

AP United States History

Summer Task: “Doing History”

3. How the Historian Decides What Is Fact

Historians use facts to validate hypotheses. But as we saw earlier, historical scholars often disagree about what is fact and what is not. Because of differences in their frames of reference, some historians accept a statement as fact while others reject it.

Sometimes historians have only one source to use as evidence. In most cases, however, they will have two or more. The problem is these sources may disagree. Even an eyewitness author has a frame of reference from which he views events. He will record some things and fail to record others. Another eyewitness will note different events or interpret the same events differently. This presents a dilemma for historians trying to understand an event similar to the dilemma law enforcement face when trying to piece together the facts in a crime investigation. Eyewitnesses each may give a different description of the suspect. These descriptions are used to create a “composite sketch”. What the artist does is what historians do; they look for the common characteristics and create a drawing based on what all of the descriptions seemed to agree upon.

In the following activity, you will be given an opportunity to consider a couple of sources on the same event and decide which facts can be accepted even though the two authors disagree on many details. While you are reading, ask yourself the following questions [these do not need to be answered as part of the graded task]:

1. Which of these accounts, if either, do you accept? Why? Do you think each might be right in parts and wrong in other parts?
2. Do the two accounts agree about something? If so, are you willing to accept it as fact? Why or why not?
3. What are some of the issues on which the accounts differ?
4. What further information would you have to find in order to decide which, if either, is correct?

Modified from:

Bartlett, I., Fenton, E., Fowler, D., & Mandelbaum, S. (1969). An introduction to the study of history. In *A new history of the United States* (pp. 1 - 16) [Introduction]. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

For five frantic days Hungary was free.

From beleaguered Budapest on Tuesday the news flashed that the Soviet tanks were pulling out. Shouted the jubilant announcer: "For long years past this radio has been an instrument of lies. It lied day and night. It lied on all wave lengths . . . From this moment those who mouthed the lies are no longer . . . We who are now facing the microphone are new men." It was the voice of the people of Hungary in that hour: a great burden had been cast off.

The first to see the unfamiliar face of freedom were the young rebels. Their weapons at the ready, their faces filthy with the grime of battle, their clothes often blood-caked, they stood along the arteries of battle leading out of the battered city, happily jeering the departing Soviet tanks as they rumbled sullenly by.

Tank Smashing. Only a few hours before, desperate battles had been fought at the Maria Theresia barracks, at the Communist Party headquarters, and at the steel mills at Csepel island. With their heavy 76-mm. guns, the Soviet tanks had attempted to blast the rebels out of their hiding places, but the "incredible youngsters" had evolved their own technique for dealing with the mighty 26-ton tanks. First they would fire on the tanks from upper-story windows, then as the big T-34s rumbled up, their great guns elevated, a small boy would leap out of a doorway, fling a pail of gasoline over the tank's engine compartment and leap back to shelter. As the tank took fire and its crew scrambled out of the turret, the young Tommy-gunner firing from the windows above would mow them down. An alternate system was to slosh a bucket of gasoline across a street and throw a match in it just as a Soviet tank plunged past.

Freedom Fighters. Now, as they began to realize what had happened and what they had done, the faces of the rebels were lit with a kind of ecstasy. There were vigorous blond students and tough-looking workers among them, but many seemed pitifully young. A correspondent noted a boy who could not have been more than ten years old holding himself at the ready with a rifle as tall as himself. Beside him was a 15-year-old girl with a submachine gun and a forage cap on her head. Grey with the fatigue of four days' ceaseless fighting, almost falling from exhaustion, they solemnly welcomed the foreigners: "We greet you in the name of the Hungarian Freedom Fighters!" Some carried machine-gun ammunition belts slung around their shoulders, and out of almost every pocket and above every inch of belt protruded hand grenades. Their striking resemblance to the classic revolutionaries of the Russian Revolution—which had occurred decades before most of them had been born—was not altogether accidental. Piped one 13-year-old veteran: "All us kids were trained in the party."

Under the wan October sun, Budapest had the appearance of a city ravaged by a full-scale war. The streets were choked by rubble and glass, dangling ends of streetcar cables and the uprooted cobblestones and raveled steel of barricades. The air was full of the fine, powdery dust of shell-chipped brick and mortar. Soviet dead in scores lay in grotesque postures beside burned-out and still smoldering hulks of tanks, armored cars, self-propelled guns. Men in white coats moved from corpse to corpse sprinkling snow-white lime which transformed the dead into marblelike statuary. Where possible, rebel dead had been laid side by side and covered by the red, white and green flag of Hungary; but in one side street a woman wept alone over the body of her coal-miner husband. In another street, a rebel fighter lay in the sun, a wreath of autumn leaves on his chest. The revolution had not yet counted its dead, but a cursory estimate put the total at 15,000 (including 3,000 Soviet soldiers) and twice as many wounded.

The Hated AVH. In the crowded hospitals surgeons and nurses worked the clock round, with anesthetics and medication in desperately short supply. Calls for medical help had gone out to Vienna and Geneva, and convoys of medical supplies had already crossed the border from Austria. But planes bringing supplies from Belgium and Switzerland were turned back from Budapest airport by the Russians. Among the wounded being tenderly

treated in the hospitals were many young Russian soldiers. They had been variously told by their commanding officers that they were putting down a revolt inspired by fascists, by Stalinists, and by Western imperialists.

Premier Nagy had disowned the city's 10,000-man Communist security-police force, and the Russians had pulled out leaving the hated AVH men to their fate. Most of them had found temporary ratholes. In a huge concrete bunker below Communist Party headquarters, some 200 were said to be hiding out with political prisoners as hostages. Scores hung from trees and lampposts.

The revolution uncovered terrible evidence of AVH cruelty. On a wooded hill in Buda, in a bright new housing development reserved exclusively for ex-Premier Rakosi and his comrades, rebels found a villa with a built-in torture chamber and prison cells, one padded and soundproofed, another equipped with a powerful lamp beamed on a chair. The rebels remembered having seen closed automobiles driving up to this house at night. At Gyor, in the provinces, Western newsmen were shown an AVH headquarters with tiny 2 ft.-wide standup torture cells, and a secret crematory for victims who did not survive AVH treatment. In the same modern building were technical facilities for monitoring all telephone conversations in western Hungary, including a score of tape recorders working simultaneously.

Realizing that they could expect no mercy, the AVH men fought desperately. But the rebels were merciful to the AVH men's families. At one house, where an AVH group was making a last stand, rebels stopped the shooting for a few minutes while the infant son of an AVH man was passed through a window and taken out of range.

The crowd was still nervous and trigger-happy, and newcomers were astonished at how many hands would come out of pockets clutching hand grenades when the cry "Panzer" went up, as a T-34 rumbled into a street, or when a few shots hammered through the air from no one knew where.

Wonderful Hour. Savage reprisals did not outlast the first tense hours of freedom. More typical of anti-AVH demonstrations was the ancient lady dressed in mourning, carrying in one hand a huge black flag the size of a bed sheet and in the other a little bunch of white asters, who marched at a funeral pace three miles to the AVH School for Communism. Naturally the AVH had long since departed, but the old lady had a wonderful hour tossing framed portraits of Lenin and Stalin and clouds of Communist propaganda out of the windows.

A quieter atmosphere, but one which could scarcely be called normal, gradually descended on Budapest. Old women with brooms began sweeping at the doorways of blasted buildings. Rebel work teams searched abandoned vehicles for salvaged weapons. A man with paint pots went from tank to tank painting over the Soviet red star with the Hungarian Republican emblem. A couple of rebel tanks tried to shoot the huge red star off the flagpole of Parliament House, but failed.

There was also fun to be had pulling down Soviet war memorials. High on Gellert Hill, antlike figures swarmed around Sculptor Szigmund Strobl's soft, statue of Freedom, a graceful woman guarded by the bronze statue of a Russian soldier. Slowly the crowd, pulling on lines attached to the soldier, rocked the statue back and forth, until he tipped forward on his face. There had been no looting in the city thus far, but to walk abroad at night was to hazard being shot at (see PRESS) or stopped by some tough young rebel and made to show identity papers.

Thursday, All Saints' Day, was for the first time in a decade an occasion for joy. Peasants brought food to the city and refused to take money for it. They pressed bread, vegetables and even live ducks and geese into the arms of astonished shoppers. Old peasant women taking food to the hotels and hospitals were offended if their gifts were not accepted. The city was aglitter with candles. Where the massacre which had sparked the

revolution had taken place, one thousand candles formed a circle. Everyone who passed knelt for a brief moment.

Democracy's Return. Small newspapers representing political parties long believed defunct suddenly appeared. The old National Peasant Party, the Smallholders Party, and the Social Democratic Party each found its voice. Out of the disorganized Communist Party a new Hungarian Socialist Workers Party with national Communism as its aim was formed by Party Leader Janos Kadar. A Christian "front" was in formation. As if by a miracle, old party leaders appeared. Bela Kovacs, sturdy Smallholders secretary, recently released after nine years in Soviet prison camps, joined the government because "we must establish national unity." The Smallholders' exiled leader Ferenc Nagy had come as far as the border, but had been turned back to Switzerland by the Austrians. Tough old Ferenc Farkas, onetime National Peasant Party leader, bobbed up. Social Democrat Anna Kethly, ailing as a result of long imprisonment in Russia, was on her way back (with a supply of newsprint) when her way was barred by Soviet tanks.

At first the rebels, flames of a spontaneous combustion, had shown no sign of political organization, but now they began throwing up scores, perhaps hundreds, of local and district organizations. There was the Patriotic Peoples Front, the Hungarian National Committee, the Revolutionary Committee of Hungarian Intellectuals, the Hungarian Revolutionary Youth Party, the Revolutionary Defense Committee. Already there was a "revolutionary personality" in the shape of tall, blond Major General Pal Maleter, an ex-Horthy-regime soldier who had deserted to the Russians and been parachuted back to Hungary during World War II. Like tens of thousands of other Hungarian soldiers (some said just about the entire Hungarian army of 150,000), he had thrown his lot with the rebels. He made a hero of himself by leading the stubborn defense of the Maria Theresia barracks.

All over Hungary, little radio stations were roaring their revolutionary announcements, getting into the wrong frequencies and conducting debates from channel to channel.

What had come over Hungary, without anyone quite realizing it, was democracy.

To continue holding down the premiership, new Premier Nagy was forced to yield to the pressures of the new parties, to promise free elections, to acclaim neutrality, and, above all, to insist that the Russian troops be withdrawn, not only from Budapest, but from Hungary. Thus he called in Soviet Ambassador Yuri Andropov, renounced Hungary's membership in the Warsaw Pact, and put his case to the United Nations. His first Cabinet was made up of Communists, with four exceptions. At week's end there were only three Communists, including himself, in the government; the Cabinet portfolios were distributed among three non-Communist parties, with General Pal Maleter in the key post of Defense Minister.

Negotiation. The Russians called for a meeting to discuss "technical details of the withdrawal of Russian troops." While seven Russian generals sat down with Defense Minister Maleter and Hungarian Army Chief of Staff Kovacs, rumors that had been flying around Budapest gained strength. Soviet forces were pouring into Hungary from Czechoslovakia, Rumania and the Soviet Union. It was said that Budapest was ringed with Soviet steel and the loyal Hungarian air force had been driven from Budapest airport. The Soviet generals explained that these were merely precautions taken to protect returning Soviet personnel, swore that Soviet forces would be out of Hungary "in three weeks."

All day long the Russians had been ferrying Soviet passengers out to Soviet planes at the airport, among them, it was reported, Russia's First Deputy Premier Anastas Mikoyan and such wanted Hungarian notables as ex-Premier Hegedus and AVH Boss Piros. But, as the reports of Russian troop movements firmed, as rebel center

Győr was cut off from Budapest, as Czech radio stations jammed the rebel stations, the Hungarians suddenly knew that their worst fears were confirmed. They had been tricked.

From the moment that U.S. correspondents had begun coming into free Budapest the rebels had never ceased to ask, "When are the Americans coming?" During the middle of the fighting a Hungarian had lifted up his son so that the child might touch a U.S. flag on a correspondent's car. Again and again, innocent of world affairs, they had asked if arms would come soon from America. Said one: "If the Russians come back, we can't hold out forever."

The Russians were coming back, and many Americans were leaving Budapest. Sadly the Hungarians watched them go. They had no stake in the revolution; they were at peace with the mighty Soviet Union and hoped to remain so—Hungary's bloodshed was only a drop of what the world would suffer in a total war. The explanation was not one which Hungarians were in a mood to understand. A convoy of U.S. diplomatic women and children and civilians left Budapest for Austria. Correspondent after correspondent hit the road, swinging precariously through the roadblocks. Said TIME Reporter Edward Clark: "In the space of eleven days I have seen Hungary pass from a Soviet satellite state, through independence, to become an occupied country." But for five of those days Hungary had been wildly, hungrily free.

Hungary: Five days of freedom. (1956, November 12). *Time*, 40.

A SOVIET TOURIST IN BUDAPEST

MOSCOW

We arrived in Hungary on 19 October with other Soviet tourists. We spent four days touring this beautiful country and were everywhere given a most cordial and hearty welcome. On Tuesday, 23 October, on our way to a theatre we saw crowds of people in the streets of Budapest. They were lined up in ranks and carried placards, many of which bore the inscription "Long live Hungary!" ... The students together with members of the intelligentsia and workers were demanding the redress of errors and omissions committed by the Hungarian Government. They were legitimate demands.

On that first evening I saw from the hotel in which we were staying a man with a rifle appear in the deserted street. He took up a position in one of the drives and, taking careful aim, began shooting out the street lamps. The lamps went out one by one and darkness enveloped the street. What prompted the marksman to do this? Just hooliganism? Hardly. I think he was one of the bright sparks of the reactionary underground who wanted to create confusion and chaos in the city. Quite soon afterwards there were flashes of gunfire and sounds of battle and we saw wrecked and burning buildings in the streets of Budapest, overturned tram-cars and other vehicles. Firing would die down and then flare up again. Hostile elements were aiming at paralysing the city's life but the workers of Budapest were repelling the rebels. Detachments of armed workers tried to restore order in the streets and prevent looting. In many places, including the area around our hotel, workers' patrols were posted.

One member of our hotel staff, a middle-aged man with grey hair, told us: "Our workers cannot have had a hand in this looting and rioting. It is fascism raising its head." And that is what it was. The counter-revolutionary underground was in action in Budapest. Fascist reactionary elements had arrived there from abroad. The hostile venture was gathering momentum and the Hungarian Government asked the USSR Government for aid. In response to this request Soviet military units stationed in Hungary under the Warsaw Treaty entered Budapest to help to restore order. The overwhelming majority of Hungarians welcomed this move in the hope that life in the city would quickly return to normal. I myself saw in one street how the people were welcoming the Soviet tanks.

One Hungarian, a member of the hotel staff, described the following incident to us. Firemen-volunteers, absolutely unarmed, were putting out a fire in one of the public buildings. Suddenly, from a small house opposite, shots were fired by fascist louts who opened fire on the unarmed firemen. Several of them fell. Our tank was stationed in the street. The tankmen immediately aimed their gun at the house where the bandits were entrenched. This was sufficient to make them run into a side street. Several firemen ran up to the tank and shook hands with the tankmen. This episode gives a good testimony of the attitude of the Hungarians towards the Soviet troops. However, reaction did not cease its activities. When we walked along some of the streets we saw that the walls of houses were thickly covered with counter-revolutionary posters

When Soviet troops began withdrawing from Budapest an unbridled White Terror started in the Hungarian capital. We Soviet tourists recall this time with horror. It is difficult to describe the chaos which reigned in the city where public buildings were destroyed, shops looted, and where crowds of armed bandits, obviously fascists, walked along the streets committing bestial murders in broad daylight. I shall never forget what I saw with my own eyes. I think it was on 30 or 31 October. A man in a sports suit walked along the Lenin Boulevard. He might have been one of those who tried to restore order in the city. Several armed ruffians wearing counter-revolutionary tricolours ran up to him. A horrible inhuman cry was heard. A whole crowd of bandits appeared from somewhere. I was unable to see what they were doing with their victim, but in a few minutes he was hanging on a nearby tree with an eye gouged out and his face slashed with knives.

Some time ago I read how the fascists in Germany burnt progressive literature on bonfires. We saw similar things... A group of some hooligans looted and set fire to the House of Books. Thousands and thousands of books were smouldering in the muddy street. We were there, witnesses of this barbarity. The works of Chekhov, Shakespeare, Tolstoi, Pushkin, and other famous authors were lying in the mud, black smoke rising. We saw an old man who lifted a few books, then carefully wiped the mud with his sleeve, pressed them to his breast and walked slowly away. Many people did the same.

In the Hotel "Peace" the atmosphere in those days was extremely tense. The counter-revolutionaries tore the red star from the front of the hotel and trod it underfoot on the pavement. We were told that the Hotel "Peace" from now on would be called Hotel "Britannia". The person who told us about it looked around and added quietly: "It doesn't matter. It will only be temporary."

More than once we were witnesses of acts which manifested the friendly attitude of the Hungarians towards the Soviet people. This friendly attitude was felt by us Soviet people, when we were leaving Budapest . . . In small groups of two or three people we made our way along the devastated streets towards the Danube in order to board a Red Cross steamer. We were accompanied by a worker a young girl. She led us from one cross-road to another, fearlessly seeking the safest way. At the pier we heartily embraced her. She said: "Someone in the West wants us to pull their chestnuts out of the fire. Don't believe them, dear friends. We Hungarians are for socialism and we are with you." When we were in Czechoslovakia on our way home, we learned that the counter-revolution in Hungary was routed and that life was becoming normal in the country. Now we are at home in Moscow. We shall not forget that Hungarian girl who said that the Hungarians were for socialism and that they were with us.

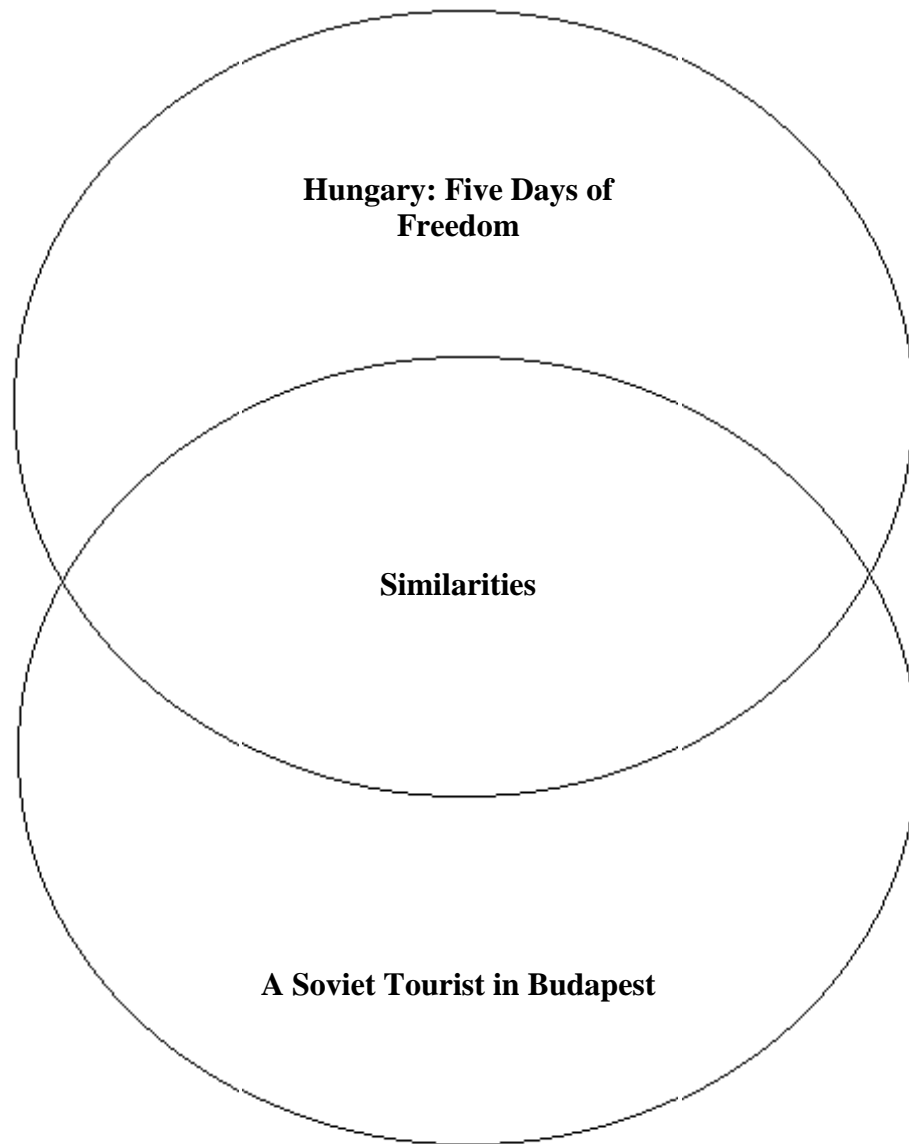
E.M. Bazarina, Radio Moscow, 10 November

<http://www.hungarian-history.hu/lib/revolt/rev15.htm>

Instructions:

1. Use the following Venn Diagram to record “facts” that can be found in only one of the sources and those that can be found in both.

Subject: The Hungarian Revolt



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2. Which of the facts included on the diagram would you accept as fact? Why?
3. What other information would you need to decide which, if either, is correct?
4. What does this activity suggest to people who are reading historical writing?