FAMILY ETHNIC PROFILE

A thorough family sketch, including genealogy, is a project that often requires years of research. In this course we are less concerned with a complete family history than we are in charting the ethnic dimension of your family from time of arrival (or earliest trace) to the present. Of particular interest will be those changes in ethnic or religious identity that have occurred as a result of such phenomena as assimilation, acculturation, religious conversions, etc.

In constructing your family's ethnic profile, letters, diaries, and photographs will be invaluable. However, most of your information will be derived through oral history, especially from parents and relatives. A cassette tape recorder is useful, though not essential for this task. Record conversations with relatives. Later, replay the tape and take notes on the conversation for use in your report.

Only you will know the kinds of questions to ask in order to elicit the information you need for your report. The following are some sample questions that will guide you in constructing your report; they may suggest to you the kinds of questions you may wish to ask relatives.

**Race and Ethnicity**

1. To what racial or ethnic group do you (your family) belong?

2. When did you begin to think of yourself as a member of this group? Why?

3. How did this identification influence you?

4. In what ways is your group primarily defined -- by religion, ancestry, skin color, language?

5. Are there, or have there been, general limitations imposed upon your group by society? What? How are they imposed?

6. In what economic and social class are most members of your group found? Why?

7. Do you, or does your family, practice rituals or enjoy special foods that derive from an ethnic identity?

8. Do you, or does your family, speak a language at home other than English? How often?
9. Do you, or does your family, read newspapers or books in any language besides English?
   How often?

10. Do you, or does your family, keep contact through letters, phone calls, or visits with friends or relatives still living in your family's country of origin?

**Religion**

1. Have you always belonged to the same denomination? Has your family always belonged to it as well? When did it change? Why?

2. Does your family go to church? How often? Which one? How long has it been a member of that church? When did it join?

3. Are most members of your church in about the same social and economic position as you?

4. How did religion affect the way you were brought up, and the way that your parents were raised?

5. How was religion practiced in your home? Did you pray at home? Sing? Light candles? Are there religious objects in your home? What kind?

6. How was the Sabbath celebrated in your home (or other religious holiday)? Were special foods eaten? Which ones? How important were such holidays in your home (family gatherings, purchase of new clothes, etc.)?

These questions, or others similar to these, should help you to amass sufficient material for your report. The report itself should consist of a well-constructed 8-10 page *word processed* essay describing the results of your research. The essay should be followed by a one-page "Note on Sources" that explains how you got the information used in the body of your report.

**PAPERS ARE DUE ON Friday, April 14th.**
INTERVIEWING HINTS

1) The interviewer should stay off the tape as much as possible and let the interviewee tell his/her story. Do not use tape-time to tell your own anecdotes.

2) Try to ask very direct and specific questions. You will always get a better response that way. For example, do not say to someone, "How was your trip?", or "What was the political situation like in the village in those days?" Such questions are entirely too broad and difficult for most people to answer. A better way to inquire about one's trip is to say, "How many monuments did you see? Which ones?", or "Which mountain did you climb?" And for the second, "Did you have any friends who were active in village politics in those days?" These questions demand specific answers. Always try to ask who, what, where, when, and why questions.

3) Avoid leading questions. You should not say, "You came to this country when you were 15, didn't you?"

4) If you are using a tape recorder, load the tape and test it well before the interview. Fiddling with equipment is very distracting and will increase the interviewee's self-consciousness.

For further suggestions, see Ellen Robinson Epstein and Rona Mendelsohn, Record and Remember: Tracing Your Roots Through Oral History (New York, 1978); or Donald A. Ritchie, Doing Oral History (New York, 1995).