

# **SOURCES FOR THESES IN AMERICAN HISTORY**

## **INTRODUCTORY MEETING**

Oxford holds a wide range of primary sources for American history – far too many to be listed here. For a more thorough overview of available sources, and a chance to ask questions, there will be a special session in the Vere Harmsworth Library (VHL) at **10am in Week 5 (Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> May)**. The VHL is in the Rothermere American Institute (on South Parks Road) and is part of the Bodleian. Anyone thinking about writing a dissertation in US history should seek to attend this session. It will be led by the librarian, John Pinfold, in the seminar room below the library.

To make best use of the session, you should try and have an idea of the sort of topic that interests you before you attend. The idea is that this session will allow you to find and look through possible sources before you approach a potential tutor, so that you will have a much clearer idea about the scope of your topic at that stage.

## **VERE HARMSWORTH LIBRARY**

The Vere Harmsworth Library holds various standard printed sources that provide coverage of the newsworthy and political decisions of the day. These include the Congressional Record, some of the main national newspapers and various journals, (such as the North American Review). These documents provide an excellent introduction to the opinions of US policymakers and other elite groups. There are also mass circulation magazines for those interested in popular culture, such as Harpers, Life and Ebony (an African American magazine). There are various statistical records, notably the Historical Statistics of the United States from Colonial Times (Bicentennial Edition).

The VHL also holds various specific collections of primary source materials. Many of these collections are held on microfilm. There are microfilm machines in the VHL, and obviously the staff will instruct you. Before searching the microfilm, take time looking through the relevant microfilm catalogue index (it is best to check for material under a range of different possible headings).

Primary sources for the colonial era are particularly extensive. They include Evans' Early American Imprints, a collection that contains the full text of all known existing books, pamphlets, and broadsides printed in the United States (or British American colonies prior to Independence) from 1639 through 1800. Other collections include the printed Colonial Records and the Records of the Virginia Company.

The two main nineteenth century collections are the American Colonization Society Papers (debates about slavery, reform and politics) and the Adams Family Letters (spanning much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from John Quincy to Henry).

Twentieth century collections include Congress on Racial Equality Papers (one of the main civil rights organizations), Public Papers of the President (Hoover to Bush), Congressional Watergate Hearings, Lyndon Johnson and the War on Poverty Papers,

'Violence in the City' report (on Watts Riot of 1965), Pentagon Papers (U.S. Defence Department report on Vietnam war) and various others.

The VHL has a tremendous coverage of secondary literature, including a full run of most state journals. This will allow you to situate your topic in the appropriate historiographical context. Students interested in literature and intellectual history will find a good range of texts.

## **OUTSIDE OXFORD**

The British Library has an excellent range of primary sources (such as the papers of the other main civil rights organizations). Obviously you will want to choose a topic which has key sources available in Oxford, but it is worth considering research in London during the vacation if this will fill in any gaps.

Other sources in Britain are listed on the British American Studies website <http://www.baas.ac.uk/resources/resources.asp>

## **WEB RESOURCES**

One great advantage of researching in American history is the availability of primary resources on the web. In many cases, web based collections are more extensive and user friendly than library based collections. Below are just a sample of collections, but obviously a web search is the best way to get a sense of what is available.

## **GENERAL WEBSITES**

<http://www.besthistorysites.net/USHistory.shtml>

**This is a helpful home page that will link you to a wide range of US history topics, and rates various sites according to available sources and 'user friendliness' (easy to search etc).**

<http://www.baas.ac.uk/resources/resources.asp>

The British Association of American Studies resources homepage.

The American Memory Project at the Library of Congress

<http://memory.loc.gov/>

## COLONIAL ERA WEBSITES

Bibliographies and introductions:

Atlantic world history: <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~atlantic/atlanbib.html>

Transatlantic slavery: <http://www.sil.si.edu/silpublications/transatlanticslavery.htm>

James Madison University colonial index: <http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/colonial.htm>

Primary source collections:

Early English books online: <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>

"The American colonist's library": <http://personal.pitnet.net/primarysources/>

The Yale Avalon project: <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/states/statech.htm>

Salem witch trials, documentary archive & transcription project:  
<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/salem/witchcraft/>

## NINETEENTH CENTURY WEBSITES (a selection from [www.br-anch.org](http://www.br-anch.org))

<http://www.hti.umich.edu/m/moagrp/>

A "digital library" of thousands of primary documents from the Antebellum period through Reconstruction. Includes 10 major 19th-century journals.

<http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/vshadow/>

This is a searchable archive of thousands of pages of maps, images, letters, diaries, newspapers, and church, agricultural, military, and public records--all relating to two local communities.

<http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/>

Historical materials from Abraham Lincoln's Illinois years.

Getting the Message Out: National Political Campaign Materials, 1840-1860

<http://dig.lib.niu.edu/message/>

Hundreds of documents, with interpretative material by historian Michael F. Holt.

<http://www.cwc.lsu.edu/> The home page of the Civil War Center which aims to make available all appropriate private and public data on the Internet regarding the Civil War'.

<http://history.furman.edu/%7Ebenson/docs/>

Hundreds of editorials from Northern and Southern newspapers.

[Freedmen and Southern Society Project](http://www.history.umd.edu/Freedmen/home.html)

<http://www.history.umd.edu/Freedmen/home.html> Features primary documents relating to emancipation.

<http://dbs.ohiohistory.org/africanam/> Primary material relating to African-American life in Ohio between 1850 and 1920.

## TWENTIETH CENTURY WEBSITES

<http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/>

A good place to start for materials relating to the civil rights movement, particularly the role of Martin Luther King.

<http://frank.mtsu.edu/~kmiddlet/history/women.html>

An excellent introduction to web materials about the women's movement.

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wpaintro/wpahome.html>

Life histories from the Great Depression era, recorded by workers from the Federal Writer's Project (1936-1940).

[http://wwics.si.edu/index.cfm?fuseaction=topics.home&topic\\_id=1409](http://wwics.si.edu/index.cfm?fuseaction=topics.home&topic_id=1409)

Cold War International History Project. Translated sources that are excellent for looking at the broader international impact of US policy during the Cold War (eg papers from Bulgaria).