

# The American Nation

## Chapter 1 / Section 3

### *The Tools of History*

#### **I. Using Historical Evidence**

*Studying the lives of people in different times and places is the work of the historian. The most basic tool for this work is historical evidence. Historians collect the evidence, and then use it to accomplish this goal.*

#### **A. Primary & Secondary Sources**

Historians look first for primary sources. A **primary source** is firsthand information about people or events. Primary sources include official documents, public speeches, eyewitness accounts, autobiographies, and photographs and video tapes. A **Secondary source** is an account provided after the fact by people who did not directly witness or participate in the event. Encyclopedias, biographies, or books and articles written by historians are also secondary sources.

#### **B. Evaluating Evidence**

When dealing with a primary source, the first job of a historian may be to determine whether it is authentic. **Authenticity** refers to whether or not the source is actually what it seems to be. After showing that a source is authentic, historians must determine whether it is **reliable**. In evaluating reliability, historians must always be on the lookout for bias. **Bias** is a leaning toward or against a certain person, group, or idea.

### *C. Interpreting Evidence*

In addition to evaluating sources, historians **interpret** what the sources mean. By explaining why things happened in the past, the historian can **help us understand** what is going on today and what may happen tomorrow. Different historians may interpret the same evidence in **different ways**. Although historians try to be **objective**, that may be influenced by the own biases.

## **II. Archaeologists Uncover the Past**

Most of the evidence that historians use to study American history is in written form. However, when examining the distant past, historians must often rely on **artifacts**, or objects made by humans. Artifacts include items such as stone tools, weapons, baskets, and carvings.

### *A. The Science of Archaeology*

Artifacts are the building blocks of archaeology. **Archaeology** is the study of evidence left by early people in order to find out about their way of life. As ancient cultures disappear, **their remains are buried** by centuries of sand, dirt, and water.

### *B. Studying Ancient Cultures*

From artifacts and other evidence, archaeologists form theories about the cultures of ancient peoples. A **culture** is the way of life that a people have developed. It includes their homes, clothing, economy, arts, and government.

## **III. Chronology and Historical Eras**

Perhaps you feel that the study of history is a collection of dates, names, and facts. Actually, it is much more than that. It is a story that has many parts.

### ***A. Learn From the Past***

When you study history, you learn how the past is **linked to the present**. Often by studying how people solved problems in the past, we can **apply these insights** to solving today's problems. History is the study of men and women that we honor as **heroes**. These exceptional men and women dared to believe they could change the world – and they did.

### ***B. Learn About People***

History is also the story of **ordinary people** who do the **everyday things** that shape the character of our country. On the practical side, studying history provides you with useful skills. As you begin to analyze events, you will learn how to research topics, recognize different points of view, make connections, and understand causes and effects.

### ***C. Absolute Chronology***

The study of history starts with **chronology**, the sequence of events over time. There are two types of chronology, absolute and relative. Absolute chronology may be expressed in terms of centuries, years, days, or even hours.

### ***D. Relative Chronology***

The time when an event took place **in relation to other events** is called relative chronology. Relative chronology helps us understand connections between different events.