

Library Initiative Confronts Challenges of Human Rights Documentation and Research

by CHRISTIAN KELLEHER

“Documents #2, 12, 29, 30, 32, 36, 37, 38, and 39 have been exempted from declassification under sections 1.4(c) and 3.3(b)(1) of Executive Order 12958, as amended by E.O. 13292.”

—U.S. National Archives response to a request to declassify documents related to Pinochet’s coup in Chile

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THE HUMAN RIGHTS DISCOURSE and scholarship on the University of Texas campus recently gained a new resource with the UT Libraries Human Rights Documentation Initiative (HRDI), housed at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection.

Human rights has long been an important part of the Benson Collection’s holdings, including everything from original slave documents from Colombia and transcripts of *desaparecidos* trials in Argentina to the *Nunca Más* publications from various Latin American truth and reconciliation commissions. But a more formal concerted effort was begun when the UT School of Law’s Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice began working with the Benson Collection and UT Libraries on the archives of American diplomat George Lister.

Lister, once called “Mr. Human Rights” by historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., was the first Human Rights Officer appointed to the Department of State’s Bureau of Inter-American Affairs. His personal archive spanned his sixty-year career and included materials from Colombia, Haiti, and Chile during Pinochet’s coup in 1973. Rapoport Center director

Karen Engle had been approached by Lister’s estate with an offered donation of the papers, and she contacted the Benson Collection as a home for the archive. What followed included months of cataloging, a conference, a Web site, and the confiscation by the National Archives of numerous documents marked “secret,” “classified,” and “eyes only.” The library, with the help of Peter Kornbluh at George Washington University’s National Security Archive, is still involved in efforts to restore documents determined to be “exempt” from declassification.

The library’s work with the Rapoport Center and the National Security Archive also led to the acquisition of the Edmund Horman and Joyce Horman papers. During Pinochet’s coup, the Chilean military disappeared and murdered American journalist Charles Horman. Charles’s wife, Joyce, and father, Edmund, searched for clues during his disappearance, and for answers after his body was found. Their efforts included the famously known suit against Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and other State Department officials for complicity in Charles’s detention and death.

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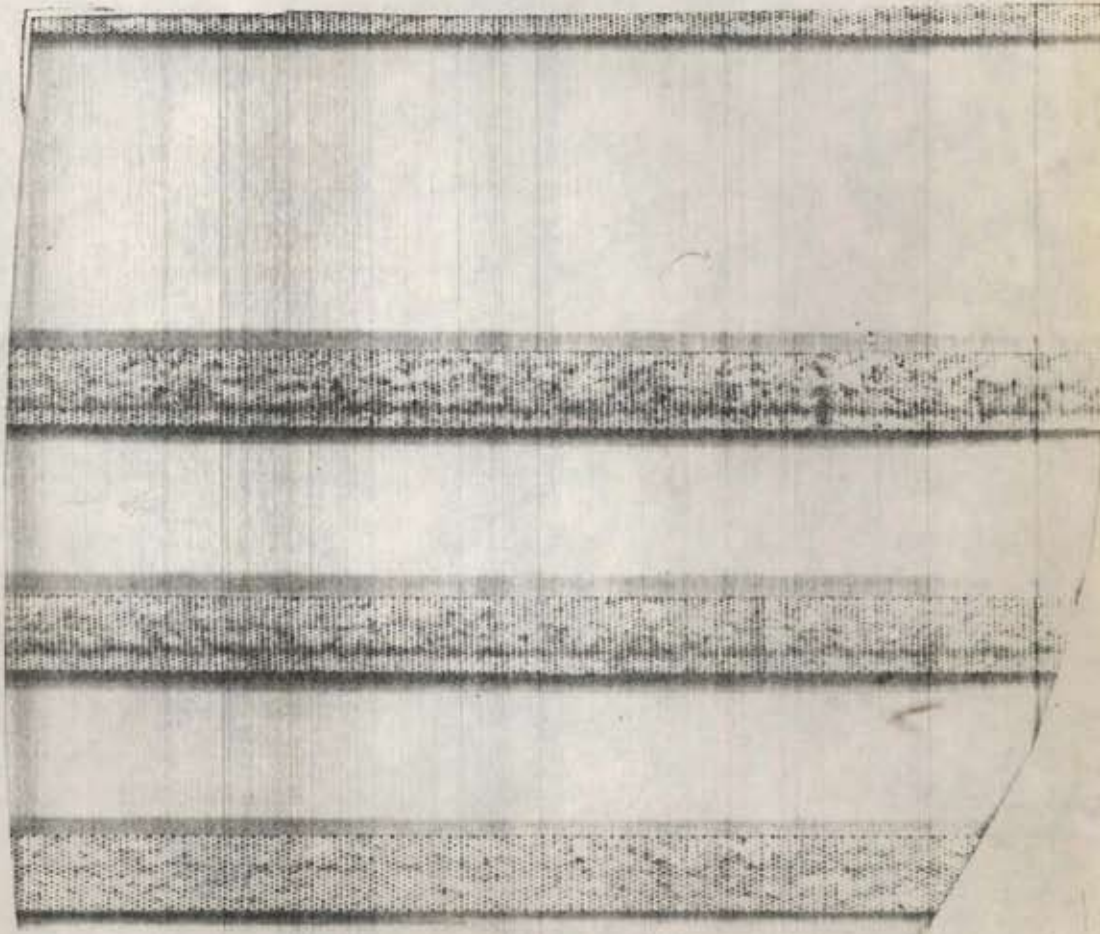
Johnson

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August 25, 1976

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TO: ARA - Mr. Shlaudeman
THROUGH: ARA - Ambassador Ryan
FROM: ARA/BC - R.V. Fimbres/R.S. Driscoll/W.V. Robertson
SUBJECT: Charles Horman Case.



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The Horman archive makes available to researchers at UT many records of the legal suit, documents attained through Edmund Horman's numerous Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, and behind-the-scenes documentation of the film *Missing*, director Costa-Gavras's award-winning retelling of Charles's disappearance that significantly influenced the American public's awareness of human rights and U.S. foreign policy. Interviewed for a DVD re-release of *Missing*, the National Security Archive's Peter Kornbluh noted how the Hormans' story "brings the viewer to the nexus of U.S. intervention in Chile, the human rights violations, and the rights of American citizens." Kornbluh and Joyce Horman visited UT for the opening of the Horman archive, a screening of *Missing* with Q&A, and a symposium on human rights in Chile held at the Benson Collection. Rapoport Center director Karen Engle, who sponsored the symposium, has remarked, "We rarely engage in an academic or advocacy project in which we don't find an opportunity either to take advantage of the work already done by the Human Rights Documentation Initiative or to expand its reach."

Global Initiative

As the Benson Collection's efforts to document human rights conflicts in Latin America were increasing, University of Texas Libraries Director and Vice Provost Dr. Fred Heath was busy building support for a larger scale human rights project. With the help of a \$1 million grant from the Bridgeway Foundation in Houston, the Human Rights Documentation Initiative inaugurated work in Africa with a project to preserve and provide access to the archives of the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre (KGMC) in Rwanda. HRDI's primary goal is to collect and conserve the most fragile records of genocide and other human rights violations, including audio and video recordings that may be deteriorating under imperfect storage conditions—or even may be at risk of malicious loss. Just one week before HRDI project staff first traveled to Rwanda, the KGMC had suffered a grenade attack that tragically killed a security guard at the center. Their unique records of the Rwandan Genocide, including video testimonies from survivors and recordings of local *gacaca* court proceedings against perpetrators, which had been sitting in hot and humid storage conditions, were in danger of catastrophic loss. In partnership with KGMC, the HRDI began a program to digitize and catalog these historical resources in Kigali in order to ensure their long-term preservation in the UT Libraries' digital archive.

Noncustodial Approach

In 2009 the UT Libraries hired human rights archivist T-Kay Sangwand to implement the HRDI's archival strategies. A graduate of UCLA where she studied Information Science and Latin American Studies, Sangwand quickly adopted HRDI's noncustodial archives model framework designed to improve access to human rights records held at other organizations for students and faculty on the UT campus. At the same time, this archival strategy was designed to support local capacity building for the grassroots nonprofit, local museum, or activist organization that created and maintained the original records.

The noncustodial archives model departs from traditional archives because it does not require that records be physically transported to Austin. That practice would separate archives from the institutional context of their original creation and use, and also run afoul of

international efforts to maintain the local community or country's historical patrimony. The noncustodial archive and library uses digital surrogates to preserve and provide access to audio, video, photographs, manuscripts, and publications. It promotes the availability of resources to students and scholars at UT, and simultaneously builds the information infrastructure in international communities while safeguarding their history against the damage that time, the environment, and changing politics may inflict.

This noncustodial approach is currently being applied to a nascent partnership between HRDI and the Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen (MUPI) in El Salvador. Human rights archivist Sangwand recently traveled to MUPI where she met with the museum's founder and director Carlos Henríquez Consalvi "Santiago" with the goal to digitize, catalog, index, preserve, and promote access to their historical recordings of Radio Venceremos. Radio Venceremos was the influential underground radio station associated with the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) that broadcast from a portable transmitter during the Salvadoran civil war (see related story p. 37). Often directly involved in the conflict, Radio Venceremos regularly reported from scenes of battles or massacres. "Santiago," one of the most prominent voices of Radio Venceremos, was the first to broadcast news of the infamous massacre at El Mozote where the Salvadoran army's Atlacatl Battalion killed hundreds of men, women, and children. Radio Venceremos was also the first to broadcast the voice of the only survivor from El Mozote, Rufina Amaya. These historic first-hand accounts reside on the original cassette tapes in El Salvador, but until now have not been cataloged, indexed, or accessible to researchers outside of MUPI.

According to archivist Sangwand, "MUPI was very interested in working with the HRDI because of the organizations' mutual goals of preserving and providing access to invaluable, yet fragile, primary source documentation of human rights struggles for the education of future generations." With the support of HRDI, MUPI will receive equipment, training, and funding to enable the on-site digitization of the audio recordings. UT Libraries will also provide technical infrastructure and bandwidth, which MUPI does not currently have locally, for open access to the audio collection on the Internet. By project end, UT students and faculty will have direct access to the historical recordings of the Radio Venceremos archive. MUPI, whose collections also include film and video, oral history testimonies, thousands of photographs, a collection on the 1932 Salvadoran peasant uprising, and much more, will have built the local technical capacity to develop this audio material and other information resources.

Karen Engle of the Rapoport Center has remarked that the work of the HRDI "is central to our goal of having one of the country's finest interdisciplinary programs in human rights." By bringing together organizations like the Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen and the Kigali Genocide Memorial Center with students, faculty, and researchers at UT in collaboration with the Rapoport Center, LLILAS, and other area studies centers, the Human Rights Documentation Initiative is able to support scholarship, activism, and justice on UT's campus, in Latin America, and around the world.

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