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A Public Good: *Documenting the American South* and Slave Narratives

Documenting the American South (DAS) is an electronic publishing program of the University of North Carolina Library that provides public access to primary source materials related to Southern history, literature, and culture from the colonial period through the first decades of the twentieth century.[1] It includes mainly nineteenth- and early twentieth-century published texts, with large numbers of autobiographies, biographies, essays, travel accounts, poetry, diaries, letters, and memoirs. It also offers a few titles published in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and some manuscripts, images, and audio files. DAS currently includes ten thematic collections.[2]

1. *Documenting the American South*, http://docsouth.unc.edu/.
2. The ten thematic "DocSouth Collections" (http://docsouth.unc.edu/browse/collections.html) are:
   1. *North American Slave Narratives* (http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/): books and articles that document the individual and collective story of African Americans struggling for freedom and human rights in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries.
   2. *First-Person Narratives of the American South* (http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/): a collection of diaries, autobiographies, memoirs, travel accounts, and ex-slave narratives written by Southerners.
   3. *The Library of Southern Literature* (http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/): a wide range of literary works of the American South published before 1924.
   4. *The Southern Homefront, 1861–1865* (http://docsouth.unc.edu/imls/): documents related to all aspects of Southern life during the Civil War, including era maps, broadsides, photographs, printed works, Confederate currency, and manuscript letters and diaries.
   5. *The Church in the Southern Black Community* (http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/): autobiographies, biographies, church documents, sermons, histories, encyclopedias, and other published materials that present a collected history of the way Southern African Americans experienced and transformed Protestant Christianity into the central institution of community life.
   6. *The North Carolina Experience* (http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/): a wide variety of print and manuscript materials that tell the story of the Tar Heel State as seen through representative histories, descriptive accounts, institutional reports, fiction, and other writing.
   7. *Oral Histories of the American South* (http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/): selected oral history interviews gathered by the Southern Oral History Program.
   8. *North Carolinians and the Great War* (http://docsouth.unc.edu/wwi/): a collection that illustrates how World War I shaped the lives of different North Carolinians on the battlefield and on the home front as well as how the state and federal government responded to war-time demands.
   9. *The First Century of the First State University* (http://docsouth.unc.edu/unc/): materials that document the creation and growth of the University of North Carolina during the period 1776–1875.
   10. *True and Candid Compositions: The Lives and Writings of Antebellum Students at the University of North Carolina* (http://docsouth.unc.edu/true/): documents written primarily by students attending the University of North Carolina between 1795 and 1868.

The American South has a unique cultural and historic heritage that sets it apart from the standard American experience. It was built on the principle of white supremacy. It supported the institution of slavery until the middle of the nineteenth century and lost the American Civil War fighting to defend it. It then established a system of segregation that lasted for much of the next century, until the civil rights initiatives of the 1960s dismantled it. As a consequence of these differences, the South developed its own customs, culture, literature, musical styles, and cuisines.

The Humanities Bibliographer who conceived DAS in 1991 and the Social Sciences Bibliographer and Curator of Manuscripts who collaborated with her on writing the vision statement for DAS believed that until recently, scholarship about the South tended to be written primarily by individuals outside the South, who viewed the region and its inhabitants as "other," and perhaps less worthy of serious consideration than mainstream American culture. Thus, an overarching goal for DAS was to develop a database of research materials that would describe the diversity of the American South from the perspective of Southerners.

Building on this concept of the American South as a distinct region, a related goal for DAS was to make accessible works by men and women from the Southern states that represented a wide cross-section of socioeconomic levels, political perspectives, and life experiences. DAS therefore goes beyond the views of the Southern social and economic elite that dominated the print culture of the period to focus on the narratives of heretofore relatively inaccessible populations, including women, African Americans, enlisted men, yeomanry, and laborers. Accounts of life on the farm, in cotton mills, or slave quarters have taken priority over accounts of battles or public lives.

Within the diversity of southerners in terms of class, sex, and race, African Americans occupy a unique place, and DAS has placed a high priority on digitizing materials that present their perspectives. Although the highest concentration of content relating to African Americans in DAS is found in *North American Slave Narratives* and the *Church in the Southern Black Community*, each of the DAS projects contains some materials associated with African Americans and other minorities. For example, a few slave narratives appear in *First Person Narratives of the American South*; *The Southern Homefront* contains materials that illustrate how many segments of the population experienced the war away from the battlefield; *The First Century of the First State University* includes materials that illustrate the roles of slaves in building the university and the attitudes of students towards slaves; *The North Carolina Experience* and *North Carolinians and the Great War* contain materials related to a broad spectrum of society.

The purpose of this article is to outline the underlying objectives, principles, and methods of *North American Slave Narratives*, the signature collection of DAS, be-

cause it represents some of the major issues associated with digitizing content from special collections. We also describe how users have responded to the resources made available to them through DAS. The reception of this content, we believe, illustrates the existence of a wide-ranging audience for the type of primary sources in special collections that DAS has made freely available on the Internet. DAS therefore represents a substantial public good, as well as a service to scholars, and as such it can serve as a potential model for other digitization initiatives associated with special collections.

North American Slave Narratives

Slave narratives document the individual and collective story of the African American struggle for freedom and human rights in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. They represent the only known information about slavery written from the point of view of the slaves themselves. Although often dismissed as antislavery propaganda, the widespread consumption of slave narratives in the nineteenth-century U.S. and Great Britain and their continuing prominence in literature and the historical curricula in American universities today testify to the power of these texts to provoke reflection and debate among their readers, particularly on questions of race, social justice, and the meaning of freedom.

Yet despite the invaluable perspective of first-hand experience they bring to the history, literature, and culture of the South, most slave narratives have been inaccessible to scholars, students, and general readers. The originals are scattered among many repositories, often surviving only in fragile copies. Although some slave narratives were reprinted in the 1960s to support the growing interest in African American studies, they represent only a small fraction of the total number of slave narratives published before 1920. *North American Slave Narratives* was therefore designed to bring as many slave narratives together in one place as possible, so users would have convenient access to these valuable resources.

In creating the slave narrative database, DAS staff addressed a number of issues, only some of which were anticipated. Foremost among them were questions related to the identification and selection of slave narratives for digitization. Decisions also had to be made whether to limit the digitization project to local holdings or include all known slave narratives, even if they had to be borrowed from other libraries. Staff had to develop specific procedures to protect the printed slave narratives from damage during the digitization process and ensure that the electronic versions would be widely and permanently accessible. Finally, they needed to develop ways to publicize the availability of the slave narratives on the Internet and respond to the overwhelming user interest in them.

Intellectual Aspects of the Project

Initial interest in slave narratives arose in the early 1990s, when the Humanities Bibliographer began to look for material that might serve as a pilot project for *Documenting the American South*, and campus events played a role in determining a topic. A number of faculty and students at UNC were advocating for a separate building for a Black cultural center that would highlight African American history and culture.[3] The center would include a library for which a collection would have to be provided. There were debates about whether the Library should be a general reading collection on African American studies assembled mainly from new acquisitions, or a research collection composed of books and serials transferred from other campus collections. A digitization program would provide remote access to materials for students using the Center's library while avoiding expensive duplication of research collections and undesirable transfers.

In addition, the Humanities Bibliographer noticed that slave narratives circulated at an unusually high rate when she reviewed circulation records as part of her collection development responsibilities. Hundreds of students in introductory courses were assigned to read them. Consequently, titles published 150 years ago were circulating six times a year and were at risk of falling apart. She also assumed that materials circulating so frequently at UNC would be heavily used on other campuses, and therefore a digitization project that included those titles would benefit students in colleges and universities around the country. These factors supported slave narratives as an appropriate choice for a pilot project, and, after hiring a temporary Digitization Librarian in 1994 and making her position permanent a year later, DAS published its first work, a slave narrative, on the Internet in 1995.[4]

Selection

Digitization efforts began by scanning and encoding slave narratives held in UNC's collections that had circulated frequently. While use may have been an appropriate selection criterion for a pilot project, because it maximized the probability that the materials would be used in their new format, the limitations of that approach soon became apparent. DAS staff initially digitized whatever edition of the narratives they found in the UNC collections, rather than the best editions of the most important narratives. Staff also found it increasingly difficult to identify the more obscure slave narratives in UNC collections, once those that were better known had been digitized. They needed to find a way to identify slave narratives globally and systematically, and, when there were several editions, select the most appropri-

3. It eventually became the Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History.
4. Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Thomas H. Jones, who was a Slave for Forty-Three Years* (Boston: Printed by Bazin & Chandler, 1862), http://docsouth.unc.edu/jones/menu.html.

ate one for digitization. DAS also had to decide whether to limit digitization efforts to the texts held in UNC's library collections—traditionally the practice of library preservation microforming projects—or identify and digitize as many narratives as possible, irrespective of where the texts were located. Such an approach would follow the example of Chadwyck-Healey's ground-breaking digitization project, *English Poetry*, which had recently appeared (1992).[5] The Chadwyck-Healey project focused on one literary genre, and decisions about which titles to digitize were based on entries in the major bibliography for the field, *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*.[6] Although broad in scope, that project's selective focus enabled users to relate poems in the database to each other in both traditional and new ways that integrated digitized primary texts with powerful searching capabilities. Because the UNC Humanities Bibliographer came from a collection development background, a project with intellectual coherence was more attractive than a serendipitous grouping of titles assembled on the basis of their location. However, at the time there was no standard bibliography of slave narratives to guide the selection of titles.

Fortunately for DAS, William L. Andrews, E. Maynard Adams Professor of English, joined the English Department at UNC during the pilot phase of the project while staff were just beginning to digitize the slave narratives. Dr. Andrew's field of expertise was African American literature before 1930, and he was intrigued by DAS' efforts to make slave narratives freely available over the Internet. Andrews had spent two decades establishing the major bibliography of separately published slave narratives in English, and his work was nearing completion. He volunteered to assist DAS with the project and offered the criteria he had used in compiling the bibliography as a guide for selecting slave narratives.

The first and major section of Andrews' bibliography consisted of an almost complete listing of the first editions of autobiographies by slaves or ex-slaves produced in English from the middle of the eighteenth century to 1920. It also included later editions that represented substantial revisions or expansions of an original text. He limited titles to separately published items, although they might be works of varying length, ranging from one-page broadsides to multivolume memoirs. In general, the bibliography did not include slave narratives that appeared in serial publications; autobiographical writings published only as introductions or appendices to books; collections of letters, diaries, reminiscences; or interviews published in periodicals.

5. *English Poetry* (http://collections.chadwyck.com/infoCentre/products/about_ilc.jsp) is the most comprehensive electronic archive of English poetry available.

6. *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, edited by George Watson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969–1972).

The conditions under which a number of early black autobiographies were written, Andrews pointed out, made the goal of distinguishing between first- and third-person genres problematic. A large number were "dictated," "edited," "corrected," or outright ghostwritten narratives of either unlettered slaves or free black people who, for one reason or another, felt obliged to enter into collaborative relationships with white writers. Andrews' bibliography did not attempt to determine the degree of authorship for the subject or the editor of any slave or ex-slave autobiography. Whether a slave or ex-slave dictated or wrote an autobiography, whether that text was transcribed or edited by another, Andrews' bibliography treated the slave or ex-slave represented as the "I" who narrates the events of his or her life as the author of that life story.[7]

The second section of the bibliography listed separately-published biographies about slaves. Unlike the first section, Andrews did not aim for this part of the bibliography to be complete. Instead, it consisted of a representative sampling of texts published as individual biographical monographs and pamphlets, books of biographical sketches, historical volumes that contain a significant proportion of biographical narratives, and substantial biographical introductions to editions of authors' works. Andrews did not list eulogies, because he believed they belonged more to the sermonic than to the biographical narrative tradition. He also excluded from this part of the bibliography other non-narrative forms, such as the commemorative speech, the newspaper, magazine, or journal article, and the obituary, even though they were sometimes used for biographical purposes. Generally in this section he listed only the first editions of works that went through several printings.[8]

The antislavery movement in the nineteenth century generated a number of narratives about slavery that were subsequently revealed to be fictitious or heavily fictionalized, although they were sometimes based on an actual case or person. Some of them were even widely read. Therefore, in the final section of the bibliography Andrews included a few of the better known fictitious or highly fictionalized narratives that purported to be the life stories of slaves or former slaves but were either wholesale inventions or so novelized that the preponderance of the text constituted invention rather than historical fact.

Andrews not only offered his bibliography for the selection of slave narratives for digitization, but also agreed to serve as series editor for the project. With his sup-

7. For more information on the roles of editors and amanuenses in the production of slave narratives, see William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760–1865* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); specifically see "Annotated Bibliography of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760–1865," 333–34.

8. For a listing of African American biography from its beginnings to the Depression, see William L. Andrews, "Annotated Bibliography of Afro-American Biography, 1760-1930," *Resources for American Literary Study*, 12 (Autumn 1982): 119–33.

port, DAS submitted a successful application to the National Endowment for the Humanities to digitize, encode, and publish 200 slave and ex-slave narratives, along with a complete bibliography on the Internet. This collaboration with Andrews was the principal reason for the high quality and scholarly integrity of the project.

Edition Choice

As work began on the narratives, staff encountered several editorial problems, and Andrews suggested that a consultant be brought in to discuss options. DAS engaged Peter Shillingsburg, Associate Director of Graduate Studies and Research at Lamar University, who had authored a number of works on scholarly editing and was especially interested in electronic editions. Shillingsburg did an extensive review of the slave narrative Web site and made several substantive suggestions.[9]

Shillingsburg thought the project was missing a rationale for selecting an edition to digitize when there were multiple editions. From studying the pilot project Web site, he got the impression that the specific edition of a slave narrative chosen for digitization was based primarily on whether it happened to be in the UNC library or could withstand the handling required by the digitization process. He argued that, while these matters were useful archival considerations, they were not important intellectual ones. Instead, he proposed choosing an edition that had some special significance: it was supervised by the author; was the one that made the work famous; was the revision that showed the greatest care in preparation; or was a modern scholarly edition that established the text according to an acceptable standard.

In his comments Shillingsburg raised several other concerns about text preparation. He worried about the inaccuracies associated with OCR scanning and the corrections staff might make while proof reading. He preferred data entry by keyboarding, because he thought it more accurate for nineteenth-century texts. In any case, he believed that if the project wished to provide an accurate transcription, then the errors of the original had to be preserved. If, however, errors in the original were corrected, some statement about their correction should appear on the Web site. The articulation of a policy was required to guarantee the integrity of the text for users.

Shillingsburg thought that the overall goals of the slave narrative project were generally sound and hoped that all associated with such projects, conceived as a means of getting texts out and available to users far from special collections repositories,

9. E-mail message about "Editorial Procedures" from: Peter Shillingsburg to William L. Andrews, Aug. 4, 1998.

would remember that the quality of the transcriptions had a direct impact on the quality of their use. Professor Schillingsburg's comments helped DAS staff become more aware of the importance of identifying appropriate editions, developing a clear policy and context for choosing among them, and implementing procedures that protected and ensured the integrity of the text during the digitization process.

Duplication

Another issue related to the intellectual aspects of the project was whether to digitize slave narratives in the bibliography that already existed in electronic format on other Web sites. The question arose regarding slave narratives that were available as part of "African American Women Writers of the 19th Century" in the *Digital Schomburg Collection* of the New York Public Library.[10] As in the DAS project, the materials were double-keyed and encoded using SGML. In a quick comparison of the Schomburg list of digitized titles and the bibliography of slave narratives for the DAS NEH project, the Principal Investigator found that the Schomburg had already digitized ten of the titles UNC had planned to digitize, including the Harriet Jacobs title, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

Initially, UNC library administrators proposed linking to the Digital Schomburg Collection Web site and any others that might emerge as having slave narratives, rather than duplicating these projects' digitization efforts. Such an approach would illustrate the power of linking on the Web and perhaps serve as a model of a "virtual collection" of texts on linked sites. These administrators also thought that this approach would have greater appeal for funding agencies, because it would take greater advantage of networking technology. However, the Series Editor was more reluctant: "I'm not sure about letting their texts substitute for ours because I don't know how carefully they are doing their texts. But links to them for our home page make a lot of sense, especially now, when we're still relatively new."[11] In time, however, Andrews became convinced that UNC should digitize all of the slave narratives and include them on the DAS Web site. His concerns were related to possible differences in the principles that guided other projects—there were no assurances that other projects involved qualified scholarly advisors, chose the correct editions, scanned them accurately, or encoded them as comprehensively as DAS planned to do. Another important factor in the rationale was that when all the narratives were in one intellectually coherent database, users could find results with a single search that would not be possible with linked texts residing on separate servers. For these reasons, DAS decided to duplicate texts for the slave narrative project.

10. African American Women Writers of the 19th Century," http://digital.nypl.org/schomburg/writers_aa19/toc.html.

11. E-mail message from William L. Andrews to Patricia Buck Dominguez regarding the "Schomburg Digital Collection," May 15, 1998.

Time has validated this decision. Positive comments from users reinforce the value of having the narratives on a single site in a common format with similar encoding and quality control standards. DAS does not take the position, however, that this approach is necessary or desirable for all projects. It may in fact be most applicable to projects dealing with the primary materials of disciplines based on canonical texts, especially literature.

The resolution of this matter further demonstrated the slave narrative project's move away from more typical library mass preservation (now digitization) projects and even beyond the more selective, collection development approach to digitization. Instead, the new model had more in common with publishing. Andrews' role, for example, was similar to that of faculty editors for books in series published by scholarly presses.[12] In adopting a publishing model for DAS, librarians relinquished to the faculty some control of projects that required a substantial investment of library resources. However, over the long term the publishing model has proved to be an effective approach for selectively digitizing materials from special collections based on their subject, format, or topic. All DAS projects undertaken since the slave narratives have had either series editors or faculty advisors to make the scholarly decisions necessary to guarantee their intellectual quality.

Another element of the publishing model was the provision of supporting materials that enhanced the value of the primary texts for users. In addition to his "Scholarly Bibliography of Slave and Ex-Slave Narratives,"[13] Andrews included a general "Introduction to the Slave Narrative"[14] that not only explains their importance for African Americans but also shows how significantly they have influenced the literature, history, and culture of Americans of all races. Andrews also added supplementary materials to some of the individual narratives, including annotations written by students from his first-year seminar on "Slavery and Freedom in African American Literature and Film;[15] a biographical essay and other materials on Harriet A. Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*;[16] his

12. As Pat Dominguez pointed out to Marcella Grendler in an e-mail message regarding "DAS editorial issues," March 22, 1999.

13. Scholarly Bibliography of Slave and Ex-Slave Narratives, http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/biblintro.html.

14. "An Introduction to the Slave Narrative," http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/intro.html.

15. Annotations, written by students from Professor William L. Andrews' First-Year Seminar on Slavery and Freedom in African American Literature and Film, and revised by Prof. Andrews are available at the following URLs: http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/drumgoold/menu.html; http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/grandy/menu.html; http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jackson/menu.html; http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/bruner/menu.html; http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/watson/menu.html; http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/lanelunsford/menu.html.

16. Andrews added his biographical essay, "Harriet A. Jacobs (Harriet Ann), 1813–1897" (http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/bio.html). The Web site also includes a variety of other useful materials.

introduction to Friday Jones' *Days of Bondage*,[17] and excerpts from his "Introduction" to *From Fugitive Slave to Free Man: The Autobiographies of William Wells Brown*.[18] DAS staff also provided biographical sketches of the slave narrative authors and summaries of the titles to make them more accessible. The UNC Press generously gave permission for DAS to include materials from reference works for which it held copyright. The value of these additions became more evident as it became clear that the majority of DAS users were members of the general public, rather than the academic community, and their comments about these enhancements revealed their appreciation for the information.

Practical Aspects of the Project

Borrowing

The decision to digitize all known slave narratives rather than only those held in the UNC collections had major implications for the cost and complexity of the project. About half of the printed narratives were held by the UNC, Duke, North Carolina Central, and North Carolina State University collections, where agreements through the Triangle Research Libraries Network (TRLN) and personal relationships between librarians facilitated the borrowing of these materials. The remaining texts had to be acquired from other libraries, however, which often proved problematic. During the first year of the grant, DAS staff secured fewer than 50 titles through Interlibrary Loan (ILL) from non-TRLN libraries, because most narratives were housed in special collections that did not participate in ILL. During the second year of the grant, staff spent considerable time identifying libraries holding the preferred editions of slave narratives and requesting them from library directors through a letter sent over the UNC University Librarian's signature. Most responded positively, although in some cases UNC's request appeared to be the first time anyone had asked to borrow materials from special collections in order to digitize them, and the librarians wanted to establish policies for loaning materials for digitization before making the materials available to UNC. Some requests had to be sent out several times, and there were a few refusals. Generally, however, librarians were supportive, and DAS was able to secure almost all of the narratives needed from other libraries. Without the cooperation of special collections curators around the country, DAS' comprehensive collection of slave narratives on one Web site would not have been possible.

17. Andrews' introduction to the Friday Jones' *Days of Bondage* is "The Spirit of Friday Jones," http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/fjones/support2.html.

18. From Andrews' "Introduction" to *From Fugitive Slave to Free Man: The Autobiographies of William Wells Brown* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 2003.), http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/brownw/support1.html.

Preservation and Conservation

Although Schillingsburg's primary interests revolved around textual issues, he acknowledged the archival importance of digitizing only those narratives that could withstand the process. Following his recommendation, DAS worked with the UNC Preservation Librarian to set up procedures to review all slave narratives from general collections before they were digitized in order to ensure that they would not be damaged in the digitization process. He referred those items that seemed particularly at risk to the Library's Conservator for evaluation. The Conservator not only examined these titles, but all slave narratives from special collections as soon as they arrived, specified how the items were to be handled during digitization, and prepared a treatment proposal for any title that needed it. If the text had been borrowed from another library, she forwarded the treatment proposal to the lending library for review prior to digitization, and, with their permission, performed the proposed treatment on the work after it was digitized. Because many of the materials were in fragile condition, this process provided critically important reassurance to librarians in special collections who were lending their slave narratives to DAS. Indeed, many of them would not have loaned UNC their texts had this process not been in place and had the Library's Preservation Officer and Conservator not been so highly respected in their fields.

Access

DAS ensured extensive and continuing access to the slave narratives by using digitization standards, encoding conventions, full cataloging, and publicity. For the pilot project, DAS used SGML/TEI standards to ensure the widest possible access to slave narratives over the longest period of time. The full-scale slave narrative project continued this approach, and the database was subsequently migrated to XML.[19] Texts were encoded following in-house guidelines based on recommendations for "basic content analysis" (level four) and the Digital Library Federation's *TEI Text Encoding in Libraries: Guidelines for Best Encoding Practices*, which also contained detailed descriptions of all tags used in DAS collections, along with several samples from texts.[20]

19. The texts have now been fully encoded in XML, following migration of the legacy database from SGML.

20. The text files included all pictorial materials within a text, e.g., covers, spine, frontispiece, title page, verso, and illustrations. DAS adopted encoding conventions that suited the materials digitized. Generally they included the following rules: 1) the preservation of original grammar, punctuation, and spelling; 2) the preservation of typographical errors in the text and their identification in red type; 3) the inclusion of textual features such as original pagination and emphasized words (e.g., bold, italic); 4) the insertion of all footnotes at the point of reference within paragraphs. Several features would not be preserved: 1) hyphens occurring in the line breaks were removed, and the trailing part of a word joined to the preceding line; 2) line indentations; 3) running titles; and 4) catchwords appearing on every page of the original. A more complete statement about the encoding guidelines used by DAS can be found at docsouth.unc.edu/support/guidelines/encoding.html.

Cataloging for the project was provided by the UNC Library Catalog Department. It consists of individual full MARC records for each text, along with a record for the overall Web site, *North American Slave Narratives*. This combined approach enables other libraries to download a self-contained set of records for the project, along with some processing by OCLC, to provide customized local information. Records for DAS titles are available through "OCLC WorldCat Collection Sets."[21] The records were also submitted through BIBCO, the monographic bibliographic record component of the Program for Cooperative Cataloging. Since UNC catalogers often work with primary materials, backed by excellent general and reference collections in the subject area, they have been able to establish many of the more obscure and complicated names with attendant cross-referencing structures to help anchor future cataloging practice in this area.

Publicity

North American Slave Narratives received considerable publicity, originating with a press release prepared by the UNC News Bureau that was picked up by a number of local newspapers across the state. The narratives seemed to strike a chord with journalists, who were especially interested in the individual stories of slaves surviving the unspeakable conditions of servitude with dignity and fortitude. The Associated Press wrote several stories about the project. The Raleigh *News and Observer* published a feature story that was carried by other newspapers in the South. Stories appeared in the *New York Times* and even the French newspaper *Le Monde*. The narratives were also featured in a local PBS program. Because of the power of their stories to document an important perspective on the region's racial history and contribute to the ongoing dialogue on race in the South, the slave narratives have received far more publicity and public attention than any other DAS project.

In addition to the press, the slave narratives were promoted through presentations by staff at professional meetings. Although DAS is composed of a number of segments, the slave narratives usually provoke the most interest and questions from the audience, many of whom have added links to DAS from their Web pages. A few, including Appalachian State University and East Carolina University, have taken steps to mount similar projects focused on the South that reflect to some degree DAS' influence.

DAS' most effective promotional activity to special audiences is through summer workshops for middle and high school social science teachers. Cheryl Bolick, Assistant Professor in the UNC School of Education, designed these workshops to

21. OCLC WorldCat Collection Sets, http://collectionsets.oclc.org/JustLooking?cmd=displayElectronicSets.

familiarize teachers with the content of DAS and the potential teaching opportunities it presents. The workshops cover all segments of DAS, but because the teachers see the greatest number of possible "lessons" in this material, the slave narratives receive the most attention. The series editors and faculty advisors for the various DAS projects lecture on content, while the librarians provide an overview of the DAS Web site and lead sessions on searching strategies. Bolick facilitates discussions on ways to integrate DAS into the classroom. Although the most time is spent at workstations or in lectures during these workshops, the high point for many teachers is to go to the Rare Book Collection to see examples of the printed texts laid out on tables where they can touch and use them. This direct exposure to primary source materials is a new experience for some teachers and enhances their understanding of the subject matter they teach. For the librarians and curators involved, this type of program opens a new avenue for exposure and use of the resources in their collections. It is especially gratifying for staff, because they realize that teaching teachers will have a strong ripple effect.

User Reaction to Materials

DAS' original goal was to provide a database of texts primarily for the use of faculty, students, and researchers in the field of Southern studies. The database would, of course, be free to anyone with access to the Internet, and DAS staff assumed that there would be some interest beyond the academic community, but they did not anticipate the overwhelming interest in DAS on the part of the general public.

DAS is a heavily used database. In 2006, DAS tabulated 58,791,745 hits, which converts to 5,394,139 user sessions or 14,738 sessions a day, an average of more than six sessions a day for each title in the database. In addition to the high volume of use, the public uses the database in many different ways. A rough breakdown of 3,280 user comments sent to DAS prior to April 2006 shows that 15 percent are from users affiliated with institutions of higher education; 7 percent from K–12; and 78 percent from the "general public," a broad category that includes all users not associated with higher education or K–12.[22] Included in "general public" are professional journalists, curators of museum and historic houses, amateur genealogists, local and family historians, and casual readers. Forty-four percent of all comments pose reference questions, and 13 percent

22. This is not the place for a technical discussion of two important questions regarding this data: 1) To what extent do the number of comments reflect actual use of DAS? and 2) How accurate are the classification of comments into categories, achieved mostly through inferences from statements or clues in the comments themselves? The general public category was probably somewhat overstated, as it tended to be a default category when there was not irrefutable evidence to place the comment in K–12 or higher education. The authors estimate that a reasonable adjustment would bring the proportion of general public comments down to between 65 to 70 percent, still a much higher proportion than anticipated.

request permissions of various kinds.[23] The breadth and diversity of this user base has led DAS to think of the project not only as a service to scholarship but, perhaps even more important, as a public good. The slave narratives are a heavily used part of the DAS database, and although DAS does not track user data by thematic segments, many of the comments relate to slave narratives. They are also among the most frequently accessed titles and appear to be important to all user categories.

K–12 teachers state that they use the digitized slave narratives to improve their own background when the originals are not available to them. One teacher writes, for example: "I am a social studies teacher who greatly enjoys your site. I find it invaluable for my reading of 19th-century African American writers and other notables. This site has greatly increased my knowledge and understanding of the era and the slave narrative … I live and teach in Indiana, and these online works are not readily available in this area. For me to have the opportunity to read these works, I would have to travel great distances, if it were not for your site. Thanks again and keep up the good work …" Several teachers mention the usefulness of the narratives during Black Heritage Month and said they assigned them for supplementary reading. There are also comments from a number of parents who home school their children. While K–12 is already an active user group, DAS staff believes it could be greatly increased with more workshops for teachers.

In the college and university category, faculty comments seem to indicate that they use DAS primarily for instruction, rather than their own research. Several faculty say that the full collection of slave narratives is especially useful for training students in the use of primary sources: "I am using your site in a U.S. survey course. I have found these Internet sites a great way to provide primary reading for students at a low cost. I also enjoyed sending them to a site that offers a variety of choices, because even though I may only assign one reading, they often browse several (just like I used to browse in the physical stacks of the library!)." These kinds of observations tend to come primarily from colleges and smaller universities without major research collections.

Graduate students are very heavy users and write the majority of the academic comments. They describe how DAS has been useful for seminar papers, master's theses, and dissertation research. Some even say that the availability of texts in DAS has helped them to define their dissertation topics and led them to do research that

23. For more information on our user comments, see *Keep up the Good Work(s): Readers Comment on Documenting the American South*, selected and with a preface by Joe A. Hewitt; ed. by Judith M. Panitch. *Documenting the American South*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library, 2002 <http://docsouth.unc.edu/support/about/readers.pdf>.

otherwise would not have been possible. A significant number of these graduate student users seem to be engaged in interdisciplinary fields such as women's studies, African American studies, and cultural studies. Like the faculty, graduate student comments come predominately from institutions without strong research collections in Southern studies.

When students from large universities comment on DAS, they sometimes say that while they initially found the title in their university's OPAC; and although their library has the title in print format, it is a great convenience to have access to the electronic text through DAS: "This is an amazing online resource for students, scholars, and researchers. I am a 3rd-year graduate student who focuses on 19th c. African American literature and intellectual history, and your website is a virtual 'gold mine' for me … I appreciate the easy access to early African American writing that your website provides, and I wish you well as you continue with this important project." A higher proportion of graduate students suggest improvements than do users in other categories. Students from library and information science programs in particular ask technical and management questions about DAS and make occasional suggestions for its improvement.

The majority of the international comments come from the higher education sector, often from foreign institutions with American studies programs but without Southern collections. There is a particular interest among international users in the slave narratives and Southern literature segments of DAS. One student wrote: "I am a student from the United Kingdom. I am currently studying American Studies as part of my degree at university and I am writing a paper on the complexities of master-slave relations through American history. I found your page to be of great help when looking for accounts of how slaves were treated by their masters and how slave owners treated their slaves." In a similar vein, a student in France explained, "I am currently doing an English master's in France. My thesis is on the significance of the woman's slave narrative in the abolitionist movement. I have found your website very useful. With your research, I was able to get a hold of essential narratives for my study."

The higher education sector was DAS' original target audience, and DAS staff believes that the goal of serving academic researchers in Southern studies has been fully achieved, as evidenced by testimonials from UNC's own students and faculty in Southern studies, user e-mail comments, and the large number of library and other academic sites that link to DAS. In addition, numerous scholars who have come to programs and conferences sponsored by UNC's Center for the Study of the American South and fellows at the National Humanities Center who utilize UNC's resources attest to the significant role that DAS plays in their work.

But the largest number of comments received comes from the general public, who use DAS in a wide variety of ways, beginning with genealogy or family history. Others are writing novels, plays, or movie scripts and use the information in DAS to provide background and context for their creative efforts. Some are museum curators or docents at plantations or other historic sites; others are independent scholars doing research. Most of the public comments, however, come from general readers seeking personal enhancement through a better understanding of the past. In some cases they initially came to DAS for specific information but were fascinated by what they found and returned to study the material more deeply. They especially appreciate the fact that DAS texts provide a more authentic and layered experience of the past than do the secondary sources to which they are accustomed. As one reader writes, the slave narratives and other firsthand accounts in DAS have led him to "a fluent empathy for the everyday lives of the past," a comment that expresses the reactions of a great many of the general public readers to DAS.

Many readers are deeply touched by the narratives. A white person writes: "Finding your website today has renewed my spirit and I feel refreshed, to be able to continue to challenge the somnambulence that overtakes me when I forget our human history … The next time some revisionist says to me that slave owners didn't do such bad things, I have the information and a tool to challenge that ignorance, with specific details about what a realistic portrayal of slavery looks like."

African Americans, for obvious reasons, are even more deeply affected. One writes, "Just recently found your website … I have just begun to explore and read the passages; however, I can say that I am thrilled to find it and look forward to exploring all the links. I am hungry for detailed information on the life of slaves and what they endured during their confinement. It disturbs me immensely that our younger generation knows so little of our history and takes our priceless freedom for granted. The cruelty that was imposed on our ancestors cannot be forgotten. Thanks for ensuring that this information be available for all who are searching …"

Another African American comments, "I am a reporter in Washington, D.C. I have your slave narrative website bookmarked at work and at home. I try to read excerpts at least once a day. This should be required reading for all Americans and taught in schools. Unfortunately it is not. Reading about the severe racism and hardships of the past I now understand what my forefathers endured and I am filled with a mixture of awe but also disappointment. The emotions are so conflicting. I'm proud we endured this as a people but at the same time I wish there had been more resistance, although the daily violence, starvation, and general ill treatment probably made this almost impossible."

The following somewhat lengthy comment illustrates the persistent and long-term appeal of the slave narratives:

> Dear University of North Carolina DocSouth Staff; as emotional as it may sound, I would like to sincerely thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for the information you've made available to the public in general and to me in particular.
>
> Being Black, I of course was familiar as well as curious about slavery but my view of it was greatly distorted because it was based primarily on the sanitized versions put forth by books, television, and movies; so as a consequence, my view of the American slaves was arrogant, reviling, and condescending because I could not only understand why they put up with such treatment but boldly proclaimed in my ignorance "I would [not] have done!!!"
>
> As far as my usage, to this day, I don't know how I happened upon your website but I know it was around 1996–1997 during a particularly tumultuous period of my life. I had little else to do but entertain myself learning about this new thing called the internet. While "surfing" I must have come across "slave narratives" for some reason, I don't remember now. I think the first "slave narrative" I read was by William Wells Brown and I [was] mesmerized.
>
> "I'd heard of the narratives of Frederick Douglas and Booker T. Washington but these were mild compared to the ones of Charles Ball or William Wells Brown and I could not stop reading other authors of slave narratives and correspondingly the reality of that time became even more real to me.
>
> I became caught up in their words and the reality of the world of the 19th century became real to me; and then I understood how wrong my sanitized view of slavery was and I understood theirs was DEFINITELY an entirely different perspective and what I take for granted today—simply wasn't available to them.
>
> I then began to think of the people at the University of North Carolina who'd patiently compiled such a wealth of information; and I was grateful to you for your time and effort.
>
> I thought how you may think you're performing a thankless humdrum task—but if my small note has any significance, please know that that is as

> far from being the truth as was my sanitized view of slavery was prior to reading the slave narratives you made available to me.
>
> I'm not particularly inclined to want to search out my ancestors because it might depress me and I'd rather let that go. However, because of your work, I know my past in that I know where I'm from, and who I am, because I understand much better the world in which my ancestors lived.
>
> Although at least 10 years in coming, thank you, very, very much.

It is clear that the digitized slave narratives exert a strong appeal to a broad range of the general public and serve a need that has not been well met by libraries and special collection repositories in the past. DAS staff therefore believe that the digitization of materials from special collections related to minority populations can result in a substantial public good.

A final point regarding general readers is worthy of note. Many public readers share the academic values of the higher education community as evidenced by their statements of appreciation for the selectivity of the collection, the careful encoding and proofreading, the search capabilities, and the high quality of the organization and presentation of the database. They are aware of the time-consuming and costly nature of a digitization project of this kind and are grateful for the effort involved. They express their trust in a site affiliated with a reputable library and university and show gratitude to the library for making the materials available freely on the Internet. Many users remark that they did not have access to collections such as these in the past nor, in some cases, even knew of their existence. They now feel privileged and empowered to be able to use resources that previously seemed reserved for professional researchers and therefore out of reach to members of the general public. Based on a large number of e-mail comments to DAS, it is clear that providing access to slave narratives and similar collections of primary sources has had a democratizing effect that is recognized and appreciated by the public. Furthermore, DAS staff are convinced that the appeal of the project to a popular audience has not come at the cost of its usefulness to the academic community nor its reputation as a scholarly project.

Conclusion

Since it began in 1994, DAS has evolved from a library digitization project committed to selectivity and quality to a digital publishing program. For the most part, however, DAS has maintained its original focus. It represents an approach to the digitization of materials in special collections that is selective and thematic, rather than collection based, relies on highly engaged scholarly editors, follows high-

quality and rather expensive production and encoding procedures, and develops supplementary materials to add value and assist readers in using the digital collections. The host library answers a large number of reference questions originating with users of DAS and sponsors workshops for teachers. It is not an inexpensive approach to digitization, but DAS has demonstrated that it is a valuable service to scholarship and a substantial public good.

Projects such as DAS reveal that the academic research library is uniquely situated to pursue a digital publishing program based on collections of primary sources in a format that has both high academic quality and broad appeal. As custodians of the collections from which the digital texts are drawn, librarians have access to faculty who can serve as scholarly editors and advisers. They have the bibliographic and technical expertise as well as the computing capacity to mount such a program, and they have the requisite knowledge of users and their needs. In some cases, they also have access to endowed funds to ensure the continuation of such programs. For these reasons, the UNC Libraries have recently assessed their position on digitization and determined that DAS continues to represent a legitimate approach that should be maintained and developed further as one among many coordinated digitization activities and programs.