Primary & Secondary Sources
What is a Primary Source?

A primary source is a document written at the time or soon after an historical event occurred.

Often, primary sources are first-hand accounts and offer an “inside view” of what happened.

Creative works and artifacts can also serve as primary sources.

Memoirs and oral histories are considered primary sources, even if they are produced long after the event.

Some examples…
Primary Sources

- Government documents
- Maps
- Correspondence
- Artifacts
- Creative works
- Memoirs & Autobiographies
- Recordings
- Oral histories
- Research data
- Photographs
- Maps
- Newspaper accounts
- Speeches
- Diaries
- Sketches
- Manuscripts
- Letters

Mary and Jeff Bell Library
What is a Secondary Source?

A secondary source interprets, analyzes, explains, reviews, or describes a primary source.

Often, secondary sources are written or recorded many years after an historical event.

Secondary sources may have reproductions of primary sources in them.

In some cases, a secondary source is used to argue a point or support a particular opinion.

Some examples...
Secondary sources

- Encyclopedias
- Textbooks
- Histories
- Interpretation of a document
- Commentary on a speech
- Analysis of research data
- Review or critique of a creative work
  “Guernica is an appalling drama of a great people abandoned to the tyrants of the Dark Ages.” –Amedé Ozenfant
- Journal or magazine articles
- Biographies
  The Essential Ronald Reagan by Lee Edwards
Where to find primary sources…

Special Collections & Archives
http://rattler.tamucc.edu/dept/special/sp_title.html

Library catalog: PORTAL
http://rattler.tamucc.edu/find/Find_Books.php

Microfilm Collections
American Periodical Series (APS)
http://rattler.tamucc.edu/elecres/resourceguide/apsseries.html
History of Women Collection (HOW)
http://rattler.tamucc.edu/elecres/resourceguide/historyofwomen.html
Library of American Civilization (LAC)
http://rattler.tamucc.edu/elecres/resourceguide/lac/LAC_0611.pdf

To find references to primary source material in PORTAL, use keywords such as: charters, correspondence, diaries, early works, interviews, manuscripts, oratory, pamphlets, personal narratives, sources, speeches, letters, documents

…in the Bell Library
Where to find primary sources...

Bell Library’s online databases:

*Archive of Americana*

*Accessible Archives*

*In the First Person*

*Texas Digital Sanborn Maps*

*American Civil War Collection*

Select Internet sites:

American Memory from the Library of Congress [http://memory.loc.gov/ammem](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem)

Primary Resources for History (University of Washington) [http://www.lib.washington.edu/subject/History/tm/](http://www.lib.washington.edu/subject/History/tm/)

Valley of the Shadow (University of Virginia) [http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu](http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu)
A word of caution…

Some sources can be either primary or secondary, depending on the context and field of study. Ask your professor if you are not sure whether or not a particular source is primary.

For assistance, please contact a librarian:

http://rattler.tamucc.edu/asklib/ask.php

(361) 825-2609
References

• Book & journal cover images from WorldCat <http://www.worldcat.org/>.
• ““Clotilde P. Garcia”.” Online Photograph. Dr. Clotilde P. Garcia Book Collection, Mary and Jeff Bell Library, Special Collections & Archives Department, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. 18 Aug. 2010 <http://rattler.tamucc.edu/dept/special/garciaclio.html>.