

DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

“Leviathan”

Centralized States in the Early Modern Era

*The modern nation-state system emerged in Europe
and elsewhere after 1500. Why?*



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Debating the DOCUMENTS

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in Primary Source Documents

“Leviathan”

Centralized States in the Early Modern Era

The 2017 World History Course and Exam Description of the College Board Advanced Placement Program* lists five themes that it urges teachers to use in organizing their teaching. Each World History *Debating the Documents* booklet focuses on one or two of these five themes.

The Five Themes

- 1. Interaction between humans and the environment.** (demography and disease; migration; patterns of settlement; technology)
- 2. Development and interaction of cultures.** (religions; belief systems, philosophies, and ideologies; science and technology; the arts and architecture)
- 3. State-building, expansion, and conflict.** (political structures and forms of governance; empires; nations and nationalism; revolts and revolutions; regional, transregional, and global structures and organizations)
- 4. Creation, expansion, and interaction of economic systems.** (agricultural and pastoral production; trade and commerce; labor systems; industrialization; capitalism and socialism)
- 5. Development and transformation of social structures.** (gender roles and relations; family and kinship; racial and ethnic constructions; social and economic classes)

This Booklet's Main Theme:

- 3** State-building, expansion, and conflict.

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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.

NOTE: If you are using these materials with an AP world history class, an honors class, or some other group of advanced and/or more knowledgeable students, you may want to make more written sources available to them on this topic. Do a basic Internet search for sources that provide additional perspectives and then add to the sources provided here.

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):

Using these sources and your background knowledge of world history 1450–1750, describe the growing power of the state in these years and explain some of the reasons for this growth.

- 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.

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★ *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.

“Leviathan”

In his book *Leviathan* (1651), English philosopher Thomas Hobbes pictured men living in a “state of nature”—that is, a time before any organized society at all. Without “a common power to keep them all in awe,” he said, people would exist in a chaotic, lawless, and warlike condition. He further described this violent state of nature:

“In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; . . . no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

For Hobbes, humans in a natural state were not guided by reason or morality, but by sheer self-interest. To have any security and prosperity at all, they would have to agree to form a single all-powerful government, a commonwealth that Hobbes described as “that great LEVIATHAN, or rather, to speak more reverently, that mortal god to which we owe, under the immortal God, our peace and defense.” Hobbes said this government could be one man or one “assembly of men,” but in any case it was to be sovereign over all citizens and “reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will.”

Hobbes wrote at a time of chaos and civil war in England, and his ideas may in part reflect his own personal desires for order and stability. However, they also illustrate a central theme of world history in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the growing power of the centralized state.

In many European nations in these centuries, monarchs were increasing the power of their kingdoms rapidly. This was true of Spain, Russia, Brandenburg-Prussia, Sweden, the Austrian Empire and especially France under Louis XIV

(ruled 1643–1715). The concept of “absolute monarchy” appealed to rulers in these and other lands as they sought to expand the authority of the state against powerful nobles and Church officials. Outside of Europe, the same tendencies existed in three great empires: the Ottoman Empire, Safavid Persia, and the Mughal Empire in India. Japan’s feudal order was being centralized under the powerful Shogunate in the seventeenth century. As for China, it had often been under the strict control of a powerful emperor. However, the Ming dynasty (1369–1644) and the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) brought tight imperial control over China to new heights.

Certain economic or technological forces in common contributed to this trend. For example, the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals are often referred to as “gunpowder empires.” This refers to a vast growth at this time of powerful military forces equipped with cannons, muskets, tens or hundreds of thousands of conscripts—forces that only a strong centralized state could support. The growth of systems of law and taxation, the use of printing technology to aid ever-more-complex bureaucracies, commercial, money-based economies that weakened the hold of land-based nobles in some places—all these also played a part.

Was this all-powerful centralizing state inevitable? In some ways, perhaps it was. However, as England, the Dutch Republic, and some other states proved, monarchies could also be hemmed in by constitutional limits on their powers. The idea of separation of powers, individual civil liberties, and elected representation also emerged out of the disorderly time that so terrified Thomas Hobbes. “Leviathan,” in other words, need not be a single man or ruling group. In time, perhaps, it could be tamed or controlled by empowered citizens, even as it continued to grow—yet continue to grow it did throughout this era and beyond.

“Leviathan” Time Line

1519–1556

The reign of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, who combines rule over Spain and its colonies in America with his Hapsburg family domains in Austria, and parts of Germany, the Netherlands, and southern Italy. His empire is held together by dynastic ties, and is never able to unite into a centralized territorial state.

1520–1566

During the reign of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent, the Ottoman Empire expands rapidly, at one point threatening Vienna. The Ottoman Empire began with Osman I, whose rule began in 1299, and lasts until 1922. It will begin a long decline shortly after another failed siege of Vienna in 1683.

1556–1605

Akbar raises the Mughal Empire in India to the height of its power. He expands his realm, but also supports the arts, architecture, literature, and a certain degree of religious tolerance. The Mughal Empire lasts from 1523 to 1763.

1588–1629

The reign of Shah Abbas the Great of the Safavid Empire of Persia. He builds a powerful army, introduces muskets and artillery, centralizes administration, and expands his empire against the Uzbeks to the northeast and then the Ottomans to the west. The Safavid Empire lasts from 1501 to 1722.

1600–1616

Tokugawa Ieyasu founds the Tokugawa Shogunate which unifies Japan and rules it until 1868.

1618–1648

The Thirty Years War causes chaos and destruction throughout central Europe. However, the Peace of Westphalia that ends it strengthens the secular territorial state and its sovereign authority, including its authority over religion within its borders.

1642–1660

The English Civil War divides England into two groups: supporters of the Stuart king versus supporters of Parliament, who also include dissenters from the established Church of England. The first phase of the Civil War reaches a crisis when King Charles I is beheaded in 1649. Parliament is victorious by 1651. From 1653–1658, the country is under the personal rule of Oliver Cromwell. In 1660, the civil war ends with the restoration of Charles II, son of Charles I.

1643–1715

Reign of Louis XIV of France. Louis XIV is the great example of a European king claiming the right to rule as an absolute monarch. He expands the power of the central state, while also controlling his powerful nobles at his magnificent palace at Versailles. His example inspires other aspiring absolute monarchs in Austria, Brandenburg-Prussia, Russia, Denmark, etc.

1651

Thomas Hobbes publishes *Leviathan*.

1682–1725

Russian Tsar Peter the Great seeks to modernize and strengthen the Russian state.

1688

In England, anger over the restored Stuart monarchy leads to its overthrow in the “Glorious Revolution.” King James II flees and William of Orange is crowned when he agrees to rule as a limited monarch, sharing power with Parliament.

1689

In the wake of the Glorious Revolution, John Locke counters Hobbes with his more optimistic *Two Treatises of Government*. In it, he argues that government is based on popular consent and a contract freely entered into by individuals to protect their rights to life, liberty, and property.

DOCUMENTS 1 & 2

Primary Source Documents 1 & 2

Document 1



Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division,
LC-USZ62-71551

Document 2



Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-46047

Information on Documents 1 & 2

Document 1. This print is a copy of a painting by Jean-Leon Gerome, a French artist of the nineteenth century. The print shows French King Louis XIV dining with Molière, one of France's greatest playwrights. Obviously, the painting is an imaginary depiction of this scene by an artist from a later time. However, it does convey what is known of the enormous pomp and ceremony with which Louis XIV conducted his daily routines. In part, this was a way to keep his nobles occupied at Versailles and less able to oppose him or diminish his power.

Document 2. The growing naval power of the state in Portugal, Spain, France, England, and the Netherlands was crucial to the success these nations had in conquering overseas lands and building empires. This eighteenth-century illustration shows the city of Quebec, with two large ships in the foreground. Quebec was founded in 1608 by French explorer Samuel de Champlain. In 1663, the fur trading post was made the capital of a royal province of France. After that, it began to grow into a major colonial settlement.