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Evidence for Competency F

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Website Evaluation Assignment

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Archival Websites Evaluation

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Archives and Manuscripts 256

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The Cuban Missile Crisis (CMC) refers to the military and political confrontation during October of 1962 between the United States (U.S.), the former Soviet Union, and Cuba. At the time the U.S. and the Soviet Union, already involved in the Cold War, came close to starting a nuclear war. It is considered one of the most dangerous moments in human history.

On October 14, 1962, U.S. surveillance airplanes obtained photographic proof of nuclear range weapons being installed in Cuba by the Soviet Union. Only a few years earlier, Fidel Castro's Revolution had come into power in Cuba after overthrowing the government of Batista, a close ally of the U.S. government. The fear of intervention by the U.S. coupled with the unsuccessful attempt by Cuban exiles to overthrow his government, forced Castro to align his policies with the Soviet Union's by declaring Cuba a socialist republic. The U.S. did not look kindly on this alliance and President John F. Kennedy (JFK) authorized Operation Mongoose designed to undermine Castro's government while enforcing an economic embargo. Meanwhile, Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet Premier at the time put into action his plan of bringing nuclear missiles to within less than 100 miles of U.S. soil. Once the missiles were discovered by the U.S. a 14 day long conflict ensued putting the world at the edge of a nuclear war.

There is a rich availability of archives dedicated to the CMC and the Cold War. In as much as possible, only those archival resources which refer exclusively to the CMC are reviewed here. The expanse of the sites to be reviewed was determined by archive reputation, content quality, scholarly background, and number of external links and references. Most of the archives were located through the finding aids at the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) website which attests to their reliability and accuracy. In addition to content and navigation analysis, each review notes collection organization, availability of finding aids, and

insight into how the archives preserves and provides access to its collection. In the case where that information is not available, it has been omitted from the review.

The Avalon Project at Yale's Law School aims to preserve and provide access through the Internet to digital documents relevant to the fields of Law, History, Economics, Policy, Diplomacy, and Government. The website can only be navigated by utilizing the search box or by browsing the major sections which are divided by centuries or major collections, in this case the Cold War. The repository accessed by either method gathers about 275 records encompassing U.S. and Soviet government documents such as briefings, presidential and press communications, papers, memorandums, and meeting minutes. The records are chronologically listed in the manner of a bibliography with descriptive titles. Curiously, the archive encourages researchers to download materials found in the website, presumably as they are declassified government documents that have been published under the Freedom of Information Act.

The National Security Archive from Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. is a fantastic independent research institute and library dedicated to collecting and publishing declassified government documents related to the Nuclear Age. As such it serves as an immense repository of records covering national security, foreign, intelligence and economic policies of the U.S. The mission of the archive is to guarantee the public's right to know and to broaden access to the nation's historical record. In its quest to achieve its mission, the archive has become a staunch defender of freedom of information legislation around the world, supporting the creation and management of programs that allow libraries and repositories to provide the free and easy access to government records. For its tireless work, the archive has won prestigious awards such as the George Polk Award in 1999 and the Emmy in 2005. Notably, archive related

lawsuits have actually brought to light previously secret documents on the CMC that are now offered for perusal in the archive's website. The main page contains links to any recently acquired collections, archive projects, and special exhibits. The *Cuba Documentation Project* can be accessed through the archive projects links. It points the user to all the available documentation on Cuba including the CMC which alone contains over 15,000 pages of declassified chronological documents reproduced on microfiche. *The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: The 40th Anniversary* collection is a special exhibit that can be reached through the main page. This collection has been organized by using well described finding aids of press releases, formerly secret documents, photographs, audio clips, naval charts, military maps, chronology of the crisis, press coverage, and scanned documents from U.S., Cuban, Soviet, and other East Bloc archives in their original language. Researchers can also obtain access to both collections through conducting a search of the entire website. Overall this is an impressive archive that is efficiently organized and easy to navigate.

Vincent Ferraro, a professor of international politics at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts, has assembled an archive on the CMC. In direct contrast to the other archives listed in this paper, this archive mostly features a bibliography of links to other websites such as libraries, newspapers, archives but also features some that are hosted locally. All of its material is presented in chronological order from 1940 until 1982. Though the CMC itself only lasted 14 days in October of 1962, it was the high point of the Cold War. It is very informative to have the background context of the start of the crisis and the developments that occurred afterwards because of it. This is a good resource that contains lots of different records such as secret memorandums, presidential addresses, notes from cabinet meetings, analysis of different

conflicts, correspondence between advisory boards, meetings notes, and press exchanges. Frustratingly enough, it does not seem to be maintained on a regular basis so there are many links that do not work properly. The archive can be only be accessed through the college's International Relations Program page involving quite a bit of navigation through the faculty page, Ferraro's own page, and finally the CMC archive under the documents section. The website does have a basic search function that does not seem to work consistently. From the navigational difficulties, the lack of an archival mission, the broken links, and the visual design, it is apparent that this archive may not be the best tool for the researcher.

Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs has an archive covering the CMC. This website is a joint effort between the university and the producers of the movie *Thirteen Days*, a film about the CMC. The website's mission is to aid researchers and movie viewers explore historical facts and analyze the state of present nuclear danger. Though the site contains quite a few reproductions of original documents, pictures, video and audio clips, the bulk of its content refers to analysis and commentary by politicians, historians, political experts, and others. Of particular value are the sections devoted to lessons learned and the current risks of nuclear war posed by other nations. The website's contents are grouped under 4 major sections and there is quite a bit of interesting commentary listed under each. However, several links are either broken or not available making this an inefficient research tool.

ThinkQuest is an annual international competition sponsored by the Oracle Education Foundation that allows students and teachers to work together to create innovative and educational websites. Winning sites are published in the ThinkQuest Library, a rich learning resource used by people all over the world. *Fourteen Days in October: The Cuban Missile Crisis*

is an archival project that won the 1997 ThinkQuest Internet Challenge. The archive can be accessed through the ThinkQuest website and it is indexed under History and Government and War and Conflicts main sections. The fact that this archive was designed by high school students does not take away from the quality of content found within the website. Its navigation is straightforward and simple, visually resembling a military operations center that is structured into 5 rooms, each containing specific portions of the repository. Each room is concisely described allowing for a glimpse of what its contents are. Curiously, the Recon Room allows researchers to access a wealth of pictures, specifications, details of the airplanes, missiles, ships, and Cuban launch sites.

The Cold War International History Project is a virtual archive compiled by the Woodrow Wilson (U.S. President 1913-1921) International Center for Scholars. The center's mission is to make available information and perspectives on the history of the Cold War. Within this major collection there is a sub-collection dedicated to the CMC whose contents are organized by a chronological finding aid listing with titles and a brief descriptions of its contents allowing the researcher to navigate quickly to relevant or desired documents.

Another excellent resource can be found in the JFK Library & Museum in Boston, Massachusetts. The mission of the library and museum is to showcase the life and legacy of the 35th president of the U.S. Interestingly this is one of 12 presidential libraries that are administered by NARA. The CMC tested JFK's presidency and as such it is featured prominently under the Educational & Public Programs, Historical Resources, and JFK in History portions of the website. This last section features *The World on the Brink: John F. Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, with presidential recordings, public reports, photos, slide show, the

presidential diary and schedule, and strategic maps. The website also features a beautiful exhibit containing the previous records plus a reading list, audio excerpts, and newspaper clippings. Navigation is intuitive and easy without convoluted steps or broken links. Because of its visually stimulating design, it is quite easy to become engrossed in navigating the collection.

*Revelations from the Russian Archives* is a special exhibit created by The Library of Congress. It constitutes the first public display of the secret internal records of the Soviet Communist rule. The archive was prepared in close collaboration with the Russian Archival Committee and it attempts to make a clean break with the policies of the past by sharing intelligence. Within this collection there is a section dedicated to the CMC as it related to the Cold War. Of noted interest are the scans of the letters in original Russian from President Khrushchev to JFK. The site is simply organized, with a main table of contents that divides information into 2 main sections that are further subdivided by common themes. This website does not specifically provide any acquisitions or preservation information but the Library of Congress' main website has a fascinating page on digital preservation.

The U.S. Navy has assembled an archive documenting the CMC military operations that were the realm of the Navy. As such it contains compilations of the ships and units that participated in the naval quarantine of Cuba, day by day naval reports, negotiation documents that involved Navy officers and other personnel, stand down, conclusion, and lessons learned from the events. Oddly enough, the Naval Historical Center, who is the custodian of the records, organizes its archives under the Frequently Asked Questions section which might not be obvious to the inexperienced researcher. This would not be a major issue were it not for the search feature being down at the time of this review. Nonetheless, the Naval Historical Center main website

offers a considerable amount of information and finding aids that coupled with detailed but intuitive navigation makes it easy to browse through the wealth of its collections. From this main page it is possible to access the War & Conflicts collection and subsequently the Cold War subsection which leads to the CMC archive. Its mission is “to enhance the Navy's effectiveness by preserving, analyzing and interpreting its hard-earned experience and history for the Navy and the American people” (Naval, n.d.).

Finally, there is an interesting, albeit small, archive created by The Washington Post whose aim is to digitize its 125 years of publications for public access. The CMC archive is organized by a well designed finding aid and contains great journalistic resources such as actual scans of the Post's newspapers, articles, commentary, video feeds, audio clips, and links to other archives. Notably, one of those links directs the researcher to Cuba's own archive in Spanish documenting their viewpoints and commentary on the CMC.

Electronic archives are a great way to access historical information on the CMC. Official government agency programs, library collections, university archives, presidential libraries, and many others offer a wealth of records that offer different perspectives, accounts, specializations, and analysis of the happenstances of October 1962. The best designed websites offered several methods of accessing the archives, be it through simple search, complex search, navigating through the major collections, or utilizing its finding aids. It is a great feeling to be able to do research on any subject and have access to a vast and diverse array of resources at the click of a button; resources that would otherwise remain unavailable to many researchers.

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