

How to Use the Digital History Reader

Context

This section situates the events described in the module within a larger historical context. Each Context section furnishes necessary background information, identifies people important to the event or events, discusses relevant political or social movements, and provides a narrative for the events as they unfolded. As you read the Context section, remember the historical question or questions defined in the Introduction so that you can begin to identify and evaluate key issues, people, places, and events.

If we take another look at the image selected for this introductory module, we might read the Context section of the module, "The End of Optimism? The Great Depression in Europe," for the background information needed to gauge its historical significance. The photograph was taken in France in the early 1930s, when street protests by unemployed workers had transformed the economic crisis into a source of political conflict. The text on the banner behind the woman in the photograph references a consortium of textile workers whose economic status was particularly affected by the decline in international trade associated with the Depression. Now that you understand the general context of the image, you can better describe what it depicts and evaluate its significance. Context, then, becomes crucial to understanding any primary source material.