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New Voices: Digital Description and Access: The Hugo L. Black Collection at the University of Alabama School of Law Library

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“New Voices” Award-Winning Papers Presented at The 2002 Joint SCLA/SELA Conference

The following two papers were presented at the 2002 SELA/South Carolina Library Association Joint Conference in Charleston, South Carolina, as part of the “New Voices” program, sponsored by the University and College Libraries Section (UCLS) of SELA. The purpose of New Voices is to support the professional development efforts of newer librarians to the profession. Earlier in the year UCLS sent out a call for papers from librarians with five years or less professional experience. Prospective applicants were given guidelines and asked to submit a summary of the planned paper. A review committee of three librarians from across the SELA region judged summaries on the basis of subject, content, scholarship and current interest, and selected these two papers. The Southeastern Librarian is pleased to reprint the papers in their entirety.

Digital Description and Access: The Hugo L. Black Collection at the University of Alabama School of Law Library

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The Hugo L. Black Collection consists of an extensive book collection, various exhibits, personal correspondence, tapes and transcripts of interviews, descriptions of court decisions, office materials, biographical and bibliographical information, photographs, student papers, lecture notes, and personal memorabilia. Hugo LaFayette Black served two terms as a United States Senator, was an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court from 1937 until 1971¹, and “the most distinguished graduate of the University of Alabama School of Law.”² Black died in 1971 soon after stepping down from the Court.

Part of the Black collection is located in a replica of Justice Black’s Alexandria, Virginia study containing its original furnishings. I began processing the collection over two years ago and am nearing completion of the print materials. The concepts that have guided the processing of this collection are various

¹ *Memorial Addresses and Other Tributes in the Congress of the United States on the Law and Contributions of Hugo Lafayette Black*. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972: vii-viii.

² Pruitt, Paul M., Jr. “The Return of Hugo Black: The Significance of the Hugo L. Black Collection at the University of Alabama.” *Alabama Law Review* 43:1(1991): 291.

manifestations of preservation, access, and retrieval issues for information in digital environments. Specifically, I have considered the relationships between bibliographic records and web pages; traditional archival finding aids and Encoded Archival Description (EAD); and my descriptive bibliography experience and doctoral studies in information theory, with an emphasis on digital formats. Major concerns throughout processing the Black Collection have centered upon the identification and construction of access points in a digital environment based on accuracy and the appropriate level of descriptive annotations for the books themselves, and the various letters and newspaper articles discovered in the books. While the furnishings from Black’s home study in Alexandria, Virginia, were shipped here in 1973, most of his favorite books did not arrive until 1983 when the Supreme Court Library stopped maintaining “bibliographic memorials for individual justices” because it ran out of space.³ As a result we have obtained more material than Black originally kept on his study shelves. We stored some materials waiting for processing, such as most of the legal reference books, so that “the maximum numbers of monographs and works of special interest” could be placed on the study shelves⁴. Approximately 72 cubic feet of boxes were stored in a closet.

Black’s library consisted of primary and secondary legal materials, a large collection of historical writings, and other genres ranging from poetry to tennis. The distinguishing features of the collection are the broad subject material, the variation of format—cheap paperback copies are mixed in with some valuable rare books—and the fact that he read

³ *Ibid*, 295, 303.

⁴ *Ibid*, 304.

and used the materials regularly. Black valued content over container and regularly perused used book catalogs. The classics greatly influenced his thought. "Black viewed human nature as changeless."⁵ Biographer Howard Ball comments that Black's books by and about Greek philosophers, poets, and historians "are worn from repeated use, underlined and replete with marginalia, [and] indicative of the personal conversations Black had with the authors of these books."⁶ He was so fond of the works of Edith Hamilton that he "literally coerced his children into reading them, with further admonitions to read Livy or Plutarch when the boys were in college or in the military." Black also gave these books to his grandchildren, had both his wives and all his law clerks read Pericles and Aristotle, among other Greek authors. While Aristotle was Black's "favorite author," Edith Hamilton's *The Greek Way* was Black's favorite book and the first required reading that he assigned to all his new law clerks.⁷ Roger K. Newman's biography of Black contains an entire chapter, entitled "Books Are My Friends," devoted to Black's reading habits in which he discusses Black's literary friendships with Will Durant, Carl Sandburg, and Alfred Knopf, among others. Knopf published a book of Black's opinions and "usually took Black to dinner" several times each year.⁸ In addition to the classics, Black was also deeply interested in United States history. Black admired American historian Charles Beard and wrote a foreword to one of his books. Black also extensively studied the writings of Thomas Jefferson.⁹

As I began this project, I consulted Daniel Meador's publication *Mr. Justice Black and His Books*, an annotated catalog of Black's personal collection as well as an invaluable commentary of Black's books and reading habits.¹⁰ I read the narrative chapters several times while considering how to formulate a methodology for processing this collection. I wrote Meador, describing my plans and solicited any comments or suggestions. In his gracious and encouraging response he remarked that he was glad the

⁵ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁶ Ball, Howard. *Hugo L. Black: Cold Steel Warrior*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996: 7.

⁷ Newman, Roger K. *Hugo Black: A Biography*. New York: Pantheon: 446.

⁸ *Ibid.* 452

⁹ *Ibid.*, 453, 448-449.

¹⁰ Daniel J. Meador. *Mr. Justice Black and His Books*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974.

collection would be made more accessible to scholars and others, and offered assistance if needed. Throughout this process, I have consulted Paul Pruitt, Special Collections Librarian, and David I. Durham, Law School Archivist, both of whom shared their knowledge, experience, and insights regarding different aspects of this project. Dr. Pruitt has been involved with this collection at every aspect of its existence. His knowledge and perspective provide continuity regarding the conception, acquisition and development processes of the Black Collection. In his 1991 article, "The Return of Hugo Black: The Significance of the Hugo L. Black Collection at the University of Alabama", he "takes up where Professor Meador left off, describing the fate of the Black collection and the uses to which it has been put since the death of its creator . . . how Black's books were acquired by officials of the University of Alabama School of Law, and how they decided to construct a replica of the library/study as it appeared in Black's Alexandria, Virginia home."

¹¹ Marcella Genz, Assistant Professor at Florida State University, helped me with both cataloging expertise and experience working with various historical materials. David Lowe, Computer Services Librarian, and Sondra Hayward, Library Assistant, provided technical support as I established electronic representation and access points for these materials in our online catalog, while considering what future technological issues might emerge. Although my primary focus has been on Black's books, I continually cultivated my awareness of how representation and implementation procedures could be applicable to non-print items in both the Black and our other individual special collections. When I encountered problematic details that involved cataloging choices, I consulted the *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules*,¹² the *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts Cataloging Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies, and Manuscript Libraries*,¹³ and Professor Genz.

¹¹ See Pruitt, "The Return of Hugo Black," 292.

¹² *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* prepared under the direction of the Joint Steering Committee for Revision of AACR, a committee of the American Library Association, the Australian Committee on Cataloging, The British Library, the Canadian Committee on Cataloguing, the Library Association, the Library of Congress. 2nd ed. 1998 Revision

¹³ *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts: A Cataloging Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies, and*

The synthesis of information made possible by electronic representation and the library space in which the collection is housed have helped determine the way I approached and designed access for the Black Collection. We have Black's books in different locations because we acquired more books than were originally contained in the study. Materials currently housed in the replicated study include books from both the Alexandria house and the Supreme Court Chambers. Currently we have in a secure closet approximately 72 cubic feet of boxes containing books that may have originated from the study and other two rooms of the house in which Black kept books¹⁴, along with two 35 x 16 x 18 wooden crates containing books, personal items, artifacts and memorabilia, and some incidental personal manuscripts. A few items, such as the autographed copy of Martin Luther King's *Stride Toward Freedom*, are kept in a locked room for added security. All these books belonged to Black with the exception of those containing his wife's name.

Upon my arrival, the books had been arranged in the replicated study more or less alphabetically by author. I intended to work my way systematically around the room, but soon I decided to pull all the relevant books I could find for a display, "Hugo L. Black and the Classics." This exhibit includes 103 books, one of which is Edith Hamilton's *The Greek Way* opened to a page with Black's marginal notes and Black's top hat. Because some of the texts I gathered for this display were not listed in the Meador bibliography, I began to notice what became an ongoing discrepancy between the books contained in the study but not entered in either the Meador bibliography or the card catalog drawers. I countered these open spaces by carefully recording bibliographic information for the newly documented books to build upon the solid framework of arrangement already in place.

I assigned Library of Congress call numbers, some of which duplicate items already held in other locations of our library. When another copy of a book exists elsewhere in our collection, I indicate its placement in the Black Collection through a location code assigned at the same time that I enter the barcode into the

system. I also place descriptive information in a note field of the item record. If a Black Collection book is a singular item in the library and will most likely remain so in our total collection, I include descriptive information in the bibliographic record as the most direct method of representation. Occasionally, I reassigned what became the main entry in the electronic bibliographic record but retained all access points. Access points are author, title, subject headings, and an added title entry, "Hugo Black Collection." The added title entry is based on the policy the Special Collections Librarian and I established for the creation of electronic bibliographic records for all our individual special collections. The Archivist and I built upon this when we later linked bibliographic records in Atticus, our online catalog, to individual webpages through the 856 MARC field.

Early on, I realized that this collection was potentially more than just a group of books that had belonged to a significant political and historical figure, and that a digital information environment would be well suited for description and meaningful access to this collection. At this point, I was not sure what exactly was possible but knew that I needed to do more than simply catalog each book so I made notations in the Meador book of inscriptions, annotated pages and other interesting details that could be scanned and made available on our webpage. I decided to differ from Meador in several ways. In processing each book, I used what became my working copy of Daniel Meador's annotated bibliography, supplemented with various notes that I arranged in file folders. I penciled in entries for books that were not listed in Meador's work. Sometimes I located these in the Black Collection card catalog drawers, sometimes not. I made notations for approximately the first hundred books I processed while considering what to put into the bibliographic record, and consulted David I. Durham, Paul Pruitt, and Marcella Genz, concerning ways of describing how Black had interacted with these texts. After working with this preliminary group, I selected what seemed to me to be the most logical notations I could use to describe what I had seen in these books. Instead of using the qualitative indicators, "marked" and "extensively marked," I chose "marginalia" to describe any type of notations or markings outside the text and "underlinings" to indicate that Black had underlined certain passages of text, placing these into a general note field in the MARC record. I did not comment as to the extent of

Manuscript Libraries compiled by Steven L. Hensen. 2nd ed. The Society of American Archivists, 1989.

¹⁴ See Meador, *Mr. Justice Black and His Books*, 40.

Black's marginal notes or underlinings because it was difficult to determine an objective delineation: some books were clearly very extensively marked but I decided not to make this a qualitative decision, partly because Meador's book already indicates this in most cases. If I process books heavily marked that are not in Meador, I record corresponding notes on that entry.

For the electronic record of several books, I did not indicate "marginalia" because I do not believe that Black made these markings. My decisions were based on the sense I began to develop of what is characteristic of Black's note-taking methodology as well as recognizing his handwriting. I made notations in my working copy of Meador's book stating my judgment and why I had interpreted these markings as not belonging to Hugo. I continued to use Meador's "personally indexed" to indicate that Black had written notes, usually in the very back of the book but sometimes in the front, consisting of brief keywords or occasional phrases in quotation marks accompanied by page number. I decided to add the phrase "Book is stored in clamshell box" for books that had already been treated as fragile as well as to help with later identification for someone seeking the book. I included notations that I added to the bibliographic records describing items found in books such as newspaper articles, party invitations, and thank you notes although I did not always include this information in the bibliographic record. Other information not included in bibliographic records includes my personal observations, such as noting that an item is the only book in which Black made notations in red instead of in graphite pencil.

When I encountered a book that was not listed in Meador's bibliography, I checked the card catalog drawers that had arrived with the collection, listing books from Black's study and Supreme Court chambers. If I did not find an entry, I would pencil the bibliographic information into my Meador catalog. Every effort will be made to maintain authenticity of the study. Because there will be no library-generated markings on any of the books, I have taken extensive descriptive notes about the physical condition and characteristics of these books and have also made photocopies of certain pages, prompted either by bibliographical or historical interest. I have consulted the Special Collections Librarian and Archivist countless times, often on an item-by-item basis,

regarding decisions of this nature. I have placed acid-free strips into each book that contain the call number, main entry information, and the identifying barcode that corresponds to the bibliographic record in our catalog. We plan to trim the strips so that they fit inside the book but are not visible, thus restoring the original appearance of the study. I will place the acid-free strip at the verso for consistency of location and so as to prevent over-handling of fragile materials. Some of the books are in poor condition and arrived in clamshell boxes. They will remain so and we have repaired some of these boxes.¹⁵ The oversized books are stored, in LC order, on the larger bottom shelves along the wall to the side of Black's desk to not detract from the overall view of the room, with a note in the item record indicating that this is an oversized book. This is our policy for other Special Collections materials, along with a note to "Please consult archivist." Some fragile items, such as pamphlets, are stored in acid-free envelopes. If their inclusion with the rest of the book collection proves to be aesthetically disrupting, I will recommend storing them again arranged by LC call number and with a corresponding electronic note for location purposes, directly behind the upper door that opens onto the Black Room from a hallway.

In addition to Black's annotations and some wonderful inscriptions from many different people (Black received many of his books as gifts), I discovered numerous interesting items inside his books. I always made at least two photocopies of all materials found, with the exception of pieces of paper being used as bookmarks, which I left in place. I recorded bibliographic information on the photocopies so that the book could be easily located if need arose to see the original.

The next stage after completion of the Black Collection print materials will be to work on its non-print items, especially the photographs. I needed to acquire more knowledge for processing non-print materials in digital environments to apply to the Hugo Black Collection as well as to other Special Collections materials. I attended the University of Virginia Rare Book School course, "Visual Materials Cataloging" with Helena Zinkham, who is Head of the Technical Services Section of the Prints

¹⁵ Paul Pruitt and Jacqueline Kennedy Jones, University of Alabama School of Law Library Clerk, both repaired and taught me how to repair these boxes.

and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress. For example, because Black's autographed Martin Luther King, Jr. book, *Stride Toward Freedom*, is stored in a secure location, we have photocopies available of the long inscription to give to interested patrons, who range from local schoolchildren to visiting legal scholars.¹⁶ For those who do not visit and may not even know of the autograph's existence, a scanned image will eventually be available on our website. Other possibilities include electronic augmentation and enhancement to strengthen the collection by scanning examples of Black's annotations and providing links to other institutions. For example, The Library of Congress Hugo Black Papers consists of 216 shelf feet of 130,000 items.¹⁷ These items relate to "his private life, his public career, his

¹⁶ The inscription reads: "To: Justice Hugo Black, In appreciation for your genuine good-will, your perceptive vision, your broad humanitarian concern, and your unswerving devotion to the noble principles of our democracy. With warm regards, Martin L. King Jr."

¹⁷ Wigdor, Alexandra K. *The Personal Papers of Supreme Court Justices: A Descriptive Guide*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986: 46-48.

colleagues and associates, and the Supreme Court since 1937."

The aspects of the Black Collection of which I have become most aware have been the essence of atmosphere that is preserved in the replicated study and the possibilities of electronic access that can transcend space and time by expressing portions of what it is that constructs the special nature of such a collection. The longer I handled these books as tangible physical objects, the more I realized the power of descriptive representation and access and that The Hugo Black Room is a very close approximation of the original study in the Alexandria house. Although the dimensions are not exactly precise,¹⁸ the essence of the atmosphere remains. One of Black's former law clerks, David Vann, upon seeing the replicated room at the University of Alabama, said that "it was 'kind of a shock really,' for him to see again."¹⁹

¹⁸ See Pruitt, "The Return of Hugo Black," 299.

"[W]hile the original study was seventeen by twenty feet, the planned space of fifteen by twenty feet would easily accommodate the furniture".

¹⁹ See Pruitt, "The Return of Hugo Black," 301.

Additional References

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