

## DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints  
in Primary Source Documents

# The First "Red Scare"

*A time of panic in the shadow of a devastating world war,  
Russia's revolution, labor unrest, and anarchist terror at home.*



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*Debating* the  
**DOCUMENTS**

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# Contents

<b>Teacher Introduction</b> . . . . .	1
<b>Suggestions to the Student</b> . . . . .	5
<b>Introductory Essay</b> . . . . .	6
<b>The First "Red Scare" Time Line</b> . . . . .	7
<b>First Group of Documents</b> . . . . .	8
Study the Documents . . . . .	10
Comparing the Documents . . . . .	12
Comparison Essay . . . . .	13
<b>Second Group of Documents</b> . . . . .	14
Study the Documents . . . . .	16
Comparing the Documents . . . . .	18
Comparison Essay . . . . .	19
<b>Document-Based Question</b> . . . . .	20
<b>Visual Primary Sources</b> . . . . .	21

# 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):**

Was the “Red Scare” of 1919–1920 a response to real dangers facing the nation, or was it based entirely on prejudice and irrational fear?

- 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 First “Red Scare”*

World War I was a horrifying and brutal shock to all who took part in it. Few were prepared for the massive and seemingly senseless slaughter of the years 1914 to 1918. At home, few Americans were ready for the vast new powers the government gained during the war. Much of industry came under public control. Even the thoughts and feelings of citizens were closely watched to keep them loyal and ready to sacrifice. Strict laws were used to arrest socialists, anarchists, German Americans, and others opposed to the war against Germany. By 1918, a mood of fear and suspicion had taken hold. If anything, the end of the war only made matters worse.

In November 1918, when the guns fell silent, millions of men returned to civilian life. They arrived home just as war production stopped. Lacking orders, factories cut back and laid off workers. Unemployment soared and wages fell, even as prices remained high. In 1919 a wave of strikes swept the nation, from Seattle in February to huge steel and coal strikes in the fall. Hundreds of thousands of workers went on strike at the worst time possible, for business owners were in no mood to raise wages when production and profits were falling.

Even in normal times, this wave of strikes might have made Americans uneasy. But these were not ordinary times.

The war’s end still left the nation facing an unsettled and extremely violent world. As one writer put it, “unrest is upon us, and no one knows to what lengths it will go before there is anything like a real world order again.” Along with the destruction and bitterness left by the war, the event that deeply disturbed many people was the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia. This brought to power the world’s first communist state. Once in power, the Bolsheviks quickly cancelled promised elections and imposed a bloody tyranny on Russia. The Bolshevik state

quickly proved far more brutal even than the older Czarist state it replaced. And the Bolsheviks quickly began calling for similar revolutions all over the world.

Soon, some radicals in the West organized their own revolutionary communist parties. The two tiny communist parties in the U.S. were almost entirely powerless. Yet their ties with Russia’s Bolsheviks frightened many people. In April 1919, packages with bombs inside began to be delivered through the mail to many well-known, powerful Americans. This terrified the nation and set off a wave of anticommunist hysteria—even though it was never learned who mailed the bombs.

Democrat Woodrow Wilson was president. His Attorney General, A. Mitchell Palmer, soon reacted to the mood of fear sweeping the country. He led a number of huge raids to round up perhaps as many as ten thousand communists and other radicals, especially foreign-born radicals. Immigration laws were used to imprison them without charges or access to lawyers. About eight hundred such alien radicals were deported.

The last of these so-called “Palmer Raids” took place in May 1920. By then, the wave of strikes had passed, and a less fearful mood was settling. Soon, a public backlash arose against what Palmer had done. Many newspapers and elected officials spoke out against the raids. Among them was Republican Warren G. Harding, who became president in 1921 and freed many remaining victims of this so-called “Red Scare.”

Some historians say this first Red Scare was worse than the more famous one led by U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy in the early 1950s. The four documents in this booklet should help you begin to assess and try to explain the Red Scare of 1919–1920.

## The First “Red Scare” Time Line

1869

• • • The Knights of Labor is founded. Its most effective leader, Terrence Powderly, is elected Grand Master Workman in 1879.

1886

• • • The American Federation of Labor (AFL) is formed with Samuel Gompers as the first president. Violence erupts after a bomb is thrown at Haymarket Square in Chicago during a rally in support of the eight-hour work day.

1892

• • • In the Homestead Strike in Pennsylvania, the union loses the fight over Carnegie Steel’s attempt to break the union.

1894

• • • Court injunctions and federal troops help defeat a strike against the Pullman Palace Car Company near Chicago.

1905

• • • The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) is founded. The U.S. Supreme Court, in *Lochner v. New York*, declares a New York maximum hours law unconstitutional under the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

1914

• • • World War I begins in Europe. The “Ludlow Massacre” occurs during a strike in Colorado when several wives and children of striking miners are killed in a National Guard attack on their tent colony.

1916

• • • The Adamson Act provides for an eight-hour day for railroad workers. This prevents a nationwide strike. A federal child labor law is enacted but is later declared unconstitutional.

1917

• • • President Woodrow Wilson leads the U.S. into World War I on the side of the Allies. In Russia, the Bolsheviks seize power in the October Revolution and form the world’s first communist government. They soon abandon the Allies in the war effort. The Espionage Act makes it a crime to interfere with the recruiting of troops or disclose national defense information. Several hundred go to prison under this act, including antiwar radicals such as Eugene V. Debs, Bill Haywood, and Emma Goldman.

1918

• • • The Sedition Act makes it a crime to criticize the government or the Constitution. Wilson’s Attorney General, A. Mitchell Palmer, will use the Sedition Act and the Espionage Act in his 1919–1920 campaign against radicalism. **November 11:** An armistice ends World War I.

1919

• • • **February 6–11:** The city-wide Seattle General Strike takes place. **June 2:** Bombs explode in eight cities, including the home of Attorney General Palmer. Anarchists are blamed. **September 14:** Massachusetts Governor Calvin Coolidge fires striking Boston policemen. **December 21:** Attorney General Palmer orders agents to detain 249 aliens suspected of subversive activities, including Emma Goldman. The suspects are deported to Russia.

1920

• • • **January 2:** Federal agents round up several thousand suspected radicals in raids in about 30 cities. The raids continue until May. Most of the arrested are released. **September 16:** an explosion kills 30 and injures 300 people in the Wall Street financial district in New York City.

## DOCUMENT 1

## Visual Primary Source Document 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

### Information on Document 1

On April 28, 1919, a plot was discovered and stopped in time when a package with a bomb arrived at the offices of the mayor of Seattle. On May 1, the day for labor's traditional May Day celebrations, anti-labor patriotic groups and marchers clashed, triggering riots in a number of cities. In May and June, a number of other bombs

were sent through the mail to top public officials. Most were stopped but a few exploded. This editorial cartoon by John T. McCutcheon appeared in the Chicago Tribune on June 5, 1919. The cartoon depicts several sorts of unrest and trouble besetting an already war-weakened world.