

NYU Launches History of Undercover Reporting Database

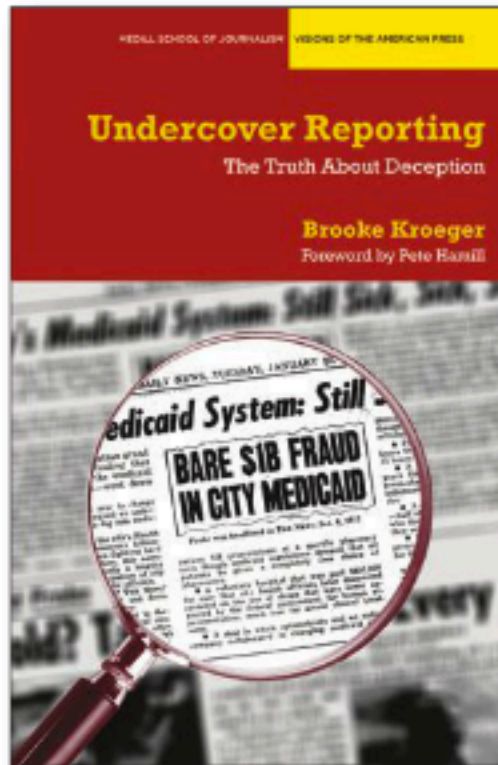
BY JAMES DEVITT

NYU has launched a database chronicling undercover journalism dating back to the 1800s. The archive, "Undercover Reporting," includes an array of stories, ranging from the slave trade in the 1850s to efforts to boycott Jewish-owned businesses in the U.S. in the late 1930s to treatment of soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in the 21st century.

The database, www.undercoverreporting.org, is a joint endeavor of professor **Brooke Kroeger** of NYU's Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute and the university's Division of Libraries, where the Digital Library Technology Services team developed the online platform that hosts the database, with consultation from the Libraries' Office of Digital Scholarly Publishing and Its Collections and Research Services.

"Much of this material has long been buried in microfilm in individual libraries and thus very difficult to retrieve," says Kroeger, who conceived and directed the project. "Most digitized newspaper archives do not go back past the 1980s or 1990s and even for those that do, it's difficult to search without exact details of the piece you are seeking."

The database is designed for scholars,



student researchers, and journalists, who can search by writer, publication, story topic, or method (e.g., prison infiltrations, shadowing migrants, impersonation, etc.). It also includes critics' reactions to these tactics—for instance, their response to the use of hidden cameras.

The database coincides with the publication of Kroeger's *Undercover Reporting: The Truth About Deception* (Northwestern University Press, 2012), which emerged from this research. In the book, Kroeger posits that this type of journalism is not separate from the profession's conventional practices but, rather, embodies some of its most important tenets—the ability to extract significant information or to create indelible, real-time descriptions of hard-to-penetrate institutions or social situations that deserve the public's attention.

"Researching the book changed my perception of the practice and its role in journalism history, making clear how early reporters were experimenting with the method—notably northern reporters working to expose the slave trade in the South in the years leading up to the Civil War," explains Kroeger.

The project is supported by NYU's Humanities Initiative and the university's Faculty of Arts and Science.

For more on the Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute, go to <http://journalism.nyu.edu/>; for more on NYU's Division of Libraries, go to <http://library.nyu.edu/>.

For more on the Division of Libraries Digital Library Technology Services, go to <http://dlib.nyu.edu>. ■