

## DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints  
in Primary Source Documents

# The Totalitarian Temptation

*What led certain nations in the 20th century to adopt  
the most authoritarian systems of rule in history?*



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## *Debating* the DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints  
in Primary Source Documents

# The Totalitarian Temptation

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):**

What do you think the attractions of totalitarianism were for many people in the modern age? Do you think totalitarianism holds such attractions for some even now? Why or why not?

- 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.

# The Totalitarian Temptation

In the 1920s, Giovanni Amendola, a deputy in Italy's parliament, led those opposed to Benito Mussolini's new Fascist government. In 1926, he died from injuries inflicted by a gang of Fascist thugs. It was Amendola who in 1923 first coined the term "totalitarianism" to describe the regime Mussolini had created. Historians have debated the word every since. Yet Amendola's sense that something new and frightening had appeared is still shared by many who look back on the history of the twentieth century.

The term "totalitarian" has been applied mainly to Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, certain communist regimes (especially Stalin's Soviet Union and the Eastern European governments it controlled after World War II), North Korea, China under Mao Zedong, and Cambodia under Pol Pot, as well as to the Taliban and certain other radical Islamic states or terrorist groups.

The term came into use because other labels such as "dictatorship" did not seem to describe fully the kind of sweeping social, cultural, and political control some states in the twentieth century have sought. Perhaps only in the twentieth century have science and technology given the state the means to try to impose total control over all aspects of life. In any case, this goal is what the "total" in "totalitarianism" refers to. The term is applied to a state in which a single party rules absolutely and uses state power and a cult of personality centered on its leader to control the economy, the military, education, all cultural institutions, neighborhoods—even the family.

Two aspects of totalitarian regimes have received the most attention: the use of terror and surveillance to intimidate and the use of propaganda and the suppression of all dissent to maintain popular support—in fact, to alter individual consciousness itself.

The first of these aspects of totalitarianism took the form of terrifying police-state tactics and violence directed toward groups labeled "enemies of the state." In the case of the Nazis,

the Jews became the single-most important enemy, slaughtered by the millions in the death camps of the Holocaust.

The Nazis depicted Jews as a parasitical people who lived off the vital energies of other nations, particularly the German nation. Hitler and the Nazis also portrayed the Jews as both evil capitalists and the force behind Soviet communism. This is ironic, for Jews also suffered greatly at the hands of the Soviet Union during and after Hitler's time. Under Stalin, the "Gulag," a vast apparatus of thousands of slave-labor prison camps, was filled with millions of innocent people. Millions died in such camps. Jews were among them. But in the case of Stalin's Gulag, the imprisoned were defined mainly by "class," as enemies who supposedly tried to sabotage the effort to build a perfect communist society of equality, justice, and happiness.

Ideals such as "equality," "justice," "patriotism," "the master race," etc., gave totalitarianism its appeal for millions. This was especially so during times of deep stress and confusing change. Such times were common throughout the 20th century. The intense propaganda programs of totalitarian regimes worked, in part, because people willingly longed for the peace, order, and harmony they promised. This longing, this "totalitarian temptation," is a part of what gave these regimes life.

The nature of totalitarianism and the totalitarian temptation has been explored by some of the greatest writers of the century: Arthur Koestler, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and George Orwell. Orwell's 1949 novel *Nineteen Eighty Four* gave us a unique set of terms for thinking about totalitarian control (e.g., "Big Brother," "Newspeak," "doublethink," "thought police").

The sources here will help you explore and debate this aspect of twentieth-century history in order to better understand the meaning of totalitarianism and the totalitarian temptation.

# Totalitarianism Time Line

1917-1923

Vladimir Lenin leads the Bolsheviks to power in Russia in 1917. During the civil war that follows, they seize factories and banks, outlaw other political parties, set up the secret police (the "Cheka"), force peasants to turn over food surpluses, and use terror on a mass scale. One official says, "We are not carrying out war against individuals. We are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a class."

1922

In chaos after World War I, Italy turns to Benito Mussolini's Fascists, whose black-shirted street fighters were fostering much turmoil. Censorship is imposed and by 1925, Italy is a one-party police state with Mussolini as the all-powerful "Il Duce."

1925

In the book *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler describes in chilling terms his National Socialist (Nazi) ideology and his plans for the German nation he hopes to rule.

1929-1933

Joseph Stalin, now fully in control of the Soviet Union, begins a drive for the full collectivization of agriculture and, as he put it, "the liquidation of the *kulaks* as a class" (*Kulaks* are relatively wealthy peasants, but the term comes to mean anyone opposed to collectivization). Beginning in 1930, several million are deported or killed. At the same time, Stalin crushes the peasantry in the Ukraine by creating an artificial famine in which several million starve to death.

1933

At the height of the Great Depression, Hitler's Nazi Party grows in popularity to become the largest party in Germany's parliament. Hitler is named Chancellor and begins the total destruction of political democracy.

1937-1938

In the purges and Moscow show trials, Stalin eliminates all potential opponents among older Bolsheviks and current Communist Party officials. In this climate of terror, possibly two million others are sent to the Gulag. Arthur Koestler's 1940 novel *Darkness at Noon* expresses the disillusionment with communism felt by many former supporters at this time.

1939

Hitler, with Mussolini and Japan's military dictators as allies, invades Poland, plunging Europe into World War II. Some 50 million will die during the course of the war.

1942

In the midst of World War II, Hitler implements his plans to exterminate the Jews as a people. His policy of arrest, imprisonment in death camps, and the execution of millions, including six million Jews, comes to be known as the Holocaust.

1949

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is published. In China, Mao Zedong's Communists take power. During its "Great Leap Forward" (1958-1960) and its "Cultural Revolution" (1966-1969), many millions perish in turmoil generated by the plans and power of Mao's totalitarian state.

1973

*The Gulag Archipelago* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is published in the West, describing the Soviet concentration-camp system.

1975-1979

In Cambodia, the communist Khmer Rouge led by Pol Pot create a totalitarian state and cause the deaths of two million people (a fifth of the country's population) in one of the worst genocidal tragedies of the century.

1989-1991

After years of growing protests, the Soviet-controlled East European communist states collapse, as does the Soviet Union itself by 1991.

## DOCUMENTS 1 &amp; 2

## Visual Primary Source Documents 1 &amp; 2

Document 1



TAOLMOR, Shutterstock Inc.

Document 2



TAOLMOR, Shutterstock Inc.

## Information on Documents 1 &amp; 2

**Document 1.** One common theme in the propaganda art of totalitarian societies seems to be a glorification of the leader as larger than life. Here in this Stalin-era Soviet poster, both Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin loom as giant figures, radiating confidence and firmness as they lead their society into an age of industrial triumph and communist social transformation.

**Document 2** is a poster of Mao Zedong. As with the Soviet poster, the leader is portrayed as both huge and reassuring. Here, Mao is smiling as he rises with the sun and its rays to watch over and guide his joyous people. The masses are depicted as strong, hard-working, ordinary people, confident and totally united.