

LESSON FOUR: UNDERSTANDING PRIMARY SOURCES

Enduring understandings:

People of all times leave clues with which historians interpret history. These clues, called primary sources, include photographs, audio recordings, diaries, letters, videos, and personal narratives.

Essential questions:

What clues help us understand the lives of people in the past?

How do historians use primary sources to interpret the past?

TEKS:

- 7.7 understand how individuals, events, and issues shaped the history of Texas during the 20th century
- 7.21 (A) differentiate between, locate, and use primary and secondary sources such as computer software, databases, media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about Texas
- 7.21 (B) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions
- 7.21 (C) organize and interpret information from outlines, reports, databases, and visuals, including graphs, charts, timelines, and maps
- 7.21 (D) identify points of view from the historical context surrounding an event and the frame of reference that influenced the participants
- 7.21 (F) identify bias in written, oral, and visual material

Materials:

1. Transparencies of Handbook of Texas article on segregation, Russell Lee photograph of sign showing segregation in Texas, and list of primary and secondary sources for student evaluation.
2. Overhead projector

Objectives:

The students will:

- Demonstrate understanding of the meaning and uses of primary and secondary sources.
- Identify examples of primary and secondary sources.
- Consider how their lives will leave historical evidence for future historians.

Anticipatory set:

Display the Russell Lee photograph of a sign of segregation in Texas and the Handbook of Texas article about segregation side by side on the overhead. Ask students to read the article and examine the photograph, then compare the two items. Discuss the students' observations, noting that the two items deal with the same historical issue (segregation). Point out that the Handbook of Texas article was written about segregation long after it

had been outlawed, while the photograph was taken during the time of segregation to document current conditions.

Procedure:

Explain that the Russell Lee photograph and article on segregation in Texas are both tools that can be used to understand Texas' past. Ask students to identify other tools that we use to understand the past. Record student answers on the overhead, separating their responses into two groups: primary and secondary resources. If necessary, prompt student responses with clues; their answers should identify primary sources, including letters, journals, diaries, audio recordings, maps, newspaper articles, videos, interviews, personal narratives, and clothing. Secondary resources identified should include textbooks, articles, and books.

After brainstorming, ask students to consider why you have arranged their responses into these two groups, leading them to identify that one group of tools was created by persons who witnessed the event (primary sources), while the other tools were created after the event by people who were not there to witness it (secondary sources). Label the two groups appropriately.

Explain to students:

We use both primary and secondary resources to understand the past. Primary sources are documents created by witnesses of an event, like a journal or photograph. Secondary sources are works that discuss a historical event that were created after the event by someone who did not personally witness it.

Discuss both kinds of sources with the class, considering:

- Why is it important to use primary sources?
- When would it be best to use a primary source or a secondary source?
- What are some of the limitations of primary sources? Secondary sources?
- How could primary sources be biased? Why might they be biased?
- How might secondary sources be biased?
- What clues will you leave behind that future historians could use to understand how you lived?

Closure:

Review the meaning of primary and secondary sources and inform students that during upcoming lessons they will use primary sources—the photographs of Russell Lee—to understand the lives of Mexican-Americans in Texas during the mid-20th century.

Evaluation:

Display the following list for students. Ask students to write down the name of the source and identify whether it is a primary or secondary source. Check student work for comprehension.

1. A Texas history textbook
2. A quote from a diary in a Texas history textbook

3. The Texas Declaration of Independence
4. A painting of the Battle of the Alamo completed in 1985.
5. A letter written by William Travis
6. A photograph of the 1901 oil gusher at Spindletop
7. An oral history of a person telling about their life during the era of segregation
8. A magazine article written last year about the Civil War
9. A newspaper article about the Battle of Sabine Pass written by an eyewitness
10. A farm tool found by an archeologist excavating a Caddo village

SEGREGATION. Separation based on race and nationality in Texas is a practice historically applied to African and Mexican Americans. Attitudes regarding racial separation probably arrived in Texas during the 1820s and obviously accompanied views toward the "peculiar institution," slavery. Anglo-Americans begin extending segregation to Mexican Americans after the Texas Revolution as a social custom. Tejanos formed a suspect class during and after the revolution, and that fact led to a general aversion of them. After the Civil War, segregation went hand-in-hand with the violence often employed as a method of group control. For both minority groups, segregation existed in schools, churches, and most public places, including residential districts. By the latter years of the nineteenth century, institutionalized segregation flourished legally in places with a visible black population, and was extended informally to Tejanos. Most Texas towns and cities had a "Negro quarter" and a "Mexican quarter."

Although the law specified until 1890 that black schools were to have equal access to the common school fund, they often did not. In the early twentieth century, black and Mexican schools faced lamentable conditions endemic in an antiquated educational system, and educational reforms of the Progressive era did not improve matters. During the 1920s, black schoolchildren were more likely to miss school than white students, black teachers received less pay and training than their white counterparts, and teaching accommodations ordinarily amounted to one-room buildings generally under the tutelage of a single teacher. The same circumstances applied to Hispanic students, who were segregated because some whites thought them "dirty" and because some white employers desired an uneducated, inexpensive labor pool. Whatever schools existed often suffered from inadequate financing, poor educational facilities, and racist curriculum. Shunned by white society, minorities formed their own PTAs and school organizations, and in the case of the black campuses, their own sports and academic rivalries. Parallel clubs and athletic teams were not as common in Mexican schools since Mexicans were considered "white" and thus did not receive the budgeting African Americans did from the "separate but equal" policy. These educational inequalities persisted into the 1950s.

An elaborate system of legal codes kept black Texans apart from the mainstream of Texas life. Railroad-car segregation began in 1891. In 1910 and 1911, the legislature passed laws dictating that railroad companies provide separate waiting rooms in railroad stations. Several Texas towns adopted residential segregation laws between 1910 and the

1920s. Legal strictures called for segregated water fountains and restrooms. By 1930, black citizens could not attend sports or cultural events, eat at the better restaurants, or get lodging at the finer hotels unless these facilities provided separate accommodations. None of these laws specifically had Mexicans in mind, but white society nevertheless generally excluded them. Often, Mexican Americans could not commingle with whites at barbershops, restaurants, funeral homes, churches, juries, theaters, or numerous other public places.

Excerpt from Handbook of Texas article: Segregation

Retrieved online from:

<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/SS/pks1.html>



Segregation, Dimmit, Texas
photograph by Russell Lee