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AMHERST**

April 3, 2009

W.E.B. Du Bois's Papers to Be Digitized for Viewing Online by UMass Amherst Library, Thanks to \$200,000 Verizon Foundation Grant

AMHERST, Mass. – The W.E.B. Du Bois Library at the University of Massachusetts Amherst today announced that it will digitize an estimated 100,000 items from its Du Bois collection, thanks to a \$200,000 grant from the Verizon Foundation. The project will provide online access for the first time to original diaries, letters, photographs and other material related to one of the most influential African Americans in United States history.

The two-year project, to start in July, will provide unprecedented access to Du Bois's papers, not only to historians and scholars but also to Massachusetts university and high school students, teachers and the public at large, according to Robert Cox, director of special collections at the library. Du Bois wrote more than 4,000 articles, essays and books, most of which are now hard to find or out of print.

“Taking advantage of broadband technology, students and teachers at all levels will soon be able to access Du Bois's experiences, thoughts and writings as a foundation to conduct research in American history and social studies,” Cox said.

Once the materials are scanned and catalogued, UMass Amherst will work with Verizon to identify documents to include in Thinkfinity.org, Verizon Foundation's free educational Web site that provides resources to enhance teacher effectiveness and improve student achievement, provided in partnership with 11 of the nation's leading educational organizations.

UMass Amherst Chancellor Robert Holub said, “This project provides an excellent example of how the Commonwealth's land grant university combines the latest information technology with excellence in public service to create new opportunities for scholarship, teaching and research. W.E.B Du Bois is a major historical figure whose career touched on the most critical social and political issues of his day, and providing public access to these original documents will ensure that his insights are valued in contemporary society.”

Donna Cupelo, Verizon region president of New England, said the Du Bois project is an excellent fit for the company's foundation. "The Verizon Foundation invests in programs that use technology that enrich the academic experience and help prepare students to succeed in the 21st century," she said. "Thanks to the power of broadband technology, UMass Amherst will soon be able to share the Du Bois papers with a wider audience. While the papers have been available to advanced scholars for many years, we are pleased to support an effort to make them available to students and teachers of all levels, wherever they are located."

Widely recognized as one of the top three collections in the country for studying African American history, the Du Bois materials at UMass Amherst offer insight into a wide range of social and historical movements. Included are Du Bois's letters to and from presidents and public figures such as Marcus Garvey, Booker T. Washington, Albert Einstein and Mohandas Gandhi. For example, a menu signed by all those present at the first meeting of the Niagara Movement, the precursor organization to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), is part of the collection. Because no restaurant in Buffalo, N.Y., would serve the black leaders, they held their first meeting across the river in Ontario.

The library at UMass Amherst was named in honor of African American scholar and political activist W.E.B. Du Bois in October 1994 by the UMass Board of Trustees. The official dedication took place in February 1996.

Since 1973, the library has housed the W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, a collection of more than 100,000 letters, photographs, manuscripts of published and unpublished writings, memorabilia and audiovisual materials. The collection is used extensively by students, faculty, visiting scholars and other researchers worldwide. The effort to acquire the papers from Du Bois's widow, Shirley Graham Du Bois, was led by Randolph Bromery, who served as chancellor of UMass Amherst from 1971-79.

Over his extraordinarily long life — from his birth in Great Barrington, Mass., in 1868 to his death in Ghana in 1963 — Du Bois witnessed or took part in many of the most important social movements and events in United States history, from post-Civil War Reconstruction to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. A journalist, social analyst and activist, and a founder of the NAACP, Du Bois vigorously explored many approaches to fighting racism, including integration, separatism, cultural and political groups including communism, expatriation to Africa and more.

Also participating in today's announcement at the Du Bois Library were Jack Wilson, UMass president; Randolph Bromery, former UMass Amherst chancellor and geophysics professor emeritus; Charlena Seymour, provost and senior vice chancellor for academic affairs; Jay Schafer, UMass Libraries director, and Esther Terry, vice chancellor for student affairs and campus life. As part of the program, MaryNell Morgan sang selected "sorrow songs," Negro spirituals that Du Bois included between the chapters of his best known book, "The Souls of Black Folk," published in 1903.

The Verizon Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Verizon Communications, supports the advancement of literacy and K-12 education through its free educational Web site, www.Thinkfinity.org, and fosters awareness and prevention of domestic violence. In 2008, the Verizon Foundation awarded more than \$68 million in grants to nonprofit agencies in the U.S. and abroad. It also matched the charitable donations of Verizon employees and retirees, resulting in an additional \$26 million in combined contributions to nonprofits. Through Verizon Volunteers, one of the nation's largest employee volunteer programs, Verizon employees and retirees have volunteered more than 3 million hours of community service since 2000. For more information on the foundation, visit www.verizonfoundation.org.

Contact: Ed Blaguszewski, 413/545/-0444, edblag@admin.umass.edu
Philip Santoro, 617/743-4760, philip.g.santoro@verizon.com