

## Exercise: Analyze Archival Sources

Archival research utilizes multiple skills. This exercise focuses on one key aspect of the process -- the deep analysis of individual sources. Although it is valuable to experience researching with original documents in person, students here will be using digitized archival sources that are discoverable online through the collections of the Columbia University Libraries. Using the digitized collections recommended below, students will select their own archival source and use the questionnaire to attempt a scholarly interpretation of a single document.

We have identified three collections related broadly to American history, politics, and literature. For the purpose of this exercise the goal is not to pursue a specific research topic, but to gain experience in the practice of deep analysis. However, if these sources do not connect to the content of your course, you may consult your liaison librarian or a relevant subject specialist for other suggestions.

Table 1: Images from the collections and the related links.

Image 1: Community Service Society Photos:



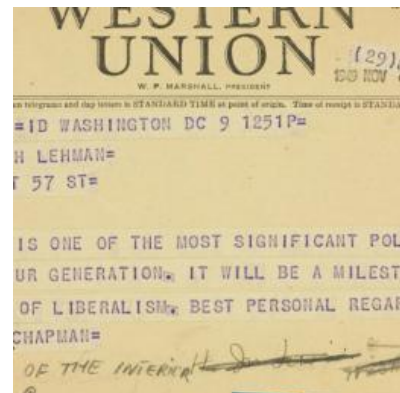
<https://bit.ly/CSSB2B>

Image 2: Hubert H. Harrison Papers:



<https://bit.ly/HubertHarrisonPapersB2B>

Image 3: Lehman Special Correspondence Files:



<https://bit.ly/LehmanB2B>

If you already have a research topic/question, you might consider searching for an archival document that engages some of the key words, people, or issues that have already come up for you in your reading and research. If you do not have a research direction, or are using this as an exercise to deepen your skills in archival analysis, consider selecting a broad theme that will produce a wide range of results. Some examples include: education, empire/imperialism, civil rights, pollution.

The collections can be explored by browsing, searching, or sorting by names and formats. Students should experiment with these various discovery tools before settling on their document for the assignment.

## Questions to Consider:

When students have identified their document, they will attempt to answer as many questions as they can from those listed below. These documents and the students' responses can be shared in class, or via online discussion.

1. When was this source created?
  - a. If it is not dated, are there clues that allow for an educated guess?
2. Who created it?
  - a. Does it reflect the perspective of an individual or an institution?
3. Who is the intended audience?
  - a. What rhetorical strategies are being used to persuade potential readers?
4. How has the meaning of the source changed over time?
5. What scholarly questions might this document begin to answer?
  - a. How would a researcher use it as part of a larger project?
  - b. What further resources would be necessary to make it more fully legible?

To explore these documents further, participants might look again at the collections in which their source was housed. Consider these questions:

1. In which of the three collections did you discover your document? How did it relate to other materials in the collection?
2. Who created the collection? What can you infer from the description about the creators?

How does your knowledge about the collection change your initial impression of the individual source you chose to examine?

---