Civil War & Antebellum Era Primary Materials

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Civil War & Antebellum Era Web-Based Primary Materials

This guide provides links to documents, reports, newspapers, journals, letters, diaries, maps, photographs, images of realia, and other primary materials from the Antebellum and Civil War era in the United States. For additional information and resources concerning this era, consult the Slavery & Reconstruction Law Research Guide and Legal History Research Guide.

Please contact a research services law librarian for help with locating or using any of the resources discussed in this guide.

The American Civil War Homepage
The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Americas: A Visual Record
Authentic History Center
Cornell University: Samuel J. May Anti-Slavery Collection
Cornell University Library: Making of America Journals & Monographs
Duke University Libraries: Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture: Civil War Women: Primary Sources on the Internet
HarpWeek: Explore History
Making of America
Smithsonian: Civil War @ Smithsonian
The United States Civil War Center
U.S. Library of Congress: American Memory
U.S. National Archives and Records Administration: Research in Military Records: Civil War
U.S. National Park Service: Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System
University of Georgia Libraries: Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library
The American Civil War Homepage

Provides links to hundreds of Web-based resources. Web site maintained by George H. Hoemann, PhD. Resources organized into 13 categories:

- General Resources
- Biographical Information
- State/Local Studies - by State
- Other Military Information
- The Secession Crisis and Before
- Histories and Bibliographies
- Battles & Campaigns
- Civil War Reenactors
- Fictional Accounts of Wartime
- Images of Wartime
- Documentary Records
- Rosters & Regimental Histories
- Civil War Round Tables

The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Americas: A Visual Record

Searchable collection of over 1,200 images, compiled by Jerome S. Handler and Michael L. Tuite, Jr., and supported by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and University of Virginia Library Digital Media Lab. Images also browsable within 18 categories:

- Maps: Africa, New World, Slave Trade
- Pre-Colonial Africa: Society, Polity, Culture
- Capture of Slaves & Coffles in Africa
- European Forts & Trading Posts in Africa
- Slave Ships & the Atlantic Crossing (Middle Passage)
- Slave Sales & Auctions: African Coast & the Americas
New World Agriculture & Plantation Labor

Plantation Scenes, Slave Settlements & Houses

Domestic Servants & Free People of Color

Miscellaneous Occupations & Economic Activities

Marketing & Urban Scenes

Music, Dance, & Recreational Activities

Family Life, Child Care, Schools

Religion & Mortuary Practices

Military Activities & U.S. Civil War

Physical Punishment, Rebellion, Running Away

Emancipation & Post-Slavery Life

Portraits & Illustrations of Individuals

Note that the authors state "little effort is made to interpret the images and establish the historical authenticity or accuracy of what the display. ... However, we have made every effort to ensure bibliographic accuracy and the correct identification of both primary and secondary sources from which the images have been obtained, as well as correct identification of the area, country, or region to which the image refers."

Authentic History Center

1600-1859

Civil War

Cornell University: Samuel J. May Anti-Slavery Collection

Searchable collection of pamphlets from the Cornell University Samuel J. May Anti-Slavery Collection. Includes over 10,000 "sermons, position papers, offprints, local Anti-Slavery Society newsletters, poetry anthologies, freedmen's testimonies, broadsides, and Anti-Slavery Fair keepsakes...." Collection also browseable by author, title, and date.
Cornell University Library: Making of America Journals & Monographs
Searchable collection of twenty-two 19th-century journals and over 100 monographs, as well as the 1894-1922 Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies and 1880-1901 Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies.

Duke University Libraries: Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture: Civil War Women: Primary Sources on the Internet Provides links to diaries, letters, photographs and other primary materials.

HarpWeek: Explore History Provides links to scores of studies based on materials from all issues of Harper's Weekly. Studies organized into categories entitled Informative Websites, Educational Lessons, Simulation Games, and Activities.
Informative Websites include:
The End of Slavery: The Creation of the 13th Amendment
Citizenship, Due Process, and Equal Protection: The Creation of the 14th Amendment
Black Voting Rights: The Creation of the 15th Amendment
Finding Precedent: The Impeachment of Andrew Johnson
A Sampler of Civil War Literature
Web site maintained by John Adler. Adler also produces a fee-based searchable full-text database of, and thesaurus-based index to, Harper's Weekly.

Making of America Browsable and searchable collection of the full text of approximately 10,000 books and 50,000 articles from the 19th century. “The collection is particularly strong in the subject areas of education, psychology, American history, sociology, religion, and science and technology.
Smithsonian: Civil War @ Smithsonian (http://www.civilwar.si.edu/home.html)
Collection of scores of 1859-1865 documents, photographs, and images of realia in the Smithsonian Institution. Collection (http://www.civilwar.si.edu/collections.html) divided into 12 categories:
Slavery & Abolition (http://www.civilwar.si.edu/slavery_intro.html)
Abraham Lincoln (http://www.civilwar.si.edu/lincoln_intro.html)
First Blood (http://www.civilwar.si.edu/firstblood_intro.html)
Soldiering (http://www.civilwar.si.edu/soldiering_intro.html)
Weapons (http://www.civilwar.si.edu/weapons_intro.html)
Leaders (http://www.civilwar.si.edu/leaders_intro.html)
Cavalries (http://www.civilwar.si.edu/cavalry_intro.html)
Navies (http://www.civilwar.si.edu/navies_intro.html)
Life & Culture (http://www.civilwar.si.edu/life_intro.html)
Appomattox (http://www.civilwar.si.edu/appomattox_intro.html)
Winslow Homer (http://www.civilwar.si.edu/homer_intro.html)
Mathew Brady (http://www.civilwar.si.edu/brady_intro.html)

The United States Civil War Center (http://www.cwc.lsu.edu/)

U.S. Library of Congress: American Memory: Civil War Maps (http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/civil_war_maps/)
Collection also browsable by place, subject, creator, and title.

Searchable collection provided by the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division (http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/). Includes over 1,100 photographs, most from the Library of Congress 1961 microfilm publication Civil War Photographs, 1861-1865. Collection also browsable by subject and Civil War time line.

Searchable collection provided by the Library of Congress Manuscript Division and Prints and Photographs Division. Includes over 2,300 narratives and over 500 photographs of former slaves, compiled by the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration during the late 1930s, and microfilmed in 1941 as the 17-volume Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves. Collection also browsable by narrator/subject, state, and Slave Narratives volume.

U.S. National Archives and Records Administration: Research in Military Records: Civil War

Includes links to hundreds of Civil War Photographs, Selected Civil War Records, miscellaneous Union Army and Confederate Army materials, as well as scores of other Civil War resources.

U.S. National Park Service: Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System

Searchable database of records of over 6 million soldiers from 44 states territories. Database divided into 8 sections: Soldiers, Sailors, Regiments, Cemeteries, Battles, Prisoners, Medals of Honor, National Parks. Data is still being added to this already massive database. Currently, the Prisoners section only contains records for Andersonville and Fort McHenry.

University of Georgia Libraries: Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library

American Civil War

Small collection of documents and images. Includes Confederate Constitution, Confederate Seal, and Andersonville Prison photographs.

Rare Map Collection - The American Civil War

Collection of over thirty historical maps of geographical areas, cities, and battlefields.
University of North Carolina: Documenting the American South (http://docsouth.unc.edu/index.html)
Searchable full-text collection of "texts, images, and audio files related to southern history, literature, and culture." Collection also browsable within categories such as:
- The Church in the Southern Black Community (http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/)
- The Colonial and State Records of North Carolina (http://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/)
- The First Century of the First State University (http://docsouth.unc.edu/unc/) (ie, University of North Carolina)
- First-Person Narratives of the American South (http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/)
- Library of Southern Literature (http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/)
- North American Slave Narratives (http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/)
- The North Carolina Experience (http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc)
- North Carolina Maps (http://www.lib.unc.edu/dc/ncmaps/)
- Oral Histories of the American South (http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/)
- The Southern Homefront, 1861-1865 (http://docsouth.unc.edu/ims/)
- True and Candid Compositions: The Lives and Writings of Antebellum Students at the University of North Carolina (http://docsouth.unc.edu/true/)

University of Virginia Electronic Text Center: American Civil War Collection (http://etext.virginia.edu/civilwar/)
Collection of thousands of letters, diaries, army records, and newspaper articles.

The Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War (http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu/)
Comparative collection of letters, diaries, church records, newspapers, speeches, census records, tax records, soldiers records, and veterans records from Augusta County, Virginia, and Franklin County, Pennsylvania. Collection also includes selected statistics, maps, and images. Collection divided into three time periods: Fall 1859 to Spring 1861; Spring 1861 to Spring 1865; and Spring 1865 to Fall 1870. Each time period contains several sections (eg, Letters & Diaries, Newspapers), and each section of a time period is searchable.
The Valley of the Shadow project is directed by Edward L. Ayers, PhD, and maintained at the University of Virginia and Virginia Center for Digital History.

Yale Law School: Avalon Project at Yale Law School: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/)
See in particular 19th-Century Documents (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/19th.asp), which contains materials such as Statutes of the United States Concerning Slavery (http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/slmenu.asp).