

DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

The Monroe Doctrine Was It Necessary?

*Was the Monroe Doctrine needed to keep Europe at bay,
or was it a pointless and arrogant gesture?*



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Debating the
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Teacher Introduction

★ Using Primary Sources

Primary sources are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past era or historical event. They are the raw materials, or the evidence, on which historians base their “secondary” accounts of the past.

A rapidly growing number of history teachers today are using primary sources. Why? Perhaps it's because primary sources give students a better sense of what history is and what historians do. Such sources also help students see the past from a variety of viewpoints. Moreover, primary sources make history vivid and bring it to life.

However, primary sources are not easy to use. They can be confusing. They can be biased. They rarely all agree. Primary sources must be interpreted and set in context. To do this, students need historical background knowledge. *Debating the Documents* helps students handle such challenges by giving them a useful framework for analyzing sources that conflict with one another.



*“Multiple,
conflicting
perspectives are
among the truths
of history.
No single
objective or
universal account
could ever put an
end to this endless
creative dialogue
within and
between the past
and the present.”*

From the 2011 Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct of the Council of the American Historical Association.

INTRODUCTION

★ *The Debating the Documents Series*

Each *Debating the Documents* booklet includes the same sequence of reproducible worksheets. If students use several booklets over time, they will get regular practice at interpreting and comparing conflicting sources. In this way, they can learn the skills and habits needed to get the most out of primary sources.

Each *Debating the Documents* Booklet Includes

- **Suggestions for the Student and an Introductory Essay.** The student gets instructions and a one-page essay providing background on the booklet's topic. A time line on the topic is also included.
- **Two Groups of Contrasting Primary Source Documents.** In most of the booklets, students get one pair of visual sources and one pair of written sources. In some cases, more than two are provided for each. Background is provided on each source. *Within each group, the sources clash in a very clear way.* (The sources are not always exact opposites, but they do always differ in some obvious way.)
- **Three Worksheets for Each Document Group.** Students use the first two worksheets to take notes on the sources. The third worksheet asks which source the student thinks would be most useful to a historian.
- **One DBQ.** On page 20, a document-based question (DBQ) asks students to write an effective essay using all of the booklet's primary sources.

★ *How to Use This Booklet*

1. Have students read “Suggestions for the Student” and the Introductory Essay.

Give them copies of pages 5–7. Ask them to read the instructions and then read the introductory essay on the topic. The time line gives them additional information on that topic. This reading could be done in class or as a homework assignment.

2. Have students do the worksheets.

Make copies of the worksheets and the pages with the sources. Ask students to study the background information on each source and the source itself. Then have them take notes on the sources using the worksheets. If students have access to a computer, have them review the primary sources digitally.

3. “Debate the documents” as a class.

Have students use their worksheet notes to debate the primary source documents as a class. Urge students to follow these ground rules:

- Use your worksheets as a guide for the discussion or debate.
- Try to reach agreement about the main ideas and the significance of each primary source document.
- Look for points of agreement as well as disagreement between the primary sources.
- Listen closely to all points of view about each primary source.
- Focus on the usefulness of each source to the historian, not merely on whether you agree or disagree with that source’s point of view.

4. Have students do the final DBQ.

A DBQ is an essay question about a set of primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, students write essays using evidence from the sources and their own background knowledge of the historical era. (See the next page for a DBQ scoring guide to use in evaluating these essays.)

The DBQ assignment on page 20 includes guidelines for writing a DBQ essay. Here are some additional points to make with students about preparing to write this kind of essay.

The DBQ for this Booklet (see page 20):

Was the Monroe Doctrine necessary to keep Europe out of the Americas and to protect the young republic?

- Analyze the question carefully.
- Use your background knowledge to set sources in their historical context.
- Question and interpret sources actively. Do not accept them at face value.
- Use sources meaningfully to support your essay’s thesis.
- Pay attention to the overall organization of your essay.

INTRODUCTION

★ *Complete DBQ Scoring Guide*

Use this guide in evaluating the DBQ for this booklet. Use this scoring guide with students who are already familiar with using primary sources and writing DBQ essays.

Excellent Essay

- Offers a clear answer or thesis explicitly addressing all aspects of the essay question.
- Does a careful job of interpreting many or most of the documents and relating them clearly to the thesis and the DBQ. Deals with conflicting documents effectively.
- Uses details and examples effectively to support the thesis and other main ideas. Explains the significance of those details and examples well.
- Uses background knowledge and the documents in a balanced way.
- Is well written; clear transitions make the essay easy to follow from point to point. Only a few minor writing errors or errors of fact.

Good Essay

- Offers a reasonable thesis addressing the essential points of the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least some of the documents and relates them to the thesis and the DBQ.
- Usually relates details and examples meaningfully to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some relevant background knowledge.
- May have some writing errors or errors of fact, as long as these do not invalidate the essay's overall argument or point of view.

Fair Essay

- Offers at least a partly developed thesis addressing the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least a few of the documents.
- Relates only a few of the details and examples to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some background knowledge.
- Has several writing errors or errors of fact that make it harder to understand the essay's overall argument or point of view.

Poor Essay

- Offers no clear thesis or answer addressing the DBQ.
- Uses few documents effectively other than referring to them in "laundry list" style, with no meaningful relationship to a thesis or any main point.
- Uses details and examples unrelated to the thesis or other main ideas. Does not explain the significance of these details and examples.
- Is not clearly written, with some major writing errors or errors of fact.

Suggestions to the Student

★ *Using Primary Sources*

A primary source is any record of evidence from the past. Many things are primary sources: letters, diary entries, official documents, photos, cartoons, wills, maps, charts, etc. They are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past event or time period. This *Debating the Documents* lesson is based on two groups of primary source documents. Within each group, the sources conflict with one another. That is, they express different or even opposed points of view. You need to decide which source is more reliable, more useful, or more typical of the time period. This is what historians do all the time. Usually, you will be able to learn something about the past from each source, even when the sources clash with one another in dramatic ways.

★ *How to Use This Booklet*

1. **Read the one-page introductory essay.**

This gives you background information that will help you analyze the primary source documents and do the exercises for this *Debating the Documents* lesson. The time line gives you additional information you will find helpful.



2. **Study the primary source documents for this lesson.**

For this lesson, you get two groups of sources. The sources within each group conflict with one another. Some of these sources are visuals, others are written sources. With visual sources, pay attention not only to the image’s “content” (its subject matter) but also to its artistic style, shading, composition, camera angle, symbols, and other features that add to the image’s meaning. With written sources, notice the writing style, bias, even what the source leaves out or does not talk about. Think about each source’s author, that author’s reasons for writing, and the likely audience for the source. These considerations give you clues as to the source’s historical value.

3. **Use the worksheets to analyze each group of primary source documents.**

For each group of sources, you get three worksheets. Use the “Study the Document” worksheets to take notes on each source. Use the “Comparing the Documents” worksheet to decide which of the sources would be most useful to a historian.

4. **As a class, debate the documents.**

Use your worksheet notes to help you take part in this debate.

5. **Do the final DBQ.**

“DBQ” means “document-based question.” A DBQ is a question along with several primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, write an essay using evidence from the documents and your own background history knowledge.

The Monroe Doctrine: Was It Necessary?

Napoleon's wars (1803–1815) greatly weakened the nation of Spain. In South and Central America, revolts against Spanish colonial rule soon broke out, and by 1823 several independent nations in the Americas had emerged. In the U.S., many people at first saw this as a hopeful sign that the entire hemisphere might soon become the home of freedom.

However, these new republics were not strong. Could they remain independent? Spain was too weak to take them back alone. But what if other more powerful European nations tried to help Spain get them back? In 1823, there were rumors that France might try to do that, or that France and Spain together would get help from another group of European monarchies, the "Holy Alliance" of Russia, Prussia, and Austria. This clearly worried U.S. President James Monroe.

Luckily for the U.S., Great Britain was also worried. Great Britain wanted to trade with the newly independent American republics. It also wanted to keep France out of the Western Hemisphere. That's why British Foreign Minister George Canning, in 1823, suggested that the U.S. join with Great Britain in warning other nations to leave the former Spanish colonies alone.

Some top U.S. leaders advised Monroe to accept this offer. One was former President Thomas Jefferson. However, Monroe's Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams, disagreed. He feared the U.S. would be tying itself too closely to the British on this issue. After all, what if the British then used this agreement to keep the United States itself from acting as it saw fit in the Western Hemisphere?

In the end, Monroe agreed with Adams. As a result, the president issued what later came to be called the "Monroe Doctrine." It was actually a part of his message to Congress on December 2,

1823. Here is what Monroe said: First, he stated that the Americas were basically different from Europe; they were made up of republics, not monarchies. Secondly, he said that any effort by Europe to recolonize the Americas would be seen as a threat to the U.S. and would not be tolerated. Thirdly, in return for Europe staying out of the Americas, the U.S. promised not to interfere in European matters.

Was this declaration necessary? After all, Great Britain had already agreed to work with the U.S. to keep other nations out of the Western Hemisphere. Also, could the U.S. even back up this "Monroe Doctrine" with force if it had to?

This second question was certainly one that must have concerned America's leaders. The U.S. was not yet all that powerful. Only ten years before the Monroe Doctrine, the U.S. had come close to losing a war with Great Britain, the War of 1812. The nation's capital city, Washington, D.C., had been attacked and burned. The two visual sources for this booklet deal with the War of 1812 because of how that war shaped the views of those who announced the Monroe Doctrine. Many Americans must have wondered whether the U.S. was now ready to go it alone in dealing with the entire Western Hemisphere—or whether it would long depend for its safety on the friendship of Great Britain, whose powerful navy policed the seas.

In other words, was the Monroe Doctrine meant to be taken seriously? Was it just a bluff that U.S. leaders knew they could not enforce? Or was it necessary as a way to keep others out of the Americas while protecting the young nation's freedom to act on its own? The sources in this booklet can help you debate and decide these questions.

Monroe Doctrine Time Line

1787

• • • The U.S. Constitution is signed and sent to states for ratification.

1789

• • • George Washington becomes president. The French Revolution begins. At first, many Americans support it. As it becomes more violent, this support fades.

1792–1815

• • • Except for a few years, Great Britain and France are at war due to tensions arising out of the French Revolution and then because of wars undertaken by Napoleon Bonaparte who rules France from 1799 to 1815.

1795

• • • Jay's Treaty with Great Britain restores peaceful trade with it but fails to settle many issues between the two nations. The treaty is very unpopular in the U.S. Another U.S. treaty sets boundaries with the Spanish territories of Florida and Louisiana, and ensures the U.S. the right to navigate on the Mississippi River.

1796

• • • In his Farewell Address, Washington warns the nation to avoid permanent alliances with foreign nations. He especially seeks to remain neutral between Britain and France.

1798–1800

• • • France sees Jay's Treaty as favoring Britain. U.S. relations with France worsen. Two years of undeclared naval war ("Quasi War") with France follow. In 1800, Spain secretly gives Louisiana back to France.

1803

• • • The U.S. purchases the entire Louisiana Territory from France. France declares war on Great Britain again.

1806–1826

• • • With Spain weakened during the Napoleonic Wars, one part of Spanish America after another begins to fight and win its independence.

1807–1812

• • • Americans' anger grows as the British continue to seize American sailors at sea and force them into the British Navy. Starting with the Embargo of 1807, first President Jefferson and then President Madison try in several ways to use bans on trade to force Britain or France to respect American neutrality. None of these efforts work very well.

1812–1814

• • • War is declared against Great Britain. The British invade Washington, D.C. The U.S. is unable to win outright. However, the War of 1812 does strengthen America's hold over the lower Mississippi River valley and its ability to limit Indian resistance to westward expansion. With the end of the Napoleonic Wars, impressment of sailors also ends.

1817–1819

• • • Pirates, fugitive slaves, and Native Americans use Spanish Florida as a sanctuary. In 1817, General Andrew Jackson leads sweeping raids into the Spanish colony, risking war with Spain. Instead, in the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams convinces a weakened Spain to cede Florida to the U.S.

1822

• • • France is delegated by the European "Holy Alliance" to restore a deposed king to power in Spain. Americans worry Spain will try to reconquer its American colonies with European help.

1823

• • • British Foreign Minister Canning proposes that the United States and England together state that European powers will not be allowed to colonize America again. Instead, Monroe states the "Monroe Doctrine" as an independent U.S. policy.

DOCUMENT 1

Visual Primary Source Document 1



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZC4-5643

Information on Document 1

The title of this 1813 print is “Columbia teaching John Bull his new Lesson.”

The print, by William Charles, is from the time of the War of 1812. On the left, Columbia, a maiden with staff and liberty cap, stands for the U.S. On the right is John Bull, a figure who stands for Great Britain. In the cartoon, John Bull is being “taught a lesson” about America’s willingness to fight for freedom of the seas. France’s Napoleon Bonaparte, the figure on a hillock in the center, is also being warned about these matters.

Columbia tells John Bull, “I tell you Johnny, you must learn to read Respect Free trade—Seamans rights &c.” She then scolds “Mounseer Beau Napperty” [France’s ruler, Napoleon] and threatens to teach him respect as well. Napoleon says he is glad Columbia is angry with John Bull, “But me no learn respect—me no learn retribution—Me be de grand Emperor.” John Bull says, “I don’t like that lesson—I’ll read this pretty lesson.” He points to the pages of a book that say “Power constitutes Right.”