Primary Sources for Undergraduate Research in African Studies

Compiled by: Matt Carotenuto¹, Liz McMahon, and Nate Plageman

One of the major problems in undergraduate research in African Studies is access to reliable primary source data. Through the principle lens of African history we have produced the following guide as a selected list of primary sources which we have encouraged students to use for capstone level research projects. The list is nowhere near comprehensive but contains useful links to both open access digital materials as well as a selection of useful databases and sources available through interlibrary loan.

**General: websites, databases and library collections**

- **Aluka**: This is a subscription-based database of materials with a focus on African plants, African cultural heritage sites and struggles for freedom, particularly in southern Africa. Aluka is open-access to African universities. Contains a wealth of primary source materials such as transcripts of oral interviews, government and organizational documents, newsletters, etc. see: [http://www.aluka.org/](http://www.aluka.org/)

- **Center for Research Libraries (CRL)**: The Cooperative Africana Microfilm Program (CAMP) has developed a huge collection of African newspapers & missionary documents from the 19th and 20th centuries, in addition to other ephemera, non-U.S. dissertations on Africa, etc. See: [http://www.crl.edu/](http://www.crl.edu/)

- **Archive.org and Gutenberg.org**: These open access sites often have a number of digitized government reports and early historical texts ([http://www.archive.org/](http://www.archive.org/) & [http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/](http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/))

- **Major African Studies Centers**: (many of the title VI funded African studies programs have digital collections of maps, photographs and other artwork along with special collections and grant funded digitization projects for archival material). For more examples of this see the web pages for the following African studies programs in particular (Florida, Indiana, Michigan State, Northwestern, Wisconsin and the University of Pennsylvania)

¹ We envision this as a working document which could easily be expanded for collective use by Africa Network members and conference participants. For useful additions to any part of this working document please send annotated citations and links to Matt Carotenuto at mcarotenuto@stlawu.edu. With sufficient interest we could then compile an expanded document and email interested parties or possibly place it on the Africa Network website at a later date.

“**The Challenges of Undergraduate Research in African Studies.”**
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• **Africa South of the Sahara (Stanford):** Like many of the African studies centers listed above, Stanford also has a particularly useful search engine for African studies related material. Particularly useful pages include those that highlight primary source materials as well as materials from the colonial period. See:
  

• **H-Net:** As not only an important list server and publisher of book reviews, h-net now has a site devoted to primary source research in African studies which can be helpful in not only locating sources but also discussing methodology. See: [http://www.h-net.org/~afsrch/](http://www.h-net.org/~afsrch/)

• **Common Library Databases:** JSTOR and a few other academic databases has full text access to some journals which have published colonial reports and other early academic perspectives on Africa: See for example *Journal of the Royal African Society* (1901-1944); and *Africa* 1928-2009 on JSTOR. Other examples of these early scholarly journals can be found across the web as well. For instance the University of Khartoum has a number of digitized volumes of *Sudan Notes and Records."

• **African History Sourcebook:** A useful website run by Fordham University which compiles a number of links to primary source texts. Especially useful for topics that deal with pre-20th century Africa and or European imperialism. See: [http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/africa/africasbook.asp](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/africa/africasbook.asp)

• **AFROL’S Center for African Documentation:** A news site similar to allafrica.com which covers exclusively African issues has an archive page which contains links to a number of contemporary African government reports and U.N. debates. See [http://www.afrol.com/archive/documents/documents.htm](http://www.afrol.com/archive/documents/documents.htm)

• **African Media sources:** Columbia University has compiled a useful list of online African newspapers, many of which have archives. (Note some archives do require subscriptions but are reasonable)
  

• **African Online Digital Library (AODL):** A collaborative project between MATRIX and Michigan State University, links to different sites and provides an array of materials, including documents, interview material, documents, and video footage (a few individual sites appear below): [http://www.aodl.org/](http://www.aodl.org/)

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• Afrobarometer: A non-partisan project that provides survey data about the social, political, and economic climate of many African countries, particularly southern, eastern, and western Africa; [http://www.afrobarometer.org/](http://www.afrobarometer.org/)

• Etudes en sciences humaines sur l’Afrique noire: A Francophone metasite focused on the social sciences and humanities in Africa. The site is indexed by country and topic and contains many webpages in French that are not found on the Anglophone sites. [www.afriqueindex.com/Categories/sciencesh.htm](http://www.afriqueindex.com/Categories/sciencesh.htm)

• The Digital Somali Library: A Digital Collection hosted by Indiana University, contains 137 books and 70 posters; [http://www.indiana.edu/~libsale/african/Digital_Somali_Library/](http://www.indiana.edu/~libsale/african/Digital_Somali_Library/)

**Photographs, Art, and Audio Sources:**

Due to language barriers and lack of field research experience, we have found historical images, artwork and audio sources especially useful for students researching the African past.

• Africa Through a Lens: A new source of 100s of British colonial photographs—good for studying how Africans were represented by Europeans during the time period. See: [http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/africa/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/africa/)

• The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Americas: A Visual Record: Run by the University of Virginia, the 1,280 high resolution images in this collection have been selected from a wide range of sources, most of them dating from the period of slavery. See: [http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/index.php](http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/index.php)

• Historical Map Collection: Northwestern University has a digital collection of over 100 maps dating from the 16th to the early 20th century. See: [http://digital.library.northwestern.edu/mapsofafrica/](http://digital.library.northwestern.edu/mapsofafrica/)

• Mission 21/ Basel Mission Image Archive: Original photographs from 1850-1950, spanning several areas of the globe and regions of Africa. Also contains a few nice essays about how to interpret photographs from a historical vantage point. [http://bmpix.org/bmpix/controller/index.htm](http://bmpix.org/bmpix/controller/index.htm)

• Ross Archive of African Images: A database of published images of African art spanning from 1590-1920, hosted by Yale University Library [http://raai.library.yale.edu/site/index.php](http://raai.library.yale.edu/site/index.php)

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• **African Activist Archive**: Part of AODL that contains posters, buttons, documents, photographs, and other items produced by African political activists or supporters in the United States [http://africanactivist.msu.edu/](http://africanactivist.msu.edu/)

• **Baileys African History Archive**: A database of images taken by Drum photographers from the 1950s-1980s. Contains images from various regions (South, East, West, Central) and covering politics, popular culture, and urban life [http://www.baha.co.za/page/aboutus](http://www.baha.co.za/page/aboutus)

• **Selections from Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives**: A database of images held at the National Museum of African Art in Washington D.C. Allows visitors to search the 300,000 image collection by country, subject, or cultural group: [http://sirismm.si.edu/siris/epatop.htm](http://sirismm.si.edu/siris/epatop.htm)

• **Music at the Centre for African Studies, Basel**: Features three different pages that contain information about popular music in Ghana and Nigeria, allows visitors to listen to several full-length tracks in a number of languages: [http://www.africanmusic.unibas.ch/index.php/home/resources/archives](http://www.africanmusic.unibas.ch/index.php/home/resources/archives)

• **Winterton Collection of East African Photographs**: Northwestern University holds this collection of photographs taken in eastern Africa during the late 19th to the mid-20th century. [http://repository.librarynorthwestern.edu/winterton/index.html](http://repository.librarynorthwestern.edu/winterton/index.html)

• **Pitt Rivers Museum**: An Oxford based museum with extensive online photograph collections of Sudan and Western Kenya [http://photos.prm.ox.ac.uk/](http://photos.prm.ox.ac.uk/)

• **Africa South of the Sahara, African Music on the Internet**: An exhaustive list of web resources, including pages on individual artists, live radio shows, audio and video content, and information on specific musical events [http://library.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/music.html](http://library.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/music.html)

• **Colonial Film: Moving Images of the British Empire**: A project that features films from the British Film Institute, Imperial War Museum, and the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum. Offers searchable catalogue, full-length videos for viewing, and accompanying written synopsis, context, and analysis pieces [http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/home](http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/home)

• **Wake Forest University Museum of Anthropology Online Database**: Offers opportunities to browse and search the Museum’s collection as well as examine individual holdings. Allows visitors to search or browse holdings, also offers user guides: [http://cairo.deacnet.wfu.edu/](http://cairo.deacnet.wfu.edu/)

Figure 4: E. Evans Pritchard 1936 Photo from Western Kenya. Open access availability at Pitt Rivers Museum website

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• **National Museum of African Art Online Database:** Allows users to access holdings of museum, including those on and off display. Particularly rich on textiles, masquerades, and musical instruments: [http://africa.si.edu/collections/start](http://africa.si.edu/collections/start)

**Thematic Topics**

Students often enter into African studies research through either a rough thematic or geographical interest. The following are just a few examples of the common topics of thematic interest we have frequently encountered with students as well as ways to engage them in primary sources analysis.

• **Development Questions:** Students are often interested in questions of development but do not know where to look for primary sources. We have found particular success having students look at published government reports, critiquing the language of NGO websites, and integrating statistical data from international organizations such as the UN, IMF and World Bank. In recent years, there has been increasing attention paid to Chinese development initiatives in Africa with a number of student research projects tapping into the below sources.

  - **The Centre for Chinese Studies:** The first research institute in Africa devoted to the study of China’s relationship with the Africa. Housed at Stellenbosh University in South Africa, the institute publishes a monthly journal and has a number of free online publications. ([http://www.ccs.org.za/](http://www.ccs.org.za/))
  - **China in Africa Web Dossier (African Studies Center Leiden):** Produced by one of the leading African studies research centers in Europe this site contains useful background information and an extensive bibliography on the subject. ([http://www.ascleiden.nl/Library/Webdossiers/ChinaAndAfrica.aspx](http://www.ascleiden.nl/Library/Webdossiers/ChinaAndAfrica.aspx))

• **Conflict:** While primary source material on violence and conflict are often hard to find, examining the reconciliation process has yielded a wealth of source material in recent years. For instance, students interested in these topics have found a large amount of source materials looking at court proceedings from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Rwanda’s Gacaca courts and newly established genocide archive, as well as cases that have come before the International Criminal Court. See: TRC- [http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/](http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/), ICC- [http://www.icc-cpi.int/Menus/ICC](http://www.icc-cpi.int/Menus/ICC), and for the Rwanda Genocide see: [www.genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/](http://www.genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/)


  ![Figure 5: Notorious Rwanda newspaper used to promote ethnic divisions in the early 1990s. Copies available at www.genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/](http://www.genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/)

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the site include occasional papers, research reports and conference reports. The site is searchable by keyword and has a regional index of country information and reports, but most of these date back to 2001 an earlier. [http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/](http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/)

- **Environmental Conservation:** Students are increasingly interested in studying topics that relate to environmental conservation in Africa. We have had particular luck engaging students in the analysis of the following types of resources.
  - National park websites
  - African media sources and government reports
  - Eco-Tourism advertisements/company websites
  - Social media, blogs and tourist trip reports (for local and global discourse)
  - UNEP and other international organizations
  - **The Core Historical Literature of Agriculture:** The Albert R. Mann library of Cornell University maintains this collection of documents. The site is a searchable full-text collection of books and journals covering agricultural economics, agricultural engineering, animal science, crops and their protection, food science, forestry, human nutrition, rural sociology, and soil science. The materials available cover the early nineteenth to late twentieth centuries and are an excellent resource for Africanists working in the fields of agriculture or environmental history. Keyword searches of the full-text allow researchers to go directly to the pages related to their interests. [http://chla.library.cornell.edu/](http://chla.library.cornell.edu/)
- **Green Africa:** The African Views Organization has introduced Green Africa, a new radio show on the environment in Africa that can be heard online at [www.blogtalkradio.com/africanviews](http://www.blogtalkradio.com/africanviews)
- **Imperialism and the African Environment:** Students have also used travelogues of 19th and 20th century “Explorers” and “Naturalists” to examine the historic role outsiders have played in controlling the environmental discourse in Africa. For one example of this see accounts of the American Museum Congo Expedition (1909-1915)-[http://diglib1.amnh.org/index2.html](http://diglib1.amnh.org/index2.html)

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**Figure 6:** A useful source from National Geographic to critique neo-colonial notions of environmental conservation in Africa

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Country Specific Resources

Along with a general thematic interest, students often approach research with a specific geographical focus. Due to St. Lawrence’s long standing abroad program in Kenya, students have developed a firm interest in East Africa. As an introduction to some of the ways we have directed students in geographic specific research below are two examples of the types of materials available. While Kenya is Matt Carotenuto’s area of research, we have also included South Africa which is outside any of the panelists’ research specialization/expertise. This is due to the fact that South Africa is arguably the region with the most digitally available source material.

Kenya

- **National Newspapers**: *(Daily Nation and The Standard)*: The web-versions of Kenya’s major national newspapers each have searchable archives going back several years. Although it should be noted that a paid subscription is needed to access the full archive. See: [www.nation.co.ke](http://www.nation.co.ke) & [www.standardmedia.co.ke](http://www.standardmedia.co.ke)

- **Government Reports**: A number of government ministries now place certain reports online and students have found some success finding annual reports, speeches and other materials for specific government agencies. (See selected examples below)
  - **Kenya Gazette**: An official publication of the Kenyan government is now available and searchable on Google books. (While not comprehensive, selected issues are available back as early as 1905).
  - **Kenya Wildlife Service**: For those interested in wildlife conservation and tourism the KWS website has a number of reports and other useful data to critique. In the past students have compared data from this official government agency to that found on websites for eco-tourism and private game reserves/conservation areas. See: [http://www.kws.org/](http://www.kws.org/)

- **Conflict**: The 2007/2008 post-election violence has sparked a large interest in political conflict. Students have often combined newspaper editorials and other media sources with the Kenyan government’s official “Commission of Inquiry on Post-Election Violence” commonly referred to as the “Waki report” see: [http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/downloads/Waki_Report.pdf](http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/downloads/Waki_Report.pdf)

- **Popular Culture**: Students at St. Lawrence commonly use media advertisements and popular music to examine social and political discourse. Of particular interest have been the Saturday and Sunday “lifestyle” sections of the major newspapers which offer a number of editorialis on social and cultural norms and relationships. For contemporary political analysis, students have also frequently critiqued the cartoons of Godfrey Mwampembwa AKA “Gado” and analyzed the political satire of the sketch comedy troop “Redykyulass” via youtube clips and library film resources.
• **Social Media:** In recent years Kenyans both in East Africa and the wider diaspora have increasingly engaged in political and social discourse via social media sites like Facebook. Students have used these to examine for instance debates among youth as well as notions of ethnicity and politics. See for instance [http://blog.jalu.com](http://blog.jalu.com/) for a website specifically devoted to “Luo” issues.

• **Legal Issues:** The Kenya Law Reports website compiles data about legal rulings and specific cases and is useful for students examining Kenyan issues through a legal framework. [http://www.kenyalaw.org/klr/index.php](http://www.kenyalaw.org/klr/index.php)

• **Swahili Culture and Language Study:** For those interested in the Kenyan coast or topics that engage in the study of Kiswahili texts the following websites have proven useful resources.
  - **The Kamusi Project:** Billed as the internet’s “Living Swahili Dictionary” this website offers useful help in translating Swahili into English. Although a rudimentary knowledge of the language is required to use this effectively. See: [www.kamusi.org](http://www.kamusi.org)
  - **Archives of Popular Swahili:** This site is run by an academic scholar and includes transcriptions of his interviews with central African artists. [http://www.lpca.socsci.uva.nl/aps/index.html](http://www.lpca.socsci.uva.nl/aps/index.html)
  - **Swahili Web:** It is currently being developed to include journal articles, manuscripts, maps, sound files, photographs and film. It will serve as a digital archive for materials that are difficult to consult elsewhere, or are damaged or threatened in their present state; and it will ensure that basic tools for research and for locating sources on the Swahili hosted elsewhere are more easily accessible. [http://www.swahiliweb.net/karibu.html](http://www.swahiliweb.net/karibu.html) (Primarily Tanzania based materials)
  - **Zanzibar Unveiled:** This site is a personal hobby of one individual, however he has collected an incredible wealth of photos from Zanzibar and has even categorized many of them by the local photographers. [http://www.zanzibarhistory.org](http://www.zanzibarhistory.org)

• **Colonial History:** (Syracuse Kenya National Archive Microfilm Collection); Syracuse University Library has an extensive collection of government documents from colonial Kenya contained on 157 reels of microfilm. Portions of this collection are also available through CRL and Michigan State University. See: [http://researchguides.library.syr.edu/kenyanarch](http://researchguides.library.syr.edu/kenyanarch)
South Africa

- **South African History Online**: An extensive site that contains historical photographs, speeches, interviews, letters, newspapers clippings, and other materials (under “media” section) [http://www.sahistory.org.za/](http://www.sahistory.org.za/)

- **South Africa: Overcoming Apartheid, Building Democracy**: Part of AODL that includes 40 hours of interviews (video and audio) with 60 people involved in the anti-apartheid struggle [http://overcomingapartheid.msu.edu/](http://overcomingapartheid.msu.edu/)

- **Perspectives: The South African War**: An incredible resource for documentary sources on the South African War. The site is maintained by Lewis P. Orans, who has collected a variety of writings from participants in the South African War, including Arthur Conan Doyle, Robert Baden-Powell, Richard Harding Davis, L.S. Amery, Christian Rudolf de Wet, and C.R.B. Barrett among others. [http://www.pinetreeweb.com/perspectives.htm](http://www.pinetreeweb.com/perspectives.htm)

- **African National Congress**: The ANC was a major apartheid-era resistance organization that became the dominant post-apartheid political party in South Africa. This site is invaluable to any researcher studying twentieth century South Africa because of the wealth of government resources, historical documents (ephemera, conference and policy documents, press releases, etc.), and full text of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reports among others. The historical documents section is divided into two parts, the ANC and “World Against Apartheid” documents. It also contains links to numerous related sites, such as the Women’s and Youth’s Leagues of the ANC. [http://www.anc.org.za/](http://www.anc.org.za/)


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• **Political Cartoons:** The official website of acclaimed political cartoonist Jonathan Shapiro (Zapiro) contains a searchable resource of many of his cartoons over the last several years. See [http://www.zapiro.com/](http://www.zapiro.com/)

• **The Nordic Documentation on the Liberation Struggle in Southern Africa Project:** This historical site is a reference source for everyone interested in the late 20th century history of national liberation in Southern Africa and the role of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden). [http://www.liberationafrica.se/](http://www.liberationafrica.se/)

• **Digital Innovation South Africa (DISA):** DISA is a freely accessible online scholarly resource focusing on the socio-political history of South Africa, particularly the struggle for freedom during the period from 1950 to the first democratic elections in 1994, providing a wealth of material on this fascinating period of the country’s history. Much time, creative thought and debate goes into the selection of the content, and participation and input from interested persons, scholars and institutions in South Africa and overseas is encouraged. [http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/](http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/)

• **The South African Bibliographic and Information Network (Sabinet):** This subscription based library service provides full text access to scholarly articles published in South Africa and often not available through other databases or interlibrary loan. [http://www.sabinet.co.za/](http://www.sabinet.co.za/)

- Please note that this is only a preliminary list of sources overall—used to spark a larger conversation about engaging students in primary source analysis. We welcome annotated suggestions and links from Africa Network members. These can be sent to Matt Carotenuto (mcarotenuto@stlawu.edu)

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