### Searching for Primary Sources -- Some Questions to Ask Yourself

#### What might be considered Primary Materials?

| Which of these relate to my topic? | Autobiographies, correspondence, diaries, memoirs, newspapers and magazines written at the time, original manuscripts, government and organization documents, legal cases and opinions, hearings, census materials, statistics, oral history, interviews, photographs, paintings, advertisements, films, audio and video recordings, etc. |

Note:
- **Primary materials** are usually contemporary to the person or event.
- **Secondary materials** use or analyze primary materials. Aim for recent publications that reflect the latest scholarship.

#### Questions Concerning Individuals related to your Topic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did the individual or related people write letters, diaries, journals, or autobiographies which were published?</th>
<th>Do an author search in library catalogs (last name, first name) Try MIDCAT, then NExpress, then Worldcat. Or try a keyword search: ex. cuba and revolution and diaries person’s name and (correspondence or letters) Also check bibliographies related to the person, event or period.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who were the family members, friends, enemies, associates who might have commented on the individual, especially in a memoir?</td>
<td>Make a list of them and search for their publications, as above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it likely someone has written a full-length biography or study of the person?</td>
<td>Do a subject search in library catalogs (last name, first name)</td>
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#### Questions Concerning Events and Periods

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<tr>
<th>Which newspapers and magazines might have covered relevant events?</th>
<th>You may discover relevant ones cited in your other readings. Check the library’s Newspaper Guide and the History Research Guides for digital collections of historical newspapers and journals (ex.ProQuest Historical Newspapers, PAO, etc.) or use Summon &amp; restrict by date.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are these newspapers, magazines available here or available on microform?</td>
<td>Do a MIDCAT, Worldcat, or CRL Catalog search by title of the publication (if known) or search by subject for newspapers or periodicals from a country and limit by language.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is there indexing available or do I need to zero in on certain dates, periods?</td>
<td>For newspapers, if it’s not searchable full-text and there’s no index, try using another full-text paper like the New York Times or The Times (London) to pinpoint the date(s) it was covered in the press.</td>
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</table>
Questions Concerning Events and Periods cont.

Would the government have published something on the topic?

Governments collect and publish information on almost every aspect of public life. U.S. documents published after 1976 are listed in MIDCAT if we own them. There are print indexes for earlier years. For non-U.S. gov't docs, look for books that reprint them or get citations from bibliographies of secondary works (and request them thru ILL).

If the original documents are not accessible, could there be reprints available?

Search in library catalogs by keyword using the term "sources", ex. japan and history and sources

Are there churches, organizations, corporations involved?

These groups often have publications, archives, annual reports.

Would statistics help to substantiate my thesis?


How might I find the accounts of events, periods by lesser-known people?

The sub-heading, "personal narratives", will sometimes identify such works, ex. crusades and personal narratives

Are there visual materials that would aid my understanding? (also useful for researching individuals)

Search library catalogs, but limit to: videos (use videos tab) Look for the subject subheading –pictorial works try ARTStor (library image database) Also see the Video, Image, and Sound Effects Guide.

Special Collections, Archives, Manuscripts, Digital Collections

Don’t forget to check the holdings of our own Special Collections.

Do a MIDCAT search restricted to “Special Collections”

If I find manuscripts or archival material in Worldcat or listed in a bibliography, can I get access online?

It is possible it has been digitized and is online. Check Hathitrust, Internet Archive and do a web search. Some material may be in databases that are not indexed by web search engines and must be searched directly.

What digital collections does Middlebury have access to?

Our Research Guides list Primary Source digital collections.

What if it material is not online?

You may have to travel to another library to use the material. Before visiting, call the library to find out what restrictions they may have (i.e. hours, do you need special permission?)

Is manuscript material ever on microfilm and available for loan?

If Worldcat or CRL catalog indicates it is on microfilm, you can often get it on interlibrary loan.

Are there other possibilities to consider?

Yes. Discuss your needs with your professor and ask for help or a research consultation from a librarian.

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