

Saunders (2011) on JFK: Evaluating Evidence Activity

The deadline for completing this activity is **3pm Tuesday 4/7**. It is based on reading Chapter 4 (on John F. Kennedy) of Elizabeth Saunders' 2011 book *Leaders at War: How Presidents Shape Military Interventions* alongside online access to the majority of the primary sources Saunders drew on. This will enable you to evaluate for yourself how accurate and precise, sufficient and representative, her use of evidence is, and to develop a more general judgment about how well her sources support specific claims she advances in her chapter.

Accessing and Using the Qualitative Data Repository

Saunders uploaded photos and/or links for the bulk of her primary sources as a “pilot project” for the Qualitative Data Repository (QDR). To access materials for this exercise you will need to go the QDR website (<https://qdr.syr.edu/>) and register. After you register and thereby gain access to the website materials, you should take the following steps:

1. Hover over the “Discover” option at the top of the page (NOT the “Discover” box in the middle) and select “Pilot Projects” from the drop-down menu that appears.
2. Scroll down the table of “Pilot Projects” to find the link to Saunders’ JFK chapter
3. This will bring up a page providing information (Project Summary, Data Abstract, Files Description, and Logic of Annotation and Activation) you should read to learn about the overall argument of Saunders’ book, the primary sources she located and analyzed in researching her chapter on JFK, and the choices she made for this pilot project regarding which sources to make available online and how to do so.
4. Next click link near the top of the page <https://qdr.syr.edu/atipaper/john-f-kennedy>
5. This will take you to the full text of the chapter. Like too many web texts, this online version does not enable you to see the actual pages of the text as it appeared in print. To remedy this, you will find a pdf of the chapter as published in hard copy under the Course Reserves tab. You should read the chapter as a whole first before undertaking the evidence evaluating activity laid out below.

Evaluating Evidence Activity

You will see specific passages in the text highlighted throughout the chapter in the text on QDR. Clicking on a highlighted passage opens a box in the right-hand margin with full citations for the primary source/s drawn on there and link/s to access the full source/s. The links work differently depending on the kind of source used. When the source is an archival document in the Kennedy presidential library, Saunders used a digital camera to take images of the document, and the link takes you to a page from which you can access a pdf of those images (it will take a series of steps here to agree to terms of appropriate use, download the pdf, and open it in whatever software you use to read pdfs). When the source is in the *Foreign Relations of the United States*, the link takes you direct to the document on the website of the US State Department’s Office of the Historian.

You will, I hope (!), be interested to use the links associated with highlighted passages to look at various sources throughout the chapter. But to keep this assigned activity manageable in scope, I

am assigning you specific section/s to analyze based on last name. Scan the chapter outline below (page numbers are from the published book) for the section/s with the first letter of your surname in bold next to it. That is the section/s you are assigned to analyze.

Untitled Chapter Introduction (92-94)

Kennedy's Beliefs (94-107)

The Nature of Threats (94-97) - **C**

Alliances and America's Sphere of Influence (97-100) - **S**

Foreign Aid (100-102) - **R**

Strategy and Policy Investments: Pre-Presidential Evidence (102-107)

- **M or P** (from start of this section up through footnote 68)

- **J or L** (highlighting preceding footnote 69 through the end of this section)

Kennedy as President: Strategy and Policy Investments (107-112) – **G or H**

Intervention Choices: Latin America (112-114) – **E** (Assigned this *and* next section)

Intervention Choices in SE Asia: Laos (114-118) - **E**

Intervention Choices in SE Asia: Vietnam (118-128)

Kennedy's Early Vietnam Policy (119-122) – **A, B or D** (Assigned this *and* next section)

The Strategic Hamlet Program (122-124) – **A, B, or D**

The Coup against Diem (124-128) – **K or T**

Alternative Hypotheses (128-130)

Untitled Chapter Conclusion (130-131)

Find your assigned section/s in the text on the QDR website. As you re-read your section/s click each highlighted passage and use the links that then appear in the right-hand margin to access for yourself the primary sources used as evidence for the point made in that passage. Create a new document in which you answer the following three questions, and then submit the document (as a doc., docx. or pdf. file) to Blackboard to receive credit for this activity.

1. For each footnote, compare the content of the primary source/s to the accompanying passage in Saunders' text to assess the **accuracy** and **preciseness** of her citations and use of quotation, paraphrase, or summary. Briefly report what you find for each footnote in a few words.

2. Looking over the section/s analyzed as a whole, what is your overall evaluation of the use of evidence? You should consider here, in addition to your accuracy/precision findings in question 1, whether the number, type, and authoritativeness of the sources together add up to **sufficient** evidence plausibly **representative** of potential sources more generally. Assign an overall letter grade for Saunders' use of evidence and explain the reasoning for your grade in 1-3 sentences.

3. Looking over the section/s analyzed, single out one footnote (and one source in that footnote if there are multiple) that it would be most instructive to your classmates to look at for themselves, and explain in 1-2 sentences what makes it stand out. You may single out a source for providing especially strong (or weak) evidence, for posing distinctive interpretive challenges, or simply for the substantive interest of the content of the source (perhaps due to it providing information that was notably novel or even surprising to you).