DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints in Primary Source Documents

The Japanese American Internment

Bigotry or Security?

What were the reasons for the internment of Japanese Americans in camps during World War II?

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):

Did the war with Japan justify any of the fears that led to the internment of 112,000 people of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast in 1942? 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.

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 Japanese American Internment

On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. Its conquering forces quickly swept through large parts of East Asia and the Pacific. Several Japanese submarine attacks off the West Coast of the United States also took place that December. As this catastrophe unfolded, panic swept the West Coast, where about 112,000 people of Japanese ancestry lived. A third were immigrants from Japan (*Issei*) who could not become citizens. Two-thirds were second-generation Japanese Americans (*Nisei*), who were U.S. citizens by birth. Both groups had long been victims of bigotry.

After Pearl Harbor, this bigotry only added to fears that Japan might invade the country. Public officials and sensational press reports fed the hysteria. Many Japanese on the West Coast were fired from jobs, refused welfare services, evicted from their homes, and harassed in many other ways. By February 1942, Congressional representatives and others were calling on the federal government to remove all Japanese, *Issei* and *Nisei*, from the region.

First, Japanese non-citizens deemed dangerous were sent to special internment camps, along with thousands of German and Italian non-citizens. Then on February 19, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066. It allowed removal of "any or all persons" from designated military areas. The order was immediately applied to those of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast. Many were allowed to find work or schooling elsewhere in the nation. Most could not do this, however. They were relocated to camps built in isolated areas away from the West Coast. The camps have been described as harsh prisons by some. Others say they were definitely not "concentration camps" in the way we use that term now. The visual sources for this lesson deal especially with this aspect of the story.

Those who see racism and war hysteria as the sole causes of the relocation often refer especially to statements by Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt, head of the Western Defense Command and in charge of the relocation process. In 1988, the government apologized and gave each surviving evacuee $20,000, in addition to compensation previously received.

Despite this official decision, some historians still claim the key decision-makers in this story acted on real security fears, not racism. As for General DeWitt, he at first actually opposed relocating all those of Japanese ancestry. More to the point, Secretary of War Henry Stimson, Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy, and President Roosevelt appear to have made the relocation decision even before DeWitt's final recommendations reached them. It is true West Coast political leaders were pressuring Roosevelt to remove all Japanese Americans from the region. Yet some historians say he, Stimson, and McCloy were influenced more by top secret information on security threats than by this pressure or by racism.

In 1941, the Army's Signal Intelligence Service broke Japan's highest-level diplomatic code. The decoded messages were given the cover name MAGIC. They suggested that there were widespread Japanese espionage networks on the West Coast. While Stimson, McCloy, and Roosevelt read the MAGIC intercepts daily, few others ever heard of them.

Did secret information shape the decision to relocate 112,000 people of Japanese ancestry? Even if it did, was the drastic roundup of an entire ethnic group necessary? The written sources for this lesson may help you answer these questions. They include one MAGIC intercept and parts of memos based on MAGIC messages. They also include a statement by General DeWitt and a newspaper editorial. This is only a small portion of the evidence, but these sources will enable you at least to begin to debate, discuss, and learn more about this troubling historical episode.

Japanese American Internment Time Line

1940

In September, the Army Signal Intelligence Service first decodes top-level Japanese diplomatic messages, a program given the name MAGIC.

1941

In November, the "Munson Report" finds that the great majority of Japanese Americans are loyal to the U.S. On December 7, Japan bombs Pearl Harbor. Martial law is declared in Hawaii. The FBI arrests Japanese immigrants identified as community leaders. The Western Defense Command is established with Lt. Gen. John L. DeWitt as commander.

1942

On January 25, the Roberts Commission report on Pearl Harbor inflames public opinion; it finds widespread espionage in Hawaii before the Pearl Harbor attack by Japanese consular agents and some Japanese residents. On February 11, Secretary of War Henry Stimson writes in his diary that Roosevelt tells him to go ahead on evacuation as he thinks best. Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy tells a key War Department official that Roosevelt has authorized the evacuation of Japanese, non-citizens and citizens alike. On February 13, West Coast lawmakers urge Roosevelt to evacuate "all persons of Japanese lineage." That same day, General DeWitt sends Stimson his final recommendations for evacuating "Japanese and other subversive persons." On February 19, Roosevelt signs Executive Order 9066. DeWitt will carry out this order, declaring the western half of California, Oregon, and Washington and the southern third of Arizona as military areas from which all persons of Japanese descent will be removed. In March, a War Relocation Authority is created to oversee the relocation. On March 24, the first of 108 "Civilian Exclusion Orders" are issued. For the next few months, Japanese Americans on the West Coast are ordered out of their neighborhoods to local "assembly centers" and then to one of 10 "relocation centers."

1943

In February, the all Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat Team is activated. Thousands volunteer. Like the 100th Infantry Battalion, another all–Japanese American unit, the 442nd fights bravely and wins many citations. That fall, based on responses to loyalty questions, "disloyal" residents in various camps are sent to Tule Lake, which becomes a "segregation center." Tensions are often high at this camp.

1944

In June, the first relocation camp closes. In December, the Supreme Court agrees that Fred Korematsu was guilty of refusing to follow an executive order; this ruling upholds the constitutionality of the relocation process.

1945

On January 2, restrictions on Japanese Americans returning to the West Coast are lifted, although many exceptions remain. On May 8, Germany surrenders. On August 6 and 9, atomic bombs are dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japan surrenders on August 14. The war is over.

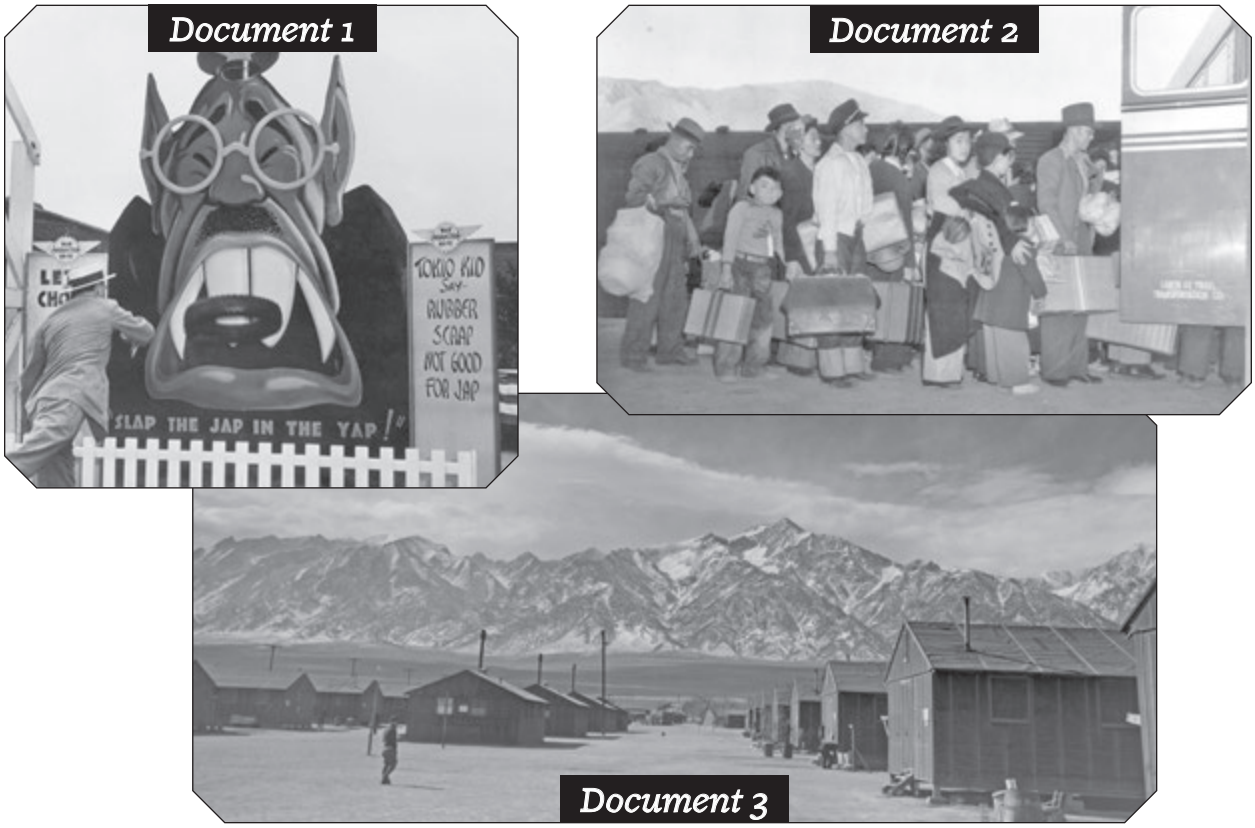
1946

President Truman signs an act to compensate Japanese Americans for some economic losses due to the forced evacuation.

1988

After years of efforts by activists and congressional hearings, a law is passed apologizing and paying $20,000 to each surviving evacuee.

Visual Primary Source Documents 1–3



Doc. 1. Ullstein Bild / The Granger Collection, New York.

Doc. 2. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-44093.

Doc. 3. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LOT 10479-2, no. 5.

Information on Documents 1–3

Document 1. A man throws a tire into the mouth of a caricature of a Japanese during a campaign to collect rubber as part of the war effort. After Pearl Harbor, anti-Japanese hostility was widespread, especially on the West Coast, making it nearly impossible for Japanese Americans to remain safe. Photograph, c.1942.

Document 2. Once relocation began, Japanese Americans were often forced to sell their homes and belongings quickly. Many were cheated out of the true value of their property. The evacuees here are leaving by bus for the Manzanar Relocation Center, California. Photo attributed to Clem Albers, 1942.

Document 3. This view of Manzanar shows its rows of barren, cramped camp houses. Guards and barbed wire surrounded the relocation camps. A small handful of violent clashes between guards and residents did occur. Some strikes and riots broke out at a few of the camps. Photograph by Ansel Adams, 1943.