

Primary Source Analysis

DUE IN CLASS AND VIA DROPBOX: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4

Primary sources constitute the principal body of evidence that historians consult when investigating and interpreting the past. They are any document or source (textual, visual, material, or otherwise) that was created in the period or circumstances under study. Historical research depends upon the evaluation, interpretation, and analysis of primary evidence. The purpose of this assignment is to introduce you to the role of the historian.

In this assignment, you will select a single primary source assigned as course reading from the first 7 weeks of the class syllabus. All course readings are eligible for this assignment with several notable exceptions: you are NOT permitted to analyze the United States Declaration of Independence or Constitution. It is recommended that you choose a source that interests you, rather than opting for the shortest reading time or most familiar.

After having chosen your selected primary source, you will first carefully and closely read the document. While reading, evaluate the source in the following capacities:

1. Survey the source's formal characteristics: What is it titled? When was it published? What kind of document is it? These details are significant to contextualizing the source in the historical period it was produced.
2. Consider its authorship: Who wrote or produced it? What is the author's identity (race, gender, work, social status, political affiliation, and other life details might matter greatly to the production of the source)? What is its intended audience? If applicable, how was it received when it was first published or examined?
3. Contextualize the source: Why was the source produced? What environmental or contextual factors influenced its production (economic, social, political, cultural conditions)? How does the source reflect its historical context?
4. Analyze the source's contents: What is the source's purpose and function? What opinions or points of view does the source convey or imply (intentionally or unintentionally)? How is it organized and why?
5. Your own interpretation: What do you, the reader, learn from this source? What does the document tell us about the past, and what argument or statement can be made from reading it? What is its lasting historical significance? What contextual details does the source exclude or omit from view? What can be concluded about the reliability or validity of the source (what are its limits in revealing a detailed picture of the past)? How might historians use it in constructing a narrative?

Having read and understood the primary source in depth, students are required to develop an essay of five (5) pages in length, reporting their analysis and evaluation of the document. The essay should be clearly organized around a central thesis statement, with successive paragraphs developing ideas that reinforce the central claim. Topic paragraphs should address the source's

context, content, authorship, organization, and historical significance. The essay should NOT incorporate any references to outside source materials. Instead, students should focus entirely on a close reading of the one source, referring heavily to passages or ideas directly from the text. References should be in-text parenthetical citations, noting author and page number/ paragraph and line number (when applicable). Formal works cited pages are NOT required and are actively discouraged. The chosen source should be the only work referenced in the paper. Any evidence of plagiarism or academic dishonesty will result in an automatic grade of zero and referral to the Brooklyn College academic integrity officer. The paper should be written in a legible standard 12-point font, double-spaced, standard margins, with the student's name, date, and chosen source clearly noted in the heading. Electronic submissions to Dropbox should be a .docx Word document or PDF titled: "Last Name, Primary Source Analysis." Failure to adhere to these style rules will result in a penalty.

This assignment will be evaluated according to the letter-grade rubric included in the assignment's Dropbox folder, with additional comments tailored to individual essays.