

GROUP ASSIGNMENT 9: Using a Primary Source

Written records provide us with useful information about historical events, everyday life, and the beliefs of different peoples. Historians use two types of written records: primary sources and secondary sources.

Primary sources provide useful information about historical events. However, primary sources can give conflicting views of an event or development. Two statements about the execution of Louis XVI follow. The first is an official announcement published by the National Convention on January 23, 1793. The second is a letter written on January 23 by a noble living in Paris to a friend in England.

Procedure:

- 1). Read the introduction as a whole class (see above).
- 2). In your small groups read the two accounts of Louis XVI's execution (found on page 2).
- 3). Then as a group just discuss—do not *write* anything—questions a, b and c (see below).
 - a. Read the sources to find out what information is given.** a). How do the two sources differ in describing the attitude of the French people to the news of Louis' execution? b). According to each source, what was the outcome of the king's execution?
 - b. Compare the two sources.** a). Do the sources agree on any points about the execution of Louis? b). On what points do the sources disagree?
 - c. Evaluate the reliability of each source.** a). How might the National Convention voting for Louis XVI's execution affect the nature of its public proclamation? b). How might the noble's background affect his view of the king's execution? c). Which source, do you think, is more reliable? Why?
- 4). Now individually compose your own answer (minimum 100 words in length) to question d (see immediately below). Use a combination of logic and evidence to create your answer. Submit your answer using *Google Docs*. Entitle your assignment [YourName]_Assignment 9. Share the assignment with the teacher (rdelainey@lcbi.sk.ca) giving them read/write permissions.
 - d. Use the sources to draw conclusions.** How do the differences between the sources reflect divisions in France during the revolution?

Official account of Louis' execution by The National Convention

Background: The National Convention governed France from 1792 to 1795 during the most critical period of the French Revolution. The National Convention was created to write a constitution for France following Louis XVI's execution. The Convention numbered 749 deputies that included businessmen, tradesmen, and many professionals like doctors, lawyers and educators. Aside from creating a constitution, the National Convention's most important act was the formal abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of France as a republic. The deputies of the National Convention did not all share the same aims. Specifically, there were two rival factions in the Convention called the Montagnards and Girondins. The Montagnards favored granting the poorer classes more political power. The Girondins favored the creation of a republic dominated by the middle class. When Austria, Prussia and England attacked revolutionary France, the Girondins were purged from the convention and the Montagnard faction prevailed.

Citizens, the tyrant is no more. For a long time, the cries of the victims, whom war and domestic discord have spread over France and Europe, loudly protested his existence. He has paid his penalty, and only approval for the Republic and for liberty have been heard from the people.

We have had to combat deep-seated prejudices and the superstition of centuries concerning monarchy. Uncertainties and disturbances always accompany great changes and revolutions as profound as ours. But respect for liberty of opinion must cause these disturbances to be forgotten; only the good which they have produced through the death of the tyrant and of tyranny now remains. The National Convention and the French people are now to have only one mind, only one sentiment, that of liberty and fraternity.

Now above all we need peace in the Republic, and the most active surveillance of the domestic enemies of liberty. Let us unite to avert the shame that domestic discord [civil war] would bring upon our newborn republic.

Account from A Noble's Report on the Death of the King

Background: the French nobility was a privileged social class. They owned vast estates and their main income was from taxes paid by farmers working the land. Nobles inherited their titles. However, there were situations where wealthy businessmen purchased noble titles from the monarchy. Prior to the French Revolution, the nobility belonged to the Second Estate. No one in the Second Estate had to pay taxes; however, they could approve of new taxes of the Third Estate (the poorer classes) in the *Estates-General*. Since the majority of nobles sided with the monarchy during the revolutionary period, they ended up losing their political and economic influence. Many nobles actually fled revolutionary France out of fear for their lives.

The frightful event of the 21st has spread dismay everywhere, and it is worth noting that even the most zealous supporters of the revolution found this measure both excessive and dangerous. It will not save us from the untold ills which threaten us, the reality and length of which are now all the more sure. We must make up our minds to sacrifice peace, security, and fortune. I very much fear that civil war will come as a finishing touch to the horrible crimes and all the misfortunes which now assail us. I doubt, moreover, whether this crime added to so many others, has the universal approval of France. Even if we thought that the king were guilty, we would not wish for his death, especially after he has endured such a long and sorrowful captivity. Meanwhile, prudence must silence criticism because under the empire of secret accusations, of inquisition, or even more, of tyranny, it is dangerous to speak one's thoughts.