

Primary Source Analysis

Sources: Choose a source written in the period covered in the course which illustrates something about servitude and freedom during this historical epoch (5-20 pp total). I will provide further guidance on locating primary sources. For Sections 1 and 2, you may use one or two secondary sources for background information. Acceptable sources include course materials, peer-reviewed articles from JSTOR, and encyclopedia articles from the Oxford Reference Books Online Collection. Section 3 must be ENTIRELY based on what the primary source says.

Format: The first page should include at the top your name and a full citation of the source (author, title, editor/translator, title of collection, publisher, year, pages). Skip two lines before beginning your analysis. If you refer to specific passages (paraphrase and summary, not just quotation), give chapter, verse, or page numbers in parentheses as appropriate. Pay close attention to grammar, spelling, punctuation, and paragraphing. Number the answers to the questions and answer the questions in order. Your analysis should be about 4-5 pages, typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins.

While reading the source: Consider the **original** author's purpose and biases (NOT the editor's). Did the author have first-hand knowledge of the events? How did the author collect the information? Who was the audience? Which side appears in the most favorable light? Also consider the hidden potential of the source. What assumptions does the author make about attitudes and society? What aspects of daily life, government, or religion does the author mention in passing?

What to say in the analysis: Your paper should include the following information **presented in numbered subsections:**

- 1. Historical background of the source.** What was happening at the time that the source was written? Be sure to indicate the source(s) of your information. Give priority to information that is likely to have a direct bearing on how you interpret the source. **[about half a page]**
- 2. Context for writing the source.** Who wrote it? When? Why? What is it about? For whom did the author write? Did the author have a personal stake in how events turned out? In the case of anonymous sources, what can you deduce about the author from the source itself? **[about half a page]**
- 3. Usefulness of the source.** What can be learned **from the source**? **Give examples** of things which can (or cannot) be learned from the source. How are the author's circumstances reflected in the source? Give specific examples of statements that are particularly biased or particularly even-handed. Is the information easily quantifiable? If so, consider including a table as an example of how to analyze the source quantitatively. If not, discuss the most applicable interpretive approaches to the source (literary, historical, etc.). Is the work theoretical? Or does the author include a wealth of details that tell about what was happening around him or her? Does the author reveal anything about general societal attitudes (e.g. towards religion, kingship, family life)? Does the author offer insights into the specific historical events or personages? Does the author give information about things that are not the main topic of the source? (For example, in a source about religion, an author might barn-yard imagery that could tell you about peasant life.) Try to go beyond a consideration of the basic facts presented in the source to analysis of larger insights into history which might be gained from the source. Note that not all questions are applicable for all sources. **[at least two or three pages]**
- 4. Conclusion.** What is your overall assessment of the source? What are its strongest and weakest points? How could this source best be used for research? **[up to one page, but at least half a page]**

Note that none of these are simple yes/no questions and that not all are going to be relevant to every source. Address only those that are relevant and re-organize to create a coherent whole within each section. Question 3, in particular, requires an answer the length of a short paper.