

MODERN AMERICAN HISTORY
FALL 2019, HISTORY 2042
PROFESSOR CAPÓ

ORAL HISTORY ANALYSIS
DUE VIA CANVAS NO LATER THAN DECEMBER 4, 2019

In *Undocumented Lives*, historian Ana Raquel Minian links the story of immigration policy to migrants' personal and intimate experiences. Indeed, she argues that one cannot understand the process of migration exclusively through policy or "official" sources that are not invested in documenting the emotional, individual, and complex conditions in which people experience these processes. She rightfully notes, "Mexican citizens experienced migration on a more intimate plane." Surely, she adds, "Migrants' personal stories seem so distant from the realm of congressional debates and bilateral meetings that, on the surface, they appear to be two distinct narratives" (7).

The Oral History Association defines the practice of oral history as "both the interview process and the products that result from a recorded spoken interview (whether audio, video, or other formats). In order to gather and preserve meaningful information about the past, oral historians might record interviews focused on narrators' life histories or topical interviews in which narrators are selected for their knowledge of a particular historical subject or event" (<https://www.oralhistory.org/oha-core-principles/>). Surely, as Minian suggests, the practice requires establishing a relationship of deep trust between the interviewer and interviewee.

To better understand the distinct utilities, implications, and biases of the practice of oral history—as with any other primary source—this exercise asks that you think critically about its uses in Minian's important book, *Undocumented Lives*. Each response must be answered fully, typed in complete sentences, and requires that you engage with and contextualize the information and content provided in Minian's book. Each response should be no more than four sentences in length. For the purposes of this exercise, "p." is shorthand for "page," of course, and "FN" stands in for "footnote."

Please submit your typed response, with each numbered reply, via Canvas by **11:59pm, Wednesday, December 4, 2019**. We will dedicate some time, as part of an in-class reaction assignment, to doing this analysis on Tuesday, December 3, 2019. Be sure to bring Minian's book to class that day in order to complete this assignment effectively and efficiently.

1. Broadly speaking, how does Minian use oral histories in this book?

2. What other sources (i.e., both primary and secondary) does Minian rely on to help fill in the gaps, or perhaps address some of the biases, of oral history testimonies?
3. On page 123 of *Undocumented Lives*, Minian tells the story of “Sara Villalobos,” and her family, as a means to explore some of the deeply personal and intimate experiences of migrant domestic workers who often found themselves in incredibly vulnerable positions. What are key arguments she makes on this page?
4. How might the argument Minian offers about the Villalobos family and their experiences be undermined, erased, or simply not made available in traditional archives had it not been for the recording of this oral history? That is, do you think that this information—or the insight we receive from this source—might have been available through some other source? If so, which source(s) might have offered up the same insight and how would one retrieve such a source?
5. Peruse the footnotes Minian provides for her above argument about the Villalobos family on page 123 (i.e., FN 85 and FN 68 on p. 281). What information about the interview do we learn from Minian’s citations? Why are they important, and what do they tell us about the practice of oral history?
6. On page 30, Minian furthers her arguments about the Mexican state’s critical role in prompting the migration of its people farther north to the United States. Look to FN 90 (i.e., cited on p. 259) and the paragraph in which it appears. How did this oral history provide a necessary piece of information that would otherwise have been difficult to recover or trace?