DEVELOPING YOUR HISTORICAL INQUIRY

Use this guide to help you begin your historical inquiry. Start with an inquiry theme that interests you. Then identify a historical event, movement, person, place, or experience that can help you explore that theme. From there, locate primary sources that provide evidence of how people experienced the theme within that historical context. The examples below, including suggested Library of Congress collections, are provided as starting points to help you develop your inquiry and locate relevant historical evidence. You are encouraged to explore other historical contexts, collections, and primary sources connected to your interests.

Inquiry Theme	Example Historical Events, Contexts, or Experiences	Example Primary Sources
Home and Belonging	Great Migration, immigration and resettlement, neighborhood displacement, Japanese American incarceration, westward migration	Maps, neighborhood photographs, migration records, letters, housing records
Identity	Cultural movements, immigration and assimilation, changing census classifications, military service, struggles for civil and citizenship rights	Family photographs, portraits, census records, identification documents, letters
Community	Development of historic neighborhoods, community gathering spots, establishment of schools and houses of worship, group organizations, community celebrations/ traditions	Photographs, maps, houses of worship or community records, business advertisements, event programs
Memory and Preservation	Creation or removal of monuments, establishment of memorials, preservation of historic sites, commemoration of significant events	Monument photographs, cemetery records, memorial programs, maps, archival collections
Justice	Emancipation, Reconstruction, women's suffrage, voting rights movements, school desegregation, Civil Rights Movement	Court records, voting records, petitions, protest photographs, speeches, newspapers
Work and Labor	Industrialization, agricultural labor, labor organizing, child labor reform, wartime employment, changing working conditions	Worker photographs, farm records, advertisements, union materials, payroll or employment records
Migration	Great Migration, westward migration, immigration through major ports of entry, Dust Bowl migration, refugee and resettlement experiences	Immigration records, train schedules, maps, family letters, photographs, passenger records
Education	School segregation and desegregation, establishment of public schools, boarding schools, expansion of educational access	School photographs, report cards, yearbooks, classroom images, school records, newspapers
Traditions	Cultural celebrations, religious observances, foodways, music and dance traditions, preservation and adaptation of cultural practices	Festival photographs, sheet music, clothing, recipes, recordings, photographs, oral traditions
Resilience	Community responses to natural disasters, rebuilding after conflict or displacement, activism and organizing, military service, preservation of culture during periods of change	Photographs, letters, newspapers, military records, oral histories, organizational records

DEVELOPING YOUR HISTORICAL INQUIRY

Start Your Search: Library of Congress Collections

The Library of Congress contains millions of primary sources that can help you investigate your inquiry theme. The collections below are possible starting points.

- Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936–1938
  First-person accounts and photographs documenting the experiences of formerly enslaved people. The collection contains more than 2,300 first-person accounts and 500 photographs. **Useful for exploring inquiry themes such as identity, family, justice, work, resilience, memory, and preservation.**

- Civil Rights History Project
  Oral histories, photographs, transcripts, and other materials documenting the struggle for civil rights in the United States. **Useful for exploring inquiry themes such as justice, community, identity, education, resilience, and memory.**

- Japanese-American Internment Camp Newspapers, 1942–1946
  Newspapers produced by Japanese Americans incarcerated in assembly and relocation centers during World War II. They document daily life, community events, relocation, and perspectives from within the camps. **Useful for exploring inquiry themes such as home and belonging, identity, community, migration, justice, and resilience.**

- Voices from the Dust Bowl: The Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection
  Audio recordings, photographs, field notes, news clippings, personal narratives, and other materials documenting migrant workers living in Farm Security Administration camps in California. **Useful for exploring inquiry themes such as migration, home and belonging, work and labor, community, traditions, and resilience.**

- American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936–1940
  Nearly 2,900 documents capturing the life stories of Americans from many backgrounds and occupations. **Useful for exploring inquiry themes such as identity, migration, education, work and labor, community, traditions, and everyday life.**

- National American Woman Suffrage Association Collection
  Books, newspapers, pamphlets, scrapbooks, proceedings, and other materials documenting the campaign for women's suffrage. **Useful for exploring inquiry themes such as justice, identity, community, work, education, and resilience.**

  Note: Within the description of this collection, it is noted that this collection largely reflects the perspectives of affluent white women involved in the movement and contains less documentation of women of color and working-class women. That makes it especially interesting when thinking about *Whose voice is represented? What is missing?*

- Sanborn Maps Collection
  Detailed maps documenting residential, commercial, and industrial areas of thousands of towns and cities. They can be used to examine how neighborhoods and communities changed over time. **Useful for exploring inquiry themes such as home and belonging, community, migration, work and labor, and memory and preservation.**

Continue Exploring: These collections are only starting points. Search the Library of Congress Digital Collections to discover additional collections, historical events, people, places, and primary sources related to your inquiry theme.