



RESEARCHING WELL-KNOWN HISTORICAL NARRATIVES ALONG WITH LESSER-KNOWN OR MISSING NARRATIVES

The following are a few examples of well-known and lesser-known historical narratives to help guide learners in examining how history is constructed, whose perspectives are elevated, and whose stories are often marginalized or missing. Research can be conducted using widely accessible online archives, including the Library of Congress (<https://www.loc.gov/>), National Archives (<https://www.archives.gov/>), Smithsonian digital resources (<https://www.si.edu/explore>), university digital libraries, and other reputable history organizations.

To support research of both well-known and lesser-known narratives, begin by searching the broader topic or era (e.g., “American Revolution,” “Space Race,” “World War II”). Then, when exploring the archives, use a combination of general search terms, well-known events, and more targeted keywords to uncover some overlooked perspectives. Primary sources may include photographs, letters, oral histories, maps, government documents, videos, and news articles from the period. Secondary sources may include scholarly essays, museum exhibits, documentaries, or encyclopedia entries that provide interpretation and context.

Analyze findings by comparing what appears quickly in mainstream search results with what requires deeper inquiry. This practice helps observe how dominant narratives are preserved and circulated, while lesser-known stories often require more intentional searching. Look for patterns, such as whose voices are represented, whose labor or contributions are highlighted, and whose experiences are minimized or absent.

Examples of Well-Known Narratives along with Lesser-Known or Missing Narratives

Topic	Well-Known Narratives	Lesser-Known Narratives
American Revolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and other Founding Fathers The signing of the Declaration of Independence The Boston Tea Party as a symbol of American resistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of enslaved African Americans who fought for their own liberation (e.g., Crispus Attucks, the first person killed in the Boston Massacre) The impact of settler colonialism on Indigenous communities, including displacement, disease, warfare, and land theft. The Haitian Revolution’s influence on the resistance movement of enslaved African Americans and fears of rebellion in the U.S.
World War II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The United States as a liberator in World War II, defeating fascism abroad. D-Day as the turning point of the war Pearl Harbor as the catalyst that unified the United States 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Tuskegee Airmen, whose excellence challenged racist military policies. The 442nd Central Postal Directory, Japanese American soldiers fighting while their families were incarcerated in U.S. camps. Wartime racial violence at home, such as the Detroit Race Riot of 1943 and the Port Chicago disaster, where Black sailors were disproportionately punished after an explosion.
The Space Race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> John Glenn, Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and American scientific triumph. Cold War competition fueled rapid scientific progress and national pride 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Black women mathematicians of NASA, including Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson, who helped calculate trajectories but were hidden behind segregation and discrimination. Indigenous communities who faced uranium mining on their lands to fuel Cold War nuclear and aerospace programs. The Mercury 13, a group of highly qualified women pilots who passed astronaut fitness tests at equal or higher levels than their male counterparts but were barred from NASA.
Slavery, Freedom, and Early Reparations Efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emancipation Proclamation The end of slavery in 1865 (13th Amendment) The Abolitionist Movement Focus on freedom as the “end” of the story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The petitions of Belinda Sutton (1783–1790s), one of the earliest documented reparations claims where she formally requested compensation from her former enslaver’s estate The broken promise of Special Field Orders No. 15 (“40 acres and a mule”) and its reversal by President Andrew Johnson Freedmen’s Bureau (1865–1872): what it promised vs. what was actually delivered