

## Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Sources in History

**Primary Sources** – The "raw materials" / foundation of historical research and writing, the echoes, fragments, shards, etc. from the past that historians collect and then cobble together in their works of historiography (see below for more information on "historiography," as well as elsewhere in the course web site). Primary sources are usually found in archives such as Berkeley's Bancroft Library, but also in some cases in microfilm reels, digitized collections on the internet, or library stacks (such as in the case of old books, newspapers, journals, etc.). Primary sources are materials that come from roughly the same time period of the topic / event that the historian has chosen to examine. Examples of primary sources include: personal journals/diaries/memoirs, letters, court proceedings, legislative debates, newspaper and magazine articles, movies, music, art, etc.

**Secondary Sources (i.e., historiography)** – Books and articles produced by historians. Your final paper is a secondary source that you, working as an historian, produce. It is a piece of historical writing (i.e., historiography) that is anchored in primary sources and informed by secondary sources. Works of historiography are not simply chronologies of historical evidence (i.e., names, dates, places, events, etc. from the past). Rather they are arguments/interpretations about the past that emerge from an immersion in and are built upon a foundation of historical evidence (i.e., primary sources). Historians draw on secondary sources – either by quoting or paraphrasing – in order to support certain claims that they're making and / or to challenge or supplement prevailing interpretations (or theses) that other historians have made in their works of historiography.

**Tertiary Sources** – Books and articles based exclusively on secondary sources – i.e., on the research of others. Tertiary sources are usually synthetic in nature – i.e., they pull together a number of separate but related accounts of a particular event, issue, body of scholarship, etc. Tertiary sources are good starting points for research projects, as they help distill large amounts of information. Often tertiary sources contain footnotes that point researchers in promising directions with respect to the secondary sources.