

DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

Ideals & Violence

The Sixties Youth Rebellion

*A reawakening of youthful political idealism
collides with the escalation of America's longest,
most bitterly contested war.*



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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):

“Senseless acts of violence by a tiny minority had nothing at all to do with the ideas, ideals, goals, or methods of the broader youth movement of the 1960s.” Assess the validity of this statement. That is, explain why you do or do not agree with it.

- 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.

Evaluating the Sixties Youth Rebellion

“Be realistic, demand the impossible.” This 1960s slogan sums up the spirit of a youth rebellion that sparked a decade of turmoil in the U.S. and several other parts of the world.

America’s youth rebellion was many-sided. It was inspired by the civil rights movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s. It was fueled by the horrors of an escalating Vietnam War. Its key goals were political—to end that war and achieve racial justice. Yet it also focused on purely personal change and the creation of alternative lifestyles. Most who took part in it acted peacefully. However, many were bitterly angry and some were explosively violent.

“Be realistic, demand the impossible” conveys this movement’s “utopian” spirit, its hope to transform life totally and create a new social order. In this, it actually may have reflected the broader society of which it was a part. In the 1960s, after all, the United States was at the height of its prosperity and world power. From the space program, to President Lyndon Johnson’s “Great Society” programs, to the Vietnam War itself, Americans seemed to feel that anything was possible. This was especially true of the huge “baby boomer” generation of young people. As this group flooded into colleges in the ‘60s, it found the leisure and independence to express itself as no young generation ever had before.

The youth rebellion was led, above all, by one organization, SDS, Students for a Democratic Society. SDS’s history in the 1960s is that of a steady shift from idealism to violence. Its 1962 founding “Port Huron” statement was a stirring call for a democratic movement to transform America. The language was similar to that of Berkeley Free Speech Movement leader Mario Savio in a document included in this booklet (page 16). From 1965 on, ever larger antiwar demonstrations led by SDS and many other groups put pressure on the government to end the Vietnam War.

Yet as that war kept escalating, SDS’s views shifted from “protest” to “resistance,” to “revolution.” In 1969, SDS split apart, with all factions adopting Marxist revolutionary strategies. The so-called “Weatherman” faction took over SDS, destroyed it, and began a campaign of political violence. Most of the Weathermen later went “underground” (into hiding, that is) to work to disrupt what they viewed as a hopelessly unjust and warlike society. From 1969 to the mid-1970s, they and several other small grouplets carried out hundreds of bombings and other criminal acts. Only a tiny few ever took part in this terrorist violence. Yet tens of thousands of others in “the movement” admired or made excuses for them, however uneasily.

Two views of the 1960s still divide the nation. SDS leader Tom Hayden wrote that “We of the sixties accomplished more than most generations in American history.” To him, the youth rebellion was a heroic and deeply moral movement to save America from itself. The second view describes the upheaval as one led by pampered children whose utopian ideas and fanatic sense of moral superiority led many into a dead-end of violence.

This booklet’s documents focus mainly on the political aspect of the youth rebellion. They touch on both its idealistic, peaceful side and its tendency over time to become more violent. They raise these questions: Was the idealism totally separate from the violence, or were these two things connected in some way, one leading to the other?

A hero of the youth movement, songwriter Bob Dylan, may well have meant to warn it when he sang, somewhat mysteriously, “My love she speaks like silence, without ideals or violence.” Perhaps the four documents here will help you decide what connection, if any, might have existed between ideals and violence in the upheavals of the 1960s.

A Sixties Youth Rebellion Time Line

1955



Allen Ginsberg's poem "Howl," read in San Francisco, becomes an anthem for the Beat movement, an early focus of youthful discontent. The Montgomery Bus Boycott launches an era of civil rights protests.

1960



Young people take part in civil rights lunch-counter sit-ins in the South. Students protest HUAC (the House Un-American Activities Committee) for its investigations of the danger of domestic communism.

1961



President John F. Kennedy creates the Peace Corps, appealing to youthful idealism. The first U.S. soldiers are sent as "advisers" to fight in Vietnam.

1962



The first convention of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) adopts its 60's student manifesto, the *Port Huron Statement: Agenda for a Generation* calling for "participatory democracy." In October, the Cuban Missile Crisis highlights the dangers of the nuclear Cold War rivalry.

1963



Buddhist monks stage suicide protests against the U.S. backed regime in South Vietnam. Martin Luther King Jr. gives his "I Have a Dream" speech at the March on Washington. In November, Kennedy is assassinated. Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson ("LBJ") takes over as President.

1964



The 1964 Civil Rights Act outlaws legal segregation. The Tonkin Gulf crisis gives LBJ authority to begin to escalate the Vietnam War (U.S. troop levels there pass 500,000 by 1968). Three young civil rights workers are slain in Mississippi. Johnson is elected in a landslide. The Free Speech Movement in Berkeley, CA, takes place.

1965



Black nationalist Malcom X is assassinated. The Watts riot is one of several in black urban ghettos during the decade. The first "teach-ins" against the war are held on college campuses.

1966



Stokely Carmichael of SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, rejects nonviolence and calls for "Black Power." Martin Luther King Jr. objects strongly. Bobby Seale and Huey Newton found the Black Panther Party, a militant and often criminally violent political movement.

1967



The "hippie" arrives, in San Francisco's "Summer of Love" with its Monterey Pop Festival. About 400,000 people march to the UN to hear Martin Luther King Jr and Dr. Benjamin Spock speak against the war. SDS and other antiwar radicals stage their march to the Pentagon.

1968



Many students campaign for antiwar candidate Eugene McCarthy. SDS and other antiwar groups battle police and disrupt the Democratic Convention in Chicago. Nixon wins the election. The assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy add to a mood of crisis.

1969



Protests spread to many colleges. Some 400,000 celebrate "peace, love, and music" at Woodstock, New York. Two million take part in "Peace Moratorium" protests. SDS splits into factions. One faction, the Weathermen, engages in terrorism and bombing lasting into the '70s.

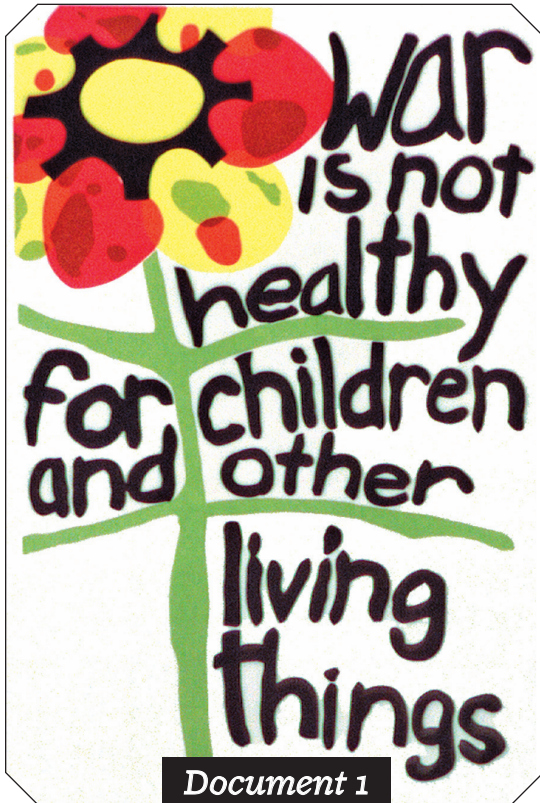
1970



During nationwide protests against U.S. bombing in Cambodia, National Guardsmen open fire and kill four students at Kent State in Ohio.

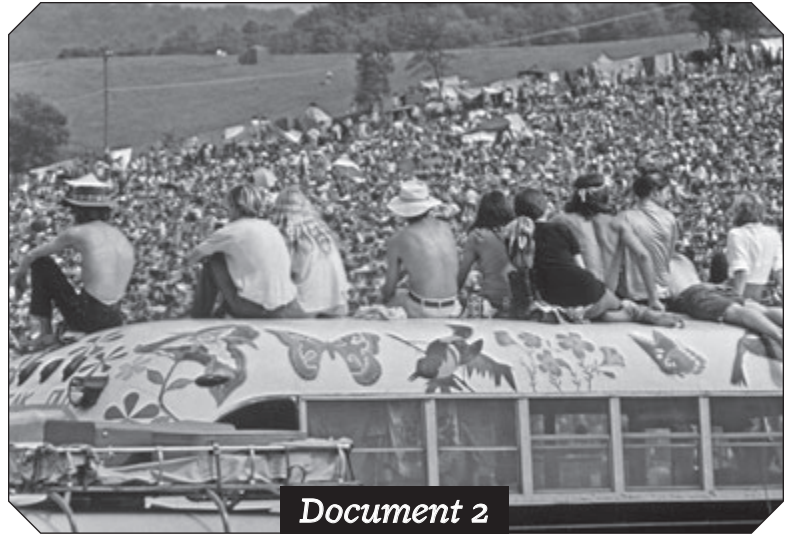
DOCUMENTS 1 & 2

Visual Primary Source Documents 1 & 2



Document 1

Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Document 2

The Granger Collection, New York

Information on Documents 1 & 2

Document 1. The poster in the upper left was one of the most popular used by the anti-war movement in the late 1960s. It was not focused so much on the Vietnam War in particular as it was on the violence of all war in general.

Document 2. The youth rebellion of the 1960s resulted in a huge outpouring of vibrant and colorful art with a social message. Posters, murals and other public displays of such art were only one of many forms of artistic activity that were a key part of what many young people came to refer to simply as “the movement.” Popular music was perhaps even more

important. Rock and folk traditions were used to express the spirit of rebellion and protest in many different ways. The enormous four-day rock concert at Woodstock, New York, in August 1969, was a key moment in this history. Hundreds of thousands gathered there to voice youthful protest and celebrate a “hippie” lifestyle that rejected traditional authority and many social conventions. In the photo on the right, the young audience members on their colorful bus illustrate this spirit of joyful rebelliousness.