

**LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEWS:  
SAMPLE QUESTIONS**

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**Initial Interview Questions:**

**This biographical interview should provide the basic framework for your conversations with each respondent interviewed. In this initial interview, respondents narrate the story of their lives, emphasizing the events and experiences which seem most important and meaningful to them. This interview will allow you to discover the respondent's paths of association regarding life events and the setting, timing, sequence, and duration of these events. It will enable you to obtain unanticipated information as well as answers to many of the questions which interest you without imposing your own perspective. It will help you formulate subsequent questions within the respondent's own frame of reference.**

**Although this interview does not follow a rigid schedule of questions, it should not be unstructured. It should proceed in rough chronological order, though respondents may not necessarily arrange their memories with dates as benchmarks. You should guide the course of the conversation by asking for elaboration or clarification, bringing up topics which the respondent has not thought to mention and asking exploratory questions in order to discover the respondent's areas of special knowledge.**

Did you know your grandparents? What did they do? Establish any background the respondent might have about the origins of their family.

Where was your first home place? Where had your parents come from?

When did you come here? Why? With whom? What neighborhood/community did you live in at first?

How many people lived in your home? Did you, your parents, and your siblings all live together? Did anyone besides immediate family live with you? Did relatives live nearby? How often did your household interact with relatives or close friends?

Before you left home, did your family change residence? Why, where to, and how often?

Where did you attend school? For how long? (Ask for brothers and sisters.)

Did your family attend church / temple? Which church / temple and where?

Did you have any jobs or particular responsibilities as a child?

When did you leave home? Why?

What was your first job? How long did you stay at this work? What other jobs have you held? For how long? When did you retire?

View of working life; did you enjoy working?

Did you marry? How did you meet your spouse? What jobs did he/she do? Have you married more than once?

How often have you moved since you left home? How long did you stay in each place?

Are your parents still alive? How long ago did your parents pass away? Who takes/took care of them in their old age?

What were things like for your family during the Depression? How did the Depression affect your community?

Who made most of the decisions in your family when you were a child – father, mother, grandparent? In your own family?

Did both of your parents work outside the home? What did they like to do best when they were not working?

Were you closer to your father or mother? Which one are you most like?

Did you or anyone else from your family go to fight in WWI or WWII? How did this affect the individual? The family?

What is most important to people in this community? How has the community changed within your lifetime as far as its physical appearance is concerned? Its population? The schools? Work available? Wages? Integration of classes, races?

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### **Detailed Life History Questions: Family History**

**This more detailed list of life history questions focuses on family genealogy, family rituals and relationships, and household routines.**

#### **Family Background & Immigration:**

Were you, your parents, or grandparents born outside of the U.S.? If yes, where were you / they born and how long did they live there?

When and why did your family decide to move to the United States?

Do you remember hearing family members describe what life was like in their homeland? What stories did they tell?

Do you have old family photographs, letters, antiques, or other memorabilia from your homeland? What special memories or stories are associated with them? How did you acquire them?

Do you remember family stories about the frustrations and difficulties of adjusting to life in the United States? Were there family stories about the benefits of life in the United States?

If your family members did not speak English before arriving in the United States, when / how did they learn to speak English?

What language(s) did your family members speak in their homeland? Do you or your family members still speak in that language? When do you use the language of your homeland and when do you use English? What determines which language you use?

Do your family's children and / or grandchildren who were born in the U.S. speak the homeland's language? Why or why not?

Do you feel that you or your family members have ever been discriminated against because you were from another country? How did you respond?

Do you still have relatives in your family's homeland? Do you stay in contact with them? In what ways?

Did you or other family members ever make a return visit to your family's homeland? What was the reason for the visit? How long did you stay? What happened during your visit?

### **Household Organization and Domestic Routine:**

What do you remember about your grandparents? Where did they live? Did you see them often? What would you do with them? Did they ever talk to you about their youth? What occupations did they engage in?

What other relatives were you close to besides your immediate family: aunts, uncles, cousins? Did these relatives live with you? Relationships with separated relatives?

Was there any person in your family older than you who you were especially close to? What impact did this person's aging and death have on you?

Who were the members of your household? Any boarders? (Follow up with questions about the role of extended family members within the household.)

What were the relationships between parents and children like when you were growing? Did you want to or not want to repeat these patterns with your own children?

What do you remember about your home? What did it look like? What do you remember about your home's layout, rooms, furnishings, artwork and portraits? Did your home have outbuildings? When you were at home, where did you and your family spend the most time? What were the sleeping arrangements in your home? Did you have indoor plumbing? Was your home owned or rented?

Who were your neighbors? How far away were your neighbors? Did relatives live nearby? Which relatives?

Who took responsibility for various household chores: cleaning, washing, cooking, gardening, sewing, child care (bathing, bedtime, etc.)?

Describe the meals the family took together. Describe your family's diet. What foods were commonly served? What were meal time seating arrangements? What kind of discussions occurred at meal time?

Was religious training important in the home?

What part did religion play in family life? What was a typical Sunday like? Did your family attend church / temple? Describe Mass / Services.

Describe holidays: Christmas, Hanukkah, Thanksgiving, Fourth of July, etc.

What do you recall about weddings, baptisms, funerals, and other family rituals?

Describe your family's most important traditions. Who started these? (Grandparents? Or were they started after their death?) Who enjoyed the ceremonies most?

Describe funerals in your family. Were stories told during the funerals? What were some of them?

What kinds of things would your family do together? Family entertainments?

What family stories, sayings, principles, and codes of conduct stand out in your mind?

Did men and women do things together? Separately?

Did your family ever move? Why? How often? How did this affect you?

What do you remember about the care of babies in your home?

What about care of the elderly? What was done for them? Who did it?

Who took care of you when you were ill? Who generally cared for the sick in your family?

What procedure was followed? What were the effects of disease on your family?

When your parents were both away from home, who cared for the children?

If a relative or friend was laid off from work or if neither parent was working, was there any help from outside sources?

### **Changes in Everyday Technology:**

What sorts of tools/equipment did your grandmothers and mother use to clean the house? How did they wash and iron clothing? Clean the floors and carpets? Clean the oven? Have new household technologies made house cleaning easier for you? Why / how?

How did your grandparents prepare family meals? What foods and appliances/tools did they use? How did your parents prepare meals and what foods and appliances/tools did they use?

Did your family sometimes wear homemade clothing? What sorts of clothes were made at home (hats, scarves, socks, shirts, dresses)? Who made and mended the clothing? What tools did they use?

What kinds of chores did your grandparents and parents do to maintain the yard and garden? What tools / equipment did they use to water and cut the lawn? To collect leaves? To weed and cultivate vegetables and flowers?

Did your family have a telephone? What did it look like and how often was it used? Were children allowed to use it? Did you use it to call long distance?

Do you remember your family's first television set? When and how was it purchased? How did television programs compare to radio programs? Did the family watch television together? What shows did you enjoy the most?

Describe your family's first automobile. What was its make and model? How much did it cost? Where did you travel in your automobile? How well did the car run? When it needed repair, how were repairs made?

What was the longest journey your family ever made? Where did you go and how did you get there (car, train, boat, airplane)? How often did you travel that way?

Does your family have a home computer? When / why did you purchase it? Who uses it and what do they use it for? How did they learn to use it?

### **Parents and Older Relatives (both sides of the family):**

What did your father do? Did he ever talk about his work? Did he like his job? What do you remember doing with him? What did he do around the house?

How about your mother? What kind of work did she do? Did she like her work? Did she ever work for wages outside the home? What did she have to say about this work? Why did she go to work? What did your father, other relatives, children, think about her working?

How did her working or not working affect the children? Your father? Did she ever earn money at home: taking in boarders, selling produce? Did she do things with other women: quilting, church / temple socials, missionary work? What did you like to do with your mother at home?

Were you closer to your mother or father? Which one are you more like?

How were decisions made in your family? Who made daily decisions about housekeeping, budget, etc.? How about other decisions like schooling, moving, occupation, approval of marriage? Who made decisions about discipline? Did any other adults besides your parents participate in decision-making? Do you remember any conflicts over decision-making?

### **Childhood and Adolescence:**

What are some of your earliest childhood memories?

What toys did you play with? Where did you play? Did you have any hobbies?

What games did you play with your siblings and with other children? Did you play with girls and boys? Did you go swimming? Where?

Did you ever “play like” someone?

How important were organized sports to you as a child?

What contract did you have with black/white children?

Did you have a favorite friend or sibling?

Were you expected to act in certain ways around adults? How did you address adults? Whites? Blacks?

How were you disciplined? Were you ever disciplined unfairly? By anyone other than your parents?

What chores were you responsible for when you were a child? An adolescent? What chores were your siblings responsible for? How were the chores distributed? Do you feel that they were divided fairly?

Were you expected to earn money as a child? What jobs did you perform? What did you do with the money you earned?

Did your parents want you or your siblings to follow a certain occupation? What did you want to be when you grew up?

When did your brothers and sisters leave home? Why did they leave? Did you and/or your siblings live at home while you were working? What did you do with your salary?

Do you remember a point at which people stopped treating you as a child? Or when you considered yourself grown up?

### **Adult Life:**

#### **Courtship**

What did boys and girls do together? When did you start dating, courting? Did your parents, preachers, act. set rules for behavior with girls/boys? Did your siblings have to follow the same rules that you did? If not, why not?

#### **Marriage**

When did you marry? How did you meet your spouse? What do you remember about your marriage ceremony? Were you married in a church / temple, courthouse? Did you need approval to marry? From whom?

#### **Single life**

If single, when did you leave your parents’ home? Who did you live with? How did you divide up the household chores in your home? Who were the people most important to you?

#### **Children**

Did you have children? How many? Who delivered them and under what circumstances? Were the births of the children planned? Did you and your wife/husband/partner use any form of birth control? Find out the sequences of childbearing and the total number of pregnancies.

Who took responsibility for child care and discipline in your family? What rules/expectations did you have for your sons and daughters? Were they the same? Why / why not? Did you treat your own children the same or differently than your parents treated you?

How were decisions made about budgeting, housekeeping, child care, etc.?

#### **Work**

Did your spouse work? When? Where? For how long?

For women, how did your husband’s work affect you and your family?

For men, how did your wife's work affect the family? What did you think of her working outside the home? What did others think? What is your opinion of women working outside the home in general?

Were you ever separated or divorced? How old were you when this happened and where were you working?

Was saving money important to you / your family? Why? Did you / your family have a savings plan? Was saving a realistic goal for your family? Why or why not?

### **Changes in Work Place Technology**

When you first started working, what kinds of technology and equipment did you and your co-workers use on a daily basis? How did you learn to use this equipment?

What new technologies have you encountered during your working life? (For example: When did you first work with a fax machine, word processor, computer, the internet and email?) How did you learn to use this equipment? In what ways have these new technologies made your job easier? More difficult?

### **Property**

When did your family first own an automobile? A house? Do you own one today?

What property (land or house) do you own today?

Did you ever inherit any property from your family? Real estate or personal property?

### **Retirement**

What are your plans for retirement? Do you plan to move? What do you plan to do when you retire? Will you have a pension?

If retired, when did you retire? What are you doing? Do you have a pension?

Do you see your children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, etc. often?

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### **Detailed Life History Questions: Community History**

**This selection of the interview questions explores the interaction of the individual with the community.**

#### **Education:**

Did you go to school (elementary, high school, college, graduate school)? Who encouraged / discouraged you? Why?

Where did you go to school as a child? How did you get there? Describe the school building.

How long did you expect to stay in school when you started? Did you want to stay in school longer than you did? How long did you go to school? Why did you leave?

What were the major differences in your education and that of your parents, your children?

Did you learn to read and write in school? At home? When? If not, how has this affected your work? Your life?

What do you remember about your teachers? Were you ever disciplined by your teachers? Was this fair? Did the teachers play favorites? Why? Who were the favored students?

What did you like about school? What didn't you like?

What educational experiences did you have, if any, outside of formal schooling? (Did you ever attend any workers' schools?)

Who set the policies and rules for the school?

Were there any gangs or groups in your school?

Did children of different class backgrounds attend the same schools?

Did you attend school with blacks/whites? Did your children attend integrated schools? What is your opinion of this?

Do you have any regrets about your education? What were the benefits of your education?

**Religion:**

Did your family attend church / temple? Where did they go for services? What can you remember about the church / temple (physical appearance)?

Who from your community belonged to your church /temple?

What did you like about church / temple? What did you dislike?

If you changed churches /temples, why?

Describe a church /temple service, dress, sermons, Sunday School. When did the services meet?

What was the relationship of church / temple leaders to national groups?

Who taught Sunday School?

What roles did men play in the church / temple? What role did women play? Were groups within the church / temple segregated by sex and age?

What were you taught to believe when you were a child? How does that compare to your religious beliefs today?

Does prayer play an important role in your life?

Do you have a personal relationship with God? Describe it.

What are your favorite religious songs?

How important are denominational differences to you?

Have you ever been involved in any type of missionary activity?

How much time did you normally spend in church / temple? What were your primary activities, variations in these?

What were /are your favorite passages from the Bible / Torah?

How did the different members of your family participate in church / temple activities?

Do you remember attending revivals as a child? As an adult? Describe. Do you recall the names of any revivalists who came through town? How did you / most people participate in revivals?

Do you still belong to / worship in your home church / temple?

What do you think of the church's / temple's involvement in fighting / supporting integration? Abortion?

What prohibitions did the church / temple enforce? What types of behavior were frowned upon? Expected? How did your church / temple view unions? Organizing activity?

When were you baptized and under what circumstances? What members of your family were married in the church / temple? Buried in the church / temple?

What are the most important things that you remember about your religious life?

### **Politics:**

Did your parents / you belong to any political organizations? Do you remember attending these meetings with your parents?

Who were the most powerful members of your community? Did these people have both political and economic power?

Do you remember any particular controversy within your community? How was it settled? What were your particular feelings about it?

Who were your town / city council people? Did they change over time?

Have you participated in local politics? How? What were / are the most important issues: transportation, utilities, education, taxes?

What are your most important political beliefs? Do you think that voting is important? Do you or have you voted? Were you ever prevented from voting?

How did you get political news: newspaper, radio, the internet, word of mouth?

Do you remember when women got the vote? Did anyone in your family actively support or oppose suffrage for women? Did wives vote like their husbands?

What influence did local companies have on politics?

Do you remember any political rallies or marches?

### **Neighborhood, Community, Leisure:**

Define your neighborhood or community. Describe your neighborhood's geographic boundaries.

Who lived / lives in your neighborhood? Did you work with them? Have your neighbors changed much over the years? Why, if so, did you move from one neighborhood to another? Have many of your neighbors left? Where did they go? Were there places especially for single people? Married couples?

How many people did you know well in your neighborhood?

Who were your parents' closest friends? Did they do the same work as your parents?

Where were the gathering places in town? Clubs? Recreational or fun places? Where did men / women / blacks / whites go? Were there places especially for single people? Places for married couples?

Were there particular places you liked to spend time as a child and adolescent? As an adult?

Was there a bad part of town? Were you afraid to go there? Describe what it looked like.

Where did your parents do their shopping? Name some of the stores in your town. What were their functions? Did you go shopping with your parents? What do you remember about these trips?

Where did you do your shopping as an adult? Today?

What were the main voluntary associations in town (KKK, Kiwanis, Masons, Order of the Red Men)?



Do you remember any civic campaigns in your town?

Did the circus, fairs, or carnivals come to your community? Describe.

Did you have a favorite local acting group, singer, musician, or dance band? Where and when did you see them perform?

Were there individuals who performed special services in the community (washerwomen, prostitutes, midwives, faith healers, palm readers, bootleggers, peddlers)?

What medical services were available to your parents? To you as an adult?

Were violent crimes ever committed in your community? How did the community respond?

Did you ever feel like a second-class citizen at work or in your community?

Who were the most important people in the community? Why were they the most important?

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### **Detailed Life History Questions for Women**

#### **Childhood:**

What are your earliest childhood memories?

Did your parents have “pet” children?

When you misbehaved, how would your parents discipline you? Who did the punishing – mother or father? Was there a time when you felt you were punished unfairly? Did punishment for boys and girls differ?

Did your parents play games with you? What kind?

Did you get along better with your mother or father? Why?

What did you learn from your parents that has helped you live your own life?

Were there favorite family stories your parents or grandparents told and that you particularly loved to hear? What were they?

Describe a typical evening in your parents’ home when you were a child.

Did the family eat dinner together? Was there much discussion at the supper table? What did you talk about – work, school? Did the children ever get into arguments at the dinner table?

What did mother / father / children do between supertime and bedtime?

What were your favorite toys? Were they store-bought or homemade? Did you play by yourself a lot or usually with brothers and sisters or neighborhood kids? Did you make up stories about your dolls and other toys?

Did your mother make your clothes? Did you wear hand-me-downs? Once you started working, did you buy your own clothes? Did you have a favorite dress, pair of shoes, hat, etc, of which you were especially fond or proud?

Did you or your family order items from the mail order catalogs? What kinds of things – clothes, appliances?

What did you and your brothers and sisters fight about? Did you tease each other? What about?

Did girlfriends come to your house for overnight visits? Did you go to their homes for overnight visits?

Did you ever have a friend or relative to whom you wrote letters regularly? What were they about?

Did you ever keep a diary? What kinds of things did you write in it?

Where did your relatives live? Did you and your family ever go to visit them? How did your relatives' lifestyles compare to your own?

Did you and your family go on vacation? Where did you go or what did you do?

What was the longest trip you ever took as a child? Describe it.

Who was your best friend? What did you talk about?

Did things change much around your house when your mother was pregnant? Were your parents more tense / happy when she was pregnant? Did your mother tell you she was pregnant or did you just figure it out for yourself? Did your mother give birth at home or in a hospital? Who delivered the baby?

Had your mother explained the "facts of life" to you before you started menstruating? What did she tell you? Were you scared when you first started having your periods?

Could you confide in your mother? Were there other older women in your family or in the neighborhood with whom you could share your feelings?

When you were little, what did you think you'd be when you grew up?

Was there a member of your family whom you especially admired? What did you admire about them?

Do you remember a favorite schoolteacher? What did you like about him / her?

Tell me about some of the good / bad things about growing up in your family.

How did your parents get along? Were they publicly affectionate toward each other? Do you remember their having disagreements, fights? Did your mother "talk back" to your father? Was he considered the boss of the house, or did they both have an equal hand in running the household?

What were the kinds of things you daydreamed about? Did your fantasies come true?

Did people in your neighborhood gossip? What did they gossip about?

Were there "good" girls and "bad" girls in your community? Describe them. Did you ever hear of a girl who "got caught" and had to get married because she was pregnant? Did you ever hear about girls being asked to leave school, work, or home because of immoral behavior?

Did you suffer from a serious illness or have a bad accident when you were a child or as a young adult? Describe it. How were you treated? Who took care of you?

When did you consider yourself to be grown up?

### **Marriage:**

Did you ask your parents' permission to get married? Why or why not?

How long had you known your husband before you were married?

What were the good qualities about your husband that attracted you to him? What should a good husband do or be?

What was the reaction of your friends when they found out that you were getting married, or had gotten married?

Did you or your friends worry about being "old maids?"

Did your parents give you any advice about being married?

Had you / your husband moved away from home before you were married?

What kinds of adjustments did you / your husband have to make once you were married? Was the first year or so an especially happy or especially difficult time? Why?

Were most of your friends single or married women? What about most of your husband's friends?

What did you like / dislike about being married?

Were you able to discuss the joys and trials of your marriage with any close friends or relatives? Did you have a close friend with whom you could discuss things that you could not talk about with your husband?

How did your marriage change over the years?

Did your husband help with the chores around the house? What was his attitude toward housework?

Are there core values or beliefs that you and your husband see eye to eye on? Describe them.

What did you and your husband most often have fights or disagreements over? Do you remember your first fight? Was there ever a time when you and your husband separated or thought about getting a divorce? Why or why not?

Did you and your husband ever disagree about how the children were to be raised, punished?

How was the household budget handled? Who made the decisions about major purchases?

If you or your husband had a hard day at work or in the home, was this something you could openly discuss with each other?

Did you ever know somebody who was physically or mentally abused by a spouse? How did you find out about the abuse? How did you respond?

How would you describe your husband's relationship with your parents? What was your relationship with your in-laws like?

How was the "ideal" wife and mother supposed behave? Did you or your friends and family members aspire to that ideal? Why or why not?

What was your husband's attitude toward your working / not working?

Describe a typical evening in your home. What did you do for entertainment after you were married?

Were you a member of any organizations or clubs? What kinds? Did you get together with women outside of work / home?

Compare your marriage with your parents' marriage.

Whose life would you say is easier – a man's or a woman's? Why?

### **Motherhood:**

What kinds of birth control did women use? How was birth control obtained? Did women talk with each other about birth control?

Had you always wanted to have children? Why or why not?

What was your reaction when you found out you were pregnant? What was your husband's reaction?

Were you under a doctor or a midwife's care while you were pregnant? If so, what sort of medical treatment and advice was offered?

What did you differently while you were pregnant – special diet, special precautions, limited activities, etc?

Do you remember any “old wives” tales about pregnancy / menstruation?

Did friends and family members offer their own advice about what to do and not do while you were pregnant? How did you respond to this advice?

Did your husband help around the house during and after your pregnancy? Did your friends or family members pitch in and help out?

While you were pregnant, did you daydream about what your child would look like and how your child would behave? How did you choose names for your children?

Were your older children curious and ask questions about your pregnancy? What did you tell them about it?

Were women more respected members of the family / community once they became mothers?

What kinds of adjustments did you and your husband have to make once you were parents?

Did you ever experience post-partum depression (feel down or sad after giving birth)?

Did you trust someone else to take care of your infant or did you feel you had to stay home yourself?

How did you learn to take care of your baby – help and advice from family, magazine article and books on child care?

Did you breast feed your baby? Why or why not?

Did your attitude toward pregnancy and child care change as you had more children? How and why?

If you worked outside of the home, who took care of your children while you were away?

Did your parents and relatives feel free to discipline your children? How did you feel about this?

Compare the way you were reared as a child with the way you reared your own children.

What hopes and aspirations did you have for your children?

### **Work:**

Did your mother or grandmothers work outside of the home? What did they do?

Do you or have you worked outside of the home? Describe that work.

Do you think women who work outside of the home are treated with more or less respect than women who do not work outside of the home? Why? Who makes these judgments and do you agree with them?

### **Questions for women who have never worked outside of the home:**

What factors influenced your decision to stay at home?

Do you have female friends or family members who work outside of the home? How would you compare their lives to your own?

Is there a situation in which you would consider working outside of the home?

### **Questions for women who do or have worked outside of the home:**

Did you dream of having a career outside of the home? What did you hope to be? Were you able to obtain that dream? Why or why not?

Did your family’s economic situation influence your decision to work outside of the home? Why or why not?

How did you gain the skills / knowledge you needed to perform your work?

If you changed careers / jobs during your working life, what factors influenced that change?

How did your husband / parents / children feel about your working outside of the home? How did they express these feelings?

Did you prefer housework or working outside of the home? Why?

Were you ever laid off from your job? Why? What did you do?

What roles did women fill in your workplace? How were women treated in your workplace? Were some women treated differently than others? Why?

What did you do with the money that you earned from your job?

### **Home and Sense of Place:**

How did you feel / react when you are in an unfamiliar place (when you are traveling, moving to a new location, etc)?

How many different homes and locations have you lived in? Did you own or rent these homes?

Did you ever share your home with other occupants? Who were they? How did this work out?

Which home did you like living in the most? Why? Did you and your husband change it, remodel it in any way?

Which home did you like least? Why? Did you and your husband do anything to try to improve the home?

Did you ever have to move against your will? Why? How did you come to terms with the move?

How do you feel about the home and neighborhood where you currently live? Do you plan to move / retire to another location? Why?

### **Death and Dying:**

Was there a death in the family or a death of a friend that was especially hard to take? Why?

How did family, friends, and neighbors respond when there was a death in the family?

What do you recall about funerals in your family? Where did they take place? Who attended the funeral? Who did not attend and why? Were certain rituals followed? Were special songs or poems included in the ceremony? Were stories told during the funerals? What were some of them?

Have you thought about or made plans for the end of your life? What are they?

### **Concluding Questions:**

If you could live your life again, are there things that you would do differently? Why?

Is there anything that we've left out that you'd like to talk about?

**Detailed Life History:**  
**Occupational History Questions for Workers**

The following questions were developed for interviews conducted with Piedmont industrial laborers. Interviewers speaking with other kinds of workers, especially professional workers, will need to modify some of the topics and questions to make them more appropriate to their respondents' backgrounds and experiences.

**Hiring, Training, Performance, Conditions:**

When did you, your brothers, your sisters, first start working outside of the home? Why?

How did you find your first job? Do you remember your first day of work?

Who taught you how to perform your job? Was it difficult to learn?

Describe what you did. How quickly did you have to work? Did you have a production quota? What were your hours and how were they recorded?

What were your feelings about the work that you did?

Did you learn to take short-cuts in performing this work?

Was the work dangerous? Were you afraid of getting hurt? Was anyone injured on the job?

What were sanitary conditions on the job (air quality, smells, noise, heat, etc.)?

Was there a speed-up or stretch out at your plant? Describe.

Were you assisted in your work by other employees? Could you help out a fellow worker if you were finished with your job?

Were your fellow employees mostly male / female? Black, white, Hispanic?

**Supervision:**

How closely were you supervised in your work? Did you need supervision? Did supervisors or managers ever try to make you work more quickly? Did they ever try to study how fast you could work?

Were there certain rules at the workplace (smoking, eating, talking, breaks, dress, behavior with management)?

Did you have to be at work on time? What happened if you weren't? What holidays could you take? Did you ever take off from work without the supervisor's permission? Why? For how long? Could you get your job back after you returned?

Did you and other workers ever decide among yourselves how the work should be done and how much work each person would do? Did each individual abide by the rules? Could you deliberately slow down production? What might happen?

Could you and your fellow employees ever make up rules that had to be followed by other workers or supervisors?

Did you ever complain to your supervisor about problems related to your work? About other workers? About excessive supervision? How did they respond? How were other workers' grievances settled?

Was there any competition among workers? Did management promote competition? How were promotions arranged? Were you ever promoted to higher positions? Were you ever overlooked for promotion? Why? How did you respond?

Do you remember any conflicts or jealousies between different groups of workers (skilled vs. unskilled, black vs. white, old vs. new, etc.)? Were some workers treated with more respect than others? Why and by whom?

### **Working Women:**

Were female workers treated differently than male workers? Why and in what ways?

Did supervisors play favorites among the women? Why?

Did families worry about their daughters being exploited by supervisors? Did you ever observe this kind of exploitation in your workplace?

### **For female workers:**

What did your parents / other workers think about your going to work?

Did you plan to keep working after you got married? Did you quit or lose your job or take time off when you had your first baby?

How did your husband feel about your working outside of the home?

When and why did you go back to work after leaving for any reason?

Who helped with the housework when you were working outside of the home?

What did you do with your wages?

### **Race / Ethnicity:**

Did your workplace employ people of different races / ethnicities?

Did people of different races / ethnicities perform the same kinds of work? Why or why not?

Did employees of different ethnic / racial groups spend time together when they weren't working (eat lunch together, take work breaks together, play on the same company sports teams, etc.)?

Was there ever any tension or disagreement between workers or different races / ethnicities? When did this occur and why? Was there any effort on the part of workers or employers to ease the tension? Why? How?

### **The Company:**

What were you paid for your work? How were you paid?

What did you think of the company? What benefits did the company offer? Insurance? Medical care? Recreation? Educational activities?

Did the company always keep its word? How or how not?

### **Social Activities:**

Did any of your co-workers live nearby? What kinds of activities would you do with fellow employees outside of work? Could you socialize with supervisors?

Were there company-sponsored recreational activities (sports teams, singing groups, volunteer groups, etc)? Describe them.

Was participation voluntary? Did the company offer prizes or awards for participation? For winning?

If there were organized athletic teams in the plant, did you have rivalries with other departments in the plant? With other companies? With other towns?

Do you remember any changes in the company's recreational program during the years you worked in industry? Did the changes make working in the company more or less enjoyable or did it make little difference? Why?

Were company-organized recreational and sports activities a topic of conversation at work?

Did the union ever organize a sports team?

**Mobility:**

Did you change jobs during your working years? If yes, why did you change jobs? Describe these jobs and compare them. If not, why not? Did you ever dream of doing other kinds of work?

**Organization:**

Did you ever join a union? Why or why not? What were the circumstances?

How was your local union organized? What was your role in the union?

How did the union educate workers about its roles and goals? In your opinion, was this education useful / successful? Why or why not?

How important was the union in your daily life? Did the union sponsor social events?

Did you have a shop steward? What role did he / she play in settling grievances? Did your local union help or disappoint you personally? How much contact did you have with the national? Did you go to national conventions? Who were the principal organizers in your local? Officials?

Were you or other workers ever harassed because of union membership?

Did the union ever go out on strike? Why? Describe the strike and your participation in it.

Who led the strike? Men? Women? Skilled or unskilled labor?

How did people in the community (preachers, store owners, neighbors, etc.) react to the strike? How did the police react? What was management's reaction?

What broke the strike? What was the impact?

What was the overall effect of the union on the company? On you? On your family?

Were you aware of other strikes around the region?

**Feelings about Work:**

Were you proud of or embarrassed by the work you did? Why?

What did you think of the company's product(s)?

What did you like about your work? What did you dislike? Did you look forward to each new day?

What is the best thing that has happened to working people in your lifetime?

What was the worst thing that happened?

Did you ever wish you didn't have to work? When? Why?

What do you think about welfare, food stamps, unemployment insurance?

Do you do any kind of work in your retirement? What? How does it compare with the work you did years ago?