

## Script for Primary and Secondary Sources in US History Tutorial

You will need to use both primary and secondary sources for your history papers and projects. This tutorial will help you learn to distinguish between the two types of sources.

Let's begin with some definitions and examples!

A primary source in history is a document, image or artifact that was created during the time you're studying. They provide direct evidence, first hand testimony or an eyewitness account of what happened. Researchers use primary sources when they need the information, data or experience to be as close as possible to what they're studying.

Primary sources can include diaries, letters or memoirs. Other examples include magazine or newspaper articles published at the time of an event, speeches, legal documents and interviews, and statistical data. These can be the original items in archives, digitized sources or those that have been edited and published. If they've been translated into English they still count as primary sources! Visual and audio objects such as photos, art, cloth or artifacts and decorative objects are also primary sources.

Alternately, secondary sources analyze or interpret an event, phenomenon, person's life or a creative work, and may be written any time afterwards. Scholars who produce secondary sources use primary sources as evidence in their analysis to support their thesis, argument or point of view.

Secondary sources are usually published as books or journal articles and can include histories, biographies and criticism. To show the difference between primary and secondary sources let's look at some examples.

The Sit-Ins at the Greensboro, NC Woolworth's lunch counter began on February 1, 1960, and continued for several weeks. A primary source for this event would include this newspaper article from the Greensboro Record because it was written on February 2, 1960, during the time of the events.

Another example of a primary source is an oral history given by Joseph McNeil. He is one of the four young students who launched the Greensboro Sit-Ins at Woolworth's. Even though this interview was done in 1979, almost 20 years after the event, it includes McNeil's first-hand account of what happened, so it is still a primary source.

Examples of secondary sources on the Sit-Ins would include books, like *Lunch at the 5 & 10* by Miles Wolff, published in 1990 or *From Sit-ins to SNCC* published in 2012. These books were written several years after the Sit-Ins by authors or scholars who did not witness them directly.

Another secondary source is this journal article about Bennett College students' participation in the Sit-Ins from the *Journal of African American History* written in 2005. When you look at the

bibliography you'll see that the author used primary sources – in this example newspaper articles—to help write the article.

The UNCG University Libraries have many tools to help you find primary and secondary sources. One way is to use the research guides for history. Let's show you how to find those.

From the Libraries home page, click on "Research Guides by Subject." Then click on "History."

The History Resources guide provides information on finding a variety of secondary resources including books, journal articles, and many other types of resources.

Let's click on the primary sources tab. It provides information on finding primary sources in many locations including online collections, the Libraries' Special Collections Department, periodicals, newspapers, microforms and through our catalog.

This tutorial provides an introduction to identifying primary and secondary sources. It will depend on the class you're taking and your professor's requirements as to what resources you should use. For further assistance in finding great resources be sure to consult with your professor. If you have any questions about using the library or the resources available, you can always Ask Us!