



Sources for US History

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Vere Harmsworth Librarian



This presentation will cover:

- Guidance on identifying and planning your search for primary sources
- Different American History primary sources:
 - Books
 - Newspapers
 - Archival material
- Useful webpages and databases for American History
- An overview of official papers and government records
- Census and statistical data
- Summary and further help



Vere Harmsworth Library (VHL) is your first stop for resources on US history.

Rothermere American Institute, South Parks Road

www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/vhl



/vereharmsworthlibrary



@vhl-lib



blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/vhl

US History Guide

The guide provides links to key resources. It also has resources listed by time period and a separate guide for newspapers and government records.

libguides.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ushistory

History, American: Home

Subjects: [American Studies](#), [History - U.S.](#), [US Studies](#)

[Home](#)[Books](#)[Journals](#)[Databases](#)[Online Resources](#)[Additional Resources](#) ▾

Purpose of this guide

This guide is intended for students and researchers studying American history at the University of Oxford, although it may be useful to others.


Use this guide to find out about key resources for American history, including bibliographies, databases of primary sources, and more.

Useful resource guides related to this topic include:

- [Newspapers: American History](#)
- [US Government Publications](#)
- [Visiting libraries & archives in the United States for research in US history](#)

Finding books for US History

Oxford has a wide range of ebooks and printed books on American History, including the main collections at the Bodleian Library and the Special Collections.

A vintage pocket watch with a white face and black numerals, a pair of spectacles with round lenses, and an open book with aged, yellowed pages. The watch is positioned on the right side of the frame, the spectacles are in the center, and the book is in the background. The scene is dimly lit, creating a sense of history and scholarship.

Primary Sources



- **When?** Timeframe
- **Where?** Location/geographic focus
- **Who?** People – individuals, organisations, groups
- **Why?** Aspect – social, political
- **What?** Type of source – newspapers, letters, memoirs, official publications, images, audio-visual, ephemera, statistics/data



HOW TO FIND PRIMARY SOURCES



Finding primary sources I

Published sources

- Print
 - Microform
 - E-resource/database
 - Online/web
- In some ways more easier to find, as you look for them similarly to secondary literature:
 - Find out how/where it was published and the format of the publication.

Finding primary sources 2

Unpublished/manuscript

- Where is the original/archive?
 - Oxford
 - UK
 - US
- Is there a reproduction available?
 - Print
 - Microform
 - E-resource/database
 - Online/web

Unpublished sources are trickier, but there are two questions to ask yourself.

- First, where is the source (or where is it likely to be)?
- Secondly, is there likely to be a reproduction?
- If no reproduction exists, that's the point at which you find yourself having to visit the original, and where the original is located will determine how accessible the source is going to be to you.

How the Bodleian Libraries can help

- Recommend a purchase:
<https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/collections-and-resources/recommend-a-purchase>
- Inter-Library Loans:
<https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/services/borrow/inter-library-loans>
- Ask a librarian!



BOOKS

Primary Sources

Physical material

- Print – search SOLO; pre-1920 books in VHL stack
- Microforms
 - Travels in the Old South, New South, West & South west



Online resources

Bodleian databases

Via SOLO/Databases A-Z

- Early American Imprints I: Evans (1639-1800)
- EEBO (1475-1700) and ECCO (1701-1800)
- The Making of the Modern World (1450-1914)
- The Making of Modern Law (1800-1926)

Other online content

(generally pre-1922)

- Google Books, Hathi Trust (www.hathitrust.org), Internet Archive (www.archive.org)
- Making of America (<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moagrp/>)
- Library of Congress (<https://www.loc.gov/collections>)
- Digital Public Library of America (<https://dp.la/>)
- Documenting the American South (<https://docsouth.unc.edu/>)



NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

Primary Sources

Individual newspaper & magazine archives via SOLO

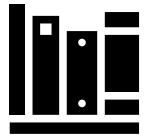
- New York Times (1851-2014)
- Washington Post (1877-2001)
- San Francisco Chronicle (1865-1984)
- Chicago Defender, (1909-1975), New York Amsterdam News (1922-1993), Pittsburgh Courier (1911-2002)
- Jet Magazine Archive
- Wall Street Journal
- The Economist
- Time Magazine Archive
- The Atlantic/Atlantic Monthly Archive
- The Nation
- National Review
- The New Republic
- Vogue...

Physical magazine titles held at Oxford

VHL: National
Journal, US News &
World Report, Ebony,
Harper's Weekly

Bodleian Libraries:
The New Yorker,
Newsweek, LIFE,
Fortune, Saturday
Evening Post...

Newspaper & magazine collections



Early American Newspapers (microfilms, e-access from British Library)

Black Journals (microfilm) (early 20th C)



American Periodicals (1740-1940)

American Antiquarian Society Historical Periodicals Collection (1684-1912)

Reader's Guide Retrospective (1890-1982)

Ethnic American Newspapers from the Balch Collection (1799-1971)

19th Century US Newspapers, Confederate Newspapers

African American Newspapers, series I (1827-1998) & African American Periodicals

Ethnic NewsWatch (1959-)

Nexis UK, Factiva, Business Source Complete, ABI/INFORM (c. Last 20 years)

Periodicals Archive Online

International Women's Periodicals, LGBT Magazine Archive

Other online resources

- Chronicling America (chroniclingamerica.loc.gov) (1789-1963)
- Google News Archive (news.google.com/newspapers)
- Making of America (19th C) (<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moagrpl/>)
Independent Voices (<http://voices.revealdigital.com/>)
- Hathi Trust (www.hathitrust.org)
- newspapers.com (subscription required £)



ARCHIVE MATERIAL

Primary Sources



Physical archival material in Oxford



- VHL microfilm collections
- VHL Elections Archive*

<https://archives.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/repositories/2/resources/10566>

- Weston Library

www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/weston/finding-resources/catalogues



Finding aids

- *A guide to manuscripts relating to America in Great Britain and Ireland* VHL Ref. E 178 .C74 1979
- ArchivesHub (UK) <http://archiveshub.ac.uk>
- ArchiveGrid <http://beta.worldcat.org/archivegrid/>
- SNAC <https://snaccooperative.org/>
- National Archives Catalog (US)
www.archives.gov/research/catalog/
- Guide to visiting US archives
libguides.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/us-archives



Finding online archives

Some resources will have paywalls, or will be limited in resource type or formatting. Focus on official archival/library collections.

Look out for web domains for the US government (.gov) or education sites (.edu).

Check the Library of Congress or National Archives finding guides for suggested resources/associated links.





Key online archives

- VHL's Diigo page (www.diigo.com/user/vhllib)
- Library of Congress (www.loc.gov/collections)
- National Archives Catalog (<https://catalog.archives.gov/>)
- State digital libraries and historical associations (www.digitalstatearchives.com/)
- University digital archive collections
- Digital Public Library of America (dp.la)





Bodleian Databases



- Visit Databases A-Z to see all the databases available
- Databases can also be searched for in SOLO
- Resources are listed on the American History Guide.

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Finding books for US History


Oxford has a wide range of ebooks and printed books on American History, including the main collections at the Bodleian and the Special Collections.



Bodleian Databases – Multi-time periods

- African American Studies Center
- American Biographical Archive
- American National Biography
- Archives of Sexuality & Gender Part I & II
- Black Authors
- Black Thought and Culture
- Confidential Print: North America
- Electing the President: Proceedings of the Democratic & Republican National Conventions (1832/56-1988)
- Historical Statistics of the United States
- History of Disabilities
- Jewish Life in America
- North American Immigrant Letters, Diaries, & Oral Histories
- North American Women's Letters & Diaries
- ProQuest Congressional (Congressional Record/Congressional Hearings)
- ProQuest Historic Annual Reports
- Women & Social Movements, International/United States
- Women's Periodicals: Social and Political Issues
- US Congressional Serial Set






Bodleian Databases – Exploration, colonial history & pre-Civil War

- Colonial State Papers
- Early Encounters in North America
- European Views of the Americas: 1493 to 1750
- State Papers Online
- USPG Archives (Colonial missionaries in the Americas)
- Virginia Company Archives
- American Founding Era (Papers of key Founding Fathers, Documents of the Ratification of the Constitution)
- The American Revolution from a British Perspective, 1763-1783
- Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice
- Slavery & Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive Part II & III
- Slavery in America & the World: History, Culture & Law
- The War of 1812: Diplomacy on the High Seas
- The American West
- Black Abolitionist Papers
- Empire Online
- Global Missions & Theology
- Women: Transnational Networks
- Early American Imprints (Evans)
- Early English Books Online (EEBO)
- Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO)
- Historic Periodicals (American Antiquarian Society)
- Nineteenth Century Newspapers





Bodleian Databases – Civil War to World War II

- The American West
- Black Abolitionist Papers
- Confederate Newspapers
- Empire Online
- Global Missions & Theology
- Records of the US Department of State (multiple countries)
- The Making of the Modern World/Making of Modern Law
- Migration to New Worlds, 1800-1924
- Travel writing, spectacle and world history
- Women: Transnational Networks
- Women's Studies Archive: Issues and Identities
- World Newsreels Online: 1929–1966
- Chatham House: Online Archive
- First World War: Personal Experiences
- Trench journals and unit magazines of WWI
- Franklin D. Roosevelt & Race Relations
- Historic Periodicals (American Antiquarian Society)
- Nineteenth Century Newspapers





Bodleian Databases – Post WWII

- Chatham House: Online Archive
- Franklin D. Roosevelt & Race Relations
- Records of the US Department of State (multiple countries)
- Travel writing, spectacle and world history
- Women's Studies Archive: Issues and Identities
- World Newsreels Online: 1929–1966
- Election of 1948
- Cold War: Voices of Confrontation & Conciliation
- FBIS (Foreign Broadcast Information Services) Daily Reports
- Political Extremism & Radicalism in the Twentieth Century
- Popular culture in Britain & America 1950-1975: Rock & Roll
- Presidential Recordings Digital Edition
- Digital National Security Archive
- US Declassified Documents Online
- Black Nationalism and the Revolutionary Action Movement: The Papers of Muhammad Ahmad
- Papers of Amiri Baraka



A photograph of the United States Capitol building in Washington, D.C. The image shows the iconic white dome and neoclassical architecture under a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds. In the foreground, a statue on a horse is visible, and a green lawn stretches out. A red banner is overlaid at the bottom of the image.

GOVERNMENT AND OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

As historical primary sources



Bodleian Guides

- US Government Publications guide:
libguides.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/us-govpubs
- North American legal resources guide (Bodleian Law Library) libguides.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/law-usa

Colonial/Revolutionary Sources

- **American Founding Era Collection-** the papers of the Continental Congress, and some papers of the Founding Fathers (Washington, Hamilton, etc.)
- The **Journals and Papers of the Continental Congress** can also be found online (www.loc.gov/collections)
- For the early activities in the British Colonies, try the **Colonial State Papers/Calendar of State Papers (1574-1739)** and the **Foreign State Papers of the Tudors (1509-1603)**
- The **Library of Congress** holds collections related to French, Spanish and Russian colonies (search in www.loc.gov/collections/)
- The **New Netherland Institute** is digitising archival material related to the former Dutch colony (www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/research/online-publications/)



Key resources

- **ProQuest Congressional** – covers key congressional resources (such as debates and remarks made during congressional sessions and congressional hearings up to 1979)
- **US Serial Set** – includes the official papers and reports created by and used by Congress (formerly the American State Papers)
- **HeinOnline** - A legal database which contains many collections relevant to presidential history, such as the Papers of the Presidents, Impeachment records and other executive records, such as the Federal Register and Code of Federal Regulations.

Presidential Papers

Presidential public papers are defined as “Presidential writings, addresses, and remarks of a public nature”

From Herbert Hoover onwards, each US President has their **Public papers of the presidents** collated and published by the Govt. Printing office.

The **Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents** covers the rest of the US presidents pre-1929.

The VHL has both of these in full in print, and online via HeinOnline. Online copies are also available at the American Presidency Project at UC Santa Barbara -(www.presidency.ucsb.edu)



President Roosevelt at a desk with papers, (Library of Congress 1910)



Other Presidential Records

- Presidential Libraries for post-1929 Presidents, are normally located in home states, and administered by National Archives. (www.archives.gov/presidential-libraries)
- For Presidents pre-1929, it can vary between individuals.
 - The Library of Congress has digital collections for individual presidents from Washington to Coolidge: <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/presidents/papers.html>
 - Some individuals have non-official Presidential Libraries
 - search SOLO with the name and “papers” to find print copies

Foreign Policy

- Official documentary records can be found in Foreign Relations of the United States (1861-) or **FRUS**.
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments>
- International treaties can be found in **US Treaties & Other International Agreements** (published since 1950), available on HeinOnline or in print.
- Other treaties and international agreements can also be found in the **Congressional Serial Set**.
- The **Department of Defense** has a historical office: <https://history.defense.gov/>
- **archives.gov** have digitized the core Department of State Records:
<https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/state-dept/rg-59-central-files/1906-1910>



President Eisenhower with
Prime Minister Nehru visiting
India December 1959



Classified documents

- Two main databases include the **Digital National Security Archive** & the **US Declassified Documents Online**, both available via SOLO. Both databases start from 1945.
- **Electronic Reading Rooms** are what most federal agencies (including the FBI and CIA) use to host FOIA responses and other de-classified documents.

<https://www.foiaadvisor.com/reading-rooms>




Key Finding Aids

Monthly Catalog – The main finding aid for US Govt. Publications post 1933. Available in print in the VHL. Online edition covering 1976-present day available online at www.catalog.gpo.gov

www.govinfo.gov – an online portal to publications from the US Govt Printing Office. Mostly recent publications, the historical material is mainly 1990s – but increasingly also older materials.

www.congress.gov / www.govtrack.us – Includes video links for current debates, texts of bills, voting records, reports and daily floor activity.



US Census

Decennial censuses for the US have been produced in some form since 1790. Since 2005, an annual American Community Census has been produced, which provides more detailed information.

- All volumes of the census reports and some datasets are available online from the **Census Bureau website**: [census.gov/library/publications.html](https://www.census.gov/library/publications.html)
- The **VHL** holds printed volumes up to the 1990 census reports.
- Early Census reports can be found in the **Serial Set**
- You can only view some of the **full census records** online:
- 1860 (partial), 1900-1930 via www.fold3.com/browse/ (under non-military records);
- 1940 at 1940census.archives.gov



Statistics and Opinion Polls

Two key sources for “macro” datasets are

- **Historical Statistics of the United States** (database available through SOLO & in print in VHL)
- **Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1878-:** (online at www.census.gov/library/publications/time-series/statistical_abstracts.html & in print in VHL)

For more “micro” datasets, try either data.gov, [ALFRED](http://alfred.berkeley.edu), or

the **ICPSR** www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/ (you will have access through the University, but you will need to create an account.)

For opinion polls:

Gallup Analytics (1933-) for more historic material, click on ‘Gallup Brain’ (bottom right hand corner)

Research Data Oxford

**Data management
plans**

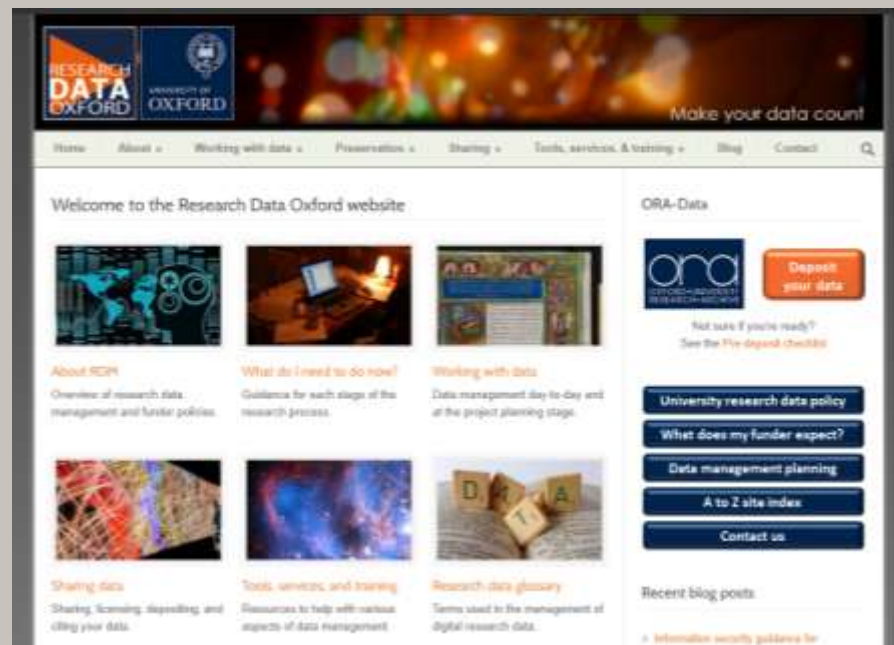
**Funder
requirements**

**Storage and back-
up**

**Preservation and
sharing**

**Personal and
sensitive data**

**Tools, services,
and training**



<http://researchdata.ox.ac.uk>
researchdata@ox.ac.uk

Any questions?



For subject specific advice on US studies resources at the VHL and Bodleian Libraries, or to organise I-Is on specific subject topics, contact:

Bethan Davies, Vere Harmsworth Librarian

Email: bethan.davies@bodleian.ox.ac.uk

Phone: 01865 282701

- For further resources
- Online guide to US History Sources (libguides.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ushistory)