

# Identifying Primary and Secondary Resources

*Sources of information are often categorized as primary or secondary depending upon their originality.*

## Primary Sources

A primary source provides direct or firsthand evidence about an event, object, person, or work of art. Primary sources provide the original materials on which other research is based and enable students and other researchers to get as close as possible to what actually happened during a particular event or time period. Often primary sources reflect the individual viewpoint of a participant or observer. Primary sources can be written or non-written (sound, pictures, artifacts, etc.). In scientific research, primary sources present original thinking, report on discoveries, or share new information.

| Examples of primary sources   |   |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Autobiographies and memoirs</li><li>• Diaries, personal letters, and correspondence</li><li>• Interviews, surveys, and fieldwork</li><li>• Internet communications on email, blogs, listservs, and newsgroups</li><li>• Photographs, drawings, and posters</li><li>• Works of art and literature</li><li>• Books, magazine and newspaper articles and ads published at the time</li><li>• Public opinion polls</li><li>• Speeches and oral histories</li><li>• Original documents (birth certificates, property deeds, trial transcripts)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Research data, such as census statistics</li><li>• Official and unofficial records of organizations and government agencies</li><li>• Artifacts of all kinds, such as tools, coins, clothing, furniture, etc.</li><li>• Audio recordings, DVDs, and video recordings</li><li>• Government documents (reports, bills, proclamations, hearings, etc.)</li><li>• Patents</li><li>• Technical reports</li><li>• Scientific journal articles reporting experimental research results</li></ul> |

## Secondary Sources

Secondary sources describe, discuss, interpret, comment upon, analyze, evaluate, summarize, and process primary sources. A secondary source is generally one or more steps removed from the event or time period and are written or produced after the fact with the benefit of hindsight. On occasion, secondary sources will collect, organize, and repackage primary source information to increase usability and speed of delivery, such as an online encyclopedia. Like primary sources, secondary materials can be written or non-written (sound, pictures, movies, etc.).

| Examples of secondary sources   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bibliographies</li><li>• Biographical works</li><li>• Reference books, including dictionaries, encyclopedias, and atlases</li><li>• Articles from magazines, journals, and newspapers after the event</li><li>• Textbooks</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Literature reviews and review articles (e.g., movie reviews, book reviews)</li><li>• History books and other popular or scholarly books</li><li>• Works of criticism and interpretation</li><li>• Commentaries and treatises</li><li>• Indexes and abstracts</li></ul> |

# How to Analyze a Source

When you analyze a source, you are undertaking the most important job of the historian. There is no better way to understand events in the past or the present than by examining the sources--whether journals, newspaper articles, letters, court case records, novels, artworks, music or autobiographies.

Each historian, including you, will approach a source with a different set of experiences and skills, and will therefore interpret the document differently. Remember that there is no one right interpretation. However, if you do not do a careful and thorough job, you might arrive at a wrong interpretation.

In order to analyze a source you need information about two things: the document itself, and the era from which it comes. The following questions may be helpful to you as you begin to analyze the sources:

## The Origin of the document:

- Is it a primary or secondary source?
- When was it created and who published it? Where was it published?
- What do you know about the author? Race, sex, class, occupation, religion, age, region, political beliefs? Does any of this matter? How?

## The Purpose of the document

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- Think about the purpose of the source. Why does this document exist? What was the author's message or argument? What was he/she trying to get across? Is the message explicit, or are there implicit messages as well?
- How does the author try to get the message across? What methods does he/she use?
- Who is the intended audience? Was this source meant for one person's eyes, or for the public? How does that affect the source?
- What can a careful reading of the text (even if it is an object) tell you? How does the language work? What are the important metaphors or symbols? What can the author's choice of words tell you? What about the silences--what does the author choose NOT to talk about?

The last step in this process is beginning to think about the relationship between the origin of a source and its purpose.

- How does the origin of a source affect the purpose?
- Does the origin make the source more valuable, or perhaps less valuable?
- Is there a clear bias that can be identified based on who the author is, when it was created or the words that were chosen?
- Is it obvious that there is a particular intention that the author had when choosing what details to include, or not include?

# **The United States shouldn't take sides in the Sunni-Shiite struggle**

By Fareed Zakaria, Opinion writer January 7, 2016

Over the past two decades, the United States has approached the Middle East through its own conceptual frameworks: dictatorships vs. democracy, secularism vs. religion, order vs. chaos. But the most significant trend shaping the region today is something different: Sunnis vs. Shiites. That sectarian struggle now infects almost every aspect of the region's politics. It has confounded U.S. foreign policy and will continue to limit the ability of the United States, or any outside power, to stabilize the region.

In his prescient book, "The Shia Revival," Vali Nasr argues that the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 was the tipping point. The United States saw itself as taking democracy to Iraq, but people in the region saw something different — the upending of the balance of power. Sunnis, who make up 85 percent of all Muslims, had long dominated the Arab world, even in Shiite-majority countries such as Iraq and Bahrain. But in one stroke, that changed. Iraq, a major Arab state, would now be ruled by Shiites. This rattled other Arab regimes, and their anxieties have only grown.

Though there always was tension, Sunnis and Shiites did live in peace, for the most part, until recently. In the 1960s and '70s, the only Shiite power, Iran, was ruled by the shah, whose regime was neither religious nor sectarian. In fact, when the shah was overthrown, the country that first gave him safe harbor was Egypt, the region's largest Sunni power, something unimaginable in today's sectarian atmosphere.

The pivotal shift took place in 1979. The Islamic Revolution in Iran brought to power an aggressively religious ruling class, determined to export its ideas and support Shiites in the region. That same year, in Saudi Arabia, militant radicals took over the Grand Mosque in Mecca, proclaiming opposition to the royal family and what they saw as its lax ways. The event scared the Saudis, pushing the regime substantially to the religious right. And Saudi Arabia's governing ideology of Wahhabi Islam was always anti-Shiite. Around the time of its founding, Saudi Arabia demolished Shiite mosques and shrines and spread its view that Shiites are heretics.

As Iran has expanded its influence in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria, Saudi Arabia has responded by adopting an even more sectarian edge. A decade ago, Saudi officials spoke of the need to include and empower the country's Shiite minority. Today Saudi Shiites are viewed with suspicion, seen by some as agents of Iran.

In Yemen, a civil war has become a sectarian one. In a report for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Farea al-Muslimi points out that now the two sides in Yemen refer to each other as "Persians" and "Daeshites" (coming from the Arab acronym for ISIS, or the Islamic State). Al-Muslimi writes that "sectarian

discourse has become more heated, reorganizing Yemeni society along sectarian lines and rearranging people's relationships to one another on a non-nationalist basis."

Saudi Arabia has real strategic concerns about Iran's influence, especially in Iraq. As Ali al Shihabi, a Saudi banker-turned-writer, said to me, "Southern Iraq is full of Iranian-backed militias. That's just a two-hour drive from Saudi Arabia's oil fields. The kingdom has to be worried." But the policy of sectarian warfare may be about more than simply geopolitics. Saudi Arabia is facing a series of challenges, from the Islamic State to domestic extremists. The country's large and active social media are dominated by radical Islamists. And as oil prices plunge, government revenue has collapsed, and the nation's generous subsidies to its people will be hard to sustain. The regime needs greater legitimacy.

Add up last weekend's execution of a prominent Shiite cleric, the break with Iran, the war in Yemen and Saudi policy toward Syria, and you see a more assertive, aggressive and sectarian foreign policy than Saudi Arabia has ever pursued. The strategy is not without risks, external and internal. About 10 to 15 percent of Saudi Arabians are Shiites, and they live in the Eastern Province, atop the kingdom's oil fields. Neighboring Bahrain and Yemen are now filled with resentful Shiites, who see Saudi Arabia as repressing them. And Iran will surely react to Saudi actions over time.

In general, the United States should support Saudi Arabia in resisting Iran's encroachments in the region, but it should not take sides in the broader sectarian struggle. This is someone else's civil war. After all, Washington's principal ally in the fight against the Islamic State is the Shiite-dominated government in Baghdad. And besides, the single greatest threat to the United States emanating from the Middle East remains radical Sunni jihadists — many of whom have drawn inspiration, funding and doctrine from Saudi Arabia.

There are very few good guys in this story.