Primary and Secondary Sources

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE AND WHY SHOULD I CARE?

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1

What are primary sources?

- Primary sources are the raw materials of history.
- Directly related to a topic **by time or participation**.
  - Letters
  - Speeches
  - Diaries
  - Newspaper articles from the time
  - Oral history interviews
  - Documents
  - Photographs
  - Artifacts

2

What are Secondary Sources?

- Works of **synthesis and interpretation** based upon primary sources and the work of other authors.
- For example,
  - Newspaper articles published much later
  - Books, magazine articles
  - Dissertations
  - Interviews with historians
  - Your paper

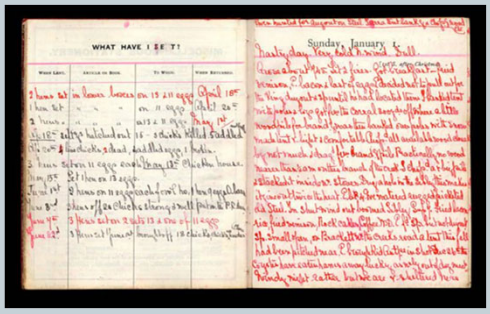
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Let's play …

Primary or Secondary?

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Primary or Secondary?



Page from Evelyn Cameron's Diary

5

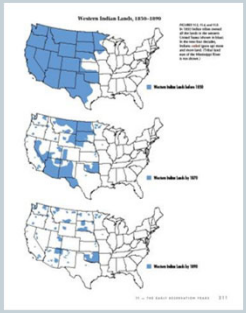
Primary or Secondary?



Photo of Garnet, Montana, 1899

6

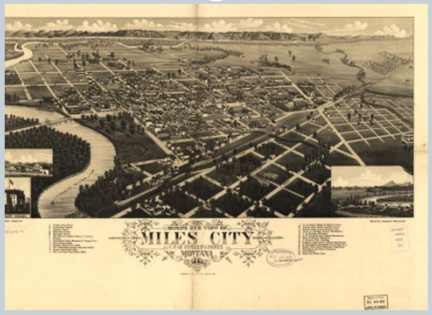
Primary or Secondary?



Map series showing loss of Indian land

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Primary or Secondary?



Map of Miles City, 1883

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Primary or Secondary?



Vigilante warning, 1884

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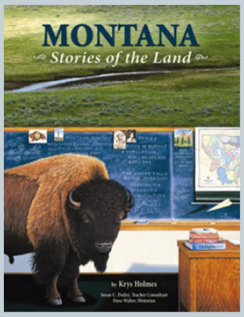
Primary or Secondary?



Oral history interview

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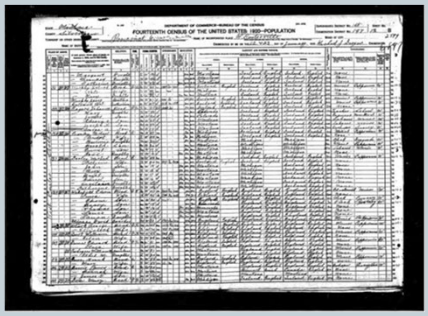
Primary or Secondary?



Textbook

11

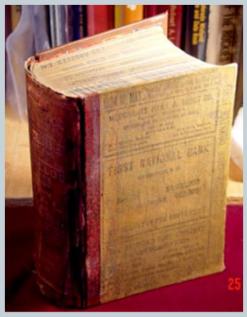
Primary or Secondary?



1920 census

12

Primary or Secondary?



Polk City Directory (like a telephone book before telephones)

13

Primary or Secondary?



Newspaper article from the time

14

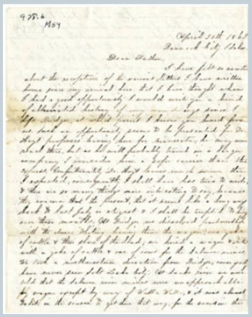
Primary or Secondary?



Newspaper article 60 years later

15

Primary or Secondary?



Letter, Emily Meredith to Father, April 30, 1863

16

Primary or Secondary?



Letter, Emily Meredith to Father, April 30, 1863

17

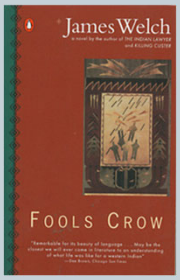
Primary or Secondary?



Me?

18

Primary or Secondary?



19

Primary or Secondary: Which is more reliable?

- Reasons for using primary sources
- Cautions for using primary sources
- Reasons for using secondary sources
- Cautions about using secondary sources

20

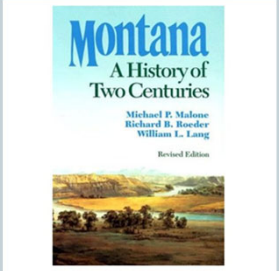
Primary or Secondary: Why does it matter?

If you rely solely on secondary sources…	If you rely solely on primary sources…
engaged in a game of "telephone"	Won't have context
not adding new knowledge	Won't have benefit of other people's research
not really able to come to your own conclusions	Will have to "reinvent the wheel"
don't have the evidence to challenge other interpretations	Won't have access to other scholars ideas/interpretations

21

Primary and Secondary Sources
Good Historians Use Both





22