



## U.S. HISTORY RESEARCH PATHFINDER

### Lansing Public Library

This sheet is to help you follow a logical path in your research. Use the guide to the collection. It is not a definitive lists of every useful source, but suggested reference titles. You will still need to use the catalog to find books in the general collection.

#### ASK THE REFERENCE LIBRARIAN FOR ADDITIONAL HELP.

First determine if your topic is mainly about a person or an event. Many topics cross over into both areas. Start with one or the other. You can always approach it from the other direction if you need more information.

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Start with the biographical sources. Find out why the person is significant. Find out if they played a particular role in history: President, abolitionist, business tycoon, reformer, political figure, etc. Start with the biographical sources such as:

- ✓ Dictionary of American Biography
- ✓ Great Lives from History (American series)
- ✓ Great Lives from History (American women)

Do not limit yourself to just the titles listed as an example! Use other biographical sources based on what you know or find out about the person. For example:

- ✓ The American Presidents
- ✓ Black Women of America
- ✓ African American Almanac

Check the person in the computer catalog—as a subject and as an author. For instance, President Nixon wrote several books, and many people wrote books about him. Look for books by associates—for instance, many of the people surrounding President Kennedy wrote books.

Look for books covering the period in history when your person was prominent. Some of these books can be tricky to find using the computer catalog. There is a separate sheet with hints on using the computer catalog. There are certain methods that are learned by experience and do not lend themselves to quick hint sheets. If you have trouble finding material, ask the Reference Librarian for assistance.

Check related topics. For example, if the person you are researching was an abolitionist, look for books on this topic, or on slavery. Check the index in the back of the back of books you find for references to your person.

Each step of research builds on what you've already found out about your subject. Consider research a matter of finding clues to a mystery to be solved.

# Researching a Person

# Researching a Topic or Event

Start with books listed in the guide as “General Sources”. Particularly good starting points are:

- ✓ Great Events from History (North American Series) (note the names of people involved)
- ✓ Dictionary of American History

Once you know something about your topic look for more specific titles such as:

- ✓ The American Revolution 1775-1783: An Encyclopedia
- ✓ Encyclopedia of American Economic History
- ✓ Encyclopedia of American Government
- ✓ The America Era series

The guide is divided into logical groupings. Look through all the groupings to find useful titles.

Once you start reading about your topic you will find names of people who were involved. Approach the topic from that direction and research individuals involved—use the techniques listed on the other side of this pathfinder.

Use the computer catalog to find additional titles. If you have any trouble finding material, ask the Reference Librarian for help.

## GENERAL TECHNIQUES AND HINTS

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Take notes for your bibliography while you have the books in front of you. Few things are as frustrating as trying to find the title you used earlier. Use the catalog to gather information for your bibliography.

Use the photocopy machine. **PLEASE** don't steal the book or tear pages out. Some of these books are impossible to replace, even if we could afford it. If you don't have the money for the copies, talk to the Reference Librarian. We'll see if you can find an alternative source you can check out, or work something out about photocopies.

Research takes **TIME**. There are no real shortcuts to research beyond having some sort of plan (which you hold in your hand) and a list of sources (which has been provided). Plan to use more sources than prescribed by your teacher. If the requirement is to use three sources, plan to look at nine to find the three **BEST** sources for your needs. **DO NOT**, under any circumstances, use **JUST** the first three sources you lay your hands on!

Research does not happen in a vacuum. Answers are not easy nor obvious. Every bit of information you learn builds on something else you have learned until you begin to understand your topic. Learning does not happen in neat, easy servings. You have to **READ** about and **UNDERSTAND** your topic before you can say you have learned anything. Random facts collected haphazardly does not equal a paper. You have to research in order to bring all your learning together into a meaningful paper.