

## TEACHING HISTORICAL THINKING SKILLS THROUGH HISTORIC NEWSPAPERS: THE PRESS AND THE MEMPHIS MASSACRE

The press played a central role in shaping the debate over the Memphis Massacre, its origins, its meanings, and its outcomes. Accounts began to proliferate even before the shooting, murdering, burning, robbing, and raping came to a close. Written as they were before [Congress](#), the U.S. Army, and the [Freedmen's Bureau](#) conducted and concluded their investigations, these early accounts tell us less about the massacre itself than they do the political and racial sensibilities of the people who wrote the articles.

Below is a small sampling of the articles available at the [Library of Congress](#) in their digital collection, [Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers](#).

1. [Memphis Public Ledger, 2 May 1866](#), in *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress
2. [The Bolivar Bulletin, 5 May 1866](#), in *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress
3. [The New York Herald, 6 May 1866](#), in *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress
4. [The Evening Telegraph \(Philadelphia\), 8 May 1866](#), in *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress
5. [The National Republican \(Washington D.C.\), 9 May 1866](#), in *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress
6. [The Nebraska Advertiser, 10 May 1866](#), in *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress
7. [The Montana Post, 19 May 1866](#), in *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress
8. [The Charleston \(S.C.\) Daily News, 22 May 1866](#), in *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress
9. [Green-Mountain Freeman \(Montpelier, Vt.\), 23 May 1866](#), in *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress
10. [Delaware Gazette \(Delaware, Ohio\), 25 May 1866](#), in *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress

11. [Memphis Public Ledger, 2 May 1866](#), in *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress

As your students read these accounts, have them consider the following questions:

1. What is the purpose of the document? What is the author trying to accomplish in writing it?
2. Where does the author get his or her information? How reliable is that information? Is all evidence equal? How does the quality of the evidence influence our interpretation of the document?
3. What is the author's point of view? Who does the author "see" as she or he is thinking or writing?
4. What else is going on at the same time/place this document is being produced? How does that "context" matter to our interpretation of the document?
5. Who is the author's intended audience? How does the nature of that audience affect what the author says and how the author says it?
6. What is the tone of the article? Who are the good guys in each article? Who are the bad guys?
7. How do our answers to these questions help us explain the differences in these different articles?
8. How do our answers to these questions help us understand the larger history of Reconstruction?