

2010

Access the Copyrighted: Integration Correspondence from the James H. Meredith Collection

Jason Kovari
University of Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/theprimarysource>



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kovari, Jason (2010) "Access the Copyrighted: Integration Correspondence from the James H. Meredith Collection," *The Primary Source*: Vol. 29: Iss. 1, Article 4.

DOI: 10.18785/ps.2901.04

Available at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/theprimarysource/vol29/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Primary Source by an authorized editor of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact aquilastaff@usm.edu.

Access the Copyrighted: Integration Correspondence from the James H. Meredith Collection

Jason Kovari, University of Mississippi

The violence surrounding the 1962 desegregation of Ole Miss inherently links the University of Mississippi (UM) with the history of the Civil Rights Movement. Thus, the Department of Archives & Special Collections at UM holds extensive civil rights related collections[i], ranking amongst our more frequently researched topics. Aside from contributing to a statewide grant-funded initiative in 2003, the UM Archives & Special Collections has shied away from prioritizing Civil Rights materials in our digital collections; however, this decision does not stem from emotion. Historically, we have focused on 19th century materials, clearly in the public realm, in an attempt to evade the complexities of contemporary copyright law. This focus has shifted recently. Taking advantage of digital rights management, UM has expanded digital focus to include 20th-century items, notably civil rights materials, in order to meet user needs.

In the past year, UM's Archives & Special Collections has mounted two civil rights digital collections: The Integration of the University of Mississippi[ii] & the United States v. Mississippi Interrogatory Answers[iii]. Using CONTENTdm, UM's content management system, these two digital projects feature images and unsolicited correspondence concerning integration in education as well as court documentation concerning African American voting rights, respectively. To further broaden access to materials on this subject, we have more civil rights and race relations materials in the planning phase of digitization.

Project Description

Our most used and complex civil rights digital collection, the Integration of the University of Mississippi, features two layers of access: materials open to the public and those restricted to UM library computers. Currently, the unrestricted integration material includes images of the 30 September – 1 October riot on the UM campus and subsequent enrollment of James H.Meredith[iv]. Pulling from multiple visual collections, these photographs represent the perspective of a contemporaneous UM student and faculty member. Additionally, the images from the Mississippi Highway Patrol, a law enforcement entity attempting to preserve peace during Meredith's enrollment, are publicly available. Upon donation, UM obtained the copyright to these image collections, which allows the archive to present the items without restriction. Although all involved wished to broaden access, this expansion raised concern over unauthorized dissemination due to the incredibly high request rate and use of the originals; thus, we watermarked the access files.

The selection criteria for materials included in the IP-based restricted sub-collection focused on preservation with rank-order based upon request rates. Currently, restricted materials comprise integration correspondence from the James H. Meredith Collection. Including correspondence from across the World, both supporting and objecting to Meredith's enrollment at Ole Miss, these documents illustrate the narrative of early-1960s racial attitudes and the broader context of

desegregation. Each semester, multiple UM courses require students to conduct research with the thousands of letters sent to Meredith between 1962 & 1963.

For any archive, frequent physical handling of materials causes serious security and preservation concerns. Although we follow the same security procedures with the integration materials as with all of our holdings, the sheer number of researchers working with these items increases concern over the possibility of theft. This same rate of use increases the possibility of wear-and-tear on the materials, as well. While items from this collection have not been stolen and the materials have not yet suffered due to the high rate of handling, the number of researchers using these materials increases the need to devise alternative methods of access to combat the increased threats.

Prior to this project, the six boxes of integration correspondence represented the sole part of the nearly 150 boxes in the James H. Meredith Collection without item-level description; thus users could not narrow their search without handling all items. Instead, many requested the initial few folders in the first box, exhausting themselves before gaining a fuller appreciation for the depth of the materials. By creating a digital presence for the integration correspondence, users can now easily choose their access points and browse without being limited to a certain number of items at-a-time.

Although more traditional archival researchers use these materials, undergraduates comprised the primary user group considered during development. As the correspondence is limited to library computers, an increased digital presence does not aid remote users, which generally guides digital projects. Instead, this project contributes to the wider library goal of expanding resources for UM students. Thus, we meet the needs of undergraduates while subverting the inherent concerns that arise with frequently pulled items.

Process

To streamline digitization of the James H. Meredith Collection integration correspondence, undergraduate workers created metadata concurrent to digitization. In an Excel spreadsheet, students entered basic metadata fields, such as “Author”; “Date”; “Author location” and “Physical extent”, thus gaining a digital surrogate while removing the time burden associated with metadata creation from full-time staff. To ensure quality, consistent formatting and proper vocabulary usage, all undergraduates working on UM digital collections undergo training in Library of Congress controlled vocabularies and Getty Research Institute thesauri. Employing undergraduates for concurrent digitization and metadata creation saves time for our full-time staff but significantly slows the digitization process; it is unknown, however, whether the time is comparable to segmenting the work between undergraduates and librarian-status metadata specialists.

Metadata was then saved as a tab-delimited file and batch uploaded with the documents into CONTENTdm. Having metadata readily available in Excel allows seamless inclusion in the collection’s EAD finding aid, as well. Since all items inhabit the same EAD container level, encoding the series is accomplished through simple insertion of code. By adding further depth to the finding aid, researchers can request specific items rather than requesting at the box-level as has been done in the past. However, with the creation of digital surrogates, requests of the physical items will become limited with encouraged use of the digital collection.

All scanning was performed at 600dpi, 24-bit color and saved as TIFF files. Master files demand between 35 and 50GB of storage space per Hollinger box, depending on number of pages and

original page size. Once scanned, the files were converted to significantly smaller JPEGs. These files were then batch watermarked and, finally, converted into PDF. The choice of using watermarked PDFs stemmed from the belief that students will wish to print pages from the letters, a task easier performed with PDFs than JPEG2000 files, our other preferred file type. Although creating TIFF master files demands additional file space than simply scanning as access resolution JPEGs or PDFs, these files allow more robust re-use while alleviating the concern for additional digitization in the foreseeable future; preservation of these original documents is one of the goals spearheading the project.

Unlike the widely available open materials, which are branded with a distinctive UM watermark, these materials are watermarked with thin red diagonal "Copyrighted" text. As the ownership of copyright over these materials is highly varied throughout the collection, we did not wish to imply the ownership of the intellectual content by using a UM seal.

Limitations

The main limitation in UM civil rights digitization projects has been the same omnipresent concern as in many archival projects: copyright. Attempting to mount modern materials derived from an extensive variety of sources makes obtaining permission not merely impractical but impossible. As the legal nature of intellectual property rights becomes stricter in opposition to the diminishing borders afforded by the web's proliferation of knowledge, institutions face considerable implications when selecting 20th-century materials for digital consumption. In the case of the James H. Meredith Collection integration correspondence, UM has employed basic digital rights management.

Primarily, rights management focuses on limiting access to IP-addresses located in the J.D. Williams Library on UM's Oxford, MS campus. By controlling the physical borders of the digital collection through IP-restrictions, we can more effectively limit access to usage protected under the fair use exemption of U.S. copyright law [v].

In addition to geographically limited access, each record includes a statement detailing that intellectual rights remain with respective authors. Further, the rights statement denies permission to use materials outside the scope of fair use. Watermarking access files as described in the section on Process, in conjunction with a strong rights statement, removes all doubt as to the documents being the author's intellectual property.

We were particularly concerned with abiding by legal restrictions with this project due the sensitive nature of much of the correspondence. As is not surprising given the era and viewpoint, much of the anti-integration letters include statements of hatred, racial slurs and death threats accompanied by the author's name. Since these documents are less than fifty years old, consideration was given to the authors' immediate descendents. Ultimately, we decided that responsibly broadening access trumped potential sensitivities.

UM strives to create item-specific subject terms & descriptions for all metadata records; however, limited staff time and diverse departmental projects disallowed this practice for the integration correspondence. Instead, basic descriptive metadata elements were chosen. Subject analysis is limited to the correspondence as a whole, using the terms "Meredith, James, 1933-"; "College integration -- Mississippi -- Oxford"; "Race relations"; & "University of Mississippi -- History".

The main exception allowing classification-by-content is the designation of "pro-Integration" and

“anti-Integration” in each record. Without this basic stipulation, researchers would be unable to browse the author’s viewpoint, which comprises the vast majority of first-level search requests. Fortunately, this designation was easily included, as it comprises the main physical organization of the correspondence.

Although less impactful to development than copyright concerns, many limitations encountered in UM projects containing multi-page documents stem from the content management system used in their creation, CONTENTdm. Unfortunately, without customization, CONTENTdm is not user-friendly for this document type. Although functional, non-experienced users often encounter difficulty navigating the various levels of each record, such as document description and page description. Through work by the UM Web Services Librarian, some of the concern has been removed as document-level metadata for multi-file documents now appears beneath each image, thus allowing more intuitive use.

Conclusion

Gaining sort-able control over the collection allows researchers to approach these items in new ways. Before item-level description existed, research demanded physically handling each letter, an arduous task when confronted with thousands of documents. Through sorting by metadata fields in CONTENTdm, such as author’s viewpoint or author location, researchers can more easily analyze the documents according to commonly queried designations, regardless of their relative physical locations in the collection’s organization.

Reception of photographs in the Integration of the University of Mississippi has been positive. Routinely ranking amongst our most used digital collections, they averaging a few thousand record views per month. As this resource grows to include varying formats and richer documentation concerning Meredith’s enrollment, we forecast a significant expansion of the collection’s user base. As the materials restricted to J.D. Williams Library computers were first mounted during this article’s writing, usage statistics on these materials were unavailable for comparison.

Regardless of the copyright implications, prioritizing 20th-century materials for digitization is important to meet the needs of undergraduates and scholars. While our digital projects in 19th-century materials continue to expand, we are beginning to counter-balance the proportion of resources to better reflect user needs. Additional 20th-century civil rights materials are queued for digitization in the coming year.

The digitization of integration correspondence is not yet complete. In the coming year, the remainder of the six boxes will undergo the same process, creating a comprehensive resource.

[i] "Civil Rights & Race Relations subject guide", University of Mississippi Archives & Special Collections, accessed September 24, 2010, http://apollo.lib.olemiss.edu/guides/archives_subject_guide/civil-rights

[ii] "Integration of the University of Mississippi", University of Mississippi Archives & Special Collections, accessed September 24, 2010, <http://clio.lib.olemiss.edu/archives/integration.php>

[iii] "*United States v. Mississippi* Interrogatory Answers", University of Mississippi Archives &

Special Collections, accessed September 24, 2010,
http://clio.lib.olemiss.edu/archives/usvms_ia.php

[iv] "Integration of the University of Mississippi" Publicly available materials, University of Mississippi Archives & Special Collections, accessed September 24, 2010,
http://clio.lib.olemiss.edu/archives/integration_open.php

[v] "U.S. Copyright Office - Copyright Law: Chapter 1", accessed September 25, 2010,
<http://www.copyright.gov/title17/92chap1.html>

Jason Kovari serves as Metadata Librarian at Cornell University. Previously, he held the position of Special Collections Digital Initiatives Librarian at the University of Mississippi. Kovari is a member of Rare Books and Manuscript Section of ACRL, serving on various committees and as the RBMS web editor (2011-2012)
