

Engaging Students with Critical Conversations About Access & Description of Challenging Archival Collections

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How can we present and classify research materials sensitively and without causing harm?

Case study 1: 1920s Ku Klux Klan membership records

The records were donated to the Hamilton County (Indiana) Historical Society in 1990s. To protect descendants of Klan members from embarrassment, the Historical Society didn't make the records available to the public; the records were only made available to historians or descendants of the Klan members.

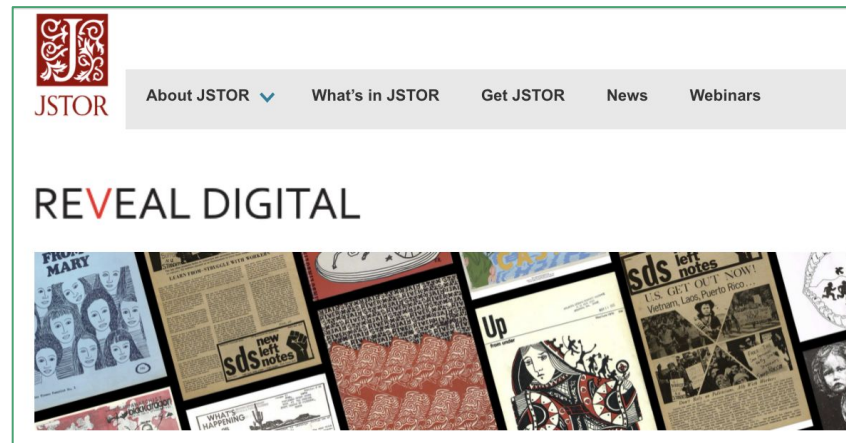
Would you have made the same decision? Why or why not?

What might you have done differently?

Tuohy, John. "1920s KKK Membership Records from HamCo Open to Public at the Indiana Historical Society." *The Indianapolis Star*. July 15, 2020.

Case Study 2: Digitized collection of Klan newspapers

Several years ago, Reveal Digital created *Understanding Hate in America*, an online collection of newspapers from the 1920s published by the Ku Klux Klan, as well as newspapers from organizations that opposed the Klan.



What are some concerns that might be brought up about making these materials available digitally?

How might you make these materials available while mitigating potential harm?

How can we help students
engage critically with
challenging primary sources
in the Archives?

Group Activity

- Review your documents, thinking about the following:
 - Would you keep these items? If so, would you place them in the archives or somewhere else? Why?
 - If you decide to keep them, how would you categorize, describe, or name them?
 - What is the research value of your documents?
- Then, using the documents as a springboard, think about an activity that you would like to do using challenging materials from your own collections, and ask students to critically engage with those materials. Share your ideas with your group.

Thank you!

Questions?

Works cited

Tuohy, John. “1920s KKK Membership Records from HamCo Open to Public at the Indiana Historical Society.” *The Indianapolis Star*. July 15, 2020.

“Documenting White Supremacy and Its Opponents in the 1920s.” JSTOR. Accessed November 28, 2021.

Ray, Anne. “Renaming and Additional Changes to the Collection Formerly Known as Understanding Hate in America,” JSTOR, April 21, 2021.