

Satellite Meeting: Innovative approaches in engaging people with local history and genealogy

Date: 17-18 August 2023

Location: KU Leuven Libraries, Leuven, Belgium

Using Digitized Historical Texas Newspapers to Engage Sociology Students in Local History

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Abstract:

In 2019, Dr. William Scarborough, Sociology professor at University of North Texas (UNT), developed and taught a Sociology course on intersectionality to undergraduate students. In this, he partnered with UNT Libraries to engage with primary sources, particularly newspaper collections, to conduct archival analysis related to the history of power, domination and resistance in Texas communities. Dr. Scarborough has offered this course a total of three times, and this has led to creating a digital collection of his students' research projects on the Portal to Texas History.

The U.S. South is infamous for its history of brutal slavery and Jim Crow racism. While the impact of these atrocities is observed through such contemporary inequalities as the racial wealth gap and residential racial segregation, few make the historical connection because local reports of past injustices are often forgotten or intentionally rendered invisible. Digital newspapers provide an important tool to correct these omissions. Reporting on a case study from a course at University of North Texas, this examines how students use digital newspapers to engage with primary sources and conduct archival analysis to unearth instances of racial violence, theft, and land dispossession in communities throughout Texas. In doing so, students become first-hand experts on how local histories are inherently connected to current social problems.

This paper explores what has emerged from this partnership, offering examples of student work from these courses to show how the libraries have partnered with an academic department to preserve and build long-term access to this student research; demonstrating teaching strategies for conducting newspaper research; and closing with future plans for this collaboration.

Keywords: *Sociology, primary source research, digital repository, archival analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

The United States (U.S.) South is infamous for its history of brutal slavery and Jim Crow racism. While the impact of these atrocities is observable through such contemporary inequalities as the racial wealth gap and residential racial segregation, few make the historical connection to the present day because local reports of past injustices are often forgotten or intentionally rendered invisible by local municipalities. Digitized historic newspapers provide an important tool to correct these omissions. Reporting on a case study from a course offered over three years at the University of North Texas (UNT), this paper examines how students engage with digitized newspapers and conduct archival analysis to unearth instances of racial violence, theft, and land dispossession in communities throughout Texas. In doing so, students become first-hand experts on how local histories are inherently connected to current social problems.

In 2019, Dr. William Scarborough, Sociology professor at University of North Texas (UNT), developed and taught a Sociology course, SOCI 4210: Intersectionality, to undergraduate students. In this, he partnered with UNT Libraries to engage with primary sources, particularly newspaper collections, to conduct archival analysis related to the history of power, domination and resistance in the local history of communities. This course utilized the Texas Digital Newspaper Program (TDNP), the largest, single-state, open-access repository to digital newspapers in the U.S. Available on The Portal to Texas History, TDNP serves over 10 million pages of openly accessible digital newspapers, all of which are fully text-searchable and primarily representing towns in the state of Texas whose populations are below 50,000. Dr. Scarborough has offered this course a total of three times and continued to collaborate with UNT Libraries, and the partnership has led to creating a digital collection of his students' research projects on the Portal.

BACKGROUND

The course we focus on in this case study, SOCI 4210: Intersectionality, aims to teach students the central tenets of intersectionality so that they may better understand and address the processes contributing to inequality.

Of many themes and tenets of intersectionality, two played a primary role in the course's collaboration with UNT Libraries and digital collections. First, *intersectionality* is an analytic lens used to illuminate factors contributing to social inequality that may otherwise be difficult to observe under conventional norms and methods (Crenshaw, 1989). To better identify social processes and factors operating in the background or margins of society, but which are nonetheless extremely consequential, intersectionality draws to attention the confluence of factors which simultaneously shape individuals' experiences of discrimination.

The first central dimension of these factors pertains to *historical antecedents*. Although many scholars and public figures have made efforts to erase or disregard the nefarious history of racial capitalism and slavery in the U.S., intersectionality has often served as an analytic framework to shed light on the enduring consequences of this history. Course readings and primary sources support research into the role of slavery and land theft in contemporary forms of racial wealth inequality. Students collectively explore the history of the Greenwood District in Tulsa, Oklahoma, once home to the largest middle class black community in the U.S., until it was destroyed by a white mob in the 1920s. Divulging this history and linking it to

contemporary forms of inequality establishes a common thread between the history and the present, one that is often intentionally rendered invisible by those with a vested interest in present conditions.

Praxis is the second theme of intersectionality that motivated collaboration with UNT Libraries. Central to intersectionality is that academic study and research should serve some purpose in addressing the systems of inequality it analyzes. The course uses the investigative journalism of historic figure Ida B. Wells-Barnett, famous in the U.S. for her activism in civil rights, as a model for this type of work. Drawing from her book *The Red Record* (2018 [1895]), students observe how the intersection of racial and gender stereotypes were fundamental to racial violence in the Jim Crow South. Wells-Barnett's documentation of lynchings throughout the U.S. South revealed white mobs' common use of conventional gender stereotypes around white women's vulnerability to justify racial violence against black men. Yet, as Wells-Barnett illustrated, there was very little evidence that black men posed any such threats. Hence, Wells-Barnett revealed both the intersection of gender and racial stereotypes in the enactment of racial violence as well as the power of data and investigation to challenge violence and discrimination, as her work played a fundamental role in illuminating racial violence and promoting public change.

Serving as a research tool for the students in this course, The Portal to Texas History is a gateway to rare, historical, and primary source materials from or about Texas. Created and maintained by the University of North Texas Libraries, the Portal connects primary source materials contributed by hundreds of content partners across the state to provide a vibrant, growing collection of resources, including digitized newspapers. Currently hosting over 10 million newspaper pages, the Texas Digital Newspaper Program (TDNP), on the Portal, is the largest, single-state, open-access interface to digital newspapers in the U.S.

Collectively, these two themes of intersectionality motivated a course project which examined historical antecedents to present patterns of inequality and helped, in some way, to address them. Students were assigned to use UNT Libraries' Portal to Texas History to investigate the primary source materials related to the community where they currently or previously reside and identify if there were events which may have had an enduring impact on contemporary forms of inequality. Using intersectionality as an analytic lens, students were cued to investigate the presence of physical violence (such as the raising of communities of families) and civic violence (where land theft occurred through local referendums) and the intersection of class, race, and gender dynamics in their manifestation.

THEORIES AND INFLUENCES FROM LITERATURE

This case study examines how a collaboration between a university library and an academic department has evolved into something broader than a professor and a librarian working with a single group of students. This collaboration has resulted in multiple, larger outputs, including improved curricular strategies for acclimating students to work with historic primary sources; external, open access teaching materials; and an openly accessible student research collection. The collaboration was heavily influenced by multiple theoretical underpinnings and curricular practices related to the authors' research backgrounds, combining elements from the disciplines of Technical Communication & Rhetoric (TCR) and Sociology.

TCR is a discipline centered on examining how context affects messages as well as considering how an author or communicator's role shapes and is shaped by that context. In the classroom, TCR curriculum primarily involves educating students about critical thinking, contextualizing communication situations, and understanding audience needs. News media materials, particularly historic newspapers as well as current news sources, are useful for teaching students about analyzing given communication situations, with a particular focus on developing critical-thinking skills. Earliest of all roots in communication are the concepts of *ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*, and *technē*, the roots of modern rhetoric grown from the Aristotelian tradition, and Kraemer employs these as conceptual frameworks to teach communication analysis of newspapers to students. Critical thinking literature, such as Kallet's *Think Smarter* (2018), supports information analysis and needs within varying communication situations related to teaching students about the most important information needs in a given situation. In addition, classroom materials have been informed by previous work on genre-centered pedagogy and information literacies from Boettger 2014 and Boettger, Palmer and Lam 2017, whose works focus on undergraduates in TCR.

Also heavily influencing this collaboration are two tools that were developed in parallel to the newspaper research teaching practices for the SOCI 4210: Intersectionality course. First is the IFLA News Media Section *News Literacy Curriculum Toolkit* (2022), with development led by News Media Section members Mutyev, Kraemer, and Feeney. The curriculum library is intended to support educating students in the higher education classroom about engaging with historic primary source materials and concepts and to facilitate news literacy skills. Second, is the "Race and Ethnicity Keyword Thesaurus for Chronicling America," hosted on the National Endowment for the Humanities Edsitement project (2023). Kraemer and Fisher were heavily involved in developing the keyword thesaurus to promote context-based historical research with newspapers dealing with topics related to civil rights, race relations in the U.S., and times and sites of protest and struggle.

There is a growing movement in library instruction to integrate open educational resources (OER) into courses in a variety of disciplines in order to provide more effective information literacy instruction and a relevant and engaging experience for students within each discipline.

Bobkowski, Younger & Watson (2021) discuss integrating the American Library Association's (ALA) Association of College & Research Libraries' (ACRL) "Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education" into resource instruction for a journalism research course at the University of Kansas. Their redesign of the course "illustrates sustainable methods for integrating library instruction in undergraduate education by shifting away from the one-shot instructional model toward open educational resources (OER) and open pedagogy." (Bobkowski et al., 2021) The TDNP collection is an example of this type of sustainable OER. Digitized newspapers are continually being added to the collection, and as the digital collection grows so do the potential research opportunities for students in future sections of SOCI 4210.

Bobkowski et al. (2021) further state that "using OER as opposed to a commercial textbook allows educators to customize learning materials and actively involve students in inclusive learning practices." Informally, students in SOCI 4210: Intersectionality reported appreciating the experience of accessing the information online from anywhere without any registration or login requirements. This lowers the threshold for access and any technological barriers students might face completing the research required for the assignment. Bobkowski et al. (2021) discuss engaging students in information literacy instruction via a "threshold

concept ... a central idea that transforms how students view a subject or discipline” as a knowledge “essential for developing advanced field-specific concepts.” Access to primary sources available on the Portal allows students to move from being only consumers of knowledge that they observe passively in their daily lives, to being producers of knowledge that they’ve developed through their own intentional and valid investigative work, developing a concept identified by Ferguson and Carbonaro (2016) as the “Sociological eye,” or “see[ing] sociology in everyday life.”

Supporting relevance and this process of investigation, students were encouraged to research historical events in their home communities or regions. As one of the largest and most diverse public schools in Texas, students enrolled in this course represent a variety of locations throughout the state. Only 4 percent of students at UNT are from out-of-state, which has been reflected in the enrollment of only one out-of-state student in the three times the course has been offered, from amongst approximately seventy cumulative students. These students nonetheless have demonstrated familiarity with the community where UNT is located in Denton, Texas and have shown a vested interest in uncovering and learning more about the history of places they are intimately familiar with.

OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

This collaboration between the Libraries and SOCI 4210 has resulted in multiple outputs that we will continue to develop and enhance as the partnership continues. These outputs include:

1. **Classroom curriculum:** for teaching about how to work with the digital collections and how to search primary sources over time.
2. **Common research themes:** to help develop training materials and plan for demonstrating how to work with primary sources, Dr. Scarborough has compiled a set of exemplary research themes that have emerged over the past three course iterations.
3. **Metadata adjustment and improvement:** to improve access to related primary and secondary sources for a more enhanced user experience.
4. **Student research collection:** to serve as a space for student research that directly ties to the SOCI 4210 research themes and the TDNP collection.

1.1 Classroom Curriculum

At the time of writing, sixty-nine students have enrolled in three SOCI 4210: Intersectionality iterations. All of these students have completed a hands-on library training with the Portal and the UNT Libraries’ research repository.

The training, run by Krahmer, the Digital Newspaper Unit director, and UNT Libraries’ scholarly repository librarian, Whitney Johnson-Freeman, included teaching students about:

- different types of collections and potentially relevant newspaper titles that could help with student research.
- basic navigation of the Portal to locate primary source materials about events and people.
- utilizing historic terms for searching rather than modern terms to locate people and events.

- examples of events (described below) where news sources buried conflict or injustice in ways that deliberately skewed the true extent of discrimination.
- and supportive information for how students could include research essays into the university's scholarly repository.

The hands-on instruction session primarily involved teaching students about the importance of context to historic primary sources. Helping students learn about considering context, for example, of a newspaper published in Texas in 1960, entails educating students about historic words and phrases used in the past that are no longer used now; discussing which authority figures influenced writing of articles related to civil rights struggles and how that authority would impact representation of civil rights issues; and examining how perspectives change over time.

To exemplify context, Kraemer provided local examples over time that discussed U.S. Civil War Confederate soldier statue erection and removal on town squares in the U.S. South. The Confederate states in the U.S. had seceded from the country in 1861, demanding rights to keep slaves, and in the 1890s, with a growth in white populism and Jim Crow racism to restrict voting rights to whites, cities heavily began erecting monuments to the Confederacy to affirm white supremacy (Atlanta History Center, 2022). A Confederate soldier monument in Denton, Texas, was erected in 1918, and the newspapers explained the people and reasons behind the monument. Between 1918 and 2018, Denton newspapers revisited the topic of the Confederate soldier monument's purpose, and Kraemer showed students different conversation threads related to this topic (see Figure 1).

Local Conversations Over Time

COMMEMORATION OF CONFEDERATE DEEDS GIVEN HERE MONDAY

Monday was a big day in Denton and marked an epoch in the city's and county's history—the culmination of long years of work for the cause of commemorating the deeds and sacrifices of Denton County patriots during the days of '61. It was a day long to be remembered by the lovers of the Old South and its people. It was a day of commemoration of past events and of inspiration for future events. It was a fitting recognition to the veterans of the gray and a fitting observance of the natal day of the South's great leader—Jefferson Davis.

The day was of much pleasure to the veterans from Denton County and other counties and many made pilgrimages to the old home to revisit the scenes of years ago and re-meet old friends made during boyhood or during the war. The gray beard and gray hair were in prominence everywhere Monday. It was their day and they made the most of it. Sitting upon the big platform behind the speakers, they formed an inspiring background for the services, their faces alight with the

Denton Record Chronicle, June 4, 1918

Statue should stay

History educates youth, leads to change

History cannot be changed or erased.

However, a group called the Committee against the Public Establishment of Race needs to be reminded of this fact. On June 19th, some members of this group hung an abolition sign and a for sale sign on a statue of a Confederate soldier that marks an entrance into the Denton County Courthouse.

Not only are these people asking for the removal of this statue from the courthouse, but also the name of Robert E. Lee Elementary School changed. One member claims that he will not let his child attend a public school that is named after a Confederate war hero — or as he calls it, a racist.

And if the group had the power to do so and park officials would listen, they would go as far as getting the Confederate flag removed from Six Flags over Texas amusement park. Of course, then the name would have to become Five Flags over Texas.

If the Denton community were to succumb to these requests, would the next step be to totally wipe out all Civil War and Confederate history from the text books? We would hope not.

The statue, which has been a part of Denton history for 75 years, serves as a memorial to the soldiers, both black and white, who fought in the Civil War. A war that wasn't just about slavery, but about a divided nation — split over such things as economics, the state's rights and two different ways of life.

NT Daily, July 7, 1994

I'll always remember how Willie, who was then my son's middle school football coach, explained it: "I'm a teacher, an educator. I know that to get people to learn, you jump right into the issues and talk about them."

For most of the years that followed, he stood alone on the issue. He marched every Sunday evening on the courthouse Square. He appeared before county commissioners, meeting after meeting, year after year. He asked for action, any kind of action. But mostly, for a long time, he was ignored.

Then came Charlottesville. The white nationalist rally in August that led to a counterprotester's murder suddenly thrust Willie's cause to the forefront. Suddenly, he had dozens of supporters. Suddenly, the county commissioners reversed course. After almost two decades of saying no, they agreed to create an advisory committee on the fate of the monument.

This month, the volunteers recommended leaving the statue as is, but with an explanation added to reflect modern times. County commissioners must approve and fund the next steps.

Nineteen years. That's all it took. But Denton didn't need Charlottesville to pay attention. Denton has its own Charlottesville. It's called Quakertown. And its tragic story began a hundred years ago.

Denton Record Chronicle, February 18, 2018

Figure 1: Showing the changes of newspaper conversations related to the Denton Confederate Soldier monument, as revealed in local news articles from 1918, 1994, and 2018.

1.2 Common Research Themes

Nearly all students sought to analyze historical events that took place in their hometowns or neighboring communities. The Portal facilitated this localization of research because of the extent of newspaper content available that represents cities with populations below 50,000. To illustrate the Portal's capabilities and highlight student outcomes, below we summarize two papers, each of which are now available through the UNT Libraries research repository.

1.2.1 Sherman Massacre of 1930

Drawing from a 1930 issue of the *Whitewright Sun*, a newspaper from Whitewright located 20 miles Southeast of Sherman in North Texas, one student recounted a series of events leading to the racial violence and the destruction of homes in Sherman's black community. A wage dispute between a black worker and white employer led to the black worker's arrest after charges of assault against the white employer's wife, who was home at the time of a confrontation. While awaiting trial, a white mob set fire to the courthouse where the black worker was being held. After destroying the courthouse and murdering the defendant within it, the mob then proceeded to Sherman's black commercial district where they destroyed and burned down several buildings.

Drawing from Ida B. Wells-Barnett's analysis, the student showed how the Sherman riot shared key characteristics with other lynchings and forms of racial violence in the Jim Crow South. In this case, like many others, it was the alleged aggression toward a white woman that a white mob used to not only murder a defendant but to raze an entire neighborhood. In other words, norms of white women's vulnerability were used to justify racial violence.

Key to the students' analysis is their linking of historical violence to patterns of inequality. Drawing from another resource available to UNT Libraries' users, the students used *Social Explorer* to show how the Sherman riot led to a substantial drop in Sherman's black population, as many residents likely fled the violence. Linking to contemporary conditions, the student used recent data to illustrate how Black residents in Sherman are disproportionately represented among the lowest-earning households. Hence, historical discrimination is linked directly to contemporary disparities.

1.2.2 White Residents Protest School Integration in Texarkana

The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court ruling banned de jure racial segregation in U.S. schools. Yet, many districts in the U.S. South nonetheless resisted racial integration in schools for many years following the ruling. For the course paper, one student recounted how white residents in Texarkana, TX protested the admission of two black students to the local junior college in 1956, a full two years after school segregation was banned. On the first day of school, when the newly admitted black students would attend their first classes, crowds of white residents blocked the entrance to the school to prevent their attendance.

Also notable from the student's paper is that their primary sources were not from Texarkana, but from reporting from Houston, nearly 300 miles away. This omission in local Texarkana news was not accidental, according to the student, but complicit with the aims of local white protesters opposing school integration and who wished to not draw the attention of the federal government. Drawing from her personal experience, the student recounted the collective avoidance of her hometown in discussing the local history of school integration resistance, specifically noting the irony of their field trip to Little Rock Arkansas to visit the site of one major school integration battle, despite there being similar events in their own city. In her own words, the student wrote:

When researching for this paper, I was surprised to find this story on the Texarkana College riot, something I had never heard of happening. I have lived in Texarkana my whole life as most of my family members have, but I have never heard about this incident. I was taught about the Little Rock Nine in school, and even went on a history club field trip to Little Rock to learn about the events occurring only one year after the riot in Texarkana. However, I was never taught the synonymous story that happened in my own hometown.

1.2.3 Common Themes Across Student Research Papers

The above essay examples illustrate themes that have arisen across all SOCI 4210 student papers using the Portal. As mentioned above, for most research situations, students examined primary sources about or from their communities, with the goal of identifying events and

situations that had been largely forgotten or intentionally rendered invisible. In so doing, students were better positioned to discuss the themes and reasons behind contemporary disparities within their communities.

These themes include:

- One student researching and writing about their communities' historical resistance to school integration.
- Several students examining the displacement of Denton's black community in 1922.
- From nearby city of Fort Worth, approximately 35 minutes south of Denton, multiple students considered that city's efforts to displace residents of color from a gentrifying area.
- Other students researching instances of racial violence and lynchings occurring in the early 20th century in their hometowns.

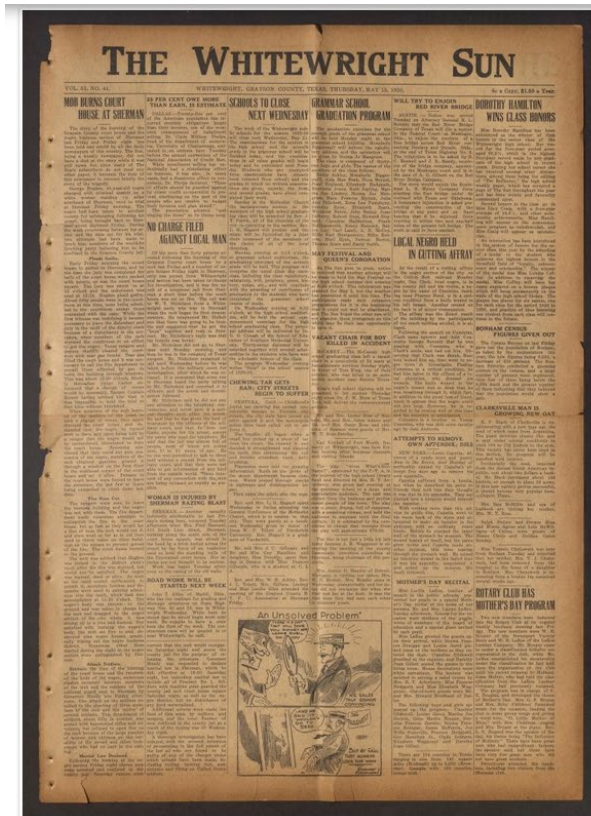
Beyond the direct benefit to individual students, this collaboration has also provoked a broader effort to enhance the user experience of working with the Portal itself.

1.3 Metadata Adjustment and Improvement

These student projects and the research process behind them has offered opportunities to build a stronger relationship between the Libraries and students, to enhance the digital collections, and to improve the repertoire of tools they can offer to student researchers.

During the Spring 2023 instruction session, students learned the potential for contributing their own research to the UNT Libraries' research repository, which is hosted and visible as part of the same locally-developed interface that hosts the TDNP collection on the Portal. Like many other institutions, the UNT Libraries invites faculty, students, and staff to contribute their scholarly output to an open-access institutional repository hosted by the Libraries. While the instruction session, discussing various search strategies for using newspapers on the Portal, had been offered to students in the previous two semesters, the Spring 2023 instruction session was the first time students had been offered the opportunity to submit their final research papers to the repository. With the students' papers and the newspaper primary sources integrated into the same digital collections system, we can utilize a metadata field ("Relation") native to the system to link student papers to the primary sources from the Portal cited within the papers. Pairing the primary source and secondary sources--in this case, SOCI 4210: Intersectionality papers produced by students in the course--demonstrates the potential of the UNT Libraries' digital collections system to represent the historical context of primary sources, particularly sources that include content that may be difficult or harmful to users, such as discussions of racial violence.

To illustrate this concept, we can look at one specific newspaper issue cited within one of the student research papers. One newspaper example is the Thursday, May 15, 1930, of *The Whitewright Sun*, published in Whitewright, Texas, a community approximately 15 miles (25 kilometers) southwest of Sherman, Texas. Any user working with this specific newspaper issue can see other digital objects related to this issue below its accompanying description. This appears to users as a blue box with the word "Related," along with a symbol indicating interconnectedness, directly below the "Context" section in the concise description of the digital object on the Portal (See figure 2, with "Related" boxed in red).



Description

Weekly newspaper from Whitewright, Texas that includes local, state, and national news along with advertising.

Physical Description

eight pages : ill. ; page 22 x 16 in. Scanned from physical pages.

Creation Information

Creator: Unknown. May 15, 1930.

Context

This **newspaper** is part of the collection entitled: [Whitewright Sun](#) and was provided by the [Whitewright Public Library](#) to [The Portal to Texas History](#), a digital repository hosted by the [UNT Libraries](#). It has been viewed 90 times, with 8 in the last month. More information about this issue can be viewed below.



Figure 2: The Whitewright Sun, May 15, 1930, showing “Related” link to additional student materials, boxed in red, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph1223693/>

After clicking on the “Related” box, users are directed to the “Related Items” box for the primary source (see Figure 3 below). This box includes such details as:

1. Related object’s title
2. A content description of the related object
3. An explanation of the relationship to the current item
4. A link to the related item within the Portal.

In the example in Figure 3, we can see the student paper about the Sherman, Texas, massacre of 1930. The same features are available in reverse for the related item when viewing that object’s description page in the system (Figure 4).

Related Items

Sherman Massacre of 1930 (Paper)



Paper exploring the lynching of George Hughes in Sherman, Texas in 1930, the ensuing race massacre, and how this event impacted the Black community in the city for decades to come.

Relationship to this item: (Is Referenced By)

Sherman Massacre of 1930, [ark:/67531/metadc2123260/](https://n2t.net/ark:/67531/metadc2123260/)

Figure 3: “Related Items” box.

What

Descriptive information to help identify this paper. Follow the links below to find similar items on the Portal.

Degree Information

- **Department:** [Sociology](#)

Description

Paper exploring the lynching of George Hughes in Sherman, Texas in 1930, the ensuing race massacre, and how this event impacted the Black community in the city for decades to come.

Physical Description

6 p.

Subjects

Keywords

- [Texas history](#)
- [community inequalities](#)
- [lynchings](#)
- [race massacres](#)

Library of Congress Subject Headings

- [African Americans -- Violence against](#)

Language

- [English](#)

Item Type

- [Paper](#)

Collections

This paper is part of the following collection of related materials.

[UNT Undergraduate Student Works](#)

[About](#) | [Browse this Collection](#)

Related Items

[The Whitewright Sun \(Whitewright, Tex.\), Vol. 51, No. 41, Ed. 1 Thursday, May 15, 1930](#) (Newspaper)



Weekly newspaper from Whitewright, Texas that includes local, state, and national news along with advertising.

Relationship to this item: (References)

The Whitewright Sun (Whitewright, Tex.), Vol. 51, No. 41, Ed. 1 Thursday, May 15, 1930, [ark:/67531/metaph1223693/](https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph1223693/)

[What responsibilities do I have when using this paper?](#)

Figure 4: Screenshot from the Portal showing description information for the digital object showing the cited newspaper in the “Related Items” box.
<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc2123260/#relationships>

Contextualizing primary sources in this manner allows users of The Portal to step back in time to learn firsthand how the events were originally reported, and this visualizes how the passage of time has changed our understanding of historical events. The pairing of primary and secondary sources not only offers an efficient way for Portal users to view historical materials through contemporary lenses, but also illustrates a fundamental benefit of the Portal as a tool to make sense of how our communities have developed.

1.4 Student Research Collection

The SOCI 4210 Student Research Collection is currently in development, with the goal of supporting long-term, open access to the papers prepared from Portal research, specifically for this course. While the current collection is still growing, once this number of submissions expands to represent multiple iterations of the course, we will create the unique course collection to explain the research themes discussed above, along with the methods students employed in developing their papers.

Because the first time we offered the opportunity to submit papers was in May of 2023, we are still collecting submissions. The collection is still growing, with three papers submitted thus far. These papers are currently included in the UNT Digital Library, under a collection named, “Undergraduate Student Works.” Student papers submitted to the current Undergraduate Student Works collection include relation tags to Portal primary sources and are searchable within the UNT Digital Library, as well as visible in The Portal to Texas History.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE STEPS

In the spirit of intersectionality, SOCI 4210 engages the Portal to bring vital information from the margins of society to the center of students’ awareness so that they may be better positioned to understand the reasons underlying contemporary inequalities and their most effective solutions. The Portal is an invaluable resource for these endeavors. As digital natives, students in this course find the interface to be intuitive and easy to navigate. Direct training from library faculty further provides vital research skills to help students understand how to sift through the digital collections to uncover key documents to support their research. Through using primary sources, students move from rudimentary regurgitation of course concepts to their application in identifying, analyzing, and discussing historical data they acquired through the Portal.

Pedagogically, one of the greatest strengths of incorporating the Portal, as a digital library, into the course is that it empowers students to take charge of their information. Learning to search and investigate primary sources, students are no longer subject to the filtering that occurs in secondary materials or, worse yet, web search results or, even, social media. Instead, they possess the skills to seek answers on their own from reliable data sources report on events firsthand. More generalizable, students leave the course with greater efficacy. While many may continue to use the Portal for their interests, others may not. However, they nonetheless leave the course with a critical thinking capacity to find and validate information on their own. In other words, they become adept at generating and evaluating public information.

SOCI 4210: Intersectionality has been offered for three semesters, with increasing demand and consistently positive evaluations. The approach we have implemented in this classroom is not without limitation. One vital tension that remains unresolved is the trauma and emotional toll that researching racial violence within primary documents can have, particularly on students who are subject to racism or whose ancestors were subject to racism and violence. Primary documents often contain terms that are offensive and convey the normalcy of public racism and sexism in prior decades. Even more upsetting are the descriptions of images of violence to ancestor members of the current audience’s communities. To mitigate potential harm, the course discusses them outright with students, highlighting the tension between the emotional stress that researching primary sources can cause while explaining their value and benefit in supporting an understanding of the causes of contemporary forms of inequality and discrimination. Students are asked to offer their own suggestions for how to resolve this tension. These discussions prioritize care and compassion in the classroom and help establish a set of norms for public discussion of these difficult topics.

Within the UNT Libraries, plans are in place to address harmful content, including such topics as those uncovered in student research for this course. To help address this potentially harmful or difficult content in historic resources available on the Portal, Fisher and Kraemer have proposed an internally-funded research project, “Investigating Descriptive Practices for Potentially Harmful Cultural Heritage Materials,” to survey library best practices for

representing and contextualizing potentially harmful resources in digital repositories. This project will consider depictions or discussions of violence; outdated, derogatory terminology in text and other media; objects that express religious, racial or cultural intolerance; or media that may cause emotional or medical harm to the viewer. If funded, we anticipate that this research project will support development of content warning statements as well as a local language thesaurus to aid research, similar to the one developed for NEH Edsitement (2022), with a specific focus on regional content related to the state of Texas.

CONCLUSION

Conducting research via The Portal helps students become better brokers of knowledge. It gives them the resources to do their own investigative work and uncover facts that are not widely covered but are nonetheless highly consequential in shaping current circumstances in communities across the state of Texas. In this sense, it helps students make the jump from being only consumers of knowledge that they observe passively in their daily life, to being producers of knowledge that they've developed through their own intentional and valid investigative work. Students use The Portal to gain an understanding of how the communities where they live, work, and go to school came to possess their current characteristics and, specifically, patterns of segregation and inequality. Students uncover, for example, how contemporary racial homogeneity of the majority-white community of Rockport, Texas was preceded by a history of racial violence and Klan organizing in this location. Others have uncovered how patterns of residential racial segregation in their community reflect forced removal of residents from some areas and their isolation in less economically viable enclaves. Revealing this history helps students conceptualize current patterns of inequality as not the result of individual choices, but rather the consequence of a long history of racial violence, land dispossession, and publicly-sponsored theft.

The combination of information, communication and sciences, through Libraries, TCR and Sociology, has demonstrated exciting possibilities for educating students, and the authors look forward to next steps both in their classrooms and in their research.

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