PRIMARY SOURCE AWARDS

April 1985 issue of *grassroots* covering the funeral of victims of the Uitenhage massacre in South Africa. From CRL collections. Learn how a Tulane professor created a South African special collections project in this issue of *FOCUS*.

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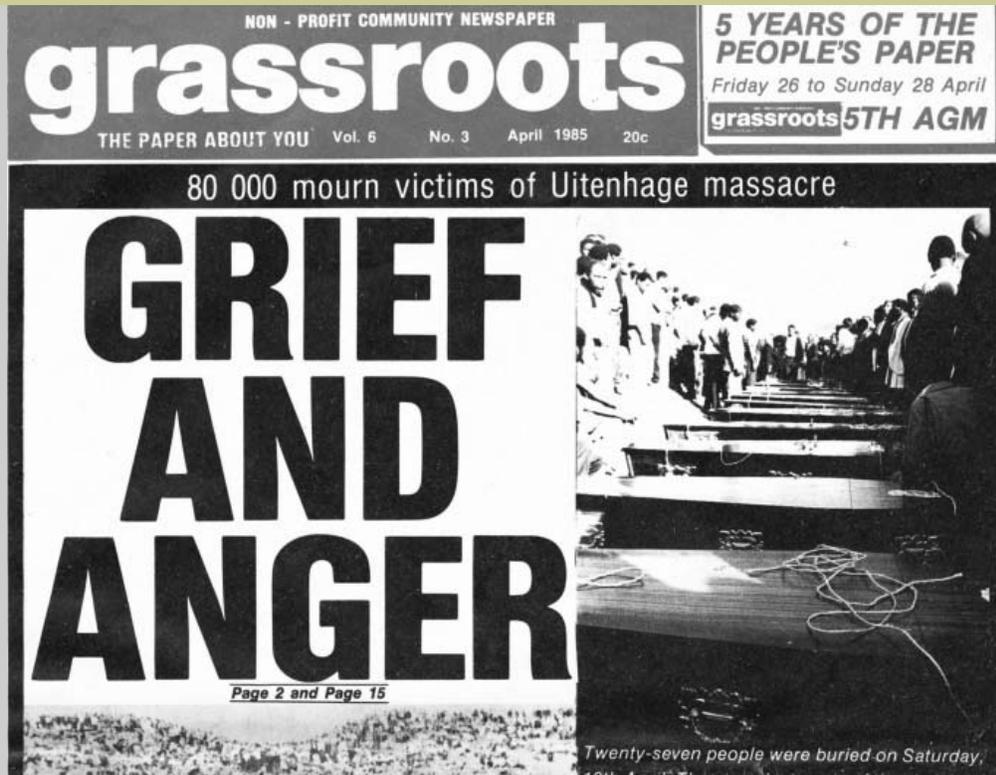
In This Issue

This issue of *FOCUS on Global Resources* highlights the three projects selected for recognition in this year's Center for Research Libraries Primary Source Awards program. CRL created the program in 2009 to promote awareness and use of primary historical and sociological evidence in research and teaching. Identifying and recognizing innovative uses of primary sources helps us to better understand the paths taken by scholarly inquiry today.

The projects featured here were selected from a very competitive pool of projects nominated by faculty and librarians at CRL institutions. CRL's Collections and Services Policy Committee reviewed all nominations and identified the top projects in three areas: research, teaching, and access. The projects recognized by this year's awards illustrate new approaches to the scholarly analysis of social media; integration of archival materials in teaching; and strategies for exposing hidden collections of traditional documents to public view.

We hope that the awards this year and in coming years help the CRL community to promote support of advanced research and teaching.

—*Bernard F. Reilly, Jr.*
President

Primary Source Awards for 2010

This detail from a 1911 cover of *American Homes and Gardens* from CRL collections was used on the Primary Source Awards flyer.

The Center for Research Libraries developed the Primary Source Awards to recognize faculty, librarians and library staff, graduate students, and other researchers within the CRL community for innovative uses of primary source materials in three arenas: research, teaching, and access. The inaugural annual juried competition began accepting nominations in fall 2009 and received many eligible nominations from universities and colleges in nine states and two Canadian provinces. For more information on the program, visit the CRL Web site. Nominations for the 2011 competition will be accepted after May 31, 2010.

This year the CRL Collections and Services Policy Committee selected the following projects to be recognized by these awards:

2010 Primary Source Award for Access

Dr. Elisabeth McMahon—Assistant Professor of History, Tulane University

Nominated by Dr. Randy Sparks, Professor and Chair of the History Department, Tulane University.

In the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Tulane University in New Orleans instituted a "service learning" component into its curriculum as a graduation requirement. So for her spring 2009 *Archiving Africa* class, Dr. McMahon engaged her students in a community outreach partnership with the Amistad Research Center, an independent, nonprofit special collections library on the Tulane campus.

The *Archiving Africa* class aimed to introduce upper-level seminar students to primary source documents on African history. By working with an Africa-related special collections library, the students received significant hands-on, primary-source experience while fulfilling the service-learning requirement.

McMahon and Amistad librarians selected an inactive set of American Committee on Africa (ACOA) files as the focus of the collaboration and carefully planned the project and its objectives to ensure meaningful and timely outcomes for both partners. The ACOA has provided support for anti-colonial and anti-apartheid movements in Africa since 1953, making the donated collection an especially good fit for the students and for eager researchers awaiting improved access to the materials.

Amistad received the ACOA collection in 1983; in 1988 staff produced an initial 54-page collection finding aid that contained a description of the contents and box and folder inventories. Although large, the finding aid lacked enough detail to encourage research, despite scholarly demand for the materials.
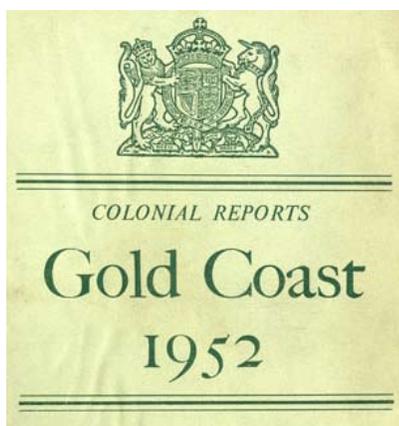
British Colonial Office report from the American Committee on Africa Archives. Courtesy of Amistad Research Center.

The students received training in archival theory and methodology prior to the hands-on work, and they focused their assistance on the African country or region that best connected with their research topic. Under the supervision of Amistad staff, students indexed a broad range of ACOA correspondence from political leaders, advocates and opponents, and others involved in the freedom movement, and inventoried boxes of ACOA files and ephemera dating from 1952 to 1976. Through the project, the students accessed primary source materials linked to real historical events and received intensive, focused experience that could be chronicled in a research paper.

The expanded and enhanced records developed through this partnership will enable Amistad staff and researchers around the world to access an important but under-used primary source collection that had remained dormant for more than 25 years. The bibliographic information developed through this project currently is being loaded into Amistad's new online finding aid database and will be available to researchers in May 2010.

Note: For information about three important CRL archives of apartheid-era documentation—the Benjamin Pogrund, Carter-Karis, and Karis-Gerhart Collections of South African political materials—see the summer 2004 issue of the FOCUS on Global Resources newsletter.

2010 Primary Source Award for Research

### Dr. G. R. Boynton—Professor of Political Science, University of Iowa

Nominated by Nicole Saylor, Head, Digital Library Services, University of Iowa Libraries.

Although a political science scholar, G. R. Boynton notes that the "constant" throughout his academic career has been computer-related projects, from a Univac in graduate school to considerably more sophisticated equipment and projects today. Professor Boynton has received the 2010 Primary Source Award for Research for a project that deploys eight computers in the Main Library at the University of Iowa to continually harvest from the Web data on new media trends. He explains the genesis for much of his recent research on his Web site:

> The economic institutional structure that has supported "the news" for the last century or two is falling away. The news is going to be remade without much left of what we have known as news media. It is an exciting time for journalists . . . but an equally exciting time for people interested in communication and politics. We need to be paying careful attention to the changes that are transpiring.

Lately Boynton has focused on Twitter, the widely used micro-blogging platform. In his online article "News as Urumqi; How to Understand what 'The News' Has Been and Is Becoming", he compares news of the July 2009 violence between Uighurs and Han Chinese in the Western Chinese city of Urumqi, as reported by Twitter and *The Washington Post*. Based on his study, Boynton identified three factors, summarized below, that distinguish social media from traditional media:

- **Audience segmentation:** Boynton observes that news for Britney Spears fans will differ significantly from news for missile defense watchers.

- **News compilation:** While Twitter messages are limited to 140 characters, restricting the amount of content that can be communicated in a single message, the platform's ease in connecting with other users enables the highly efficient and rapid aggregation of news from a multitude of contributors.

- **News to market timing:** The Twitter news reporting on the Urumqi riots peaked hours before *The Washington Post* "broke" the story in the mainstream media. Fans of Urumqi news on Twitter would have had a comprehensive "real time" account of the riots long before the first *Post* article appeared.
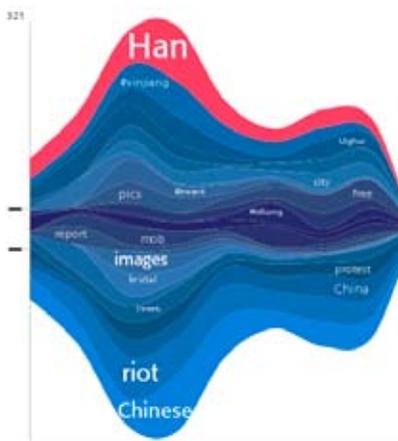
StreamGraphs display of Twitter messaging associated with the July 7, 2009 street demonstrations in Urumqi, China. G.R. Boynton "News as Urumqi; How to Understand what 'The News' Has Been and Is Becoming."

Professor Boynton remotely controls and monitors his computers' 24/7 harvesting of Twitter messages and examines the data collected for analysis. His research focuses on dissemination of information about "real time" events, such as Iran's nuclear production activity and President Obama's Nobel Peace Prize. By undertaking a systematic analysis of Twitter feeds and other social media, he sheds light on the shifting information landscape and explores emerging areas of research on the intersection between these new media and politics. Boynton publishes reports about his new media research with supporting data on his Web site, and, of course, posts updates on Twitter (@bobboynton).

During the fall 2009 semester, Professor Boynton also involved his students in his Twitter research. His Multimedia Politics and Global Communications class followed such topics as the H1N1 flu outbreak, the Afghanistan war, and U.S. unemployment. Iowa Research Online features the Web reports the class produced with supporting data. Boynton plans to return to this valuable collection of data with future students.
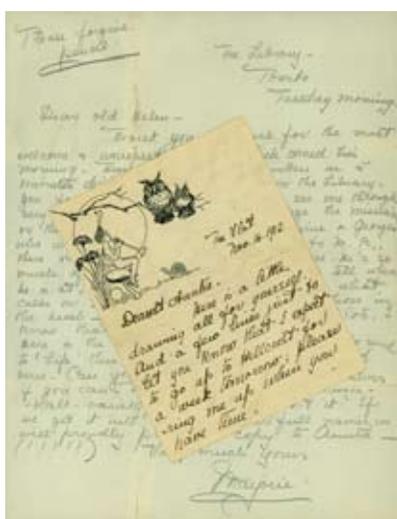
2010 Primary Source Award for Teaching

Dr. Anne Urbancic—Senior Lecturer, Italian Studies at the University of Toronto, Victoria College

Nominated by Roma Kail, Reference, Research and Instruction Librarian, Victoria University in the University of Toronto.

In the syllabus notes for her *Individuals and the Public Sphere: History, Historiography, and Making Cultural Memory* undergraduate seminar, Professor Urbancic offers the following context:

> History is written by the victors. They appropriate the discourse of power. But we know they often omit far more than they include. What criteria determine what to put in, what to leave out? How important are the social, philosophical, cultural, and scientific contexts of what is reported? What happens to what is discarded? How are words and phrases used to manipulate history?

To empower students to explore and engage the historiographical questions posed in this synopsis, Urbancic's course enabled undergraduate students to approach research like historians. The course was designed to provide the needed skills for such an undertaking through traditional classroom pedagogy, experiential exercises, and the creative use of primary source materials.

In the classroom, students examined the theoretical basis of historiography—how history is written—with a focus on contemporary theorists, such as Michel Foucault, Umberto Eco, and Edward Said. Students also considered and discussed the impact of a rapidly changing media environment on historiography, concepts such as counter memory, and other contemporary issues.

Students then moved on to research in the special collections in the University's E.J. Pratt Library and other archives in the Toronto area. Each student consulted with a special collections librarian or archivist early in the term. Students applied and honed their newly acquired historiographic skills in the course by conducting what Professor Urbancic characterizes as two "science experiments," both involving primary source materials:

- First, students prepared a brief history of a forgotten person or event, using diaries, correspondence, and other primary source materials.
- Students then selected a person or event from their contemporary environment, studied that person or event, and developed a case for their inclusion in yet-to-be-written history.

Diary entry by Marjorie Pickthall Fonds. Courtesy of Special Collections, Victoria University Library (Toronto).

Both of these guided exercises offered ample opportunity for consultation with Urbancic and special collection professionals. Students could also add their reports to a permanent record to be used by other researchers.

Students credit Professor Urbancic's class, enthusiasm, and guidance and the early exposure to rare documents and special collections with instilling in them a strong sense of confidence about doing research and the self-assurance to seek information in places where undergraduate students usually do not tread. ❖

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