

## Media Literacy Mini-Lesson #1

# PRIMARY SOURCES

How do journalists and historians accurately describe important events? They rely on **primary sources**.

**A PRIMARY  
SOURCE IS...**



- **A first-hand account from a key moment or event**
- **Created by someone who had a direct connection with the event**



### **Primary sources can take many forms...**

such as an interview with people who experienced the event, a photograph, a letter, a film, a text message or cell phone video, a diary entry, or a recording of a speech that help capture a key moment as it happened.

### **Using multiple sources:**

Just because something is a primary source doesn't mean it's necessarily accurate or true all by itself. After all, journalists might interview witnesses who might not have seen or heard everything at an event or incident.



### **Here is a classic example:**

*Many Titanic survivors said they were on "the last lifeboat." They were just on the last lifeboat that they could see. Journalists and historians seek multiple sources to try and confirm exactly what happened.*

**The following source** was written by Thomas Morris Chester, a Black journalist during the Civil War. In this excerpt, Chester describes what he heard and saw during the surrender of Richmond, Virginia, which was the capital of the Confederacy.

The pious old Negroes, male and female, indulged in such expressions: "You've come at last"; "We've been looking for you these many days"; "Jesus has opened the way"; "God Bless"; "I've not seen that old flag for four years." "Have you come to stay?"; "Thank God", and similar expressions of exultation (joy). The soldiers, black and white, received these assurances, of loyalty as evidences of the [patriotism] of an oppressed people, which a military despotism (dictatorship) has not been able to crush."

"The Fall of Richmond - Hall of Congress - Richmond, April 4, 1865." *Thomas Morris Chester: Black Civil War Correspondent: His Dispatches from the Virginia Front*. R.J.M. Blackett. Louisiana State University Press, 1989.

**Describe what is happening in the excerpt. What did you notice or wonder about?**

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**What makes the source a primary source?**

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**PRO  
TIP**

**Check your sources!** Primary sources often come with a caption. There, you can find bibliographic information like the name and year of publication.