HRAF AND THE HRAF FILES

The Human Relations Area Files, Incorporated (HRAF), centered at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, is a non-profit international research organization sponsored and controlled by 22 major universities and museums. It has over 300 participating member institutions in some two dozen countries. For over 37 years HRAF has been developing programs and services to encourage and facilitate area studies and the worldwide comparative study of human behavior, society, and culture. HRAF's basic program, called the HRAF Files, is available on a membership basis to any non-profit educational or research institution.

Nature of the HRAF Files

"Files" is a rather dull term for denoting what may well be one of the most important resources available for teaching and research in the social-behavioral sciences.

Essentially, the HRAF Files constitute both a major cultural data archive and a rapid and efficient data retrieval system. In more specific terms, the HRAF Files are a continually expanding collection of mostly primary source materials (i.e., published books and articles plus some unpublished manuscripts) on a large sample of cultures or societies representing all areas of the world. The materials include many rare sources not generally available and many exclusive English translations of foreign texts.

Organization of the HRAF Files

This collection of material is organized first of all into separate Cultural Files, each of which contains descriptive information on one or a closely related group of cultural units such as the Zuni Indians, the Rural Irish, or the Yoruba of Nigeria. These cultural units are selected from a manual entitled the Outline of World Cultures (OWC), which presents a systematic listing of the contemporary and historic cultural units of the world known to history and ethnography. Over 320 cultural units are now represented in the Files.

The second basic organizational principle of this collection is that the information within each Cultural File is arranged according to a special subject classification system consisting of over 700 numbered subject categories grouped into 79 major topical sections. This classification system is presented in another manual entitled the Outline of Cultural Materials (OCM).

Using this subject classification system, each text page of every source selected for inclusion in each Cultural File is analyzed and annotated in the margin with the category number of every subject treated on that page. The page is then reproduced in multiples to provide a copy for inclusion in each applicable subject category within that File. Thus, all materials dealing with a particular subject are brought together under a single subject category within each File.

Efficiency of the HRAF Files

The HRAF Files are designed for the rapid and accurate retrieval of data on specific cultures and topics. The proof that the Files do accomplish these goals is available in published studies. For example, in 1950 a distinguished anthropologist, G.P. Murdock, presented a vivid demonstration of the amount of time saved when producing a research report based on the Files in comparison to the amount of time that would have been required using the ordinary laborious process of library research (29 hours vs. 29 days). As for accuracy, our own studies of the reliability of the subject classification process indicate that a user of the Files may expect to find up to 90% of the major topics described in a source appropriately classified by subject categories.

Advantages of the HRAF Files

To the Library—

- They greatly reduce the task and cost of acquisition of library resources in the social and human sciences, and in area studies.
- They can be used as a data resource throughout the curriculum, although their special value is for the social sciences.
- They are easy to file and require minimal storage space.
- They are accompanied by a variety of user aids that make accessibility to and control of the collection much easier.
- They provide a range of material on cultures and societies that is rarely available in any one library.

To the Student, Researcher, Scholar—

- They greatly reduce research time.
- They enable a researcher to focus on analyzing data rather than searching for relevant materials.
- They afford simultaneous access to the same data by several researchers through the multiple filing system.
- They provide a system for rapid and accurate retrieval of information on a particular culture, on a particular topic, or for comparative research.
- They include exclusive English translations of texts from 15 different foreign languages.

To the Teacher—

- They provide a unique, organized resource for the preparation of courses or lectures on a particular culture, area, or topic.
- They have proved to be an effective tool for training students in comparative research.
- They offer an especially useful resource for class assignments and collaborative class projects.
social order in its broadest sense. Only if he is fully conscious, as, for example, no man of importance will accept an invitation to visit for a time in a distant band or tribe without calling a consultation. Should some head man of his band indicate disapproval, the invitations will be declined. The theory is that the welfare of his band is endangered by his absence. Above all, the head men are expected to preserve the peace. Should a dispute arise in which members of their band are concerned, one or more of them are expected to step in as arbitrators or even as police officials if the occasion demands. When it is anticipated that a man contemplates a crime or the taking of personal vengeance some head men go to his tipi and talk with him, endeavoring to calm him, giving such kind advice as to the proper means for the good of all concerned. If he has been wronged, they often lend him money toward his enemy. Again, the head men may be appealed to for retribution against a fellow member of the band. In the adjustment of such cases the head men preceded by text, punctuation, and extreme declamation. They threaten the young men, as much as possible, after the same method. In all such functions, they are expected to succeed without resort to violence.

For mild persistent misconduct, a method of formal ridicule is sometimes practiced. When the offender has failed to take hints and suggestions, the head men may take formal notice and decide to reject this discipline. Once evening when all were in their tipsi, a head man walked out to a neighbor asking if he had observed the conduct of Mr. A. This starts a general conversation between the many tipsi, in which all the grotesque and hilarious features of Mr. A’s acts are held up to general ridicule until abashed of laughter, the bellowing continuing until far into the night. The mortification of the victim is extreme and usually drives him into temporary exile or, as formerly, upon the warpath to do desperate deeds.

When there is trouble between members of different bands, the head men of each endeavor to bring about a settlement. Thus, if one of the raiding party is killed, the band of the deceased sends notice to the murderer’s band that a payment must be made. In the meantime, the murderer may have called upon a head man of his own band to explain the deed. The head men then discuss the matter and advice that honor and other property to suit even to the injured band at once. A copy goes about with the order and numbers of the band contributors. This offer may be refused by the injured band and the demand made for the offender’s life. No matter how

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**SAMPLE FILE PAGE (reduced size)**

This sample page is a copy of the paper original, and is reproduced here solely to demonstrate HRAF indexing techniques. The source materials are not abstracts or excerpts from documents, but exact reproductions of the original text. English translations of foreign texts are included.

Complete pages, not separate phrases or sentences, are filed by subject categories. Thus no single passage is torn from its surrounding discourse.

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1 One informant commented on this paragraph as follows: When the payment is made, he will exact from the head man of the band recovered. The head man of the band at this time will demand some token from the person who has been killed, but will send them back to the person who killed him to drop them into new altars to the honor of the dead.

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**SOME MICROFICHE (actual size)**

This is a 105mm positive microfiche of the HRAF Paper Files produced in a conventional 4" x 6" size on either silver halide or diazo film. The reduction ratio is 20 to 1 for the first 28 Series, and 24 to 1 starting with Series 29. Each continuously filmed microfiche can accommodate up to 168 pages at 20:1 or up to 240 pages at 24:1. Eye-readable numbered flasher pages inserted throughout the collection instantly signal the beginning of each OCM category of information, and describe the category. The top portion of each microfiche carries the coded identification of the material produced on that particular fiche. Each Cultural File is made up of a varying number of such microfiche, each fiche being consecutively numbered to facilitate filing.

Any microfiche with a defect caused by material or workmanship is replaced free of charge.