

## Transcript: US primary sources

Welcome to our presentation on primary sources for U.S. history. My name is Bethan Davies and I am the Vere Harmsworth librarian. My role within the Bodleian libraries is to purchase, manage and promote the resources related to American history and politics.

This presentation will be looking specifically at U.S. primary sources. I will begin by providing a quick introduction to the Vere Harmsworth Library.

We will then look at why you should use primary resources in your research.

And I will provide a quick overview of the different kinds of primary resources you could use.

This includes our key book collections, newspaper collections and databases, both from within the VHL, wider Bodleian libraries and other collections of interest.

Finally, we will look at official and government documents, which will be especially of use if you are looking at American political history.

There will also be some further contact information at the end of this presentation if you need any further help with your studies. You may choose to work through the presentation at your own pace or use the

navigation tools at the side of the presentation to skip to your key area of interest.

Let's start by taking a further look at the Vere Harmsworth Library, or the VHL as I will be referring to it throughout the rest of this presentation, is the primary library within the Bodleian libraries, with resources related to American history and politics.

We have one of the largest collections related to U.S. studies outside of the United States.

Alongside this, we hold many of the key primary sources that I will mention in this presentation, such as microfilm collections, the Phillip Davis Election Ephemera Archive and our historical books.

Or you can find out more to more information such as our opening hours.

You can also keep up to date with the VHL via our social media pages, including our Facebook and Twitter accounts and our blog, which will include news on our most recently purchased resources.

I also want to take a moment to promote our U.S. History LibGuide. Organised by time period. Our LibGuide is an online guide for key U.S. resources, including the ones I will be including in this presentation. If you are ever unsure about where to start your research, this is the place to go. You can visit our LibGuide at

[www.libguides.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ushistory](http://www.libguides.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ushistory)

Many of you watching this presentation, may not have thought about why you need to include primary sources in your research.

You may feel that the use of them in a history essay is pretty self-explanatory.

However, it's worth considering why you need to use primary sources and what ones you are specifically planning to use in your research.

Using original primary sources is considered a key element of historical research, especially at higher levels of academic study.

Most original academic historical research will be expected to interact with primary sources in some form.

This might include in-depth analysis of a specific source or group of resources, or by using primary sources to support your academic writing alongside secondary sources.

Knowing how you want to use your primary sources in your research can help you narrow down which sources you want to focus on.

However, if you are still unsure about which ones you want to use, consider the following questions.

This may seem obvious, but you may have a narrow time period, or you may wish to give a broad overview of a longer time period.

This will help you plan how much in-depth analysis you can provide on individual sources.

You may wish to focus on a specific time period which will cross over multiple years or days, such as a presidential term, for example.

So consider what search terms you may need to use to cover your specific period.

So, for example, if you were looking at the 1920s, you might want to consider looking through the roaring 20s or the prohibition period in 1923. So there will be little freely available after that date.

If it does exist, it will probably be in a published collection or behind a paywall.

The second thing to think all is geography. Where are you focussing?

Again, this may seem obvious. This presentation is looking at U.S. history after all.

However, you may be focussing specifically on a very narrow geographic area, such as a specific town or county or across several states or broad areas.

Again, think of the key search terms you may need to use, including nicknames such as the Tar Heel State codes or general terms such as the East Coast.

The third thing to think about is who you are studying.

Even if you're not looking at a specific individual, you're likely to be thinking about a specific group or organisation or demographic.

Consider the key materials they would have been producing and interacting with this time.

Would they be communicating by speeches or magazines or producing surveys and reports?

Also note similar to geographic location. The more specific your group is the more niche research will be.

You may be lucky and have a freely available large collection of sources related to one person or small group.

More likely is that you will have to search more broadly for general mentions of your topic of interest.

Are you particularly interested in the political, legal or economic perspective or a personal one?

So a personal/social study might look at correspondence or letters, whilst legal/political studies would look at official documents

This will be informed largely on your answers to the previous four questions.

You might want to focus entirely on written sources such as diaries and letters, numerical data such as statistics, audio visual sources, all physical ephemera.

However, you need to make sure that by focussing on only a few specific primary sources, you're not leaving out key items which on the surface may not seem connected to your research, but could provide a much broader context to your research. Try to consider related or similar resources that might also be of interest and how they may support or interact with your research.

Now that we've considered how to identify key primary sources for your research, we now need to think about how to find your selected primary sources.

A good place to start is to think about whether your source will be published or not.

Published sources such as print, microfilm, eresources or databases are generally easier to find. You would treat it as you would for secondary literature.

Find out how or where the item was published. And the format and use that to help you in planning a research.

Non-published material is harder to find. You need to think about two things.

Firstly, think where is the item likely to be, say, for example, a letter by a president is likely to be in a collection associated with that president or a presidential library.

The second question is, is that item likely to have been reproduced in a published source?

So a presidential letter may be published in the Presidential Papers, for example, or a collection of correspondence with that individual, or digitised as part of an online collection.

If your material was published, then you would treat it as any other published source.

Find out how and where it was published and in what form, and then go from that.

However, if the item has not been published, then that means that you may need to visit the original in an archive or library. At this point, you need to consider how accessible this resource may be to you, and especially if you can factor in the time and the money required to plan your visit.

I colour coded them to help keep things simple. The orange bookshelf symbol means that the item is available in a physical format, either in the VHL, the wider Bodleian libraries or another physical location.

You can locate anything within the VHL or Bodleian Libraries via the SOLO library catalogue.

You can search for these databases again through SOLO, the U.S. History Lab Guide or on the Bodleian databases A-Z.

The green open padlock means that the item is open access.

This means the item is freely available online. And a Web link would normally be included.

With that in mind, let's talk primary sources.

The VHL has substantial collections of printed books from the late 19th century onwards, all findable via SOLO.

Pre-1920 titles are kept in our Stack and need to be requested up to the reading room.

We also have a very large collection of microfilms, which include collections of printed books and other publications.

There's a very rough subject guide to our microfilm collections available in the library and online on our LibGuide to help you identify useful material.

We have particularly strong holdings in travel, literature, journals and so on from the late 18th and 19th centuries.

This contains more than 37000 digitised versions of printed material published in America from 1639-1800.



It's incredibly wide ranging, covering every aspect of life in 17th and 18th century America.

EEBO and ECCO refer to Early English Books Online and Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

Both are both focused on English histories, but contain many American publications.

EEBO covers 1475-1700. ECCO is still having items added to it and covers the whole 18th century.

The Making of the Modern World contains around 67,000 books covering 1450 to 1914 from library collections all over the Western world, including America. The focus is on the development of modern Western world through the lens of trade and wealth.

You might also want to look at the Making of Modern Law also useful for the 19th and early 20th centuries.

It is unsurprisingly focused on law, but is also very wide ranging in terms of the subjects covered including politics, military history, religion and social welfare. It covers British, Commonwealth and American 19th C material.

The Making of America, which contains thousands of digitised primary sources for 19th century US social history and is freely available on the Web from the University of Michigan.

You may also like to check the webpages of the Library of Congress.

You can also find a ton of material online through three major digitisation sites. Google Books, you've almost certainly heard of already. But you also have the Internet Archive and the HathiTrust.

Out of copyright HathiTrust material is now available through SOLO. All well worth searching.

Google Books also contains digitised versions of Oxford's older collections, including material from the VHL stack.

Be aware, as mentioned before, most open access material will be focussed on pre-1920 content.

Now let's look at newspapers and magazines. The Bodleian subscribes to a huge range of newspapers and magazines, far too many to mention here.

Some of the big names include New York Times, Washington Post, Vogue, The Nation, National Review.

We also subscribe to key historic African-American newspapers such as The Chicago Defender and New York Amsterdam News.

That doesn't include the number of physical subscriptions we also have.

The VHL, for example, has the National Journal, Harpers Weekly, Ebony, U.S. News and World Report.

If you can't find an individual title, try searching through our newspaper and magazine collections.

The VHL holds microfilm collections of Early American Newspapers and Black Journals of the early 20th century on microfilm.

Online collections are much more wide ranging.

American periodicals and the 19th century US newspapers cover a wide range of historical sources.

Whilst Ethnic American newspapers, African-American Newspapers and Periodicals and Ethnic News which provide sources from alternative perspectives.

More current collections such as Nexis and Factiva cover the main current new sources from around the globe, which covers all the newspaper collections within the Bodleian.

You might also want to look at newspapers.com. However, you will need to pay a subscription.

It can be quite daunting to find archival material, especially if it's your first time using archives.

Here are some key finding aids that you might find useful.

A key historic text is *A Guide to Manuscripts related to America and Great Britain and Ireland*, something which we hold physically in the VHL.

Some of the key databases you want to check include ArchiveHub, which covers U.K. archives.

ArchiveGrid for the US. SNAC, which is mainly useful for focussing on individual people.

And the National Archives catalogue for the US tells you about individual archive locations.

Very useful if you're planning research in the United States as the archives are spread all over the country and you need to make sure you go to the right place for the collection you're after.

We have an online guide with some tips about travelling to the U.S. to visit libraries and archives for those considering this option.

Now material within the VHL. We've already mentioned the microfilm collections, as well as printed books and newspaper collections.

They include the papers of individuals and organisations such as the NAACP CORE, the Republican Party and the American Colonisation Society.

There are guides to all of these individual collections available in the library to tell you exactly what's included, which is a substantial collection of campaign ephemera, from elections at all levels, of all parties in the US.

Badges, bumper stickers, leaflets, posters, ballot papers and all sorts of campaign branded items.

Most of the material dates from the latter half of the 20th century, and the Donor is still adding material from current elections.

But there is also more historic material added in the archive.

If you're interested in consulting this, please contact the VHL directly for further information.

Within the Bodleian libraries, most of the archival collections are held at the Weston Library.

Most significantly, the Weston holds the Archives of the United Society of the Propagation of the Gospel and the British Anti Slavery Society, both of which contain a lot of American material and the papers of three British ambassadors to the US, as well as all other sorts of bits and pieces spread throughout the collections.

Check out the finding catalogues for more information.

There are a huge number of other online resources for American history freely available on the Web.

It can be difficult to know where to start looking. One of the ways we tried to support researchers is we have over 400 links saved at the moment to all sorts of freely available sites for primary sources.

Some of the key places you may want to start with include the Library of Congress, which often have lots of digitisation projects ongoing.

Finally, here is just a selection of our Bodleian databases focussed on American history, politics and culture.

We subscribe to these collections so you can access them by logging in to your SOLO account.

You can find them via SOLO or on Database A – Z, or our LibGuide. Many of these include unpublished or archival material.

We don't to have time to go through all of them.

The American National Biography is the main resource. It's available online and in we have physical copies in the VHL.

The World Biographical Archive contains biographies from a variety of publications, sometimes a lot more specialised and can be useful if you can't find the person you're after.

Who's Who in America is also an excellent source.

We have the American version physically and the more recent editions are held on Nexis UK.

If the person you're looking for ever served in Congress, check out the excellent Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, which is hugely comprehensive and also provides bibliographies and information about archival collections of papers,

This is often a really good reason for using biographical sources in general, really useful for helping you in finding more primary sources.

Before we go on, I need to just add this warning to you. Please be aware that Oxford University subscribes to a wide range of E resources, e journals and e-books to support your research and study.

These resources are governed by the licence agreements. So please be aware of this when using them.

We are now going to take a look at government and official documents as historical primary sources.

For those just starting their research, government sources can seem confusing and difficult to get your head around.

But they offer our researchers an incredible range of historical, social and political sources.

And are key for those researching economic legal perspectives. We are going to be speaking about a lot of resources at this point, but don't worry.

Everything we cover will be listed on our US Government Publications LibGuide.

Separate from our History LibGuide, it focuses specifically on government publications and official documents.

If you are more interested in legal studies, we recommend that you visit the North American Legal Resources Guide created by our wonderful colleagues at the Bodleian Law Library.

When you are beginning your research, there are three key resources that you may find useful.

First is the monthly catalogue, which is the main finding aid, for US government publications published after 1933. We have it in print in the VHL, in the reference section. And an online version is freely available covering 1976 to present day.



It contains digital versions of all their recent publications from across all the branches of the US government.

Most publications are from the 1990s onwards, but some had more historical titles are being made available.

The second resource, which may be more useful from a historical perspective, is HeinOnline, which is a massive legal database available via SOLO or the Databases A to Z.

It contains many collections relevant to U.S. legal and government history,

Let's begin with early American historical studies based on the colonial or revolutionary sources.

A key source to start with is the American Founding Era Collection which includes the Personal Papers some of the Founding Fathers, and the papers of the Continental Congress.

You can also find the journals and papers of the Continental Congress freely online via the Library of Congress and a site called fold3.com, which is a Web site mainly focussed on military history.

But the Continental Congressional papers are freely available.

If you are more interested in looking at the governance of America when it was a British colony, the Colonial State Papers cover 1574-1739 and

include thousands of papers concerning English activities in the American, Canadian and West Indian colonies, including papers presented to the Privy Council and Board of Trade.

You might also like to look at the foreign papers of the Tudors which covers 1509-1603. Each database is available via SOLO or the database A to Z.

We also have various colonial state and governmental papers in published editions in the VHL, for example, Virginia, Massachusetts and South Carolina.

You can also find the Pennsylvania State papers on Evans Early American Imprints, which we mentioned in the Books section and you may also find other earlier state and government papers on Evans or the HathiTrust.

Next, let's look at congressional publications.

Beyond 1789, the documentation for government sources starts to get a lot more formalised and larger in volume.

Congressional reports and documents start with the American State Papers, which cover 1789 to 1838.

And then from 1817, these are published under the Congressional Serial Set.

The Serial Set only goes up to 1952. But we do have a few volumes in print within the VHL of the journals from 1960s to 1970s.

For the verbatim record of the debates, you'll need to have the Congressional Record, which started publishing in 1874 to present day.

The Congressional Record was preceded by various other publications, which aren't verbatim but do record debates and speeches.

All of these titles are available online through SOLO or via ProQuest Congressional.

One of our key databases for the study of the US Congress.

You can also find print or microphone copies of the journals.

Physical editions of the Congressional Record and its predecessors can be found in the VHL.

We hold almost all the copies of the Congressional Record in the VHL stack up to 1982 in print, then up to 1990 in microfilm, after which the Congressional Record becomes freely available online.

Some of the records are also available online via the Library of Congress or Google Books.

None of the above include the voting records showing the voting behaviour of the Senate and the House. For this, use [www.congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov) or [www.govtrack.us](http://www.govtrack.us) both freely available web pages.

You may also see references to the Roll Call published since 1969, which also lists the voting record of Congress. We hold a physical copy of this in the VHL.

Alongside official congressional papers, Progress Congressional includes a huge collection focussed on Congressional Hearings from 1824 to 1979.

Most post 1990 hearings are freely available by [www.govinfo.gov](http://www.govinfo.gov)

For hearings outside of these timeframes, you might want to look at the substantial physical collections held by the VHL and the British Library,

The VHL Collection is focussed mostly on the mid 20th century. Anything that we don't have, the British Library probably will.

The most difficult documents to source are hearings from the 1980s. The best thing to do is to find the Government Printing Office SuDoc number, which normally starts with Y.4. and give it to either the VHL or the British Library.

This will help us in finding out whether we have a copy available. Now let's move on to the Executive Branch.

First, sources focussed on the US presidency.

It's key to distinguish between public papers and the private papers of an individual president.

Public papers are defined as presidential writings, addresses and remarks of a public nature.

This might include speeches, executive orders or written statements.

From Hoover onwards, Public Papers of the Presidents were collated and published by the Government Printing Office for Records.

Pre-1929, presidential papers were all published together under a Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents.

The VHL has a complete collection of both of these in print, and they are also both available online via HeinOnline.

Start with the presidential libraries for post-1929 presidents, which are normally located in home states and administered by the National Archives.

Many of these libraries are digitising material and making it more available online, some more than others.

You can find the entire list of them on the National Archives website.

For presidents pre 1929, it can vary. So for example, Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln have been digitised by the Library of Congress.

The Theodore Roosevelt collection is digitised by Dickinson State University.

Some of the earlier presidents also have presidential libraries, although they're not part of the official National Archive administered ones.

The VHL also holds published collections of some of the major figures.

The best thing to do is to search SOLO for the individual name and the word papers.

A great resource I want to highlight is the presidential recordings programme, which is provided via the Miller Centre, home to the Presidential Speech Archive.

Great for those interested in modern American history. It includes the audio and transcripts of the White House Tapes.

The VHL subscription includes full coverage of the transcripts and audio recordings that many of the significant recordings have been made freely available.

Although you might want Executive Records, you may not be interested in the office of the President.

The main finding guide for historic executive records is the CIS Index, which covers 1789 to 1909. We hold a print copy of this in the VHL.

For 20th century studies, we have access to key resources such as the Federal Register, the Code of Federal Regulations, Budget of the US Government, and an Economic Report of the US President. These can all be accessed by HeinOnline or Fraser, which is another key database.

If you cannot find an individual department publication, try searching for it, via SOLO, or through the Serial Set, which I mentioned before under the Congressional Branch records.

As mentioned before, records focussed on the judicial branch, such as the Supreme Court, federal law and U.S. legal history will be based primarily at the Law Faculty Library.

They have created their own LibGuide on U.S. legal resources, which you can find linked on the page here.

I'm now going to focus on two specific topics that often come up in discussions when looking for official documents: foreign relations and classified documents.

The key resource for US foreign relations is for FRUS or Foreign Relations of the United States. This resource is freely available online alongside physical copies held in the VHL.

Be aware that this resource is still currently under work. It's currently up to the Carter and Reagan administrations so please be aware of this when using it.

Alongside FRUS, the VHL also holds the Diplomatic Instructions and Dispatches from the 19th Century in microfilm versions, and the U.S.

Treaties and International Agreements. You can also search the U.S. Treaties and International Agreements online via HeinOnline.

You may find older treaties and international agreements in the Congressional Serial Set, which I previously mentioned in the Congressional Branch Records.

You might also be interested in the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, which is the U.S. record of openly sourced intelligence used to create daily reports for individuals in each branch of government and used to inform, and to support policy decisions.

A special word on our documents focussed on UK/U.S. relations.

A good starting point would be the Confidential Print: North America, which covers 1824 - 1961.

Bodleian libraries also hold several individual archival collections of key British political figures, such as three of the British ambassadors to the US.

Visit the Western Library for more information. Now, a word about classified documents.

We have two key data bases that we subscribe to, the Digital National Security Archive, or DNSA, and the US Declassified Documents Online, both of which cover the time period post-1945, and both are available via SOLO.



It's also worth checking out the CIA's Electronic Reading Room freely available on the CIA's website. This is where the CIA posts declassified documents in response to Freedom of Information requests.

So if you're lucky and your topic of interest has had requests before, you may find a lot of useful information. Now, let's have a look at some statistics and data.

One of the key data sources requested by researchers is census data.

A decennial census has been produced in some form since 1790.

All the volumes of the census reports are published on the Census Bureau website, alongside other censuses, which are more thematic and specialised in focus.

The VHL also holds printed volumes of most of the censuses up to 1990, which you can find via SOLO.

Early census reports can also be found on the Serial Set, which is in ProQuest Congressional.

For census records, you can find some of these for free on fold3.com, which is a subscription webpage focussed primarily on military history.

You can also find records on the 1940 census web page, an openly available website which is just focussed on that one year.

For other key macro data sets, you might want to use the Historical Statistics of the United States, and the Statistical Abstract of the United States.

The Historical Statistics is a database available via SOLO. The statistical abstract is freely available online. Both are also available in print at the VHL.

Micro datasets are more difficult to find, although you may want to look at the two resources mentioned just now to help you.

Two other key sources to check are data.gov, which is freely available, or the Inter University Consortium of Political and Social Research, which Oxford University is a member of. You will need to create an account in order to use this.

For opinion polls, iPoll is a great database, which includes opinion poll questions and responses on all sorts of subjects from 1933 onwards.

Gallup Analytics also allows you to look at data from 1933 onwards.

For all data related queries, do you make use of our Bodleian Data Librarian, who can provide further advice and training on using data software, and further information on how to manage and evaluate data.

And that's it! My name is Bethan Davies and I am the Vere Harmsworth librarian.

I am the subject librarian for US Studies within the Bodleian libraries.  
And I can help you in finding resources and planning your research.

If you have any questions, do contact me via email or phone.

I would be happy to chat with you.

US Studies LibGuide.

You can also find more in-depth information about some of the  
resources mentioned in the U.S. Studies Resources at Oxford blog.  
Although we no longer adding content on here, it's still a really good  
resource to check out.