

DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

How "Progressive" Was Progressivism?

A multi-sided movement changed America in the years leading up to World War I. What does it mean to say it was "progressive"?



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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):

Did the Progressives want a more just society? Or did they simply want one that was more efficient, better managed, and run by a “better” sort of leadership?

- 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.

How “Progressive” was Progressivism?

After the Civil War, a less formal, smaller-scale America faded rapidly. Rails and telegraph wires bound Americans together into a truly national society. A nationwide market soon evolved, served by giant corporations and trusts based on mass production. This meant greater wealth for a growing middle class and fabulous riches for a few powerful families. At the same time, it left many, both in the middle class and the poor, with growing fears about vast forces beyond their control.

Elihu Root, Theodore Roosevelt’s Secretary of War and of State, put it this way:

The tremendous power of organization has combined great aggregations of capital in enormous industrial establishments . . . so great in the mass that each individual concerned in them is quite helpless by himself.

On the prairies, this unease erupted in the Populist movement of the 1890s. A brooding anger at corporate power moved farmers to revolt in the face of uncertain world markets, high railroad rates and a banking system they saw as rigged against them.

Cities in the late 1800s added to the sense of helplessness—with their thousands of new immigrants, their tenements and sweatshops, their squalor and political corruption. Yet in urban America, Populism never caught fire. Instead, a different set of concerns gave birth to a very different reform movement—Progressivism. Largely urban and middle class, it responded to the poverty and disorder of the rapidly growing cities. Its reforms reflected a desire to bring both greater equality and greater efficiency and order to a national society that seemed increasingly out of control.

As with the Populists, a central issue for Progressives was the vast power of the unregulated corporation. Its dealings with workers, its effect on consumer health and safety, its use of natural

resources and its impact on the environment all seemed in need of reform. On the national stage, Progressive hopes centered on two figures, above all: Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. Both presidents called for a more vigorous use of anti-trust laws, federal regulations, new federal agencies and social science experts. Progressives wanted a new basis of order and “social efficiency” (a favorite Progressive phrase). As Elihu Root put it:

And in many directions, the intervention of that organized control which we call government seems necessary to produce the same result of justice and right conduct which obtained through the attrition of individuals before the new conditions arose.

Other strands of Progressivism offered more radical approaches. Wisconsin governor Robert La Follette opposed political bosses and urged greater use of technical experts in public service (his “Wisconsin Idea”). He also promoted direct primaries, the initiative, referendum and recall, and more. Other progressives backed a more thorough socialist program for America including ownership of major industries and an end to what was seen as “destructive” private competition.

Many progressives backed the temperance movement to limit or ban alcoholic beverages. They usually supported the right of women to vote. On the other hand, few progressives seemed interested in the problems facing ethnic and racial minorities. Many of them feared the “new immigration” that brought millions of southeastern Europeans to America in these decades. The spread of “Jim Crow” segregation against blacks and the plague of lynching in the South mattered little to many of them.

Was Progressivism truly “progressive”? That depends somewhat on how you define the word itself. It will also depend on how you interpret and balance the sources for this lesson against one another.

Progressivism Time Line

1870s

- • • In 1874, the Women's Christian Temperance Union is formed. In 1878, the Women's Suffrage Amendment is introduced into Congress.

1880s

- • • In 1887, the Interstate Commerce Commission is formed to regulate railroads. In 1889, Jane Addams opens Hull House in Chicago to aid the immigrant poor. It inspires a generation of social workers.

1890s

- • • In 1890, the Sherman Antitrust Act outlaws combinations in restraint of trade. Jacob Riis publishes *How the Other Half Lives* on lives of tenement dwellers. In 1895, the Supreme Court strictly limits the Sherman Anti-Trust Act to actions restraining interstate trade. In 1896, John Dewey's lab school opens to test new progressive educational ideas.

1901

- • • Theodore Roosevelt becomes president after McKinley's assassination.

1902

- • • Roosevelt helps settle a dispute between mine workers and owners. His use of the federal government to arbitrate such disputes becomes a key part of his "Square Deal" policies. Ida Tarbell publishes her attack on the Standard Oil Company. This style of muckraking journalism has a direct impact on progressive reform.

1903

- • • Wisconsin is the first state to adopt direct primary elections.

1904

- • • Northern Securities, a huge railroad company, is broken up for violating the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. It is Roosevelt's first big "trust-busting" case.

1905

- • • The Supreme Court finds a state law limiting maximum working hours for bakers unconstitutional.

1906

- • • The Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act are passed, inspired by Upton Sinclair's muckraking book, *The Jungle*.

1908

- • • The Supreme Court rules that an Oregon law setting maximum hours for working women is constitutional.

1909

- • • W.E.B. Du Bois and others found the NAACP.

1911

- • • Wisconsin Senator Robert La Follette helps found the National Progressive Republican League to promote better government through the initiative, referendum, recall, direct primaries, etc.

1912

- • • Roosevelt runs for president again, this time as a progressive replacing La Follette as the candidate of the "Bull Moose" Progressive Party. Democrat Woodrow Wilson, also a reformer, is elected president.

1913

- • • The Sixteenth Amendment makes the income tax legal. The Seventeenth Amendment provides for direct election of Senators. An act creating the Federal Reserve system is passed.

1914

- • • The Clayton Anti-Trust Act strengthens anti-trust laws. It excludes unions from them and makes peaceful strikes, picketing, and boycotting legal.

1916

- • • An act limiting child labor is passed by Congress, but the Supreme Court declares it unconstitutional.

1919

- • • The Eighteenth Amendment bans manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors.

1920

- • • The Nineteenth Amendment grants women the right to vote.

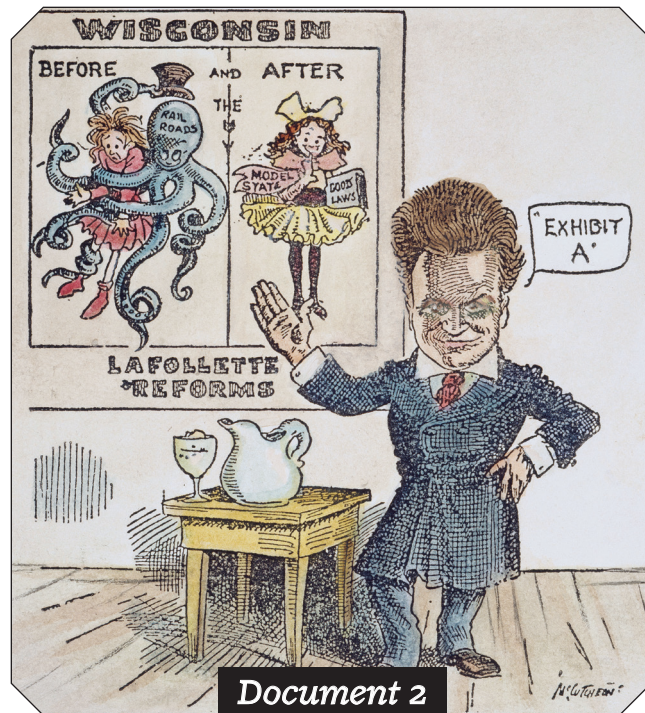
DOCUMENTS 1 & 2

Visual Primary Source Documents 1 & 2



Document 1

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZC4-434.



Document 2

The Granger Collection, New York.

Information on Documents 1 & 2

Document 1. A cartoon by Udo J. Keppler that appeared in the magazine *Puck* in 1904. It shows Theodore Roosevelt, holding a sword labeled “public service,” facing giants representing Jay Gould, John D. Rockefeller, John J. Hill, Henry Oxnard, and J. P. Morgan. The cartoon is titled “Jack and the Wall Street Giants.”

Document 2. A political cartoon commenting on Wisconsin Governor Robert La Follette and his efforts to reform his state’s politics. These reforms included the “Wisconsin Idea” — a greater use of university experts in setting public policies — as well as direct primaries and other ways to increase popular control over government.