

Great Documents in U.S. History

EARLY SETTLEMENT TO RECONSTRUCTION (1620–1870)

Volume I

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To the Teacher

The material in this volume is presented to allow maximum teacher flexibility in how it is used in the classroom.

Each document and exercise can be used in a variety of ways. Here are three.

1. Have students work independently on the questions, some or all, to be discussed as a class later.
2. Have students work in small groups on the questions. The groups can do the following:
 - Work on all of them together.
 - Divide the questions among members to work on independently. Members can then explain their answers to their group.
3. As a teacher-directed activity, do the exercises as a whole group.

The exercises that follow the documents are divided into question sets by type.

Comprehension Questions. The comprehension questions simply require a literal understanding of the documents.

Critical Thinking. The “Critical Thinking” question set requires students to go beyond the document text. Some questions call for an assessment of the information’s reliability. Many students are likely to take as fact anything written by a firsthand source. Teachers may need to lead students to evaluate sources. As explained in the student introductory section, certain factors influence the message in a primary source. Among these are author, source, and audience.

Making Connections. Students should have had exposure to the historical issues that each document addresses before reading the documents. Nonetheless, an introduction providing background precedes each document. Teachers may decide not to have students read this and instead use it themselves to teach the documents. It should be understood that the “Making Connections” question sets often rely on outside information, both regarding events surrounding the source and previous sources. Context is critical to students creating meaning out of the documents.

Relating the Past to Our Lives. This question set asks students to connect the document to their lives or to the modern United States. It is designed for students to see the relevance of history today.

Essay Questions. These call for an extended answer. This may be in the form of a written essay or perhaps in large- or small-group discussion.

Note: Some of the documents are shortened versions. Missing portions are designated by ellipses (. . .). In most documents, the original spelling has been preserved, except where archaic spellings might be difficult for students.

To the Student

Reading and Interpreting Primary Source Documents

Primary sources are the raw material of history. They include but are not limited to the following:

letters	report cards	laws
advertisements	oral histories	photographs
diaries	maps	objects
bills	autobiographies	programs
speeches	drawings	

They are documents and objects left by people who participated in or witnessed events. Historians interpret this evidence to write secondary sources—books, such as your textbook. The key word here is *interpret*. With most records, there is room for disagreement on their meanings.

Interpreting primary sources, then, is as basic to the historian's work as performing experiments is to the scientist. It is how they reach conclusions about what they are studying. As history students, you need to learn to interpret primary sources as part of your study. What follows are hints for getting the most out of reading the primary sources included in this book.

1. Identifying the Document

What type of document is it? What is its purpose? Who is the audience?

Answering the first question helps to answer the second two. For example, a friendly letter usually has a limited audience due to its purpose. A speech, however, will have a much broader audience. This matters. Some ideas a person might disclose in a private letter he or she would not include in a public speech. Think about what you would write in a letter to your closest friend about a teacher. Compare that with what you might say about the teacher in a speech at a school assembly. People make speeches to persuade or inform. The speaker understands that the audience will be mixed and that the message needs to be tailored to this. A letter to a friend has a different purpose and audience. Therefore, it contains different information.

2. Placing the Document in Its Context

When was the document created? What was happening in the country at this time?

Knowing about the circumstances that surround the primary source's creation is important. This places the document in its context. It helps the historian to grasp its full meaning.

For example, a student writes an editorial in the school newspaper calling for more diversity in faculty hiring. Twenty years later someone researching a history of the school reads the editorial. The researcher would want to know about the circumstances surrounding the editorial.

- Did the editorial represent a large number of students with a similar opinion, or was the author a lone voice?
- What was the racial makeup of the staff at the time?
- What was the racial makeup of the student body?

Answers to these and other questions would help the historian understand the document by placing it in context.

Who created the document? What do you know about that person? What was his or her role in the events?

Answering these questions furthers the historian's understanding of the context. Imagine reading excerpts from a diary written by your brother or sister ten years earlier. Your knowledge of the circumstances of his or her life at the time—about friends, home, interests, opinions, problems, and so forth—would make the diary much more understandable. Now imagine someone reading it who never knew your brother or sister or anything about his or her life. That person's understanding would be seriously weakened—unless he or she did some research. You can place the diary in its proper context. The other reader cannot.

Context is provided before each document in this book in the sections titled "Historical Context" and "Importance." You may want to read this material first. What you learn in history class about the time period will add to your knowledge of the document's circumstances. It is likely your teacher will assign the documents in this book when you study the time in which they were created.

3. Reading and Understanding the Document

What are the key words in the source and what do they mean?

When reading documents, the language can be difficult. This can be especially true when documents were written a long time ago. Today, we value clear, direct language. This was not necessarily true in the past. It is important when you read the documents in this book to understand the meanings of the words used in the documents. Keep each document's vocabulary list with definitions close by for reference.

What is the message? What point is the author trying to make? What evidence does the author give to support the point?

All documents have a main idea or message. It could be helpful to jot down what you believe is the main idea after reading a document. Listing the evidence used to support the main idea will also help your understanding.

4. Evaluating the Document

How reliable is the document? Is the information supported by other evidence?

Historians must take this task very seriously because they will read many documents surrounding an event. The information provided by these documents may differ slightly. In some cases, the documents might contradict one another. This leaves the historian to make a judgment about what to believe. One way to make the judgment is to check for other sources that support it. Your textbook or other primary sources can help in determining whether other information supports the facts stated in a document.

In what ways might the information be biased?

All documents are biased to some degree. The creator always has a point of view on an issue or event. The information the author wants his or her audience to know becomes the message. Certain facts could be left out or slanted in a particular way. This might be done on purpose. For example, when you make an argument, are you likely to include the evidence that hurts your position?

But bias may not be conscious. For example, consider a loud argument between two students in a school hallway. This may be reported differently by observers depending on the following:

- their location in the hallway
- their relationship with one of the students involved
- to whom they are reporting the event
- how soon after the event it is reported

The historian takes nothing at face value. Instead, she or he weighs the factors of creator, purpose, audience, and context to determine the reliability of the document.

Consider these ideas when reading the documents in this volume. Approach them as a historian just as you perform experiments as a scientist in chemistry class.

George Washington's Farewell Address

Document: George Washington, Farewell Address (1796)

Historical Context

The Twenty-second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution became law in 1951. It limits a U.S. president to two terms. Until Franklin Roosevelt in 1940, no president had won a third term. Only a few tried. President George Washington began the two-term tradition. Almost all later presidents held to this tradition.

Washington's departure from office was also important for his final speech, or address, to the American people. By the end of his second term in 1796, Washington had had enough of politics. Sixty-four was a reasonable age to retire from public life. He had accepted his second term with reluctance. His health had been declining. He had been away from Mount Vernon, his Virginia plantation, for the better part of eight years. Before that, he had served as the commanding general of the Continental Army from 1775 to 1783.

In addition, Washington had begun to find the presidency less appealing. He had watched political parties develop during his second term. His secretary of the treasury, Alexander Hamilton, led the Federalists. His former secretary of state, Thomas Jefferson, became the Republican leader. Strong competition existed between these two men. Each believed that the other's ideas would harm the country's future. President Washington tried to stay out of the conflict. But he had become identified with the Federalists by the end of his second term.

The Republicans began criticizing Washington. The most important was over Jay's Treaty with England. The Federalists supported this treaty. The pro-French Republicans opposed it. The experience left Washington, a man quite sensitive to criticism, wishing for retirement at Mount Vernon.

These political problems led President Washington to worry about the nation's future. Before leaving office he gave some advice to his country. He called this advice the "warning of a parting friend." Alexander Hamilton wrote a draft of the Farewell Address, and Washington revised it. The address especially concerned two issues that had created conflict during his administrations and threatened future ones. These issues were:

- The quarrels advanced by political parties. At the time, people like Washington believed that political parties were harmful to a nation. They saw political parties as acting for their own self-interest rather than for the well-being of the whole nation.
- Interference by other nations with the affairs of the United States. Washington had his experience with France in mind. It had meddled in American internal politics to get support for its conflict with England.

Importance

This is one of two famous farewell addresses by American presidents. Both included warnings. The other, by Dwight Eisenhower, warned about the growing military-industrial complex. Washington's warnings are interesting today because we have not followed his advice. Some believe these problems cause trouble today. The address is also an interesting look at American thinking at the time, when anything seemed possible. The address has been read in the U.S. Senate on Washington's birthday since 1893.

George Washington, Farewell Address, 1796

Friends and Fellow Citizens:

The period for a new election of a citizen to administer the executive government of the United States being not far distant, and the time actually arrived when your thoughts must be employed in designating the person who is to be clothed with that important trust, it appears to me proper, especially as it may conduce to a more distinct expression of the public voice, that I should now apprise you of the resolution I have formed, to decline being considered among the number of those out of whom a choice is to be made. . . .

I have already intimated to you the danger of parties in the State, with particular reference to the founding of them on geographical discriminations. Let me now take a more comprehensive view, and warn you in the most solemn manner against the baneful effects of the spirit of party generally. . . .

It serves always to distract the public councils and enfeeble the public administration. It agitates the community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms, kindles the animosity of one part against another, foment occasionally riot and insurrection. It opens the door to foreign influence and corruption . . .

The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible. So far as we have already formed engagements, let them be fulfilled with perfect good faith. Here let us stop. . . .

It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world; so far, I mean, as we are now at liberty to do it; for let me not be understood as capable of patronizing infidelity to

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existing engagements. I hold the maxim no less applicable to public than to private affairs, that honesty is always the best policy. I repeat, therefore, let those engagements be observed in their genuine sense. But, in my opinion, it is unnecessary and would be unwise to extend them. . . .

Taking care always to keep ourselves by suitable establishments on a respectable defensive posture, we may safely trust to temporary alliances for extraordinary emergencies. . . .

United States
19th September, 1796
Geo. Washington

Vocabulary

administer—to supervise

executive—the branch of government responsible for carrying out laws; the U.S. president

designating—selecting

trust—responsibility

conduce—lead

distinct—separate

apprise—inform

resolution—firm decision

intimated—made known

discriminations—differences

comprehensive—complete

solemn—serious

baneful—seriously harmful

councils—elected bodies

enfeeble—weaken

agitates—excites

ill-founded—without a sound basis

kindles—stirs up

animosity—hatred

foments—incites, stirs up

insurrection—rebellion against government

corruption—dishonesty

conduct—behavior

commercial—having to do with business

good faith—honesty

alliances—associations between nations

portion—part

patronizing—supporting

infidelity—unfaithfulness

engagements—agreements

maxim—a basic principle

genuine—real

suitable establishments—proper military organizations

Comprehension Questions

1. Who is the intended audience for Washington's address?
2. An election will be held soon. What office will people be voting for?
3. What does Washington say his role will be in that election?
4. What negative effects of political parties does Washington list?
5. Under what circumstances does Washington believe the United States should have relations with foreign nations?
6. What type of relations should the United States avoid?
7. Washington warns against permanent alliances with foreign nations. What exception does he make?

Critical Thinking

1. What do political parties and involvement with foreign nations have in common, according to Washington?
2. Is Washington against relations with foreign countries? Explain.

3. Do you think it was important for Washington to make this address? Explain.
4. Do you think the public, when reading this address, felt more anxious or more comfortable about the future?

Making Connections

1. What is Washington referring to when he writes about parties based on “geographical discriminations”?
2. What would Washington think of NATO? What would he think of the permanent establishment of the political parties?
3. Why is Washington’s decision not to run for a third term important?
4. What events during Washington’s administrations may have caused him to give the advice he gave?

Relating the Past to Our Lives

1. George Washington was the closest the new nation had to a father. Do you listen to advice from either of your parents? Explain.
2. Washington did not have an outlet for this address when he wrote it. He eventually asked a Philadelphia newspaper to print it. How would he make it public today?
3. Write a farewell address for the current U.S. president, issuing warnings about problems you see that threaten the nation’s future in the twenty-first century.

Essay Questions

1. How well are we following Washington’s advice? Explain.
2. If we followed Washington’s advice today, would the United States be better off or weaker? Explain.
3. Do political parties serve a purpose or simply create more problems? Explain.

The California Gold Rush

Document: Luzena Stanley Wilson, forty-niner; memories recalled in 1881 for her daughter Correnah Wilson Wright

Historical Context

Imagine walking from Missouri to California. What would make someone want to do this? Visions of free, fertile land and a better life brought many settlers west to Oregon in the 1840s. California settlers had migrated in smaller numbers. Until 1848, California was Mexican territory. But in 1849, thousands of settlers headed to California with a greater sense of urgency. Why? Gold had been discovered at Sutter's Mill near Sacramento. James Sutter was a rancher with visions of a cattle empire. He had hired James Marshall to build a sawmill on the American River. In January 1848, Marshall fished a lump of gold from the river. Soon word spread to the East. During 1849, scores of fortune seekers left their former lives behind, packed what they could carry, and headed west. They were called forty-niners. By the end of 1849, 80,000 fortune seekers had arrived in California.

Travelers to California went by one of three routes, each with advantages and disadvantages.

- The route by ship went south from eastern ports, around South America's Cape Horn, and then north to San Francisco. The trip could take six months, at a cost of \$150 to \$200 per passenger. Many passengers suffered seasickness along the way. But people from the East with some money found this to be the best route.
- A faster route combined sea and land. Travelers left the East Coast by ship, arriving at today's Panama. This was the shortest stretch of land between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Passengers walked the fifty miles to the Pacific. Malaria and thieves along the way were among the hazards. If the fortune seekers survived those hardships, they had to wait on the western coast for another ship to carry them north to California. The wait was unpredictable. It could be weeks—or months.
- The route used by most was the overland 2,000-mile Oregon-California Trail. This was the best alternative for travelers in the middle part of the country or those in the East with limited funds. The travel pace was the speed at which horses, oxen, and people walk. Hostile Indians always presented a concern, as did snow in the mountains. But water was the biggest problem. Along the way, settlers who thought ahead sold extra water to those who had not for \$100 per glass.

Although the earliest arrivals found gold worth millions, it dried up by mid-1849. Most forty-niners found no gold left to pan in rivers. Some left California. Most, though, stayed to pursue business chances that the booming population and abundance of money presented. The sudden growth of San Francisco led to a need for merchants, lawyers, doctors, hotels, and more. Luzena Wilson and her husband and two children traveled from

Missouri along the overland route. The family settled in Sacramento 1849, where they kept a hotel.

Importance

Luzena Wilson's book is a firsthand account dictated to her daughter in 1881. It offers an excellent window into the feelings of a woman making a life-changing, difficult journey. Keep in mind that it is a recollection thirty-two years later recorded by someone else. Memory is selective, and recollections are not the same as diaries.

Luzena Stanley Wilson, forty-niner, memories recalled in 1881 for her daughter Correnah Wilson Wright

The gold excitement spread like wildfire, even out to our log cabin in the prairie, and as we had almost nothing to lose, and we might gain a fortune, we early caught the fever. My husband grew enthusiastic and wanted to start immediately, but I would not be left behind. I thought where he could go I could, and where I went I could take my two little toddling babies. Mother-like, my first thought was of my children. I little realized then the task I had undertaken. If I had, I think I should still be in my log cabin in Missouri. But when we talked it all over, it sounded like such a small task to go out to California, and once there fortune, of course, would come to us. . . .

Monday we were to be off. Saturday we looked over our belongings, and threw aside what was not absolutely necessary. Beds we must have, and something to eat. It was a strange but comprehensive load which we stowed away in our "prairie-schooner," and some things which I thought necessities when we started became burdensome luxuries, and before many days I dropped by the road-side a good many unnecessary pots and kettles, for on bacon and flour one can ring but few changes, and it requires but few vessels to cook them. One luxury we had which other emigrants nearly always lacked—fresh milk. From our gentle "mulley" cow I never parted. . . .

Well, on that Monday morning, bright and early, we were off. With the first streak of daylight my last cup of coffee boiled in the wide fire-place,

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and the sun was scarcely above the horizon when we were on the road to California. The first day's slow jogging brought us to the Missouri River, over which we were ferried in the twilight, and our first camp fire was lighted in Indian Territory, which spread in one unbroken, unnamed waste from the Missouri River to the border line of California. Here commenced my terrors. Around us in every direction were groups of Indians sitting, standing, and on horseback, as many as two hundred in the camp. I had read and heard whole volumes of their bloody deeds, the massacre of harmless white men, torturing helpless women, carrying away captive innocent babes. I felt my children the most precious in the wide world, and I lived in an agony of dread that first night. The Indians were friendly, of course, and swapped ponies for whisky and tobacco with the gathering bands of emigrants, but I, in the most tragicomic manner, sheltered my babies with my own body, and felt imaginary arrows pierce my flesh a hundred times during the night. At last the morning broke, and we were off. . . . Our train consisted only of six wagons, but we were never alone. Ahead, as far as the eye could reach, a thin cloud of dust marked the route of the trains, and behind us, like the trail of a great serpent, it extended to the edge of civilization. . . .

The traveler who flies across the continent in palace cars, skirting occasionally the old emigrant road, may think that he realizes the trials of such a journey. Nothing but actual experience will give one an idea of the plodding, unvarying monotony, the vexations, the exhaustive energy, the throbs of hope, the depths of despair, through which we lived. Day after day, week after week, we went through the same weary routine of breaking camp at daybreak, yoking the oxen, cooking our meagre rations over a fire of sage-brush and scrub-oak; packing up again, coffeepot and camp-kettle; washing our scanty wardrobe in the little streams we crossed; striking camp again at sunset, or later if wood and water were scarce. Tired, dusty, tried in temper, worn out in patience, we had to go over the weary experience tomorrow. No excitement, but a broken-down wagon, or the extra preparation made to cross a river, marked our way for many miles. The Platte was the first great water-course we crossed. It is a peculiar, wide, shallow stream, with a quicksand bed. With the wagon-bed on blocks twelve or fourteen inches thick to raise it out of the water, some of the men astride of the oxen, some of them wading waist-deep, and all goading the poor beasts to keep them moving, we started across. The water poured into the wagon in spite of our precautions and floated off some of our few movables; but we landed

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safely on the other side, and turned to see the team behind us stop in mid-stream. The frantic driver shouted, whipped, belabored the stubborn animals in vain, and the treacherous sand gave way under their feet. They sank slowly, gradually, but surely. They went out of sight inch by inch, and the water rose over the moaning beasts. Without a struggle they disappeared beneath the surface. In a little while the broad South Platte swept on its way, sunny, sparkling, placid, without a ripple to mark where a lonely man parted with all his fortune.

Vocabulary

toddling—barely able to walk

comprehensive—complete

prairie schooner—covered wagon

burdensome—creating a heavy load

vessels—containers

emigrants—travelers leaving a place

mulley—a cow with no horns

jogging—going at a slow pace

ferried—carried by boat across a body of water

waste—broad expanse of uncultivated land

commenced—began

skirting—moving along the edge

plodding—slow moving

monotony—boring sameness

vexations—irritations

throbs—pulses

yoking—fastening together at the neck

meagre—small in amount (more commonly spelled *meager* today)

scanty—limited

weary—tiring

astride—with one leg on each side

goading—poking with a pointed rod

precautions—care taken in advance

frantic—emotionally out of control

belabored—beat

treacherous—dangerous

placid—calm

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Luzena's husband want to leave his family temporarily?
2. Why did he end up bringing his entire family?
3. What did the family expect would happen once they reached California?
4. List the items they believed were necessities at the outset of the journey.
5. How early did they leave?
6. How did the family's covered wagon get across the Missouri River?
7. What frightened Wilson above all else? Why?
8. How did the Indians with whom they came into contact behave?
9. How many wagons were in their train? Were the trails crowded?
10. List the complaints that Wilson had about the overland journey.
11. What precautions were used to keep the contents of the wagon dry when crossing the South Platte River?
12. What happened to the wagon that followed the Wilsons' during the river crossing?

Critical Thinking

1. Was Luzena Wilson's family taking a big risk in going to California? Explain.
2. Why did Wilson think that certain items were necessities but then left them behind on the trail?
3. What did Wilson think of the journey?
4. Why did settlers travel in wagon trains?
5. Luzena Wilson's daughter recorded this memoir in 1881. How might the passage of time since the event have colored Wilson's recollections?

6. How would you describe Wilson's attitude toward the journey?
7. How might a diary Wilson could have written along the way be different from her later recollections?

Making Connections

1. Look at a physical map of the United States. What physical features might present problems to an 1840s wagon train traveling from Missouri to the San Francisco area of California?
2. Find a map that shows the Oregon-California Trail—used by those traveling to the gold rush. Use the map scale to compute the distance from Independence, Missouri, to Sacramento, California.
3. Was Luzena Wilson's fear of the Indians reasonable? Do you think it was fair? Explain.
4. How might a woman's traditional role change on the overland trail?

Relating the Past to Our Lives

1. Imagine you had to leave your home with just the bare necessities for a journey. What three things would you select first?
2. Today California still seems to be a destination for people who want to start a new life. What is there about California today that seems to prompt this optimism?
3. The towns where a wagon train gathered and left from were called "jumping-off points." That's because wagon-train travelers were jumping off into the unknown. What feelings would the prospect of such a journey have created in you?

Essay Questions

1. Write a diary entry of a typical day on the trail to California.
2. Even without the gold rush as a motive, thousands of settlers left their homes to move west. What factors caused people to seek a new start in the West?
3. Historian Frederick Jackson Turner wrote that conquering the frontier formed the American character. What personal qualities did the experience of overcoming the obstacles of traveling west draw on?