

## Digital Archives in the Wired World Literature Classroom in the US

Charlotte Nunes

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**Abstract:** Digitized archival materials open up exciting possibilities for teaching and learning in the undergraduate world literature classroom. Generally, undergraduates are not introduced to archival analysis until their junior or senior years, if at all. However, current research suggests that students can benefit greatly from even preliminary exposure to archives early in their undergraduate careers, by means of short-term, small-scale archival research tasks. This essay draws on case studies from the author's introductory world literature classes to demonstrate how digital archives enable students to tap into the rich history of English-language world literature as intimately tied to legacies and contexts of imperialism. It concludes with strategies and considerations to assist educators interested in incorporating digital archives into the undergraduate world literature classroom.

**Keywords:** world literature, digital archives, digital humanities, British imperialism, American imperialism, undergraduate research, inquiry-based learning

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Digitized archival materials open exciting possibilities for teaching and learning in the undergraduate world literature classroom. Due to the ongoing digitization of correspondence, photographs, manuscripts, oral testimony, government records, out of print journals and political pamphlets, and other artifacts at archival institutions around the world, global pedagogies can increasingly benefit from the incomparable sense of context offered by archives. In this essay I reflect on my own recent experiences in the classroom and detail the value of integrating components of

archival research and analysis in world literature lesson plans. Analyzing selected digitized archival materials alongside literature allows students to contextualize course readings in terms of the literary, social, and political networks that influenced the authors under discussion and shaped the significant movements of centuries past, including abolitionism, pan-Africanism, Irish literary nationalism, and Indian anti-imperialism.

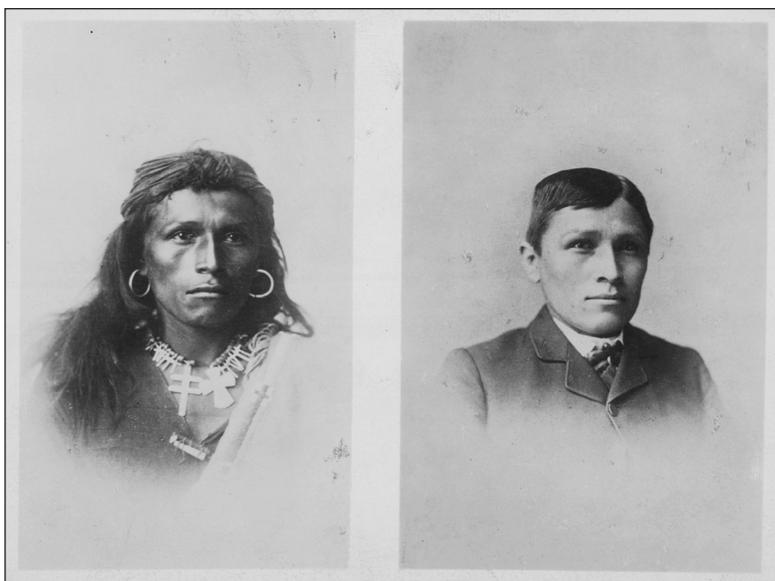
In the introductory world literature survey courses I taught at the University of Texas at Austin during the spring of 2014, I presented multimedia lectures on Anglophone world literatures emerging from and speaking to specific British and American colonial contexts throughout history. I incorporated digitized text, image, video, and audio artifacts into lectures and invited students to participate in in-class archival analysis. I observed that archival materials generated enthusiastic student responses, created opportunities to build digital and information literacy, and strengthened student engagement with course concepts. In this essay, I draw on case studies from my world literature classes<sup>1</sup> to demonstrate how digital archives enable students to tap into the rich history of English-language world literature as intimately tied to legacies and contexts of imperialism. I also offer strategies and considerations to assist educators interested in incorporating digital archives into the undergraduate world literature classroom.

Generally, undergraduates are not introduced to archives until their junior or senior years, if at all. Of course, long-term archival research projects require advanced skills in critical thinking, analysis, and interpretation as well as mastery of pertinent contexts, histories, and languages. However, current research suggests that students can benefit greatly from even a preliminary exposure to archives early in their undergraduate careers, by means of short-term, small-scale archival research tasks.<sup>2</sup> Experts such as Barbara Rockenbach and Marcus Robyns emphasize that such tasks help build students' information literacy, internal authority, recognition of the contingent nature of primary sources, and ability to process multiple diverging perspectives. Developing these skills early in their programs of study increases undergraduates' capacities to absorb and critically analyze information as well as the likelihood that they will pursue advanced research projects.<sup>3</sup>

The benefits of archival analysis tasks—which produce interdisciplinary, inquiry-based undergraduate learning—are increasingly well documented.<sup>4</sup> Archival institutions often have an educational mandate; since 2006, for example, education has been a central objective of the Strategic Plan of the United States National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, the ongoing digitization of archives means that the raw material of humanities scholarship is more accessible than ever before. Yet as Stephanie Browner observes in “Digital Humanities and the Study of Race and Ethnicity,” “being able to click on a link is only the first and perhaps most easily addressed issue in assuring a real democracy of knowledge. Having intellectual access is much harder” (215). There remain few precedents for using digital archives in undergraduate education.

In my role as an educator, I often challenge students to look at one archival artifact as a granular representation of a phenomenon in history, or as a dynamic empirical example of a theoretical concept. For example, during a class discussion of Sherman Alexie’s 2007 young adult novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, we analyzed “before and after” portraits of Tom Torlino (fig. 1), a Navajo student at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. This US government-sponsored boarding school was founded in 1879 in Carlisle, Pennsylvania with the explicit goal of assimilating Native American children and young adults. At the 1892 Conference of Charities and Correction, the school’s founder, army officer Richard Henry Pratt, famously declared his mission to “kill the Indian, and save the man.” Alexie’s novel strongly appeals to this legacy of punitive assimilationist education, in part through direct historical references and in part through the text’s premise as it concerns the ongoing marginalization of Native American students: Junior, the protagonist, decides to leave the Spokane reservation school to pursue his education at a largely white, much better funded high school off the reservation.

The Tom Torlino portrait, which dates to 1882 and is made digitally available by the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, offers an easily identifiable visual manifestation of the assimilation process. Although Torlino’s expression is nearly identical



*Fig. 1. Choate, John N. "Tom Torlino, Navajo, Before and After." ca. 1882. Richard Henry Pratt Papers, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New Haven. Web. 31 May 2014.*

in each portrait, the transformation of garb and styling is striking. In the second portrait, his head covering, earrings, necklace, and shawl have disappeared and been replaced by a starched collar and suit jacket. Students note that his hair is cut very short and that even his complexion appears lighter in the "after" portrait. The set of portraits provides a highly accessible touchstone for students' discussion of assimilationist education. Almost without exception, students referred to the images in short-answer responses to a final exam question about how Alexie's novel speaks to the deep history of Native American education.

In addition to providing graspable examples of complex currents in history, archival analysis tasks offer opportunities for students to hone information literacy, critical thinking, and research skills. In the following examples from class discussion, I will touch on how particular archival analysis tasks provide points of entry into each of these skills categories.

**I. Information Literacy: Leonard Woolf's *Stories of the East* and the *Anti-Slavery Reporter and Aborigine's Friend*<sup>6</sup>**

Although he is more often remembered for his contributions to international relations and his marriage to legendary novelist Virginia Woolf, Leonard Woolf had an important literary career of his own. I assigned the class his short story "Pearls and Swine," which appears in the 1921 collection *Stories of the East*. We talked about the short story in the context of Woolf's political and advocacy activities following his return to England from Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka), where he lived from 1904–11. Woolf's colonial fiction was inspired by his tenure as a colonial administrator, during which he observed the exploitive qualities of British economic policies aimed at "modernizing" the Ceylonese economy. "Pearls and Swine" is based on Woolf's experience superintending the pearl extraction industry at the Marichchukkaddi Fishery in 1906. It opens in the mahogany-paneled smoking room of a British club, where a character known as the Commissioner, who is thoroughly ambivalent about the Empire after his experience administering it, relates a visceral tale of the human suffering he witnessed while overseeing the pearl harvest on the north coast of Ceylon. The unidentified narrator listens silently and attentively to the Commissioner; he does not speak out loud but makes internal editorial comments about the story and the other members of the Commissioner's audience in the smoking room. These characters include three men who, like the narrator and the Commissioner, remain without proper names over the course of the text. The Colonel, the Clergyman, and the Stockjobber represent, respectively, British military, religious, and economic justifications for imperialism. Collectively, they object to the anti-imperial edge of the Commissioner's tale.

Woolf's story takes an anti-imperial position in part by narrating pro-Empire characters in purely contemptuous terms. For example, the narrator describes the Colonel as a "tubby little man" with "stupid red lips" and "kind choleric eyes bulging out on a life which he was quite content never for a moment to understand" (Woolf 35). Judging from his short story, it would seem that Woolf's anti-imperialism was unequivocal. To complicate the discussion, however, I introduced Woolf's association

with the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society. His experience in Ceylon inspired his earnest participation in Ceylonese and Indian campaigns for independence during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, but he was not immune to the Orientalism (Edward Said's term and a key concept in our world literature class) that so strongly inflected even the most progressive British attitudes of the day toward colonized populations. Indeed, the April 1918 issue of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter and Aborigines' Friend*, the periodical of the Anti-Slavery Society, includes a report that challenges assumptions that Woolf was strictly opposed to imperialism. According to the report of an Anti-Slavery Society delegation to the Colonial Office, "Mr. Leonard Woolf referred to the importance of regaining the confidence of the people of Ceylon" ("Ceylon Disturbances" 5). This brief report of Woolf's testimony is a reminder that in the context of late British imperialism, the progressivism of even the most politically active and articulate allies of colonial nationalists must be carefully examined for historically specific nuance. Is Woolf's objection to economic exploitation and political repression in Ceylon equivalent to anti-imperialism?

In order to pursue this question, we examined the cover art of the first issue of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter and Aborigines' Friend* (fig. 2), which has been digitized as part of the British Periodicals Collection of ProQuest's Periodicals Archive Online. We considered the ethical relationship the visuals of the *Anti-Slavery* cover constructs between colonized subjects of Empire and sympathetic Europeans, anti-slavery advocates and self-proclaimed "Aborigines' Friends." Students noted a contrast between the exoticized visual depiction of an unidentified, generalized colonial location signposted by lush palm trees and the London address that appears at the bottom of the cover. One student pointed out that this contrast emphasizes the distance—perhaps even the disconnection—between the publishers and the subjects of the periodical. Another student considered the rhetorical impact of the name of the organization as it appears prominently on the cover. Why, she asked, was the relationship about protection? Why was the association not called "The Aborigines' Collaboration Society" or the "The Aborigines' Solidarity Society"? Picking up on her comment, another student responded that, like the text of the cover, the

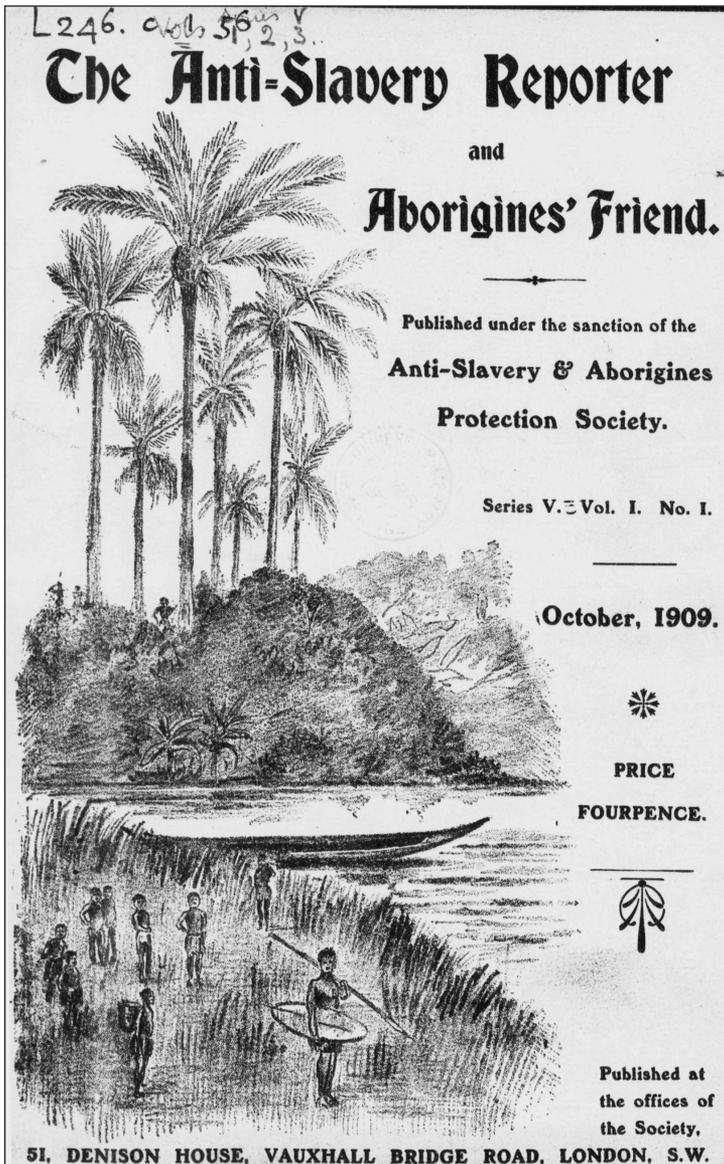


Fig. 2. Cover of *The Anti-Slavery Reporter and Aborigines' Friend* 1:1 (1909). As reproduced in ProQuest Periodicals Archive Online. Web. 31 May 2014.

visuals assert an interpretation of indigenous people in colonial contexts as vulnerable children in need of protection rather than adult agents. He observed that in addition to lacking particular facial features that might more fully humanize them, the figures on the cover are also ambiguously childlike—they could be adults, but the lack of detail and their slight stature leave their ages open to interpretation. The students concluded that the cover art makes the argument that indigenous peoples need the protection of the benevolent British.

Reading the cover art of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter and Aborigines' Friend* alongside Woolf's short story enabled us to approach a more nuanced understanding of the implications of Woolf's objections to imperialism. The activity also usefully provided an inroad to a lesson on information literacy. I projected *ProQuest's* Periodicals Archive Online, reproduced the search process that led to my selection of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* cover for our class discussion, and highlighted the differences between a scholarly database like *ProQuest*, to which UT Libraries subscribes in order to make it accessible to students, and university-affiliated open access digital collections such as the one where I found the Tom Torlino portraits. During the discussion that followed, we talked about navigating finding aids, databases, and catalogues; distinguishing between primary and secondary sources; and recognizing various categories of primary source materials (such as manuscripts, oral histories, and periodicals). Introducing the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* cover into our class discussion of Woolf's fiction thus enabled powerful student insights into the general course theme of how literature relates to imperialism and anti-imperialism and provided an opportunity for a skills-specific information literacy session.

## II. Critical Thinking and Analysis:

### *The African Times and Orient Review*<sup>7</sup>

For a class discussion of early-twentieth-century Pan-Africanism, I assigned excerpts from Ghanaian author J. E. Casely Hayford's *Ethiopia Unbound* (1911). Born in 1866, Casely Hayford wore many hats over the course of his career as an educator, journalist, lawyer, editor, fiction

writer, and statesman. He led the first meeting of the National Congress of British West Africa in 1920, headed up delegations of African leaders to London, and was elected to the Ghana Legislative Council in 1927. *Ethiopia Unbound* is an expansive work of experimental fiction that offers a sophisticated analysis of social, political, and economic conditions in Africa under British imperialism. The novel tries on a variety of genre conventions. Our class focused on two segments of the novel anthologized in Elleke Boehmer's excellent *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature 1870–1918*. “As in a Glass Darkly” is a parable, while “African Nationality” is a nonfiction, persuasive essay. The title of the parable is a biblical reference to Corinthians; it means to see a poor reflection or a dim image in a mirror. The parable satirizes the colonial powers that came together for the Berlin Conference of 1884–85, which resulted in a General Act that formally instituted the Scramble for Africa. Through his use of the parable—a Christian narrative form—Casely Hayford exposes the hypocrisy of imperial conquest justified in terms of a Christian civilizing mission.

In order to facilitate an understanding of how resistance to imperial exploitation was theorized during the early twentieth century by important Pan-Africanists such as Casely Hayford, his mentor Edward Wilmot Blyden, and his colleague Duse Mohammed, founding editor of the *African Times and Orient Review*, I introduced two archival items from the database *Empire Online*, which, according to its description, “brings together manuscript, printed and visual primary source materials for the study of ‘Empire’ and its theories, practices and consequences” (“Welcome to Empire Online”). We discussed *Ethiopia Unbound* alongside the extraordinary cover art of the July 1912 inaugural issue of the *African Times* (fig. 3) as well as a letter Casely Hayford published in the August 1912 issue. The *African Times and Orient Review* was published out of London from July 1912 through December 1920. According to the *Oxford Companion to Black British History*, *The African Times and Orient Review* was a “militant magazine” (“African Times and Orient Review” 18). “The first political journal produced by and for black people,” it was committed to the “exposure of various colonial injustices”

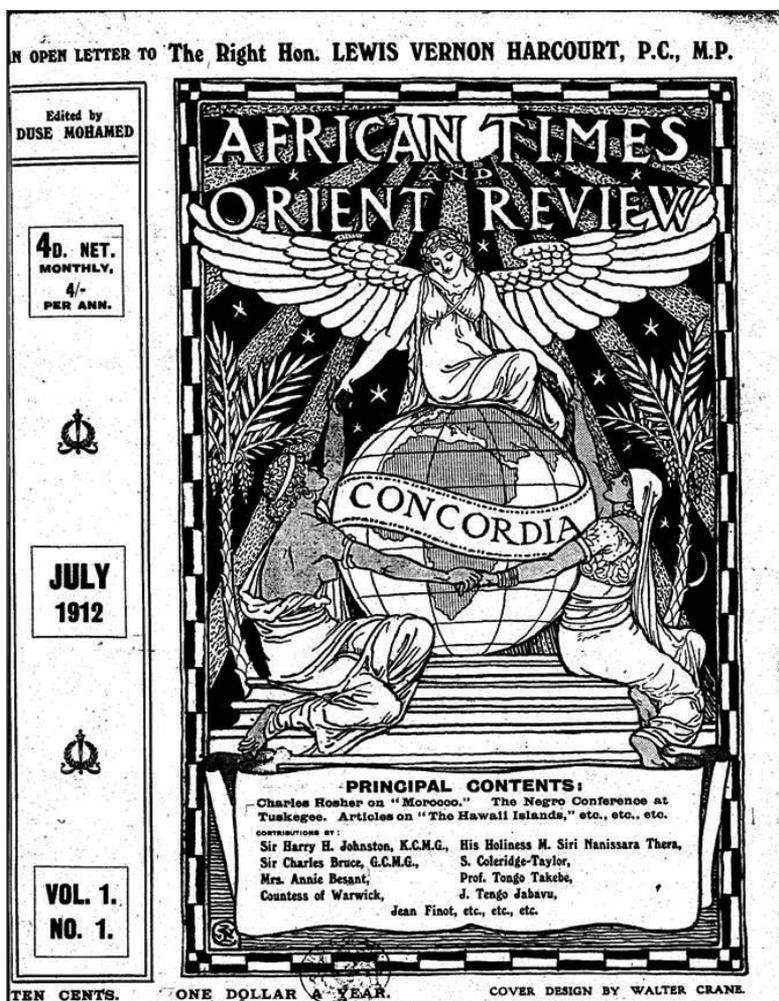


Fig. 3. Crane, Walter. Cover of The African Times and Orient Review 1.1 (1912). As reproduced in Empire Online. Web. 31 May 2014.

(18). The cover art of the inaugural issue, however, tells a different story about the identity of this groundbreaking periodical.

There is a lot to observe about the magazine's provocative cover art. Students noted that it features a white angel hovering benevolently above

two imperial subjects representing, respectively, Africa and the Orient. The three figures join hands around a globe with a banner proclaiming “CONCORDIA.” The editorial foreword of the first issue sheds further light on the orientation of the publication: “We, as natives and loyal subjects of the British Empire, hold too high an opinion of Anglo-Saxon chivalry to believe other than that African and Oriental wrongs have but to be made manifest in order that they might be righted” (Mohammed iii). Such language indicates that the publication was invested in reforming rather than ending imperialism. Several students remarked on the prominent contrast between Casely Hayford’s tone in “As in a Glass Darkly” and the content of his letter “A Tribute from Africa,” published in the second issue of the periodical. The letter reads:

The appearance of the “AFRICAN TIMES AND ORIENT REVIEW” in the field of journalism is an object lesson of great value to the teeming millions of voiceless peoples within the pale of the British Empire. . . . A time has come, in these days of airships and universal unrest, when East must directly make itself heard and understood by the West in order to promote and establish that spirit of concord and goodwill which is dear to the hearts of all good men. (67)

Casely Hayford’s correspondence indicates his alliance with the reformatory rather than revolutionary values of *The African Times and Orient Review*.

Whereas “As in a Glass Darkly” offers a sharply satirical critique of British justifications for imperialism, Casely Hayford’s letter to the *African Times* indicates that he publicly supported the ideals of imperialism, even as he opposed its exploitive practice. Analyzing this contrast provides students with a generative critical thinking challenge. Critical thinking entails, of course, practices such as verifying facts, evaluating the credibility of claims and sources, identifying bias and unstated assumptions, and recognizing logical inconsistencies and compromised lines of reasoning. In order to relate and reconcile the positions on imperialism Casely Hayford takes in his fiction and his letter to the editor, students implemented many of these skills. Most fruitfully, perhaps,

contending with the complexity of Casely Hayford's orientation to imperialism provided students with the opportunity to practice two areas of critical thinking particularly valued in the world literature classroom: processing multiple divergent perspectives and recognizing the contingency of knowledge. While reading Casely Hayford's fiction in the context of his affiliation with the *African Times*, we discussed the idea that his positions on imperialism as expressed in his fiction and non-fiction, respectively, are not necessarily contradictory; rather, his position as a whole is emblematic of his particular early-twentieth-century Pan-Africanist intellectual context.

### **III. The Research Process: Onitsha Market Literature<sup>8</sup>**

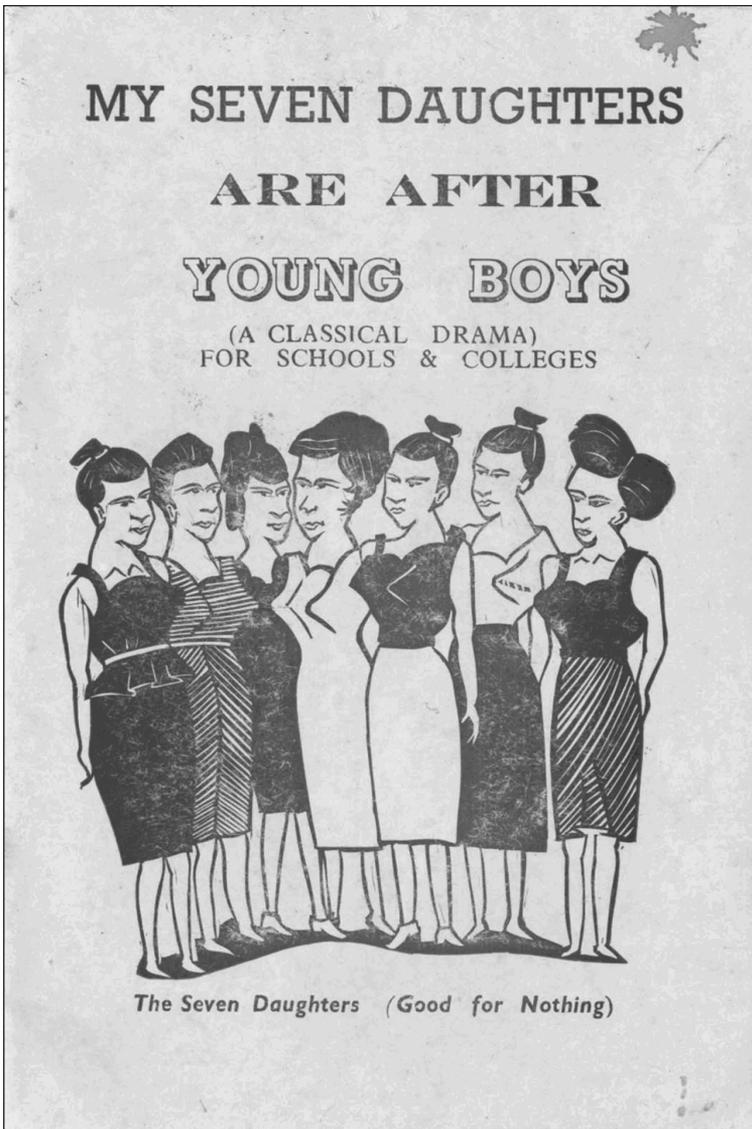
For a unit on modern and contemporary Anglophone African literature, I conducted an in-class exploration of the University of Kansas (KU) Libraries digital collection, "Onitsha Market Literature: From the Bookstalls of a Nigerian Market." This fantastic collection includes twenty-one digitized versions of once pulpy, now priceless pamphlets printed by enterprising Nigerian publishers on British presses that were discarded after World War II. To contextualize the pamphlets historically and culturally, I relied on Kurt Thometz's anthology *Life Turns Man Up and Down: High Life, Useful Advice, and Mad English*. The pamphlets we analyzed circulated amongst a popular readership at the Onitsha Market in Nigeria during the 1960s. Onitsha, a port city and trade center on the Niger River in Igboland in southeastern Nigeria, has a history strongly determined by the British slave trade that operated in the region from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, as well as the British colonial rule that followed. The pamphlets in the digital collection are a legacy of this history in that they were generally printed in the lingua franca of the region, a Nigerian pidgin that blends regional vernaculars with English. The pamphlets thus represent the culturally textured crossroads of British colonial influence and the print record of a traditionally oral regional narrative tradition.

Together, the class surveyed the content and striking cover art of a selection of pamphlets available in the digital collection, with an eye to

how they reflect both international and local influences. Compare, for example, the visuals of “My Seven Daughters Are After Young Boys” and “Beware of Women” (fig. 4 and fig. 5). The first cover features rubber-block-cut prints that connect it with the local Igbo folk art tradition, while the second features an image that looks like it has been cribbed from a Hollywood cinema magazine or advertising. Read comparatively, these visuals strongly indicate the geographic and historical context of Onitsha as a point of cultural confluence and international trade.

Analyzing Onitsha Market pamphlets together in class offered an effective entrée into a lesson about the research process. In general, when I teach with archival materials, I ask students to raise questions first, rather than immediately leaping to an argument about what the materials reveal about a course theme or topic. This sends the message that we should let the evidence guide our learning process rather than seek evidence in the archives to prove our preconceived notions about an author or literary movement. I began with the Archival Artifact Analysis Worksheet that I use to structure most in-class discussions of archival items (see Appendix 1) and asked students to think about the Onitsha pamphlets in terms of the questions these digital archival materials raise. The purpose of this worksheet exercise is not to compress the entire research or analysis task into a single class assignment, but to provide students with preliminary exposure to the inquiry-based nature of archival research. Since the Onitsha pamphlets constitute particularly diverse combinations of linguistic, graphic, cultural, and geographic influences, they challenge students to think strategically about the disciplinary traditions, methodologies, and skill sets that might help them better grasp the content and significance of these unique texts.

Once students generated a series of questions raised by the Onitsha Market pamphlets, we brainstormed how they might go about finding answers to some of their questions. Students mentioned anthropology, linguistics, and history as disciplinary and methodological traditions that could assist them in further exploration of the pamphlets. From there, we discussed the various components of the research process:



*Fig. 4. Cover of “My Seven Daughters Are After Young Boys” by Nathan O. Njoku. Osha: New Era, circa 1960-65. Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence. As reproduced in Onitsha Market Literature Digital Library. Web. 31 May 2014.*



*Fig. 5. Cover of "Beware of Women" by Nathan O. Njoku. Osha: New Era, n. d. Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence. As reproduced in Onitsha Market Literature Digital Library. Web. 31 May 2014.*

delineating a field of inquiry; developing a research question; retrieving, surveying, and critically evaluating relevant information sources; identifying and summarizing main arguments; and citing sources. Although students do not undertake research projects in this introductory world literature class, the interactive Onitsha Market literature discussion offered an opportunity to involve students in the early stages of the research process and familiarize them with next steps. This discussion was thus important preparation for research that students might undertake later in their undergraduate careers.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In-class exploration and analysis of selected digital archival materials and collections, made possible by access to a media console, offers fantastic opportunities for students to practice information literacy, critical thinking, and research skills. Although a single document or artifact has limited evidentiary value, analyzing and contextualizing an artifact can be a productive first exposure to archival research. Following this initial experience, students are better prepared to take on more substantive, longer-term research tasks. Moreover, digital archives can supply vivid, memorable touchstones that help students engage with and retain important interdisciplinary course concepts. By the end of the semester in my world literature classes, archival materials had greatly enhanced students' understanding of the historic role of English-language literature as a tool of both imperial assimilation and anti-imperial critique.

Of course, not all students and educators have internet access, let alone access to media consoles and wired classrooms. Therefore, any pedagogical engagement with digital archives must be accompanied by an examination of the privilege that makes access to digital collections possible. Even as academic libraries and cultural heritage institutions increasingly digitize their special collections, both to preserve their collections and to make them more widely accessible to users, access remains contingent upon reliable internet and devices. Digitization initiatives may therefore aggravate "digital divides" between resourced and under-resourced student populations in the US and globally, even as such initiatives open up

hitherto unimagined possibilities for incorporating archival exploration into undergraduate courses remote from physical archives.

Digital archives may re-entrench inequality in other critical ways, as well. For example, the KU Libraries digital collection of Onitsha Market literature is undeniably a compelling gateway for students with internet access to appreciate the colonial history of the Igbo region of Nigeria. But what does it mean that the most complete digital collection of Onitsha Market pamphlets is hosted on a server in Kansas rather than at a Nigerian institution? It is especially important, in a class that considers the functions and features of imperialism, to think about the ways in which the conditions of digitization may recall historically imperialist practices of archival and museum stewardship, which often involved the removal of artifacts from their native sites of provenance to repositories in England and the US. As is made clear by Indiana Jones, *American cinema's* most impenitent tomb raider—"That belongs in a museum!"—museums and archives are not neutral cultural heritage spaces. What they hold and how those holdings were acquired may involve complex histories of cultural appropriation.

This is not to say that KU's Onitsha Market literature collection or any other archival digitization initiative is inherently appropriative. On the contrary, recent high-profile digital archiving initiatives by institutions such as the University of Texas Libraries Human Rights Documentation Initiative, or HRDI, practice what the Society of American Archivists terms "postcustodial" archiving ("Postcustodial Theory of Archives"). Exemplified by HRDI collaborations with the Genocide Archive of Rwanda and the Texas After Violence Project, the postcustodial approach pairs community holders of valuable archives with experienced, resourced archivists to facilitate preservation on-site and allow custody of the materials to remain within the community of provenance. Alerting students to examples such as the HRDI's Guatemalan National Police Historical Archive, the online presence of which is an integral component of an ongoing collaboration between the National Police Historical Archive in Guatemala and the University of Texas at Austin, is an effective way to open a conversation about issues of provenance and the range of archival acquisitions and stewardship practices—whether

appropriate, collaborative, or some combination thereof—that might underpin a given digital archival collection.

Encouraging a critical awareness of archival provenance is one step toward setting the conditions for students to meaningfully engage with digital archives. Below are further strategies and considerations for educators interested in incorporating digital archives in the classroom.

**Maintain a running list of digital archives, special collections, and archives-oriented resources that you could imagine incorporating into your teaching.** Even if you are not immediately sure how a given artifact or collection might figure in your teaching, keep a record of striking, textured digital archival objects that you encounter in your research. In my world literature class, many of the digital artifacts we examined were items I had come across in my dissertation research, found interesting, and kept in a folder for potential later use. As I built my world literature syllabus, it became clear where some of the items could be usefully incorporated.

Academic libraries are also rich sources of digital archival materials. Most university-hosted digitized special collections, such as the KU Onitsha Market literature collection and the Richard Henry Pratt papers at Yale, are free to access and use. Many archival institutions, such as the Yale University Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Library and the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, have designated, publicly accessible “Digital Collections” pages on their websites. Browsing digital collections can spark inspiration for digital archives-based courses and assignments. At a large research institution, instructors and students may have access to subscription-based databases such as *Empire Online* and *ProQuest Periodicals Archive Online*, both of which host vast collections of digitized rare and out of print periodical publications. At institutions with limited resources for subscriptions, instructors might consider identifying databases that would allow access to primary sources relevant to your field. Then, talk to an acquisitions librarian about subscription possibilities. Digital subscriptions are often negotiated year to year, so it may be possible to acquire a subscription on your wish list.

In addition to more traditional academic research practices, simple online tools can yield useful results when it comes to identifying digital archives and finding resources for teaching with them. If you are interested in working with digital archives pertaining to a particular figure, writer, or region, a basic *ArchiveGrid* search ([www.archivegrid.org](http://www.archivegrid.org)) can indicate which institutions internationally have potentially relevant holdings. Following archival institutions on Twitter, particularly those where you have conducted research and/or those that have holdings that interest you, is a useful way to discover newly digitized collections. Twitter and blog accounts connected with *Slate.com*'s *The Vault* and institutions such as the National Archives identify and analyze fascinating individual artifacts, raise awareness about existent digital collections, and provide analytical models. Finally, websites such as *TeachArchives.org* and *DocsTeach.org* provide freely available resources for teaching with archives, including pedagogy articles on best practices as well as sample exercises, assignments, and worksheets.

**Craft undergraduate archival research assignments with the goal of generating inquiry-based rather than argument-based outcomes** (see Appendix 1). For example, rather than asking students to build an argument about how a given primary source connects with a theme, text, or context, you might challenge students to construct a research question and an annotated bibliography of pertinent secondary sources. In this case, you would assess student work based not on the strength of an argument but on the research question's originality and applicability to course themes and the appropriateness of sources listed in the bibliography to pursue the research question.<sup>9</sup> Preliminary exposure to the archives introduces students to the inquiry-based nature of archival research, builds confidence in the research process, and sparks research interests that students might pursue later in their undergraduate careers. Think of the archival collection as the "laboratory" of the humanities and social sciences where students can test their hypotheses about currents in intellectual, cultural, social, and political history.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, educator Barbara Rockenbach explains that in undergraduate archival research and analysis, "learning occurs

through inquiry and asking questions, rather than through absorption of static knowledge” (277).

**Recognize that building student confidence is as important as building research skills when it comes to facilitating successful student engagement with archival materials.** Particularly in preliminary undergraduate exposures to archival research, it is best to offer a narrow selection of materials for students to work with, since the vast holdings can be daunting to undergraduates unsure of how to initiate the research process. Guidance at this early stage is crucial for building student confidence in working with archives.<sup>11</sup> Make sure that students understand what a primary source is, and clarify that primary sources can take a variety of forms, such as texts, images, oral testimony, and government records.

**If possible, set the conditions for students to work collaboratively.** When students analyze archival materials in small groups, they share observations and questions that can lead to richer insights about the artifact(s) under review. Marcus C. Robyns advocates the “think-pair-share” model of artifact analysis. Educators should pre-select materials that are “provocative, controversial, and also visually stimulating” (Robyns 384). Students first review the materials independently, then pair up to share questions and issues raised by the materials, and finally present their observations to the class.

**Contextualize the archives.** To successfully incorporate an archival component in class discussion, it is important to contextualize the digital artifact that you are introducing. What is the artifact? What do you know about its provenance? What information can you offer about the digital collection or database where it is archived? It is equally important to contextualize the concept of the archive itself. What is the difference between an archive and a library? What constitutes a primary source? Early in the semester, I assign an Archival Research Terms Glossary and Exercise (see Appendix 2) based on the Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology maintained by the Society of American Archivists. Asking students to complete this exercise and discuss the results in class ensures that the class has a basic understanding of the fundamental terms of archival research and analysis.

Contextualizing the archives at both the level of the particular collection and at the level of the concept of the archive itself sets the conditions for students to draw insightful connections between the archival materials and course themes.

### **Acknowledgments**

Thanks to Joseph Slaughter for the introduction to Onitsha Market Literature.

### **Appendix 1**

#### *Archival Artifact Analysis Worksheet<sup>1</sup>*

Archival collections consist of many categories (textual, visual, material, digital) and can include many types of “artifacts.” Letters, city planning records, sound recordings, out of print books and pamphlets, personal diaries, government documents, maps, and video testimony are just a few of the “artifacts” you may encounter in an archive. Archival artifacts are primary sources—that is, original materials that emerge from a unique and specific historical context. Researchers draw on primary sources in order to develop secondary sources such as scholarly articles and books. Whether you visit a material or digital archival collection, the following worksheet will help you prepare for independent research by facilitating your analysis of an artifact that interests you.

- 1) Identify the type of “artifact” you are working with. For example, if it is a document, is it a newspaper article? Map? Letter? Telegram? Press release? Advertisement? Pamphlet? Government record? If it is in another media category, is it a photograph? Sound recording? Video testimony? Website?
- 2) Describe the artifact. What is its topic or theme? What are some unique characteristics of the artifact? If it is a document, is it hand- or typewritten? Does it have any seals, stamps, or notations? Does it feature any people, acronyms, organizations, or institutions that you can learn about in a quick online search?

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1 Prepared by Charlotte Nunes. This resource draws on similar worksheets available through the Human Rights Documentation Initiative (<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/signaturecourses/resources/archival-source-analysis-worksheet>) and the National Archives ([http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/written\\_document\\_analysis\\_worksheet.pdf](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/written_document_analysis_worksheet.pdf)).

- 3) Where did the artifact originate? Who created the artifact? When was it created, and why?
- 4) To what audience does the artifact appeal? How can you tell? What features of the artifact provide clues?
- 5) If the artifact has a clear creator or author, can you detect any bias or prejudice? Note any tone or language that may indicate bias.
- 6) List three things you find particularly striking or important about the artifact.
- 7) What questions do you have about the artifact? What information might you seek in order to gain a fuller understanding of the artifact?
- 8) Does the artifact reinforce, contradict, or raise questions about expert opinions you have read or heard about the artifact's topic or theme?

## Appendix 2

### Archival Research: A Glossary of Basic Terms<sup>2</sup>

The online Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology<sup>3</sup> maintained by the Society of American Archivists is the authoritative source on key terms and concepts pertaining to archival research. Following is a selection of definitions from this glossary that you will need to understand as you explore the archives.

**Archives:** (also **archive**), n. - 1. Materials created or received by a person, family, or organization, public or private, in the conduct of their affairs and preserved because of the enduring value contained in the information they contain or as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator, especially those materials maintained using the principles of provenance, original order, and collective control; permanent records.

**Archival:** adj. - 1. Of or pertaining to archives. - 2. RECORDS · Having enduring value; permanent.

**Classified:** adj. - 1. Accessible only by permission, especially as regards national security.—2. Restricted from general disclosure.

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2 Prepared by Charlotte Nunes.

3 <http://www2.archivists.org/glossary>

## Digital Archives in the Wired World Literature Classroom

**Collection:** n. ~ 1. A group of materials with some unifying characteristic. – 2. Materials assembled by a person, organization, or repository from a variety of sources.

**Depository:** n. ~ A library designated to receive all or selected government publications in order to provide the public access throughout the jurisdiction.

**Document:** n. ~ 1. Any written or printed work; a writing. – 2. Information or data fixed in some media. – 3. Information or data fixed in some media, but which is not part of the official record; a nonrecord. – 4. A written or printed work of a legal or official nature that may be used as evidence or proof; a record.

**Document Box:** n. ~ A container that holds folders containing paper documents vertically and that measures roughly 10 inches high, 12 or 15 inches wide, and 6 or 3 inches deep, and that usually has an integral top hinged at the upper back.

**Finding Aid:** n. ~ 1. A tool that facilitates discovery of information within a collection of records. – 2. A description of records that gives the repository physical and intellectual control over the materials and that assists users to gain access to and understand the materials.

**Folder:** n. ~ 1. A sheet of cardboard or heavy paper stock that is used as a loose cover to keep documents and other flat materials together, especially for purposes of filing

**Library:** n. ~ 1. A collection of published materials, including books, magazines, sound and video recordings, and other formats. – 2. A building used to house such a collection.

**Manuscript:** n. (**ms**, abbr.) ~ 1. A handwritten document. – 2. An unpublished document. – 3. An author's draft of a book, article, or other work submitted for publication.

**Papers:** n. ~ 1. A collection. – . A collection of personal or family documents; personal papers.

**Primary Source:** n. ~ Material that contains firsthand accounts of events and that was created contemporaneous to those events or later recalled by an eyewitness. Notes: Primary sources emphasize the lack of intermediaries between the thing or events being studied and reports of those things or events based on the belief that firsthand accounts are more accurate. Examples of primary sources include letters and diaries; government, church, and business records; oral histories; photographs, motion pictures, and videos; maps and land records; and blueprints. Newspaper articles contemporaneous with the events described are traditionally considered primary sources, although the reporter may have compiled the story from witnesses,

rather than being an eyewitness. Artifacts and specimens may also be primary evidence if they are the object of study.

**Rare Books and Manuscripts Section:** n. (**RBMS**, abbr.) ~ A professional organization that promotes the interests of librarians, curators, and other specialists concerned with the acquisition, organization, security, preservation, administration, and use of special collections, including rare printed books, manuscripts, archives, graphics, music, and ephemera.

**Record:** n. ~ 1. A written or printed work of a legal or official nature that may be used as evidence or proof; a document.

**Redaction:** n. ~ 1. The process of concealing sensitive information in a document before being released to someone not authorized to see that information.

**Researcher:** n. ~ An individual who uses the collections and services of a repository; a customer; a patron; a reader.

**Secondary Source:** n. ~ 1. A work that is not based on direct observation of or evidence directly associated with the subject, but instead relies on sources of information.—2. A work commenting on another work (primary sources), such as reviews, criticism, and commentaries.

### Archival Research Terms: An Exercise

*Using the “Archival Research: A Glossary of Basic Terms” handout, answer the following questions.*

1) What is the difference between a **primary source** and a **secondary source**? List a few examples of each.

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2) What is the difference between an **archive** and a **library**?

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3) If you are interested in exploring the content of an archival collection, what **tool** might you use to discover what is available in the collection?

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4) What will you find inside a **document box**?

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5) A **document**, a **manuscript**, a **record**, and **papers** are all items you might find in an archival collection. Compare and contrast these terms as they are defined in the handout.

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6) If a document you find in an archival collection was formerly **classified**, part of its content might have been concealed by government authorities. What is the term for the process of concealing sensitive information in a document?

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- 2 See Rockenbach’s “Archives, Undergraduates, and Inquiry-Based Learning: Case Studies from Yale University Library” (284–86) and Marcus Robyns’ “The Archivist as Educator: Integrating Critical Thinking Skills into Historical Research Methods Instruction” (374).
- 3 See Schmiesing and Hollis’ “The Role of Special Collections Departments in Humanities Undergraduate and Graduate Teaching: A Case Study” (471).
- 4 For compelling examples, see recent scholarship by Rockenbach, Robyns, Duff and Cherry, and Schmiesing and Hollis.

- 5 See “Strategic Goal 5” in *Preserving the Past to Protect the Future: The Strategic Plan of the National Archives and Records Administration* (10).
- 6 This discussion reproduces my 7 March 2014 blog post on *ArchivesEducate.com*.
- 7 This discussion reproduces my 26 February 2014 blog post on *ArchivesEducate.com*.
- 8 This discussion reproduces my 21 April 2014 blog post on *ArchivesEducate.com*.
- 9 See the Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University report “Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America’s Research Universities” ([http://www.niu.edu/engagedlearning/research/pdfs/Boyer\\_Report.pdf](http://www.niu.edu/engagedlearning/research/pdfs/Boyer_Report.pdf)) for an in-depth discussion of inquiry-based learning in higher education.
- 10 See Rockenbach 279.
- 11 See Rockenbach 285.

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