Primary Sources:
Historical “Facts” & What to do with them
Primary Sources: Historical “Facts” & What to do with them

• Get down to the facts.
• The fact of the matter is. . . .
• Just the facts m’am.
• Cold hard facts.
• Can’ t get around the facts.
Primary Sources: 
Historical “Facts” & What to do with them

• Historical facts not always discernible; generally a symbol or statement of some kind generated by a number of other even simpler facts.
Primary Sources: Historical “Facts” & What to do with them

- The events of history have faded into the mists of time.
- Another person’s affirmation that something had happened.
- Symbols are rarely cold or hard and precarious to say true or false.
Primary Sources:
Historical “Facts” & What to do with them

• The search for historical facts begins in the complex, cross-motivated terrain of the human mind.

• Historians hold up a mirror to the past and find pale reflections of what has transpired.
Primary Sources:
Historical “Facts” & What to do with them

• Accept the notion that history is an imaginatively recreated intangible world.

• German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), “The objective man is a mirror.”
Primary Sources:
Historical “Facts” & What to do with them

- U.S. President Abraham Lincoln assassinated on 14 April 1865 by John Wilkes Booth.
- No historian can ever completely tell the whole story behind the all the participants’ motivations.
Primary Sources: Historical “Facts” & What to do with them

- The historian has to judge the significance of the series of events emanating from one single, never to repeated performance.
- Records are incomplete and imperfect.
- The imagined picture of the event are determined by the actual event and by our own purposes into knowing it.
Primary Sources: 
Historical “Facts” & What to do with them

• Evidence of historical facts come from sources—some reliable some not.
• The site of King Alaric the Visigoth’s burial place (d 410 a.d.) come down to us via an ode composed by a German poet.
Primary Sources:
Historical “Facts” & What to do with them

• The world knows little of Germans before they crossed paths with Julius Caesar.

• Historians generally get their information second-hand.

• Consider Edward Gibbons’, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, a well researched secondary source.
Primary Sources: 
Historical “Facts” & What to do with them

• The more frequently information gets passed along, the more unreliable it becomes.
• Everyone is fond of a good story.
• The case of Cardinal Baronius, William Robertson, and the attitude towards the year 1000 a.d.
Primary Sources: Historical “Facts” & What to do with them

- Where does the historian get his/her information?
- How far and wide does the research encompass?
- Reliable historians examine evidence for themselves.
Primary Sources:  
**Historical “Facts” & What to do with them**

- Contrary to popular belief, not all primary source materials are hard to find, difficult to read, and resolutely dull.
- Primary sources are molded by the spirit of the time in which they are written.
- Primary sources help us to form our own opinions of the past.
Primary Sources:
Historical “Facts” & What to do with them

• Sort through mutual antagonisms and study motivation and perspective.
• Dealing impartially with regards to the past can allow cooler heads to prevail in the present.
Primary Sources:
Historical “Facts” & What to do with Them

- In early 19th century, much of Europe’s primary sources were still held in small often remote collections—monasteries.
- 19th century also saw development of scientific approach to historical sources.
Primary Sources:
Historical “Facts” & What to do with them
Primary Source Analysis: Photograph
Primary Source Analysis: Written Document

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Primary Source Analysis: Cartoon
Primary Source Analysis: Map

Shirley Burchill, Nigel Hughes, Richard Gale, Peter Price and Keith Woodall 2007
Primary Sources:
Historical “Facts” & What to do with them

• Start your search at the library and its catalog.
• Be aware of different formats—microfilm, video, microfiche, etc.
• Learn indexes and databases.
• Look at books’ bibliographies.
Use of Primary Sources: Irish-Catholic Emancipation

• In spite of its size and because of its proximity, Ireland proves most irksome to British governments in the nineteenth century.

• Political emancipation for Irish Catholics
Use of Primary Sources:
Irish-Catholic Emancipation,
Daniel O’Connell Letters

- In 1823, O’Connell establishes the Catholic Association.
- Non-violent, grass roots tactics serve as model for other protest movements.
- Catholic clergy join the fight.
Use of Primary Sources: Irish-Catholic Emancipation

- Catholic rent chart shows strength of organization.
- Parliamentary candidates from England making a name out of Ireland.
- O’Connell’s election speech.
Use of Primary Sources: Irish-Catholic Emancipation

- Legislative act enunciates terms for Irish Catholic emancipation.
- Limited to well off landowners.
- Mindset of O'Connell on his next legislative priority revealed in letters.
Tactics that stand test of time

• Irish emancipation and repeal tactics become the model for all future non-violent peaceful protest and civil disobedience campaigns.
Primary Sources:
Historical “Facts” & What to do with them,
The fanciful fiction of The Da Vinci Code

- Most successful novel of this time (7 million copies currently in print) and an awful movie.
- Based on feminist scholarship and esoteric histories.
Primary Sources:
Historical “Facts” & What to do with them,
The fanciful fiction of *The Da Vinci Code*

- Historical accuracy measured by how well it occurs in existing historical record.
- Ask, “How historically accurate is history?”
Primary Sources:
Historical “Facts” & What to do with them,
The fanciful fiction of *The Da Vinci Code*

- Book itself full of historical errors.
- On Brown’s “Fact Page” it merely states that the sources exist not that there is fidelity to any historical evidence.
- It’s a novel.
Primary Sources: 
Historical “Facts” & What to do with them