

# AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES

## Interview Tips

### Before the Interview:

- Identify somebody you would like to interview.
- Call or meet with the potential interviewee to explain the class project and obtain their permission to be interviewed. Once they agree, set a convenient date and time for the interview.
- Learn as much as you can about the interviewee before the interview. Research the historical events they may have experienced so you can come up with good questions to ask them during the interview.
- Prepare four or five questions to ask during the interview. The questions should be "open-ended" rather than "yes-no" questions. For example, instead of asking "Were you scared when World War II began?" (which could be answered with a yes or a no) a better way to ask might be "How did you feel when World War II began?" (which would encourage the interview subject to share his or her feelings and experiences).
- If you are working in a group, assign roles to each member. For example, one person might ask the prepared questions, another might take notes, and the third might ask questions that follow up on what the interviewee says.
- Practice the interview several times by role-playing with your classmates.

### During the Interview:

- Find a quiet location without a lot of background noise so that you and your interviewee will be able to hear each other clearly.
- Start by introducing yourselves. You may want to chit-chat a little bit to "break the ice" before starting in with your prepared questions.
- Speak clearly and slowly, make eye contact, and LISTEN to your interview subject. Instead of just reading through your prepared questions one by one, listen to how the interviewee responds and ask more questions that follow up on what they have to say before proceeding to the next prepared question.
- Give the interviewee time to respond to your questions. Don't worry about occasional silences – the subject might just need a minute to think about your question.
- When taking notes, use shorthand symbols (like "+" for "and," and "w/" for "with") to speed up your note-taking.

### After the Interview:

- Be sure to thank your subject for his or her time.
- As soon as you and your group are alone, sit down and go over your notes. Make additions and corrections to your notes to clear up anything you might have missed writing down.
- Write a thank-you note to your interview subject and mail it no later than the next day.