

Module #17 General Instructions – Primary Source Analysis

Primary sources are the core elements of historical analysis and interpretation. The writing assignments for this semester will ask you to carefully read and write about some of these sources. Before starting your first assignment listen to my explanation Analyzing a Primary Source at then read through the following general explanation. I have also included a sample essay which is also at Modules.

1) Context -In addition to reading assigned primary sources in the textbook, the essay assignments will involve three 4-page essays that require you to examine and evaluate primary sources. Remember that a primary source is one that originates at the time an event is happening, and a secondary account is a historian's interpretation and explanation of the event.

Knowing the context or background is the first step toward analyzing a source. In other words, it is important to understand what was happening at the time the source originated. For example, in order to evaluate "The Duty of a Man of Wealth"(your first primary source analysis) it is important to have some understanding of who Andrew Carnegie was and how he treated his workers. Without understanding the context, it is impossible to decipher that meaning of the source. So for each source that is assigned it is important that you read the background in the text or any additional material is assigned. When doing the background reading pay close attention to the description of the event as well as to the important names, places, and terms. The background reading supplies the who, what, when, and where for your essay. You are not required to do any research outside of what is assigned. I do however expect you to thoroughly read and understand the assigned material and to incorporate that into the essay.

2) Read and analyze the primary source- To help you evaluate the sources, each assignment includes some questions to help you focus on specific aspects of the source. After you have completed reading the context for the source, read through the questions that I assign, then read the primary source carefully looking for answers to the questions. Making a print copy of the source and highlighting the specific portions might be helpful here.

3) Organize an outline- After reading through the primary source for the first time, turn the main points of the questions into topics and organize the questions (now topics) into a short topical outline. Use the main ideas from the questions as the topics and the information from the sources as the subtopics. The outline should use correct outline format with Roman numerals for the main topics and capitalized letters for the subtopics. The outline allows you to form a framework for the main ideas of the essay and should be no longer than one page. Do not write paragraphs for the outline, save the writing to "flesh out" the topics in your actual essay.

4) Write a thesis-After organizing an outline, write a one sentence statement that lays out the main point or thesis of your paper. A thesis statement is a specific point that you will pursue in your essay and that is supported by the evidence. Your essay should be like a lawyer going before a jury. You will present the main idea (the thesis) followed by the evidence that supports your main idea and try to convince the jury (or the readers) that your thesis is correct. The questions that I give you about the source will direct you to the main points that should be

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