

Evaluating Source Material – Questions and Considerations

There are multiple ways to “vet” a source or to determine the viability or credibility of a source. The following guidelines, presented as questions, may help make a determination. Asking questions is also a useful tool for helping students independently evaluate materials.

Evaluating a Source - General Questions to Consider

- Who is the author of the source or information?
- What seems to be the intent of the author in presenting the information?
- Who is the audience/ intended audience?
- Is the information based on fact or opinion?
- Does it rely solely on emotion and/or emotionally charged language or vocabulary to evoke a particular response?
- Does the source point to corroborating evidence to support claims or points presented?
- Is the information presented in a way that oversimplifies the topic?
- Are you able to cross-reference or connect facts to other credible sources?

Defining –

Primary Sources are typically defined as original material not filtered through how others might interpret or analyze the material.

Secondary Sources are materials derived after the fact or not during the time of an event.

With respect to Tulsa history and/or history related to the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, here are additional considerations.

- Is the information considered a primary source such as eyewitness accounts, original photographs or original artwork, historical documents, or autobiographies?
- How does the material represent or present the background/ history of events in relation to facts that can be verified or authenticated?
- Secondary sources can provide information after an event, such as what one might find in a biography, through data interpretation, or through analysis of facts.
- Whose perspective or point of view is represented and what perspectives are missing/ not represented?
- Most importantly, as presented, does the material or source maintain respect for human lives and/or human dignity connected to a specific event or set of events?

Evaluating web sources

For the general consumer of web-based information, consider this a beginning point for evaluation.

Evaluating Source Material – Questions and Considerations

Authority

- Who is presenting, publishing, or sponsoring the information?
- Is the author's expertise represented in other contexts or communities?
- Are some sources of authority (other voices) privileged over others?

Accuracy/ Reliability

- Can you determine the original source of the content?
- Does the author/publisher present citations to support the content?
- Does there seem to be a bias in how the content is presented? Are the biases made clear by the author/publisher?
- Is the content housed on a personal web site vs. one connected to an organization or institution? (Domain names include .edu, .gov, .org, .com, .net among others)

Currency/ Timeliness

- When was the information published?
- Has it been recently updated? (check for any outdated/ broken links)
- Does the author/publisher present any other relevant dates/ timelines?

Purpose

- Does the content attempt to answer specific questions related to the topic?
- Is there an economic value to the content and for whom? If so, consider who this might benefit or exclude.

Relevance

- What does the information cover and to what extent?
- What information or point of view is missing or not included?

*This document was created through a collaboration between two Tulsa Community college faculty and The John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation. Any individual views or perspectives expressed do not necessarily reflect those of either institution. Educators may freely use these documents and adapt any resource to meet the needs of their students.