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INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS HISTORIOGRAPHY?

Historiography is the study of how history has been written, studied, researched, and analyzed over time. When historians look at specific historical documents, they want not only to learn what it says about an event or person, but also to understand who wrote it, where they wrote it, and when. Historians want to know this information because they are trying to figure out what may have influenced the author(s) perspective, biases, and interpretation of the specific person or event detailed in the source.

Every historian knows that when authors write something they are not doing so in a perfect vacuum or even being completely objective about their topic. Rather, each document (or source) was produced at a time when certain cultural, political, religious, geographic, economic, and/or social events were swirling around them. Therefore, historians would argue that the time period in which the source was written affected how its author(s) saw the world around them.

It is also important to note that very few historical figures lived their lives with the thought they were living “in history.” Rather, most people live day-to-day without considering that in the future their daily actions might be analyzed, researched, written about, and debated. For example, the immigrants who came to the United States in the late 1800s did not sit around saying to one another, “Isn’t it great living in this historical time period known as the Gilded Age?” They were much more concerned about surviving and getting set up in their new home and were probably not considering how people in the future would view them either individually or as a larger group. Therefore, when they wrote letters home, kept journals, or communicated with people in their own community, they wrote what they felt and knew at that moment. Now, because of historical research, we know that there were certain political, economic, geographic, religious, social, and cultural things going on at that time, all of which may have had a direct impact on how these new immigrants viewed the world.

What does all this mean for the study of history today? Consider the following scenario. Today, two historians end up researching the same historical event. For arguments sake, let’s say they are interested in why the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and which world leader should get credit for this event. They are researching the same topic and reading many of the same documents, but when they write up their final report they have two very different perspectives on this same event. One discussed how it was U.S. President Ronald Reagan who was the key player in ending the Cold War by forcing Germany to tear down the Berlin Wall, while the other argues that it was obviously Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and his policies in the former Soviet Union that ended the Cold War.

These two historians came to completely different interpretations of what caused this major historical event probably because their sources emphasized different perspectives. These historians then based their arguments on what individuals from the past had written about the event at the time the event occurred. Some of the sources could have

been an East German who had just left his country to get into West Germany, a Soviet soldier who was stationed in East Berlin at the end of the 1980s, or even an American diplomat working in the U.S. Embassy in East Berlin at this time. Each participated in the exact same event but may have seen and remembered it differently from the others.

After considering all of this, think about one more thing. You have been assigned to read articles about who should get credit for the Berlin Wall coming down in your history class. And, as any good history student does, you check out the sources and footnotes for the articles in front of you and you notice that one has been written by an American historian, and the other by a Russian historian. This forces you to ask another historiographical question: “Does their nationality impact how they researched and perceived this event?”

This is historiography. It allows the reader to think about history from a larger perspective by forcing them to consider not only what was happening at the time of the historical event, but also what is happening in our own time which might affect how we learn about this event.

This perspective is what makes history so interesting, useful, and significant. Studying history is not just about names, dates, and places; applying historiography forces students and teachers to engage with the material, to consider why sources were written the way they were and when they were, and to ask how they relate to our world today. Because, in the end, students must remember that they too will become a part of history, and that current geography, economics, politics, society, culture, and religion may all affect how they view historical events as well.

This workbook will use eight historiographical time periods from American history to examine the external societal impacts that may have influenced how each textbook was written. Use this handout as a reference to help you understand how historians have categorized the different historiographical periods of American history. This will help you get a better sense of some of the major social, political, economic, religious, and cultural issues that may have influenced how these history textbooks were written. It can also help shed some light on the author(s) own interpretation, bias, and perspectives concerning the historical events they were writing about at these specific times in American history.

IMMIGRATION AND INDUSTRIALIZATION

DOMESTIC VIEW OF IMMIGRATION

1. Answers may vary but students should emphasize that the excerpts from 1905, 1916, 1933, and 1936 all seem to fall under the Nationalist School of history in that they all argue the superiority of the Northern Europeans over the other groups that immigrated to the United States. Students will be able to choose a number of overtly racist and anti-immigrant phrases from the selections above. The last two textbooks, 1950 and 1961, seem to resemble the Consensus school in that the authors seem to make the point that, while some Americans were against immigration, the United States also benefitted greatly from these immigrants coming to this country.
2.
 - a. Most historians would argue that the late 1800s to the early 1900s was the peak of European migration to the United States. But, many of these immigrants were coming from Eastern European countries and were bringing different cultures and religions, which worried many old-stock Americans.
 - b. There were some harsh immigration laws written in the 1920s and with the rise of groups like the KKK many Americans continued to oppose new immigration. Of particular interest was a crackdown on immigrants coming from Asia.
 - c. With World War II and the massive immigration coming from Europe over, there were not as many immigrants coming to the United States. Those who did were often refugees from war-torn lands. It is also interesting to note that the students who would have read these textbooks may have been the children of the immigrants who came earlier, which may have impacted how textbook publishers decided to write about these groups.
3. Answers may vary but students may see some similarities in how immigrants were talked about in the twentieth century and how they are today. Textbooks today could possibly come from the New Left School and therefore would emphasize the important impact that immigrants had and discuss how hard life was for these people.

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON IMMIGRATION

- Answers will vary but students in each of these countries would either hear about how good or how bad the U.S. was to their citizens. Many students would contextualize this and bring this argument into the modern day and either continue to find fault with the U.S. or agree with the positive images and therefore defend the United States.

Country	Negative Images of Immigration	Positive Images of Immigration
Sweden		Land of opportunity. Escaped poverty and famine. Possibility of good jobs.
Italy	Propaganda to bring immigrants in. Many struggles for new immigrants, including prejudices. Families usually did not come with and it was hard to get to, and then into, the United States.	
Germany	Fear of Catholics and the immigrants bringing their old German culture with them.	Letters sent home and newspapers talked about how great the U.S. was. Established their own communities in which people helped one another.

2.

Country	Push Factors
Sweden	Economics, politics, and famine
Italy	Lack of jobs and hunger
Germany	Catastrophic situation in Germany, impoverished people, the political situation

- Answers will vary but should include a series of push and pull factors, often relating to economic reasons for leaving one's homeland. Students could argue that it was a myth because few recent immigrants became wealthy right away and many were not wanted in the United States. Others might argue that these immigrants escaped from poor conditions and were able to find work and support their families, all the while helping to build the American dream.

4. Answers will vary depending on the topic and depth of the student research. Teachers should try to point out how a student's current political and social views might impact how they view this topic.

NATION BUILDING IN THE U.S.

1. 2011
2. Malmo, Sweden
3. The development of a country's political, economic, and social institutions.
4. They were forced off their land and onto reservations.
5. Answers will vary.

EUGENE V. DEBS AND THE PULLMAN STRIKE

1. Answers will vary depending on the amount of research and the issues students want to highlight in their answer.
2.
 - a. Progressive History: Discussed the struggle between the “power elite” and the people. Conflict helped shape American history.
 - b. Progressive History: Discussed the struggle between the “power elite” and the people. Conflict helped shape American history.
 - c. Consensus History: Authors point out issues caused by both the labor unions as well as blame President Cleveland and his administration for causing unrest.
 - d. Neo-Conservative, Consensus, or New Left: Answers may vary depending on student's perspective.
3. Answer will vary depending on the depth of student research.

AMERICA AS AN IMPERIALIST POWER

THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR, 1898

1. Answers will vary. Typical responses may include examples which explain how this textbook refers to the Americans becoming “masters” of these other nations. This textbook argues that the U.S. usually took over economically, more than militarily. The authors also stress how Spain was forced to turn over its territories to the United States at the end of the war.