

## **Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST)**

### **Why use diplomatic oral histories in the classroom?**

Diplomacy is the art of conducting international relations, negotiating alliances, and exercising tact and skill in dealing with people of varied backgrounds to advance our nations' interests and security. The success of our foreign policy, peace, prosperity, and security depend in large measure on the skill and experience of diplomats.

From 1789 until 1924, the Diplomatic Service, which staffed U.S. legations and embassies, and the Consular Service, which was primarily responsible for promoting American commerce and assisting distressed American sailors, developed separately. The Rogers Act of 1924, also known as the Foreign Service Act of 1924, is the legislation that merged the United States diplomatic and consular services into the U.S. Foreign Service that we know today.

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST) captures, preserves, and shares the experiences of America's diplomats (also known as Foreign Service officers, or FSOs) to strengthen public appreciation of diplomacy's contribution to America's national interest. We were established as a nonprofit in 1986 by retired Foreign Service officers. ADST's primary source oral history collection, available for free at [adst.org](http://adst.org) and at the [Library of Congress website](#), now exceeds 2,500 interviews in transcript form, via podcast, and some in video format. Our collection is a record of our dialogues with diplomats, including ambassadors, and family members of those who have represented America as diplomats since World War II. Our oral histories provide a rich and vivid context for individuals' lives from their point of view in order to gain better insight for many historical events.

### **Using Oral History as a Primary Source**

Primary sources are the raw materials of history, as distinct from secondary sources, which are not based on firsthand experience. Examining primary sources gives your students a powerful sense of history and the complexity of the past.

Simply put, oral histories make your classroom content come alive. If your class is studying a particular historical topic, primary source oral histories provide a social and cultural context that enriches your curriculum in a way not otherwise possible. Historical records and documents often lack the everyday experiences of people, how they felt about a particular topic, why they made certain decisions, and how historical events impacted their personal lives. As historical agents of change, these individuals made an impact shaped by their time, place, circumstance, and specific role and responsibilities in working for our government.

**Diplomats? To be candid, the Foreign Service is a great career path, but many of our citizens don't learn about it as an option until after their careers are over.**

Foreign Service officers work on a broad range of important issues that relate directly to social studies curricula, such as environmental issues, climate change, counterterrorism, women's rights, conflict resolution, technology, science, human trafficking, global health, and the preservation of cultural property, among others.

Diplomats become specialists on the country to which they are assigned, its language, politics, economics, history, culture, and traditions. Daily, diplomats work with a fascinating range of people beyond host country officials, from artists and musicians to parliamentarians, journalists, and scientists. They conduct high-level discussions with foreign leaders, analyze political and economic developments, write speeches for their ambassadors, and engage in social media. Above all, they are masters at communicating across cultures.

Using oral histories in your classroom provides opportunities for your students to analyze the authenticity and credibility of sources and develop perspectives of time and place, all higher-order thinking skills.

At the same time, there can be challenges to using oral histories as primary sources. Memory is often imperfect, and some people may sanitize their recollections or choose which topics to discuss. We feel that addressing these challenges can actually be useful to developing students' critical thinking skills.