Defining Documents in American History: Secrets, Leaks & Scandals

School Library Journal Starred Review
March 2019

A CHOICE Best Reference Book of 2018

CHOICE Editors’ Top 75 Community College Resources – April 2019

“This installment in the Defining Documents in American History series contains 75 documents (speeches, memos, letters, reports, transcripts, minutes, testimony) related to secrets, leaks, and scandals throughout American history, starting with an encoded letter from American general Benedict Arnold to British major John Andre. As with the other titles in this series, the documents (presented in part or in whole) are contextualized with a summary, overview, defining moment, author biography, and analysis of document themes. Each essay has a bibliography and additional readings section. The book organizes the 75 documents into the following sections: Secrets, Conspiracies, and Scandals through the 19th Century; Controversies, Conflicts, and Communism through the mid-20th Century; Government in Hiding, from Vietnam to Watergate and After; Scandals, Scares, and Intelligence Failures in Recent Decades; Lies, Leaks, and Hacks in the Contemporary Period; and Selected Environmental Debacles. In these sections, users will find foundational information on important historical moments and topics... High school and undergraduate students starting a research project or hoping to find the answers to identification questions will find this a useful set. There are also a number of black-and-white photographs, cartoons, and maps that add value to the material presented. Highly recommended.”

-ARBA, 2019

Pub. Date: November 2018
ISBN: 978-1-68217-698-6
Price: $295
“Extending the “Defining Documents” series, these volumes offer evidence of transgressive misrepresentation, betrayal, corruption, misbehavior, concealment, and other failures of government ethics and openness, in 74 documents from 1797 to 2018. Grouped chronologically in six sections (and reordered in a final time line), the entries examine political, social, foreign, and domestic scandals; espionage; controversies; hacking and leaking; environmental malfeasance; and more. Section overviews, chapter bibliographies, extensive web and general bibliographies, and an index are valuable. Shally-Jensen and 20 scholar contributors critically dissect each primary source document (sometimes edited for concision). Incisive critiques illuminate these key cases: Benedict Arnold’s treason, the Chennault affair, Watergate, My Lai, and more. The past 60 years alone fill the entire second volume: President Ronald Reagan on the Iran-Contra scandal, intelligence on Iraq’s supposed weapons of mass destruction, birtherism, Wikileaks, the 2018 policy on child separations at the U.S.-Mexico border, and much more. Tension between state security and transparency continues to be an issue, and the evenhanded close readings of these riveting historical cases clarify some risks and costs. VERDICT Accessible to college and upper-level high school students, this work provides convenient access to, and clear objective analysis of, selected documents essential to our understanding of U.S. history—and to our future.”

–School Library Journal, 2019

“All in all, this set gives students a glimpse of the underside of US history through primary documents. For faculty who do more than simply use a textbook for their courses, this set should find use in the hands of high school through undergraduate course in US history. Summing Up: ★★ Recommended. Lower-division undergraduates through faculty.”

–CHOICE, 2019