### What are primary sources & why should you use them in your research papers?

Primary sources are the raw materials of history. They are firsthand resources created by eyewitnesses — people who actually see or participate in an event and record it and their reactions to it. Primary sources have not been edited, rewritten, or otherwise distorted by another person.

In Finding History, Christine Bombaro writes: "An effective research paper should incorporate as many relevant primary sources as possible in order to place the events under consideration in their appropriate historical context and to gain insight on historical issues from those who lived through them. Primary sources will give you a truer sense of a past event than any description by a secondary source could....Using primary sources will help you develop your own opinions about historical questions and prevent you from simply restating the conclusions of other historians."

Evaluating primary sources is critical. Ask:

- Who created this source?
- Why was this source created?
- Who is the intended audience?
- How do the ideas and values in the source differ from those of our time?
- How does this source compare to other primary sources of the era?

# We're #1! Primary sources & where to find them



#### Other types of sources

**Secondary** sources analyze and interpret primary sources. Examples: Magazine articles, biographies, books, reviews, textbooks, lit crit

**Tertiary** sources compile data on a topic. Examples: Encyclopedias, dictionaries, manuals, databases, almanacs, guidebooks, library catalogs

### Are primary sources always reliable?

No. A primary source gives ONE person's perspective on a historical event or period.

While primary sources may or may not tell the truth, one source is not likely the "whole truth." Different people participating in the same event or same era had different experiences — for example, a knight and a serf in the Middle Ages viewed and would have described social issues very differently.

People view events through a window colored by their age, culture, education, gender, political beliefs, religion, and time period. Two people experiencing the same event could have different perspectives. For instance, a police officer and a protestor may tell very different stories about the same event.

Good historians collect primary sources, compare them with other sources, and use the lens of history to set an event in the context of the time period.

#### One stop, many links

https://is.gd/primarysource

This web page offers links to reliable online collections of primary sources.

Glendale Community College Library, 10/2019

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#### **Primary sources: Examples**

Primary sources offer firsthand evidence <u>about an event</u>, person, object, or artwork.

Letters, diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, first-person news coverage, historical and legal documents, eyewitness accounts, photos, experimental and statistical data, audio and video recordings, artifacts, patents, speeches, interviews, art, surveys, oral histories, dissertations, and Internet communications are all primary sources.

## search the library catalog for book series focused on primary sources

- Defining Documents of American History (some available as ebooks)
- Defining Documents of World History (some available as ebooks)
- Milestone Documents (some available as ebooks)
- Voices of an Era

# Looking for a specific format? Add these words to your library catalog and database searches

- Sources (ex. Civil rights Sources or Medieval sources)
- Correspondence (ex. Civil War -Correspondence or 19th century -Correspondence)
- Diaries (ex. Confederate Diaries)
- Personal narratives (ex. Holocaust -Personal narratives)
- Facsimiles (this means exact copies) (ex. New York Times - Facsimiles)
- Interviews (ex. Refugees Interviews)
- Pictorial works (ex. West (U.S.) -History - Pictorial works)
- Notebooks, sketchbooks, etc.
- Speeches
- Caricatures and cartoons (ex. United States - Politics and government -2001-2009 - Caricatures and cartoons)

#### **Primary sources databases**

- Historical Periodical Collection (AAS)
- ProQuest Historic American Periodicals
- Gale News Vault (includes 19th Century American Newspapers)
- Historical Index to The New York Times
- EBSCO Magazine Archives
- Women's Magazine Archive

How do you find these databases? Start at the library's home page (lib.gccaz.edu/lmc). Click the **Library Databases** link, located to the left of the search box. Scroll down to the **Historical Publications** category and start exploring the databases.

Working at home? Use your MEID and password to log into the databases.

Note: Many other library databases, especially history-, medical-, and science-focused ones, include primary sources. In the **History** category, take a look at US History in Context, World History in Context, and Salem History. Explore other categories and use what you've learned about primary sources to identify them.

#### Need help? Ask!

Visit or phone a librarian at a Reference Desk GCC Main — 623-845-3112 GCC North — 623-888-7112

**Ask a Librarian** is a 24/7 service! - Use the chat box on the Library's home page