

DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

Why Fight for Cuba?

At the end of the 19th century, America suddenly took its place as a new imperial power on the world stage. Why?



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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):

What were the real reasons for the U.S. war with Spain in 1898?

- 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.

Why Fight for Cuba?

For most of the 1800s, the United States was a vigorous, expanding nation. However, the lands it took over were all within the continent and mainly bordering the U.S. If America was building an empire, it was an internal empire. It was also an empire of lands that would be parts of the same nation, with all the same rights as the other parts. It was not an empire of overseas colonies to be kept separate and less than equal. At a time when Europe's powers were carving up much of Africa and extending their rule elsewhere in the world, the U.S. showed little interest in acquiring overseas colonies.

All that changed suddenly in 1898, when a short, sharp war over Cuba led the U.S. to take control of Cuba, the Philippines, Guam and Puerto Rico. The U.S. also annexed Hawaii that year, though not as a part of the war. Why did the nation go to war over Cuba? Was that war the opening act of a new U.S. drive for a colonial empire?

Cuban rebels had long been fighting to free their land from Spanish rule. In 1895, this rebellion flared up again. It was very bloody, and it also threatened U.S. interests in Cuba. Spain's unwillingness to grant Cuba its long overdue independence led many in the U.S. to say that a war for Cuba was needed.

As for deeper underlying causes for this Spanish-American War, and the sudden arrival of the U.S. on the world stage, four others have been debated by historians.

First, there was Spain's cruel treatment of the rebels and the outrage many in the U.S. felt about this. In other words, this cause of the war was the need to end a terrible humanitarian disaster just off our shores.

A second cause is related to this first one. A new sensational kind of journalistic crusade was mounted in the U.S. It focused on the

reports of atrocities by Spanish forces in Cuba. In particular, Cuba became a key topic in a New York newspaper war between William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer. Their papers' sensational reports of bloody Spanish rule culminated when the U.S.S. *Maine* blew up in Havana Harbor. What or who caused this explosion has never been fully determined. Yet the press played on intense nationalist pride and anger to goad the public into demanding war in response. In other words, the war was fought for glory and out of aggressive, nationalistic pride.

Other historians note that sugar and other U.S. business interests in Cuba may have wanted a war of conquest to protect their property. More generally, some say a need for overseas markets for our huge industrial output drove the U.S. to seek colonies. We are told this explains why we went to war over Cuba but wound up fighting a far more bloody war for the Philippines. There, we dealt with rebels as harshly as Spain had dealt with its rebels in Cuba. Did we fight for profit and empire? Perhaps—although at least one key anti-imperialist of the time was Andrew Carnegie, one of the most powerful businessmen of the age.

Finally, a small group of U.S. officials backed the war as part of a more limited drive to increase U.S. naval power in the Caribbean and the Pacific. Theodore Roosevelt was in this group. Those who see its ideas as the war's chief cause point out that the lands we did acquire had value mainly as coaling stations on trade routes to Asia and Central and South America. If this was imperialism, it was a quite limited kind of imperialism.

So why did we fight for Cuba? Which explanation makes the most sense to you? Perhaps the documents for this lesson will help you make up your mind about this important turning point in the nation's past.

Spanish-American War Time Line

1890



Naval officer Alfred Thayer Mahan publishes *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783*, to show that sea power was the key to a nation's greatness.

Mahan's views influence Theodore Roosevelt and other leaders who believe the U.S. must lead in the Western Hemisphere and need a big navy to do so.

1895



The latest Cuban revolt against Spanish rule begins.

1896



Spanish General Weyler (labeled the "Butcher") comes to Cuba. He soon begins rounding up Cubans and putting thousands of them in concentration camps. He is recalled by Spain in 1897. In August a revolution against Spanish rule begins in the Philippines.

February: The U.S.S. *Maine* is sent to Cuba. Hearst publishes Spanish ambassador Dupuy du Lome's letter insulting President William McKinley. This outrages the public. A few days later the U.S.S. *Maine* explodes in Havana Harbor. Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt cables Commodore Dewey, telling him to attack the Philippines if war with Spain breaks out.

April: The U.S. formally declares war on Spain. The Teller Amendment to the war resolution promises that the United States will not annex Cuba, but will return control of it to its people after the war. **May:** The Battle of Manila Bay in the Philippines takes place. The Spanish fleet there is destroyed. **June:** The American Anti-Imperialist League is organized to oppose annexation of the Philippine Islands. Among its members are Andrew Carnegie, Mark Twain, and Samuel Gompers. **July:** Main fighting in Cuba takes place, including the taking of San Juan Heights with the help of Teddy Roosevelt's "Rough Riders" at the battle on Kettle Hill. Attempting to leave Santiago Bay, Admiral Cervera and the Spanish fleet are destroyed by the U.S. squadron under Admiral Schley. On July 7, Hawaii is annexed. **August:** Spain signs the armistice, while the next day U.S. troops capture Manila. **December:** The Treaty of Paris is signed, and the U.S. annexes Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines.

1898



1899



Followers of Emilio Aguinaldo declare the Philippines an independent republic. Aguinaldo leads Filipinos in a guerilla war against the U.S. that lasts three years.

1900



The Foraker Act allows some self-government in Puerto Rico. In 1917, Puerto Rico is made a U.S. territory and its people are granted citizenship.

1901



Emilio Aguinaldo is captured.

1902



The U.S. withdraws from Cuba. The war ends in the Philippines, with more than 4200 U.S. soldiers and more than 200,000 Filipino civilians and soldiers dead.

Under William Howard Taft, civilian rule is restored and the economy improves. In 1916, an elected Filipino legislature is established. Full independence is granted in 1946.

DOCUMENTS 1 & 2

Visual Primary Source Documents 1 & 2



Document 1

The Granger Collection, New York



Document 2

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZC4-5232

Information on Documents 1 & 2

Document 1 is an 1898 cartoon by Louis Dalrymple urging war with Spain to save Cuba from Spanish colonial misrule.

Document 2 is an 1898 poster created by the Strobridge Lithograph Company. The poster shows a naval battle in order to advertise the Barnum & Bailey Circus's

recreation of the key naval showdown of the Spanish-American War. The smaller type beneath the image reads: "The Total Destruction of the Spanish Fleet on the Cuban Coast. The Greatest Naval Battle of Modern Times, Truthfully Represented by Fac-Similies of All the Huge Fighting Ships."