

## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative research study evaluates the effect of historical documents on 11<sup>th</sup> grade history students' ability to think historically and to think with historical empathy. The students were from a moderate income, suburban school district with a predominantly homogenous Caucasian population with little ethnic diversity. The study defines historical thinking and historical empathy as thinking about the past in the historical context from which the person, event, or document came, in order to, in the least, achieve an intellectually enriched understanding of the past derived from a multiplicity of views and perspectives by developing competent interpretations of historical inquiry. The study examines participants' cognitive impressions through written works as they engage in the research and analysis of historical documents (e.g., primary documents: speeches, historical accounts, articles, poetry, lyrics, music, still photographs, art, video; graphs and charts; and secondary sources charged with period quotes). The author details students' engaged responses and activities associated with the promotion and use of historical documents and historical inquiry. The study suggests that students' process of historical inquiry encourages students to make history more meaningful, encourages students to analyze and synthesize historical documents, and encourages students to shape and reshape historical narratives linked to historical documents. Finally, the study questions whether historical documents promote tolerance in a pluralist society regarding the past and present in order to recognize an intrinsic value and worth in diversity and to quell the effects of racism and prejudice.