DOCUMENTS

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Revivalists and Utopians

Reform in Antebellum America

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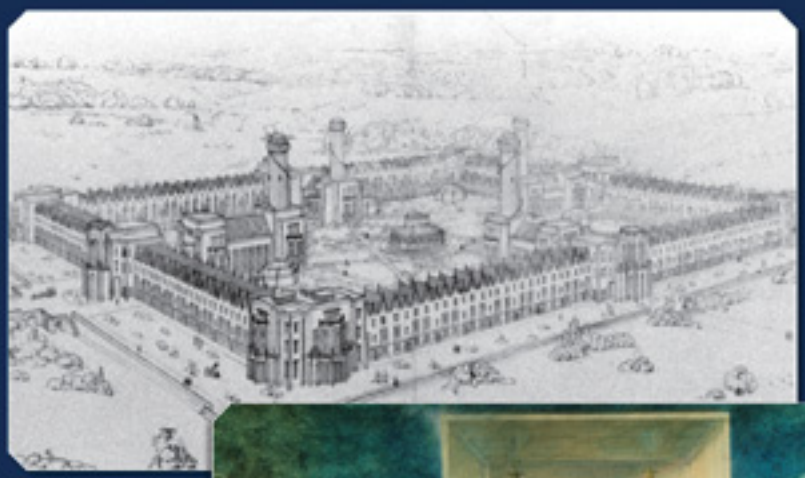

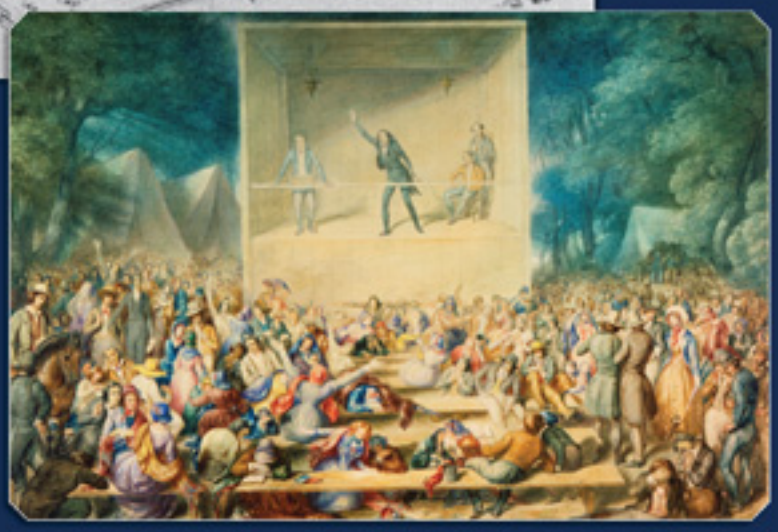

Debating the DOCUMENTS

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Contents

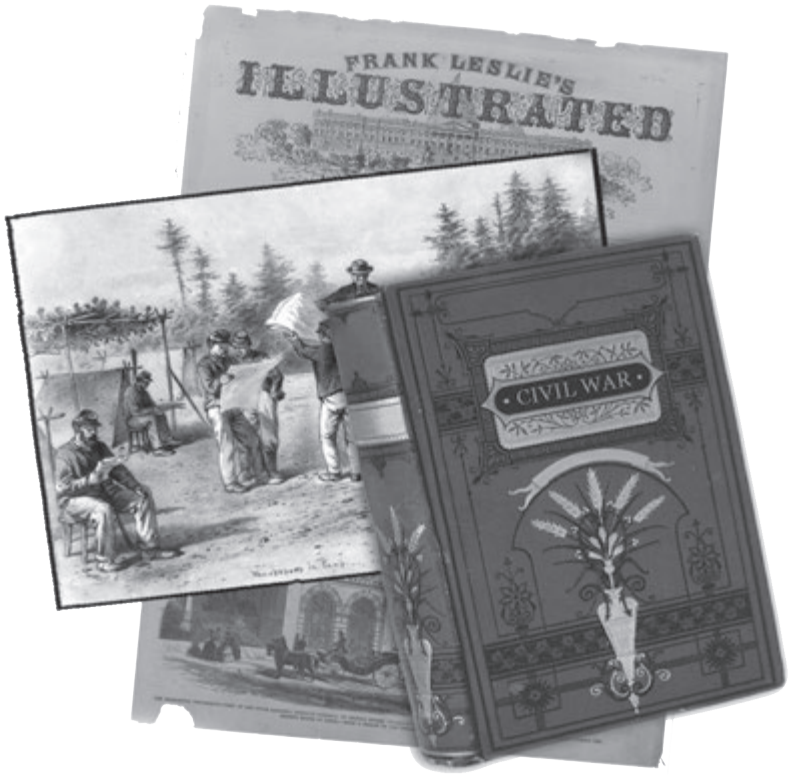
Teacher Introduction

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.

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):

What, if anything, did the revivalists, social reformers, and utopian communities of antebellum America have in common?

- 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.

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.

Revivalists and Utopians: Reform in Antebellum America

In 1776, Americans fought a revolution for liberty and independence. In 1787, they adopted the U.S. Constitution, setting up a government in the name of, "we, the people." These men—Madison, Washington, Jefferson, etc.—are often thought of as bold radicals and daring revolutionaries.

Yet they were also all wealthy, powerful white men. They believed in an orderly society in which property would be protected. It is true that they created a "republican" form of government in which citizens would choose their leaders. Yet while all citizens were represented, not all got to choose these representatives. The vote was not given to black slaves, women, or even many white males who lacked property or paid no taxes.

In their personal lives, the nation's founders were mostly upright men who many today would call old-fashioned. They lived in small communities where everyone knew who their "betters" were and acted accordingly. The new United States was a republic, but one in which these "betters" were expected to rule and did rule.

Nevertheless, these men still did launch a revolutionary age of change. In part this was because the American Revolution, the Declaration of Independence, and the U.S. Constitution contained ideas about liberty and equality that could not be controlled or limited. Over time, they took on new and deeper meanings. In addition, in the "antebellum" era (the decades before the Civil War), new social and industrial forces led to other big changes and to demands for more liberty and individual opportunity.

This growing democratic spirit soon began to affect not only politics, but all other aspects of social, economic, and cultural life. It led to an expansion of the right to vote, at least for all white males. And by the 1830s and '40s, it had produced a vast array of reform movements, some based on deep religious beliefs, others based on "utopian" dreams of building a perfect society.

The first signs of this outpouring appeared in the 1790s, in a movement historians call the "Second Great Awakening." In it, preachers of many faiths organized emotional camp meetings and other missionary activities all across the land. They appealed to each individual soul to renew itself and live a purified life. Far more than in the First Great Awakening (1730s and '40s), this one had a deeply positive and optimistic tone, both for the individual and for society as a whole. Each individual was seen as carrying a divine spark that could transform not only his or her life but all of society.

Intellectuals drawn to Transcendentalism expressed this hopefulness in a more rarified way. All sorts of other movements for social reform also appeared. They dealt with prison conditions, educational reform, the problems of factory life, alcoholism, women's rights, etc. In time, much of this reform energy would narrow its focus in on the abolition of slavery, the greatest barrier to liberty of all.

At the same time, various utopian socialist thinkers set up a number of small experimental communities. These were based on secular ideas and were sometimes openly hostile to religion. Yet the Mormons, Shakers, and several other new religious groups also established communities based on shared wealth and equality. The religious communities were in fact often the most successful and longest lasting. In all of these cases, the utopians and revivalists were sure that a new age was about to begin. Why did this outpouring take place? What, if anything, did all these reform efforts have in common? The sources in this booklet will help you decide.

Revival and Reform Time Line

1787 The first Shaker community is founded in New Lebanon, New York. The Shakers believe in living simply, practicing celibacy, and treating men and women as of equal spiritual value. By 1840, the Shakers will have about 6,000 members in 19 communal villages.

1801 A huge gathering at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, is one of the earliest camp meetings of the "Second Great Awakening." At these meetings in frontier areas, thousands sing, shout, dance, pray, and undergo conversions.

1821 Emma Willard founds the first college-level school for women in Troy, New York.

1825 Robert Owen founds his communist society at New Harmony, Indiana.

1826 Charles Grandison Finney begins preaching, further fueling the "Second Great Awakening." The revival movement's stress on individual perfection inspires many secular as well as religious reformers. Also in 1826, the American Temperance Society is formed in Boston.

1830 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) is organized by Joseph Smith in the state of New York.

1831 William Lloyd Garrison begins publishing his antislavery newspaper *The Liberator.*

1833 The Female Anti-Slavery Society is organized in Philadelphia by Lucretia Mott. The American Anti-Slavery Society is organized by Theodore Weld and Arthur and Lewis Tappan.

1836 Ralph Waldo Emerson publishes "Nature." This essay describes ideas that come to be known as Transcendentalism.

1840 The Transcendentalists (including Ralph Waldo Emerson, George Ripley, Henry David Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller) begin to publish *The Dial.* The next year, they establish Brook Farm, a cooperative living experiment.

1841 A visit to a Massachusetts jail shocks Dorothea Dix into starting her life's work of improving conditions for the mentally ill.

1844 William Miller and thousands of followers (Millerites) expect the return of Christ. His failure to appear hurts but does not destroy the movement.

1845 Thoreau moves to a cabin on Walden Pond for two years and two months. He publishes his account of it, *Walden*, or, *Life in the Woods*, in 1854.

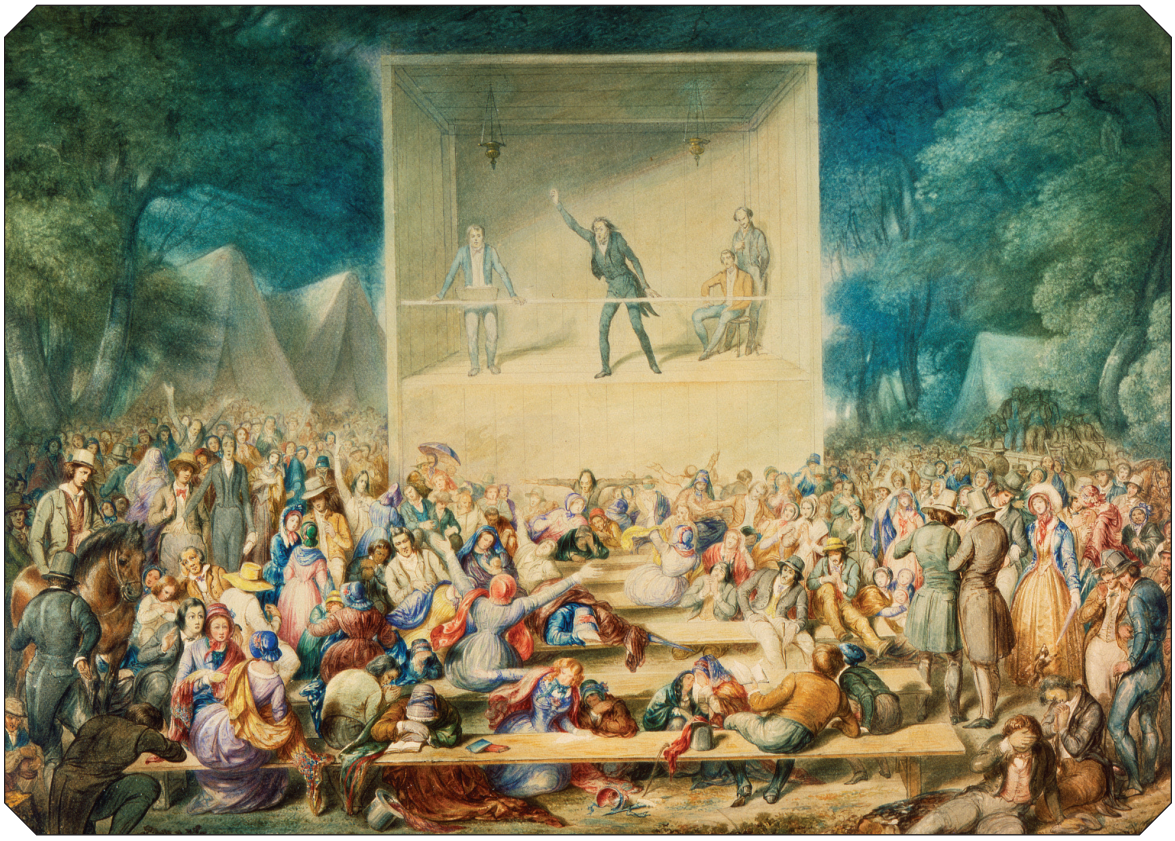
1847 Mormon leader Brigham Young and his Mormon followers arrive in the valley of the Great Salt Lake in present-day Utah.

1848 The first women's rights convention meets in Seneca Falls, New York. Also that year, New England clergyman John Humphrey Noyes founds a perfectionist community in Oneida, New York, based on "complex marriage" and communal care of children.

1849 Thoreau publishes his essay "Civil Disobedience" under the title "Resistance to Civil Government." He is moved to write it by his opposition to slavery and the Mexican War.

1852 Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*

Visual Primary Source Document 1



Painting by J. Maze Burbank. © The New Bedford Whaling Museum

Information on Document 1

This 1839 painting depicts a scene from one of the many revivals that took place throughout America in the early and mid-1800s.

Historians call these waves of religious revival "The Second Great Awakening." This sets them off from the earlier "First Great Awakening" of the 1730s and '40s. In that earlier upheaval, people gathered in churches and open-air meetings to hear emotional sermons urging them to repent their sins and open themselves up to God's saving grace.

In "The Second Great Awakening" the preachers were even more emotional. Many revivals took place at huge outdoor meetings, often in remote rural areas and often lasting days. Dancing, shouting, groaning, and speaking in tongues kept the mood tense and exciting. As in earlier revivals, preachers warned of sin, but their appeal this time was more optimistic. They stressed the ability of each individual to reform, live a new life, and help perfect all of humanity. In this way, the revivals fueled a growing spirit of social, moral, and political reform.