls or blind emails. Sometimes, organizations offer a good starting point, since they can contact their members to announce your project. You can also look to your family and friends: do you know anyone whose experiences make them relevant?

For this class, your interviewee must be someone who has directly experienced war in some capacity, broadly defined. That means you can interview a range of relevant subjects: veterans, diplomats or other civil servants, individuals who witnessed armed conflicts in any capacity, Holocaust survivors, etc.

- ✓ You should begin looking for interview subjects now, with the aim of having a firm commitment by Week 6.
- ✓ Once you have located a potential interviewee, please confirm your choice with Dr. Peterson.

Contacting your subject

When you are ready to contact your potential interview subject, it is best to get in touch with them first through a phone call or an email.

- ✓ In your initial contact, you should briefly explain who you are and what the interview is for (*i.e. you are undergraduates at FIU, you are taking a course on War and Society, and as part of that course you are collecting oral histories of war*).
- ✓ Do not hesitate to reach out through acquaintances in common, such as friends of family members. Often, contacting interviewees through someone trusted can help build trust between you and your interview subject.
- ✓ Most important: be clear about your timeline, without being pushy. We want to make sure our interview subjects agree to participate with a clear sense of the schedule, but without feeling coerced to do so.

You should not expect a firm commitment the first time you get in touch, and you may want to contact several potential interview subjects in case one declines. Give your potential subjects a few days to decide if they would like to interview, particularly if they seem hesitant.

Setting up a Meeting

Once your subject has agreed to be interviewed, you may want to set up an initial meeting to build familiarity and introduce yourself more fully to your subject.

- ✓ This interview can take place in person or over the phone. However, face-to-face meetings usually work better because it is easier to establish personal rapport in-person.
- ✓ In this meeting, you should explain yourself and your project in a bit more detail, but not ask questions – save those for the recorded interview!

After that, you are ready to schedule a time for the actual interview.

- ✓ Aim for Weeks 9-12 of the semester, to give us time to learn the methodology
- ✓ Try to schedule the interview at your subject's convenience. This can present challenges if your subject lives farther afield (in, say, Broward County), or if they can only meet during the times that your team members are in class. Try to be as accommodating as possible, but also be transparent about the limits of your own schedule.
- ✓ Set up a time for the interview that works for all members of your group. Even though this is a group project, all students must participate in the actual interview. If you have an irresolvable scheduling problem, ask if you can schedule a second follow-up interview with your subject, or talk to Dr. Peterson
- ✓ When you schedule the interview, set a time and location. If the interview will take place at your subject's home, remember that you are a guest. You should act accordingly. If the interview is in public, try to choose a quiet location. Bustling coffee shops might put everyone at ease, but it may be harder to hear the recording later.

Oral History Project Guide 2
Writing Interview Questions
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To prepare for conducting an oral interview, it is important to compose a list of questions you would like to ask – both to help guide you during the interview, and to help you think through *what it actually is you want to learn* from the interview. In writing interview questions, however, it is important to remember that the questions you bring to an interview should only serve as a guide to get the interview started.

During the interview, you may drift onto a tangent that yields much more important or interesting information, and you want to make sure you give your narrator enough freedom to speak that these stories can emerge. Likewise, the actual questions you pose in the interview will need to be interactive – that is to say, they should build upon earlier questions you ask, react to things your narrator says, and push your narrator to explain unclear points or provide more detail.

General principles for writing interview questions

- ✓ *Use broad, open-ended questions* (e.g. “Please tell me about your life during the war”). These questions allow your narrator lots of room to talk about what they think is important, using their own logic. You can pick up on things they say to ask more focused or detailed follow-up questions
- ✓ *Start with the easy stuff*. Don’t dive right into emotionally complicated or detailed questions. Begin by asking general biographical or personal questions. A narrator’s broader life experiences may be important for understanding the limited subject you’re interested in.
- ✓ *Avoid judgmental language*. In phrasing your questions, think about the words you use. Asking “How do you feel about Cubans moving into this neighborhood?” sends a very different message than asking “How do you feel about Cubans invading this neighborhood?”
- ✓ *Avoid too specific of questions*. Details like exact dates and times or the number of books on a bookshelf are really hard to remember. You can still get at this information with a broader framing: “do you remember about what year this was?”
- ✓ *Avoid close-ended questions*. Yes or No questions can stifle the conversation by giving the narrator limited choices in answering.
- ✓ *Group related questions topically*. If you have a larger question you want answered, it sometimes helps to ask several questions about the topic in different ways. Narrators respond differently when questions are phrased differently, and you may get a more complete answer by asking a similar question several different ways.

- ✓ *Memorize your questions.* You don't have to have them rote-memorized, but it helps to have them in your head. Your interview will go on many tangents, and you will necessarily have to ask follow-up or clarifying questions that lead you away from your written guide. Keeping your research questions in your head can help you stay on track.
- ✓ *Be flexible.* Your narrator may not want to discuss a certain topic, and therefore might shut down any questions related to it. Build in a plan B and C so that you can still learn something valuable from the interview. Likewise, your narrator may tell you something interesting but wholly unexpected that you may want to pursue further. Keep yourself open to these possibilities.

Sample Interview Questions for a U.S. Armed Services Veteran

Biographical Information

Where were you born? Where did you grow up?

What was your family like? What did your parents do?

Where did you go to school?

What were your experiences there?

Are/were you married? Do you have children?

What was your profession?

Going to War

When did you join the military? Why did you choose to enlist to fight in Afghanistan?

How did you train? Where was your training?

What was your job in the military?

Where were you deployed, and when?

Did you know anything about Afghanistan before you arrived there?

What were your first impressions when you arrived – sights, sounds, smells?

During the War

Tell me about your time in Iraq/Afghanistan. Are there any memories that stand out?

Can you recount for me what an average day looked like while you were deployed?

Who was with you during your service?

What was your unit like? Were they funny? Were they serious?

Lots of units seem to develop unique cultures in the field. Did your unit do anything quirky?

Were there things that soldiers complained about? Were there things you looked forward to?

Were there certain types of activities you preferred to do while you were deployed? Why?

Did you interact with anyone outside your unit while you were there?

What were the people like in X Province?

How did you feel about the politics around the war at home during the war?

Did you feel that you were prepared for what you experienced? What sorts of skills did you have to develop on the spot?

Who do you remember most from your time in X Province and why?

What was satisfying about what you did in __? What was difficult?

Do you feel like you learned any life lessons from your experiences? Why or why not?

Family Life and Coming Home

Where was your family/children/spouse during the war? What did they do?

How did your family feel about the war? About you being away?

How did you keep in contact with your family?

How was your family life affected by being deployed?

When did you come home from war?

What was the journey coming home like?

What expectations did you have in coming home? Was it different than you expected?

What was the first thing you did when you arrived home?

How long did it take you to readjust?

What seemed different when you got back?

Oral History Project Guide 3
Pre-Interview Checklist

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This checklist lays out the deadlines and requirements for preparing the materials you will need to successfully complete your oral interview. You will submit rough drafts of these ‘Pre-Interview Materials,’ and the final draft will be worth 10% of your final grade in the course.

The **Pre-Interview Materials** will consist of two written documents and two forms, which you will create collectively in your oral history groups:

- A 3-page description of your research question
- A set of 10-15 research questions you intend to ask during your interview
- A consent form (to be signed during the interview)
- An Oral History Deed of Gift form (to be signed during the interview)

The **due-dates** are as follows:

- 10/4** A brief description of your group’s research question due
- 10/18** A rough draft of your group’s interview questions due
- 11/1** Final draft of all Pre-Interview materials due

The Research Question

Your research question will guide and focus your interview. It should be neither too broad (*what was ‘wartime’ like?*) nor too narrow (*what was the attitude of troops from December 1st-10th, 1944*), and should focus on answering a question, rather than just on a topic. Most importantly, your research question should focus on something that interests you!

The thematic approaches we’ve taken all semester can be a good starting point for thinking about your own research question. What kinds of questions have various authors asked about motives, propaganda, masculinity, race, the home front, homecoming, etc.? You should have a particular line of questioning in mind to guide you *and* your narrator – after all, they probably have lots of memories to share.

The written document you turn in should include three components:

- a) **Research question:** The ‘big picture’ question you want answered.
- b) **Methodology:** An explanation of what drew you to this big question and how you hope to approach answering it in your interview.
- c) **Background:** A short description of the historical context of the conflict or events needed to understand your narrator’s story.

This third component will require a bit of outside reading, either on your own or with recommendations from the professor. This reading does not have to be extensive – only as much or as little as you feel necessary to be able to carry out your interview effectively. You should, however, draw on academic rather than popular sources (i.e. not just Wikipedia), and **cite those sources in your document**.

When writing your Research Question and Interview Questions, I highly recommend you do so by creating a **Google Doc**. That way your group members can collaboratively edit the document in real time and access it remotely. *If you do work through a Google Doc, consider sharing access with me so that I can offer feedback and see how your project is developing.*

The rough-draft version of your interview question should focus mostly on the first two elements. The final draft should incorporate more extensive background material as well.

The Interview Questions

These questions will serve as a jumping-off point or guide during your interview. You can (and should) ask more general biographical questions in your interview, but these 10 to 15 questions should reflect your specific interests tied to your research question above, and build on one another.

For examples of research questions, see *Guide 2*. You may feel free to use these questions as a basis for your own, but your questions must also demonstrate some original thinking.

The Consent Form

The consent form ensures that narrators fully understand why they are being interviewed, and that they willingly agree to be interviewed. The form is based on a template provided by FIU, and should not be modified. This form must be signed and dated at the end of your interview. *You can find this form on Canvas.*

The Deed of Gift

This document grants FIU the rights of ownership to the recorded interview you produce (your narrator retains the right to use the interview in any way they see fit). This document does not need to be modified in any way; it just needs to be filled out, signed, and dated by your group members and your narrator at the interview. *The Deed of Gift form can be found on Canvas.*

Oral History Project Guide 4

Interview Checklist

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Oral history interviews are complicated affairs, and require a lot of planning. This checklist is designed to help walk you through the process from start to finish.

Interviews must be **right around one hour in length**, and ideally ought to be **completed by November 15th** to give you time to reflect and analyze the interview before writing your final report.

Before your interview, make sure you:

- Set up a short preliminary meeting with your narrator to explain the project
- Arrange a clear interview time and location
- Coordinate your transportation
- Strategize as a group how you will conduct the interview

When you head to your interview, don't forget to bring:

- Directions to your interview location
- Your recording equipment. Digital recorders and/or camcorders can be checked out from the Digital Scholars Studio in GL 540 or from Media Equipment Services in GL 177. Arrange check-out in advance via email with the DSS at dscholar@fiu.edu, or by phone with the MES at (305) 348-2815.
- Your interview questions, a notepad, and a pen
- 2 copies of the consent form (one to sign, and one to leave with the narrator)
- 2 copies of the Oral History Deed of Gift form

To begin the interview:

1. Arrive on time. Nothing throws off the mood of an interview like a frantic researcher scrambling to set up the recorder after having frantically searched for the correct address.
2. Explain the project again in brief and reassure your narrator that you won't be offended if they don't want to answer a particular question.
3. Cut the tension by chatting informally and introducing yourselves for ten minutes or so before you begin recording.
4. Turn on the recording device (!) check if it is recording (!) and ask for oral consent.
5. Begin by stating the name or pseudonym of the narrator, the names of the interviewers, the location of the interview, and the date. If you have a personal

- relationship with the narrator, state this as well (this will be important to know for future researchers using the interview).
6. Start with easy biographical questions: this personal context is important and can help put everyone at ease.

For detailed advice on **interviewing techniques and strategies**, see the course readings for week 8:

Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), “Interviewing Techniques and Strategies,” pages 103-122.

Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack, “Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and analyses,” in Perks Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader*, 4th ed., pages 179-192.

To end the interview:

7. Ask a few last questions that indicate you will be winding the interview down, such as “*Is there anything else you would like to add?*” or “*Is there anything else that you feel it is important for us to know?*”
8. If your narrator keeps talking or thinks of something else to add, it’s OK to turn the recorder back on.
9. Ask if the interviewer would like to do another interview, or if they have friends who might like to be interviewed. It is often easier to ask more detailed questions or expand your network of contacts once trust has been established during an interview.
10. Thank your narrator.
11. Give your narrator a copy of the consent form and deed of gift form and ask them to sign. Explain what these forms are for: the consent form protects your interviewer by ensuring that they willingly agreed to be interviewed, and the deed of gift form allows us to use their interview in the future. Explain that they can opt to restrict access or remain anonymous, if they prefer.

After the Interview:

- In the hours following the interview, each group member should reflect on what they learned. Write out notes on any details that struck you as important or confusing before you forget. Think about times when the narrator seemed guarded, or deflected your question. You will need this information for your report and for the interviewers’ comments you will deposit in the archive alongside your interview.

- Take some time to reflect on the process as well. What did your group do well – or not so well – in conducting the interview? What difficulties did you encounter? What body language or non-verbal communication did you notice? What ‘tips’ might you give yourself to improve the process next time?
- In the days following the interview, follow up with your narrator. Thank them with a handwritten note or phone call and ask them how they would like to receive a copy of their interview (i.e. on a DVD in the mail, as a digital file via email, etc.). Please convey this information to Dr. Peterson.

Congrats! You’ve just recorded your first oral history!

Oral History Project Guide 5
Oral History Portfolio Checklist
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This checklist lays out the guidelines for the final project that you will submit following your Oral History interview: the **Oral History Portfolio**. This assignment is worth 25% of your final grade in this class.

The Oral History Portfolio will consist of several documents that you will write as a group, as well as your recorded interview and the required archival paperwork. **All pieces listed below** must be submitted in order to receive credit for the assignment:

The Interview

- A copy of your recorded interview, formatted as a universally-accessible media file and copied onto the USB thumb drive that I will provide you.

The Paperwork

- The consent form, signed by you and your narrator.
- The Oral History Deed of Gift form, signed by you and your narrator.
- The Information Sheet for the Archive [see template below].
- An Audio File Index [see sample below].

The Final Report (10-15 pages in length)

- A cover sheet with your names, the name/ pseudonym of your narrator, and the date of the interview.
- An analysis of the research question (5-7 pages).
- A reflection on the interview experience (5-7 pages).

Additional Materials

- Each student should submit a 1-page reflection on working in a group, submitted separately from the project to Dr. Peterson (these do not count toward the 10-15 pages).
- Please include a final copy of your Pre-Interview Materials in the Portfolio.

These materials should not be stapled, but bound neatly in a report cover. The Portfolio is **due in my mailbox in DM 392 by 5:00pm Monday 12/9**. You must also submit an **electronic copy of your report** through the Canvas Drop-box.

The Interview

You will need to submit a copy of your interview recording to be deposited in the archives. It is best to submit the file in the uncompressed digital format straight from your recording device, but the following file formats are also acceptable: *.wmv*, *.mp4*, *.avi*, *.mpeg*. Please do not submit files in any Apple format, since these files are only accessible through Apple's proprietary software.

The Paperwork

Alongside your recording, you will also need to submit several pieces of paperwork. The **Consent Form** and **Release Form** are crucial legal documents that allow us to make the oral histories you produce part of the public historical record, and must be submitted with the interview.

The **Information Sheet** and **Audio File Index** are what we call 'metadata,' or data about the data the interview that you have produced. This metadata will help us to build our online archive, and will be made publicly available alongside the interview recordings themselves. The Information Sheet provides basic data about the interview – who was interviewed, when, by whom, where it took place, etc. The Audio File Index gives a brief set of time-points throughout the interview so that users can skip ahead to relevant sections. In a sense, it's the table of contents for the interview. Your Audio File Index does not need to be super detailed, but it should list the starting point of each major topic discussed during the interview.

Attached to this document, you will find a template for the Information Sheet and a sample Audio File Index from my own research.

The Final Report

The Final Report is your opportunity to reflect on your experience conducting your oral interview. What did you learn about your research question, about your narrator, and about yourself as an interviewer?

This report should contain two main sections: an **analysis of your research question**, and a **reflection on the interview experience**. Both sections should be 5 to 7 pages in length, and should be formatted in double-spaced, 12-pt. Times New Roman font.

The **analysis of your research question** should critically assess your interview. You should focus on analyzing the interview you produced as a *source*: how did the interview shed light on your research question? How did it not? How might the interview be useful for other historians working on your topic?

As part of this analysis, you should think critically about your narrator: what issues did they emphasize or omit? How closely did they recount events? Did their stories seem natural, or rehearsed? What additional insights might we be able to get by 'reading between the lines' of what the narrator said – or didn't say? The point of this section is to think critically about what we can learn from the interview now that it exists as a source.

The **reflection on the interview experience**, by contrast, should focus on *your process* of conducting the oral interview. What was your strategy (methodology) for answering your research question going into the interview? Did it work out? Was your narrator interested in talking about the same things as you were, and how did that impact the way that you asked questions in the interview? What problems did you encounter during the process of planning and conducting the interview, and how did you deal with them? Think about what your group did well, and what you could improve in the future.

The point of this section is to think about the practical and methodological lessons you learned from your experience.

In addition to these two sections, each member of the group should **separately submit a 1-page reflection** on their experiences working in a group. You should assess the dynamics of the group and your own contributions to the project.

Grading

I will grade your interview and final report as a cohesive whole. I will not assign grades for the paperwork submitted along with the interview, but I would encourage you to put an earnest effort into producing a high-quality Information Sheet and Audio File Index, since the general public will be able to see your work.

In assessing your interview and final report, I will look for the following things:

Professionalism. Did you make an earnest effort to incorporate the practices discussed throughout the semester into your interview? Did you follow the professional standards of the discipline?

Project Design. Did you approach your interview with a clear research question, and did the questions you asked allow you to effectively address that question?

Analytic Thinking. How effectively did you use your interview to assess your research question? Did you think critically about your narrator and read between the lines in order to draw insights out of the interview? How well did you reflect on your own strengths and weaknesses as interviewers?

Quality. Did you produce an interview and supplemental documents that meet the archival standards?

Information Sheet for [Name of Narrator]

Name of Narrator: *If using a pseudonym, please indicate the fact in parentheses.*

Interviewers:

Others Present: *Were other people like the narrator's family members present during the interview?*

Date of Interview:

Place:

Length of Interview:

Keywords: *Five or Six keywords that will help researchers find your interview. Try to pick terms that connect to the key themes in the interview: 'Vietnam War,' 'Battle of Fallujah,' etc.*

Context for the Interview: *Did one of you group members know the narrator beforehand? In what circumstances did the interview take place? (i.e. as part of this class). Include any information you think might be relevant for other historians who might use this oral history as a source later.*

General Description: *This section should do two things. First, it should give a brief biography (2-3 sentences) of your narrator. And second, it should give a broad overview of what was discussed in the interview. This summary should be brief enough to fit into one page, but detailed enough to convey every topic covered in the interview. Think about it this way: this is the description that later historians will read to decide whether or not the interview is relevant to what they are researching. What will they need to know?*

Audio File Index

Narrator: Captain Pasqual de Rocque* Date: May 8, 2013
Interviewer: Terrence Peterson

<i>Narrator</i>	<i>Hour:minutes:seconds</i>	<i>Topic Summary</i>
PdR	00:00:30	Permission to record
PdR	00:01:05	Served in the Aurès region of Algeria. Headed a unit of Moroccan auxiliaries, then Algerian auxiliaries. Had little confidence in French soldiers.
PdR	00:05:17	Never believed in 'French Algeria,' and saw 13 May 1958 as the only real moment when French and Algerians found a common identity. Argues that de Gaulle fooled everyone by hiding his true intentions.
PdR	00:09:55	After returning from Algeria, worked with the Forestry and Water Service in France, where he employed former Algerian auxiliaries. Took a trip to Algeria to help develop water infrastructure.
PdR	00:17:03	Discusses place of Muslim women in Algerian society.
PdR	00:19:15	Begins to discuss SAT-FMA in Paris. Members drawn from auxiliaries in Algeria.
PdR	00:22:07	SAT-FMA created by Maurice Papon. Describes personal friendship with Papon.
PdR	00:26:30	SAT-FMA used to combat FLN inside France
PdR	00:27:44	Description of SAT-FMA daily duties
PdR	00:35:11	Anecdote: Algerian auxiliary who tried to submit paperwork to change his race.

* pseudonym