

DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

The Haymarket Square Riot

Were the Haymarket defendants completely innocent victims or were they partly to blame for their fate?

Attention Workingmen!

MASS-MEETING

TO-NIGHT, at 7:30 o'clock,

HAYMARKET, Randolph St., bet. Desplains and Halsted.

Good Speakers will be present to discuss the latest
arrests and the police, the shooting of our
fellow workmen yesterday afternoon.

Workingmen Run Themselves and Against
THE EXECUTIVE

Achtung Arbeiter!

Größe

Massen-Versammlung

Heute Abend, 7 1/2 Uhr,
Haymarket, Randolph-Str.,
zwischen Desplains- u.
Halsted-Str.

Die besten Redner werden hier anwesend sein, um die
neuesten Nachrichten über die Verhaftungen, die
Schüsse und die Ermordung von Arbeitern gestern
Abend zu besprechen.

Das Organisations-Komitee.



Attention Workingmen!

MASS MEETING

TO-NIGHT, at 7:30 o'clock,

HAYMARKET, Randolph St., bet. Desplains and Halsted.

Good Speakers will be present to discuss the latest
arrests and the police, the shooting of our
fellow workmen yesterday afternoon.

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

Achtung Arbeiter!

Größe

Massen-Versammlung

Heute Abend, halb 8 Uhr, auf dem
Haymarket, Randolph-Str., zwischen
Desplains- u. Halsted-Str.

Die besten Redner werden hier anwesend sein, um die
neuesten Nachrichten über die Verhaftungen, die
Schüsse und die Ermordung von Arbeitern gestern
Abend zu besprechen.

Das Organisations-Komitee.

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Debating the
DOCUMENTS

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victims or were they partly to blame for their fate?*

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Teacher Introduction

★ *Using Primary Sources*

Primary sources are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past era or historical event. They are the raw materials, or the evidence, on which historians base their “secondary” accounts of the past.

A rapidly growing number of history teachers today are using primary sources. Why? Perhaps it's because primary sources give students a better sense of what history is and what historians do. Such sources also help students see the past from a variety of viewpoints. Moreover, primary sources make history vivid and bring it to life.

However, primary sources are not easy to use. They can be confusing. They can be biased. They rarely all agree. Primary sources must be interpreted and set in context. To do this, students need historical background knowledge. *Debating the Documents* helps students handle such challenges by giving them a useful framework for analyzing sources that conflict with one another.



*“Multiple,
conflicting
perspectives are
among the truths
of history.
No single
objective or
universal account
could ever put an
end to this endless
creative dialogue
within and
between the past
and the present.”*

From the 2011 Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct of the Council of the American Historical Association.

INTRODUCTION

★ *The Debating the Documents Series*

Each *Debating the Documents* booklet includes the same sequence of reproducible worksheets. If students use several booklets over time, they will get regular practice at interpreting and comparing conflicting sources. In this way, they can learn the skills and habits needed to get the most out of primary sources.

Each *Debating the Documents* Booklet Includes

- **Suggestions for the Student and an Introductory Essay.** The student gets instructions and a one-page essay providing background on the booklet's topic. A time line on the topic is also included.
- **Two Groups of Contrasting Primary Source Documents.** In most of the booklets, students get one pair of visual sources and one pair of written sources. In some cases, more than two are provided for each. Background is provided on each source. *Within each group, the sources clash in a very clear way.* (The sources are not always exact opposites, but they do always differ in some obvious way.)
- **Three Worksheets for Each Document Group.** Students use the first two worksheets to take notes on the sources. The third worksheet asks which source the student thinks would be most useful to a historian.
- **One DBQ.** On page 20, a document-based question (DBQ) asks students to write an effective essay using all of the booklet's primary sources.

★ *How to Use This Booklet*

1. Have students read “Suggestions for the Student” and the Introductory Essay.

Give them copies of pages 5–7. Ask them to read the instructions and then read the introductory essay on the topic. The time line gives them additional information on that topic. This reading could be done in class or as a homework assignment.

2. Have students do the worksheets.

Make copies of the worksheets and the pages with the sources. Ask students to study the background information on each source and the source itself. Then have them take notes on the sources using the worksheets. If students have access to a computer, have them review the primary sources digitally.

3. “Debate the documents” as a class.

Have students use their worksheet notes to debate the primary source documents as a class. Urge students to follow these ground rules:

- Use your worksheets as a guide for the discussion or debate.
- Try to reach agreement about the main ideas and the significance of each primary source document.
- Look for points of agreement as well as disagreement between the primary sources.
- Listen closely to all points of view about each primary source.
- Focus on the usefulness of each source to the historian, not merely on whether you agree or disagree with that source’s point of view.

4. Have students do the final DBQ.

A DBQ is an essay question about a set of primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, students write essays using evidence from the sources and their own background knowledge of the historical era. (See the next page for a DBQ scoring guide to use in evaluating these essays.)

The DBQ assignment on page 20 includes guidelines for writing a DBQ essay. Here are some additional points to make with students about preparing to write this kind of essay.

The DBQ for this Booklet (see page 20):

The Haymarket anarchists often discussed the use of violence for political purposes. Even if they were innocent of the Haymarket bombing, were their critics right to see them as a danger to Chicago and the nation? Why or why not?

- Analyze the question carefully.
- Use your background knowledge to set sources in their historical context.
- Question and interpret sources actively. Do not accept them at face value.
- Use sources meaningfully to support your essay’s thesis.
- Pay attention to the overall organization of your essay.

INTRODUCTION

★ *Complete DBQ Scoring Guide*

Use this guide in evaluating the DBQ for this booklet. Use this scoring guide with students who are already familiar with using primary sources and writing DBQ essays.

Excellent Essay

- Offers a clear answer or thesis explicitly addressing all aspects of the essay question.
- Does a careful job of interpreting many or most of the documents and relating them clearly to the thesis and the DBQ. Deals with conflicting documents effectively.
- Uses details and examples effectively to support the thesis and other main ideas. Explains the significance of those details and examples well.
- Uses background knowledge and the documents in a balanced way.
- Is well written; clear transitions make the essay easy to follow from point to point. Only a few minor writing errors or errors of fact.

Good Essay

- Offers a reasonable thesis addressing the essential points of the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least some of the documents and relates them to the thesis and the DBQ.
- Usually relates details and examples meaningfully to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some relevant background knowledge.
- May have some writing errors or errors of fact, as long as these do not invalidate the essay's overall argument or point of view.

Fair Essay

- Offers at least a partly developed thesis addressing the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least a few of the documents.
- Relates only a few of the details and examples to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some background knowledge.
- Has several writing errors or errors of fact that make it harder to understand the essay's overall argument or point of view.

Poor Essay

- Offers no clear thesis or answer addressing the DBQ.
- Uses few documents effectively other than referring to them in “laundry list” style, with no meaningful relationship to a thesis or any main point.
- Uses details and examples unrelated to the thesis or other main ideas. Does not explain the significance of these details and examples.
- Is not clearly written, with some major writing errors or errors of fact.

Suggestions to the Student

★ *Using Primary Sources*

A primary source is any record of evidence from the past. Many things are primary sources: letters, diary entries, official documents, photos, cartoons, wills, maps, charts, etc. They are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past event or time period. This *Debating the Documents* lesson is based on two groups of primary source documents. Within each group, the sources conflict with one another. That is, they express different or even opposed points of view. You need to decide which source is more reliable, more useful, or more typical of the time period. This is what historians do all the time. Usually, you will be able to learn something about the past from each source, even when the sources clash with one another in dramatic ways.

★ *How to Use This Booklet*

1. **Read the one-page introductory essay.**

This gives you background information that will help you analyze the primary source documents and do the exercises for this *Debating the Documents* lesson. The time line gives you additional information you will find helpful.



2. **Study the primary source documents for this lesson.**

For this lesson, you get two groups of sources. The sources within each group conflict with one another. Some of these sources are visuals, others are written sources. With visual sources, pay attention not only to the image’s “content” (its subject matter) but also to its artistic style, shading, composition, camera angle, symbols, and other features that add to the image’s meaning. With written sources, notice the writing style, bias, even what the source leaves out or does not talk about. Think about each source’s author, that author’s reasons for writing, and the likely audience for the source. These considerations give you clues as to the source’s historical value.

3. **Use the worksheets to analyze each group of primary source documents.**

For each group of sources, you get three worksheets. Use the “Study the Document” worksheets to take notes on each source. Use the “Comparing the Documents” worksheet to decide which of the sources would be most useful to a historian.

4. **As a class, debate the documents.**

Use your worksheet notes to help you take part in this debate.

5. **Do the final DBQ.**

“DBQ” means “document-based question.” A DBQ is a question along with several primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, write an essay using evidence from the documents and your own background history knowledge.

The Haymarket Square Riot

It was evening, May 4, 1886. In Chicago's Haymarket Square, two or three thousand workers had gathered. They listened as speakers protested police shootings at a riot at the McCormick Harvester plant the day before. The last Haymarket speaker was just finishing up. Only a few hundred people remained when police on horseback moved in and ordered everyone to leave. Suddenly, someone threw a bomb. It exploded. Police began shooting. People screamed and fled. Seven policemen and at least four workers died. An eighth policeman died of his wounds much later.

Long before 1886, Chicago had become a tense, deeply divided city. After the Civil War, it grew rapidly, even uncontrollably. Tens of thousands of workers labored long hours for low pay in its factories, warehouses, and stockyards. A huge demand for laborers made Chicago a magnet pulling in immigrants from Germany, Ireland, Poland, Italy, and many other nations. As they struggled to find their way in a strange land, they often met with suspicion and hostility. Many native-born Chicagoans saw these immigrants as a threat to social order and a more traditional way of life.

Struggles to organize unions often brought these tensions to the surface. Powerful business owners fought bitterly to keep the unions out. In the 1870s and '80s, several strikes led to riots and violent clashes between the police and the workers. The Haymarket bombing itself took place at the high point of a national movement for the eight-hour workday. The Chicago newspapers generally backed the owners in such labor battles. The press often depicted union organizers as dangerous, foreign-born radicals who were merely using the workers to bring about a violent socialist revolution.

Clerks, professionals, small business owners, and other middle-class Chicagoans knew little about the radical ideas brought to Chicago by German or other foreign-born socialists and anarchists. What they did know was that these

radicals always seemed to be stirring up trouble among the city's workers.

Their fears were not entirely unreasonable. Some radicals, foreign and native-born, did call for revolution. And at times, they did seem to glorify the use of violence to bring it about. In anarchist newspapers such as the German *Arbeiter-Zeitung* or the English language paper *The Alarm*, some writers seemed almost glowing in their view that dynamite could be the great equalizer in the war between the bosses and the workers.

Following the Haymarket bombing, terrified Chicagoans directed their rage at the anarchist leaders of the Haymarket protest. Eight of those leaders were convicted of inciting the violence, even though none were linked to the bomb or the bomb thrower. Four were hung. One committed suicide.

Most historians agree that the Haymarket trial was deeply flawed. Witnesses were highly unreliable. The judge was openly hostile to the defendants. Only people already suspicious of the anarchists were allowed on the jury. In 1893, after tempers had cooled somewhat, a reform-minded governor pardoned the remaining three Haymarket defendants still in jail.

From the four documents provided here, you will NOT be able to decide the innocence or guilt of the anarchists on trial. Instead, these documents will help you understand the ideas of the anarchists and the views of their critics. Your task is not to act as a jury in what was clearly an unjust trial. Instead, it is to understand the radicalism of the late 1800s and the views of those opposed to it. The documents should help you debate the larger meaning of Haymarket to Chicago and the nation at that time.

Haymarket Square Riot Time Line

1869

• • •

The first transcontinental railroad is completed. Chicago begins its rapid growth as a major industrial city. Uriah Stephens organizes a new union known as the Knights of Labor.

1873

• • •

The Panic of 1873 is followed by several years of economic hard times.

1877

• • •

A railroad strike protesting recent wage cuts spreads to many railroads and large cities. Widespread violence occurs. Federal troops are called out when some state militias side with the strikers.

1883

• • •

Anarchists August Spies and Albert Parsons are among the radicals who organize the International Working People's Association and issue the "Pittsburgh Manifesto." It calls for the "destruction of the existing class rule, by all means."

1884

• • •

The Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions passes a resolution calling for an eight-hour work day by May 1, 1886.

1885

• • •

The Knights of Labor lead a successful strike against railroad tycoon Jay Gould. Membership in the Knights soars (including in Chicago).

1886

• • •

March. Knights of Labor unions lead more than 200,000 workers in another huge strike against two railroads owned by Jay Gould. Clashes occur between strikers and Pinkerton detectives working for Gould. State militias are brought in, sparking even more violence.

May 1. Workers across the nation rally to demand the eight-hour day. Albert Parsons helps lead 80,000 members of the Knights of Labor and other workers in a march down Michigan Avenue in Chicago.

May 3. At the McCormick Reaper Works a strike turns violent and police kill four people. Some anarchists and others meet that night to plan a protest the next day in Haymarket Square.

May 4. At the Haymarket rally, Spies, Parsons, and Samuel Fielden speak. As the rally is ending, police move in to urge people to leave. A bomb is thrown, police begin firing, and several people are killed.

May 5. In the hysteria following the Haymarket bombing, many radicals are rounded up. Eight will ultimately go on trial.

June 21–October 9. The Haymarket defendants are tried and found guilty. Seven are sentenced to death.

November–December. The Knights especially are harshly blamed for the troubles in Chicago. Their great railroad strike had petered out that summer. Membership plunges as many leave to join the new American Federation of Labor.

1887

• • •

On November 11, Spies, Parsons, Adolph Fischer, and George Engel are hanged. The evening before, a fifth defendant, Louis Lingg, committed suicide in prison.

1893

• • •

Reformist Governor John Peter Altgeld pardons Fielden, Oscar Neebe, and Michael Schwab after deciding all eight defendants were innocent.

DOCUMENT 1

Visual Primary Source Document 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Information on Document 1

Thomas Nast was one of the most famous American editorial cartoonists of the late 1800s. This cartoon of his appeared in the national news magazine *Harper's Weekly* shortly after the verdict was handed down in the trial of the Haymarket anarchists. *Harper's Weekly* covered the Haymarket riot and bombing heavily. It was relentlessly hostile toward the anarchists, depicting them as a grave danger to the republic.

The female figure shown here was often used in political cartoons to stand for justice or for the nation united in a just cause. Nast shows only the figure's powerful hands. One of these hands has grasped the wriggling and helpless Haymarket defendants. The hand holding the sword has a wedding band labeled "UNION." This female figure may also suggest the Statue of Liberty newly arrived in New York Harbor.