

My Research Process

When selecting my source materials for my essay on kimonos and their cultural impact in America, I usually searched for sources regarding the primary kimonos as the primary topic. The biggest asset to my essay was a book written by Terry Satsuki Milhaupt titled, *Kimono: A Modern History*. It discussed a detailed history of the origin of kimonos and how they impacted Japan and the rest of the Western world. In addition, I also utilized scholarly essays that explained the cultural impact of kimonos in the United States, photographs from Milhaupt's book, and various newspaper articles that displayed kimonos via shopping advertisements. Newspaper articles in particular allowed me access to primary sources, which I believed to be significant to include along with my secondary sources. However, the amount of sources that discuss kimonos exclusively appeared limited so I branched out and searched for source material regarding themes such as orientalism and cultural exchange. In essence, I strived to also include sources that although may not discuss Japanese kimonos exclusively explain themes that relate to the topic of kimonos and how they impacted American culture.

When it came to finding secondary or primary sources I typically used Ebscohost or simply referred to Milhaupt's book. As explained above, my biggest search strategy involved researching documents regarding kimonos as the primary topic of discussion. But my essay was not a history on the historical origins of kimonos in Japan but rather a history on how kimonos travelled out west and impacted American society. Therefore, I could not use sources that discuss how kimonos were designed or what their relevance was to Japanese culture and history. When searching for sources, I included terms such as "America," "cultural exchange," "stereotype," and "orientalism." Orientalism by far was my most searched term when finding sources and primary documents. Considering how my essay discusses the cultural impact of kimonos in

American society and how orientalism is a western ideology that characterizes cultures of the eastern hemisphere, I knew that sources discussing orientalism would contribute greatly to my essay as it would allow me to research and discuss varying opinions to Japanese kimonos. While searching through documents I came across opinions ranging from kimonos allowing eastern and western cultures to coexist via cultural exchange to kimonos being a symbol of racism and stereotyping. Varying perspectives on kimonos in the realm of American culture became a necessary component to the structure of my essay.

Although my essay is very detailed and historical, I refrain from considering myself as an expert of kimonos. In fact, after all the research I have conducted, I have only scratched the surface in terms of researching the impact of kimonos in America as well as the world. When I constructed this essay, I knew that I wanted to make kimonos my primary topic. While starting my essay, I came to the conclusion that the amount of source materials that discuss kimonos primarily is limited. So I asked myself, “How can I make the audience care about my topic despite the fact that hardly any scholars discuss it in depth?” In order to make my argument more cohesive I decided to tie in my topic with bigger themes such as orientalism and cultural exchange amongst western and eastern cultures. Numerous scholars have heavily researched both themes so I knew that by connecting my topic to these bigger ideas I could make a more convincing and solid argument.

One of the biggest points I made in my essay was that the idea of Americans wearing kimonos is a prime example of cultural exchange and that Americans could wear them casually without stereotyping the Japanese culture. But as I perused through various articles I read through varying articles where scholars examined the criticism behind the western cultivation of kimonos and how they apply to discrimination of the Japanese race. Orientalism does not

necessarily imply a negative or positive connotation. It is simply a western interpretation of what is synonymous with an Asian culture. The arguments that criticize Americans wearing kimonos interpret orientalism as something negative in regards to stereotyping and racial discrimination. I recognized this perspective in my essay specifically how classic American films depicted women in kimonos as being damsels in distress or tied kimonos to stereotypical ideas of Japanese women. As I wrote my essay I did not want to appear one sided in an argument so I knew including different perspectives on kimonos could help broaden the scope of my essay.