

DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

Africa's Slaves

The Transatlantic and East African Slave Trades

*Europeans and Islamic societies controlled two huge
slave systems. What were the differences and similarities?*



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Debating the DOCUMENTS

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in Primary Source Documents

Africa's Slaves

The Transatlantic and East African Slave Trades

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 Themes:

- 4** Creation, expansion, and interaction of economic systems.
- 5** Development and transformation of social structures.

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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):

How do you think the two major slave trading systems described in these sources shaped the ideas of the slave traders about slavery in general and African slaves in particular?

- 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.

Africa's Slaves

Today, we think of slavery as one of the great crimes of the human race. We value individual freedom so highly it is hard for us to imagine how people could enslave other people, usually without it bothering them at all. When it comes to Africa, the idea of slavery is especially hard to think about. We in the Western world still live with the legacy of that form of slavery.

Yet until the eighteenth century, no society took a principled stand against slavery. It was accepted as normal almost everywhere. It is not that people doubted how miserable it was to be a slave. After all, war captives and criminals were favorite targets for enslavement. At times, people hopelessly in debt or in other dire circumstances, might sell themselves or their children into slavery. Even in the few cases where slaves had important tasks—as slave soldiers or palace eunuchs, say—they were still seen as outsiders, unable to live a normal existence with any real respect or social acceptance. Yet the idea of individual freedom was apparently not yet strong enough to arouse horror at the thought of having no freedom at all.

For Africa, the irony of this is that Africans themselves actively took part in two of the worst slave-trading systems of all. These systems brought centuries of misery to that vast continent. Of the two systems, the transatlantic slave trade easily gets the most attention. It uprooted and transported 11 million or more to the Americas from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, French, and English slave merchants met African dealers along the coast of West Africa. They exchanged rum, firearms, metal implements, trinkets, and other things—for human beings. The voyage across the ocean was a horror known as the “Middle Passage.” After surviving weeks at sea confined below deck in cramped spaces, slaves were sold to spend the rest of their lives mainly growing and processing sugar, cotton, tobacco, rice,

and other products. They worked for plantation owners whose interest was in profit and who saw their slaves as commodities and little more.

The other slave system is less well-known. It was conducted mainly by Arab and other Muslim merchants and their African middlemen. It took the form of caravans across the Sahara to North Africa or the Red Sea, or to key cities along the coast of East Africa. This system began long before the Transatlantic slave trade, perhaps even before Islam appeared. It involved fewer African captives each year. Yet because it lasted many centuries longer, it also may have involved the enslavement of ten million or more. Unlike the transatlantic trade, the East African slave trade took more women and children than men. (Often in a raid, the men would be killed and the women and children marched away.) Slaves in Muslim lands served as domestics in homes, in harems, as concubines, at times as slave-soldiers, and as eunuch servants of powerful princes. (The surgery creating a eunuch was often carried out en route, and some estimate that it caused nine deaths for every one boy to survive it.) Slaves in Muslim lands also worked on plantations and mines, or at removing salt-encrusted soils from swampy lands—such as the Zanj did in the salt marshes of what is now Iraq. (“Zanj” means “Land of the Blacks.”) From 869–883 CE, the Zanj staged one of the greatest slave uprisings in history.

The sources with this lesson will help you better understand these slave systems. They will help you to compare and contrast the two systems in terms of what they did to the slaves, and why, and how the enslavers viewed the Africans they caught by the millions and exiled from their lands forever.

Africa's Slaves Time Line

100 CE

• • • The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* is written. It is a Greek account of travels and trade along the Red Sea and lands around the Indian Ocean. It describes a small trade in slaves taken from the coast of East Africa.

700-900

• • • Demand for labor to reclaim marsh land in southern Iraq leads to stepped up importation of black slaves from East Africa.

869-883

• • • The "Zanj" (black slaves from Africa) labor in horrible conditions to remove salt-encrusted soil from the marshes of present-day southern Iraq. In 869, tens of thousands of them rise in a revolt that lasts 13 years.

900-1000

• • • The trade in slaves across the Sahara desert to North Africa increases substantially in this century after the camel is introduced into the region.

1441

• • • The Atlantic slave trade is often dated to 1441, when a Portuguese captain brought a handful of African slaves back to Portugal.

1481

• • • On the coast of West Africa, the Portuguese found Elmina, the first of several European forts there to hold African slaves for shipment to the Americas .

1600

• • • By 1600, about 370,000 Africans have been taken to the Americas in the transatlantic slave trade, according to Paul L. Lovejoy's "Volume of the Atlantic Slave Trade" (*Journal of African History* 23, 1982).

1600-1700

• • • Nearly 2 million Africans are taken to the Americas in the transatlantic slave trade, according to Lovejoy.

1700-1800

• • • This century is the high point of the transatlantic slave trade. About 6 million Africans are taken to the Americas in that trade, according to Lovejoy.

1791

• • • A slave uprising in the French West Indian colony of Santo Domingo leads to the establishment of the independent nation of Haiti in 1801.

1794

• • • The French National Convention emancipates all slaves in the French colonies.

1800-1900

• • • A little over 3 million Africans are taken to the Americas in the transatlantic slave trade, according to Lovejoy. The Muslim-dominated slave trade across the Sahara, from the Red Sea and from East Africa increases in this century to about 2 million, according to Ronald Segal in his book *Islam's Black Slaves* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002).

1807

• • • The British Parliament bans the Atlantic slave trade. Also, the U.S. passes legislation to take effect in 1808 banning the slave trade.

1819

• • • Britain stations a naval squadron on the West African coast to patrol against illegal slavers.

1833

• • • Great Britain passes the Abolition of Slavery Act, providing for emancipation in the British West Indies—set to take effect August 1834. (Following emancipation, a six-year period of apprenticeship is permitted.)

1861-1865

• • • The U.S. Civil War results in the defeat of the Confederate States of America, and the Thirteenth Amendment abolishes slavery in the United States

1888

• • • Brazil becomes the last nation in the Western world to abolish slavery. Some nations in the Middle East, such as Mauritania or Saudi Arabia, do not do this until the second half of the twentieth century.

DOCUMENTS 1 & 2

Visual Primary Source Documents 1 & 2

Document 1



The Granger Collection, New York

Document 2



The Granger Collection, New York

Information on Documents 1 & 2

Document 1. To make a profit, European slave traders had to pack as many Africans as they could below deck for the trip across the Atlantic. Conditions were horrible. Many slaves died on these voyages. For purely practical reasons, slave traders tried to prevent this. After all, each slave who survived the trip was worth a lot of money at sale. To give the slaves some air, a few at a time might be brought up on deck for exercise. In this illustration of an eighteenth-century French slave ship, slaves are being forced to dance on the deck.

Document 2. The Atlantic slave trade mainly supplied slaves for backbreaking labor on sugar, tobacco, cotton, and other plantations in Brazil, the West Indies and southern colonies of what would become the United States. That is why a large share of Africans taken in the transatlantic trade were males. Here African slaves in the seventeenth century are seen working at a sugar mill in the West Indies on what was probably a Dutch-owned island. The sugar plantations and mills of these centuries were the industrial powerhouses of their day.