Case Statement:
Meeting in the Middle: Community Engagement in a Digital World Working Group
Project: *Hear, Here*
Ariel Beaujot, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Hear, Here is an audio documentary project in downtown La Crosse Wisconsin (UW-L) that launched in 2015 and will be available until 2020. The way *Hear, Here* functions is that orange street-level signs with toll-free numbers on them have been placed wherever a story is told. Users of the program dial the number to hear a story about the exact location where they stand. All stories are first-person narratives (not historical markers read out over the phone line), and they span a 100-year period, thanks in part to a long-standing Oral History Program at UW-L. Along with the pre-existing oral histories, we have recorded a number of stories specifically for this project. Once listeners have heard a story they can stay on the line and record their own stories that will be added if the story fits the objectives of the project. We currently have 34 signs/stories up, and hope to increase that number to 60 by the 2020. One of the main objectives of the project is to highlight the voices of historically underrepresented people—Ho-Chunk, Hmong, African American, Latino/a, LGBTQ*, homeless.

Other than the street-level signs that are supported by EZ-Route, an Interactive Voice Response solution provided by CenturyLink; we have a website (www.hearherelacrosse.org) that contains all recordings, photo essays, transcripts, project objectives and allows users to submit stories and make comments; and a Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/HearHereLaCrosse/) that allows us to interact with our audience still further. The work of putting together this project was also done entirely through Google Documents with a class of UW-L students, and it continues on with interns using and adding to this same group of documents.

Now for the issues:

- All of the interactive media we use have tracking devices. While we have found that people consistently interact with the website and Facebook page throughout the year, the phone system is not as heavily used from November until March. This is due to the cold Wisconsin winters and also to the lack of outdoor downtown celebrations during this period (we frequently have tours and booths during festivals that results in an increase in use of the phone system in the Spring, Summer, and Fall). We have tried to counteract this by working with Explore La Crosse who are doing more active marketing through this period. We also currently have a *Hear, Here* poetry contest due in March that should increase the calls to the system. This is the first year that we are attempting these new ideas, so we are still waiting for the data to see if this helped increase calls in the colder months.

- Another major issue of this project is with EZ Route, the IVR solution provided by CenturyLink. When we decided on the system we were told that the audio files would be .wav, a very high quality audio file, but it turns out that the system only supports .vox, a very low quality audio file. This created a number of issues: 1) the oral history interviews were often recorded on reel-to-reel and therefore we could not get high enough quality audio file from these recordings so that it would still be understandable when converting to .vox. 2) the new interviews that we did were in the locations where the story happened, including all the background noise of the streets. This was done for theoretical reasons—we wanted the people telling the stories to reconnect with them by telling them on location—but the street level noise took over the recordings when converting to .vox. We have come up with two solutions to these issues: 1) re-record the older oral histories with modern actors 2) take narrators to the location to tell their stories and then do the final recording in a quiet space. Neither of these are ideal and it might be better to switch to a new IVR system that would support .wav files but our research shows that this solution would be 12 times as expensive.

- In terms of accessing new audiences this project brought up another important issue. From the beginning we wanted to make sure that historically underrepresented voices were well represented in this project. Some community members—local politicians, business owners—felt challenged by stories told by African American narrators. This resulted in a lot of initial push-back against the project and some even demanded that the signs representing these voices be taken down. In two instances these signs were even stolen effectively silencing Black voices. My solution to this was three-fold: 1) I reiterated the objectives of the project about how ALL voices need to be represented in a democratic, ideal city 2) We brought in James Loewen, author of *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism,* who spoke at City Hall identifying La Crosse as a city that historically took actions to maintain itself as predominantly White. The issue of the push-back against *Hear, Here* and other similar work is in part due to this racist history of the town. 3) Finally we searched out and put up more stories by African American narrators, because we wanted to make sure that the stories told could not be considered isolated incidents that could be swept under the rug, or easily forgotten, rather anti-Black racism is an issue in our city that needs to be addressed at a variety of levels.
- Another issue I have experienced because of using Google Docs with my students is that as students add files (and then graduate) these files will be lost. The time-consuming solution to this is for me to go through and make myself the owner of all the documents. And when working with people from the community from the Baby Boomer generation there is some confusion about how to navigate and use Google Docs, though in the future this could be easily rectified by providing some training.

"Meeting in the Middle: Community Engagement In a Digital World" Working Group
NCPH 2017
Julia Brock, Case Statement

Antioch A.M.E. Digital Archive

I'm currently working on a digital archive of records related to a historic A.M.E. Church near Atlanta (http://antiochamehistory.org/archive). The project began when a church member approached the Center for Public History at the University of West Georgia, where I work, to solicit help in finding historic resources related to the church's 148-year history. We formed an advisory group of other church members and public historians and in the fall of 2015 received a small grant from the Georgia Humanities Council to create a History Day program in July 2016, which we structured as a history harvest to begin scanning records. We currently have eight collections from donors, and will begin an oral history project this spring (interviews will be included on the site).

Digital Divides

The question I'd like to explore is one of equity in soliciting and accepting digital contributions to the site--particularly those of of crafting permission and rights language that avoids perpetuating a historic legacy of white institutions exploiting or ignoring communities of color. On the day of the history harvest, several church members--who had arrived with collections to scan--voiced their uneasiness with the team of historians there to do to the digitizing. They were concerned particularly with the language of copyright included in the consent forms we used. Ultimately, due to questions of ownership, several members did not allow us to make digital copies of their records.

I consider the loss of trust by church members as a misstep on my part. I should have advocated more strongly to include alternative rights language in our consent form. Public historians have used Creative Commons language to ensure parity, particularly in oral history

projects.[1] The legal team at my institution, however, is wary of adopting CC licensing. Our

consent forms require copyright for donations, even for the reproductions of artifacts and

documents that populate the digital archive. In subsequent meetings the advisory group agreed

that we must change consent language before moving forward with additional scanning. It

seems we're stalled in the meantime unless we use CC language without the institution's

explicit permission.

Solutions

I'm hoping that members of the working group might address two issues this case

raises--the broader one of mistrust in working with community partners (and an understandable

mistrust grounded in past injustice) as well as specific strategies to create parity in partnerships,

even if working against institutional priorities of risk management. Projects like this one,

informed by a turn to community archiving (wherein collections remain in control of community

stakeholders instead of being deposited with external gatekeepers), are growing--yet how are

practitioners working to cross divides?[2] Are there some among you who have successfully used

alternative rights language in projects like this? If so, did they navigate solutions with

institutional legal representation? One solution I'm considering is to schedule a joint meeting

with legal representatives and church members to clarify the stakes. If I can, additionally, bring

models of successful CC language employment our case might be further bolstered. I look

forward to insight from participants in the working group, and am willing to draft collaborative

best practices for navigating this kind of divide should the group does take on the creation of

such a document. Thank you, in advance, for your contributions!

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[1] See Jack Dougherty and Candace Simpson, "Who Owns Oral History? A Creative Commons Solution," in *Oral History in the Digital Age*, http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/2012/06/a-creative-commons-solution/.
[2] For a brief overview of community archiving, see Lindsay Kistler Mattock, "Where is the Archivist in Community Archiving?" *Americans for the Arts*, http://www.americansforthearts.org/blog-feed/where-is-the-archivist-in-community-archiving.

NCPH 2017: Meeting in the Middle: Community Engagement in a Digital Working Group

Case study: Matthew Barlow, University of Massachusetts – Amherst

In my experience as a digital and public historian, both within and without the academy, I have been amazed at the great disconnect between and betwixt academics, communities, and community stakeholders, as well as between clients and patrons. This is not the usual academic/community divide, but is something more complex and more profound at the same time it is both more banal and quotidian. As academics, we spend a lot of time wringing our hands, trying to figure out how to connect to 'regular people,' but this is not the problem I, at least, have encountered. Rather, it is a question of authority, and the problem does not lie entirely, of course, at our end. In some instances, I have been a conduit for community members to attain their goals, in other instances, I have been an equal partner, and yet others, I have brought my knowledge and expertise to a community to help it attain it goals. The other issue that I have had arise, and I am certainly not unique here, either, is the question of technology. By this, I mean what is desired versus what is possible, and what is desired and/or possible versus cost.

I am not drawing on a specific case study, but rather I am drawing on my cumulative experience as both an academic and a consultant to query the manner in which we tend to approach projects and pondering notions of democracy. In particular, I am questioning the basic meaning of democracy, whether that means equality or something else, whether or not it is desirable for both digital humanists and the communities we work with. And I am, ultimately, questioning how the notion of shared authority works in practice. It is these broad questions that I would like to approach and tackle with this Working Group.

One of the great challenges of doing public history is the question of shared authority and allowing ourselves to be guided by our partners in our projects, to surrender control of our visions and ideas for our projects. At the same time, our partners have the same issues, as they have their own ideas and goals for the projects. We are then left to negotiate complex issues of sharing authority, of compromising on our visions.

Another concern centres around technology. My original impetus for joining this Working Group was based on mobile browsing technology and capabilities. This arises from my experiences in noting two things: first, that most people use their phones to browse the web and that many websites are not actually optimized for mobile browsers; second, data shows that users prefer web browsing to apps. The reason for creating apps are obvious, in that they allow for a customized experience of an historical event, historic neighbourhood, museum, and so on. However, this is also their limitation in an era of concern about Big Data. At the same time, apps are

closed systems, whereas web browsers are open. Thus, I am interested in creating web sites based on our projects, for and with our communities.

My specific questions, thus, are based on these two issues that are, I realize, rather disparate.

1. How do we meaningfully create a democratic experience of Web 2.0 within the context of our projects?
2. What kinds of communities do we seek to build/nourish/grow?
   a. How do we use digital platforms to bridge divides of gender, race, politics, etc.?
3. When we use terms like 'crowdsourcing', what do we mean?
   a. Do we have a target audience or crowd?
   b. How do we determine that audience or crowd?
   c. What do we do if we get participation beyond our target?
   d. Especially, what do we do if that extra-crowd participation is hostile?
   e. How, then, do we respond to hostility?
4. What do we mean by 'democracy' in our projects?
5. How do we respond to user demands?
6. How do we work to create an optimized mobile browser experience of our projects?
7. In the political climate we are entering, how do we practice such things as inclusiveness?
8. And for those who are inclined towards activism, how do we harness the power of digital history and democratic crowd-sourced participation to build communities, practice resistance, and do more than post in a Facebook group or on Twitter?
   a. In other words, how do we use the DH (whether defined as Digital History or Digital Humanities) to create meaningful dissent?

Meeting In The Middle: Community Engagement In A Digital World

Case Statement: Jim McGrath (Brown University)

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Our Marathon and Community Engagement in Digital and Analog Contexts

Our Marathon: The Boston Bombing Digital Archive is a community project hosted at
Northeastern University that collects stories, photos, oral histories, and social media about the
2013 Boston Marathon bombings and their aftermath. _Our Marathon_ got up and running very
quickly: we had major components of our public-facing web interface in place by May of 2013,
and we began rolling out the digital mechanism for crowdsourcing at our first "Share Your Story"
event in October. The ability to engage with the public and collect content quickly was, in many
ways, a strength of the project, given the time-sensitive nature of media coverage, a desire to
gather digital records that, if not ephemeral, may have been less immediately on the minds of
users (or less accessible, given the poor search mechanisms available on social media sites like
Facebook and Instagram), and it encouraged project team members and crowdsourced
collaborators to focus on documenting content at temporary memorials around the city. Using
Omeka, an open-source content management system, we were able to set up a functional
interface that enabled the project to make digital objects accessible and invite contributions on a
live site. And thanks to collaborations with public libraries across Boston and the state at-large,
we were able to meet with local communities invested in this subject matter and discuss the
value of creating and contributing to a public-facing digital archive.

I think there are two major areas I'd like to focus on in terms of challenges worth discussing with
the working group.

What "Public Engagement" Looks Like in Academic Contexts

"Public humanities" and "public history" are increasingly visible terms in the context of digital scholarship and digital humanities work, and I'm sure some of the invocations of these terms irritate attendees of NCPH when "public engagement" seems to amount to little more than "we made a web site." On the other hand. I've also seen many well-intentioned digital projects from the worlds of public history and public humanities made by architects who could probably spend more time considering (among other areas) use of third-party / commercial platforms, questions of long-term preservation and accessibility, user experience / UX and design principles, and database design / architecture (with an eye towards the creation of visualizations and the reuse of data via the circulation of usable datasets).

Beyond press releases, CV lines, and conference talks, digital projects invested in "public engagement" must think about how most digital public-facing academic initiatives, despite their noble intentions, "look" to the publics they aspire to serve: at their worst, clunky, dated, jargon-laden, and disconnected from the rest of the web. While it may take relatively little time to set up an Omeka instance, will your desired audience find and use this space? How do you want them to "engage" with your materials? How can you acknowledge limitations in terms of available expertise, money for designers, or time constraints, and how do these areas transform more ambitious initiatives into projects that are still compelling and useful to particular audiences? How do we have conversations with faculty members, department chairs, librarians, archivists, community members, and others about strategies for public engagement in digital contexts?

Our Marathon, for example, did suffer from the fact that its funding and labor commitments essentially ran out in the summer of 2014. While this timeline was anticipated and prepared for (materials are destined for Northeastern's Archives and Special Collections for this reason, and we established this relationship early on), it meant that there was no Version 2.0 of the digital interface that year, that public outreach essentially concluded around the one-year anniversary of the bombings, and that a more robust, engaging digital portal (which is in the works!) was a long-term project for the five-year anniversary of these events. Project members who have gone on to other public history / public humanities projects try to think carefully about why (or if) Omeka is a good fit for a public-facing project. We spend substantial time wireframing and drafting site layout and architecture. We often advocate a "slow" form of project development and incubation that can sometimes frustrate faculty members and grad students who have more immediate desires or concerns (amusing, given how slow academic writing develops and circulates, but whatever). We are happy to meet projects and collaborators "halfway" on some of these issues, but we remain surprised at times by perceptions about "one-click install" digital tools (for example, that they exist at all), by the way labor is valued and allocated for (and, funded), by the distance between public history practitioners and their so-called constituents.

The Labor of Public History in Academic Contexts

The value of labor became a major issue on *Our Marathon*. More specifically, perceptions of tenure review boards, dissertations committees, departments, librarians, and others on campus shaped decisions to invest in or disavow particular kinds of labor. What role can graduate students play on a project when they are juggling commitments to course work, teaching, dissertations? How can librarians or archivists who are better informed on best practices in digital work share authority with tenured faculty who may have other ideas (or perceptions about

librarians as "service" labor?)? How can validated forms of labor -- building CV lines, attending prestigious conferences, documenting commitments to public work or digital work -- sometimes negatively impact a project's ability to productively engage with members of the public? Does every grad student need to come out of a program with his/her own digital project because that's what is appealing to potential employers especially? If we are invested in ideas of shared authority, collaboration, and community engagement, how do these investments sometimes come into productive conflict with certain assumptions about labor and our roles at institutions? How might some of these conflicts lead to a transformation of institutional practices or spaces so that this labor is valued and transformative? How do they impact the people staffing centers, the time commitments required of students and faculty, the goals of collaborative work that gives community representatives and collaborators agency, control, and authority on these projects?

On *Our Marathon,* librarians helped us think about best practices for engaging with their patrons in terms of event programming, staffing, and resource allocation. Many librarians seemed content to let the digital team "do their thing" in terms of crowdsourcing: they were often more interested in providing a space in their programming to address events that impacted their community in a productive and engaging manner. I think it is important to acknowledge that our investments in digital spaces may not be shared by all of our collaborators, and that project collaborators may have different aims and goals that serve a range of audiences. These aims should be clearly stated, as they impact metrics for success as well as labor and time commitments. And the forms of labor beyond the university -- librarians, curators, oral historians, contributors -- should be acknowledged and made visible when these projects are discussed in academic settings like conferences and journal articles.

NCPH Working Group Case Statement

Meeting in the Middle: Community Engagement in a Digital World

Emily Esten

In the transition from developing public-facing projects to public-engaging projects, most collaborators are still concerned with form and structure to best support exploration of content. But my interest in this working group, and in the evolution of digital scholarship in general, comes from wanting to understand the types of participation (or non-participation) that exist in evolving digital projects. With tools and methods in place to support the goals of content management, digital public historians now have a new layer to consider: community engagement. In exploring this new angle for public scholarship, collaborators must develop introspective insight to understand how we ask others to engage with materials through these channels.

Monitoring the ways in which audiences read and work within these environments, both individually or collectively, can help collaborators understand the value of a project in digital form. Crowdsourced digital archives are a great example of public history scholarship moving towards its public engagement phase. In larger organizations, like Smithsonian Transcription Center and New York Public Library Labs, eager participants volunteer their time and services to a digital project. Through community peer-review processes, #volunpeers work through curated projects to transcribe records for participating institutions. Equally as fascinating, a small-scale project like Cornell University's *Freedom on the Move* uses transcription to "undermine the barriers between professional historians and the historically-inquisitive public." In reading

through the runaway ads, *Freedom on the Move* emphasizes individual case study for North American Slavery. In both cases, participants work their ways through documents or text-based materials to make them readable and accessible.

But the quantitative crowdsourcing transcriptions represent a shallow level of engagement in the long-term. While these projects introduce a "citizen historian" audience to materials in a new learning environment, the type of engagement from these participants lacks quality personal input. Beyond making these materials accessible, these types of digital projects do little to encourage these same participants to respond to the materials with which they work. And in that case, these projects fail on some larger level to have the public connect these materials to a larger narrative or context.

Crowdsourced transcription projects rarely ask a public to make statements about the information collected, or to curate in its own way the artifacts present. Nor does it encourage a public to do anything with the information with which we present them. While public transcription represents a different type of research process, institutions frame the goals in such a way that accessibility to the data is aimed for "other" practitioners. In giving these volunpeers the opportunity to share authority in developing transcriptions, crowdsourincg also devalues their labor as service to some larger project.

But shouldn't institutions and organizations consider these participants as creators and collaborators if an audience shows the interest to take on that role? And if public historians consider transcription projects as a form of engagement, can they also encourage constructing a narrative around these objects? Just as we do in museums and cultural organizations with

programming, forums, and participatory elements in exhibits, we should encourage a digital public to not only give feedback but to develop that feedback with each other.

These aren't the intentions of projects like the Smithsonian Transcription Center, and it may be unfair to judge the project on these terms. But they are the intentions of *Freedom on the Move*. Small-scale collaborative public history projects in the transcription field should encourage audiences to pursue and promote individual works with the presented materials. And while in some vein, we wouldn't expect the same level of engagement in "analog" participation, digital projects can challenge the structure of community engagement and what we expect from individual and community interaction. .

Public historians center and define quality engagement in face-to-face interactions, but digital environments require clearer parameters and new understandings of how people interact within these platforms. So, that leads us to two distinct questions. In building guidelines for future projects, what can we do to support successful interactions within our existing project communities?

- What forms or structures are conducive to digital conversations?
- Are these projects accessible to our analog publics, addressing the existing digital divide?
- Who is excluded in these conversations, by identity or accessibility?
- What investments are we asking of a community in participating in a digital project?
- How do we find collaborators and participants that support using this digitized media for networked purposes?

And beyond that, we also should define what counts as quality community engagement for our projects.

- Are we monitoring purely quantitative participation - number of views, comments, edits?

- Are the goals of a digital project focused on views, or use and contribution of materials?

- Are we looking to build communities or curate within a specific community?

- Does a digital project feature a way for audience members to comment and critique the materials and/or the construction of a project in a public or private way?

- Can crowdsourcing transcription foster long-term initiatives like discussion or dialogue?

Beyond building public-facing projects for the content, practitioners need to consciously think through how the audience is served in a digital environment. By critically analyzing our success and failures – defining the issues within our tools, methods, and evaluative measures – future projects can acknowledge how identity and community function in this space.

Thinking broadly about the role of public history practitioners in cultivating digital communities begs the question of digital citizenship. Asking how people do or don't participate in digital projects, we can tie this question back to ideas of historians' role in traditional citizenship and the early role of cultural institutions shaping social/cultural behavior. In larger debates of the value of history education, leading educators have point to the responsibility of historians to strengthen and promote democratic values. Similarly, early museum founders sought to shape social behavior and cultural conversations of their time. When asking digital audiences to participate our projects as citizen historians in our projects, practitioners carry this cultural capital of both public and academic streams. What stake do practitioners have to implement this in digital projects? Do we have any right to implement these values within existing digital communities? In our efforts to improve upon community engagement, what can we do in our pedagogy or practice to continue these values of the historical discipline?

Meeting in the Middle: Community Engagement in a Digital World
Case Statement
Karlyn Forner, SNCC Digital Gateway Project

The SNCC Digital Gateway website (snccdigital.org) is a collaborative project of the Student

Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Legacy Project and Duke University that portrays civil rights

history from the perspective of the activists, themselves. It tells a story of how young activists in SNCC

united with local people in the Deep South to build a grassroots movement for change that empowered

Black communities and transformed the nation. Movement veterans are co-collaborators in shaping this

story. They have developed the vision and framework of the SNCC Digital Gateway in partnership with

the scholars, archivists, and administrators who serve on project's editorial and advisory boards, and

they have been instrumental in bringing together grassroots stories, digitized primary source materials,

and new multi-media productions within the website. The partnership seeks to document SNCC's

history, as well as pass on both an empowering history and practical strategies to the next generation.

The SNCC Legacy Project-Duke collaboration is also trying to create a new working model where

those who made the history have as much "credentials" as those in the scholarly community to tell the

story. Much like SNCC, the collaboration is committed to small "d" democratic decision-making. Project

partners are consulted, issues are debated, documents are collectively edited (sometimes by fifteen

people), and decision making can take weeks. The SNCC Digital Gateway portrays not only SNCC's

history, but the reasons behind the organizers' thinking and the lessons that they learned. The stated

goal of the website is to bring this history to a new generation, but first and foremost, it needs to

accurately reflect movement veterans' understanding of the work they did.

The SNCC Digital Gateway (SDG) then has two audiences with different perspectives: project

partners and the young people the project seeks to connect with. The commitment to telling movement

history from the perspective of the activists has directly influenced how the SNCC Digital Gateway is

structured, designed, and what types of content it features. But it has also resulted in less input from

young people on the front end of the project. Instead of being involved in the development of the site, young people are being asked to engage now that the SNCC Digital Gateway is live. The setup of the collaboration creates this gap. Telling SNCC's history to the satisfaction of the project partners is an essential measure of success. Given the activists' exclusion from writing movement history, that's a worthy goal in and of itself. But it also makes input from young people secondary.

I am interested the question of how to make democratic history as democratic as possible. SNCC was an organization that was committed to grassroots organizing and empowering local people to make change in their own lives. It's bottom-up, people's history at its best. In terms of the SNCC Digital Gateway, how do you create space for young people to weigh in on what they see as most relevant about civil rights history that also acknowledges the lessons that an older generation of activists learned and want to pass on? Is it possible to do both? More broadly, how do you meaningfully engage young activists and students when telling grassroots, bottom-up history? Stories of people joining together to take action for change are compelling and empowering. How do projects that work to digitally document people's history effectively engage with the audiences they hope to mobilize?

It seems like the answers to these questions involve spaces and relationships. What spaces (both physical and digital) need to be cultivated to make democratic history as democratic as possible? SNCC's grassroots organizing work involved countless hours of pounding the pavement, knocking on doors, and talking to people. Do those same strategies have staying power in today's digital world? Is there a digital equivalent to SNCC's face-to-face relationship building or pounding the pavement? Does engagement require more than just the primary digital platform? There's a lot of excitement around the possibilities of social media, but what does meaningful engagement look like on social media? Is the same kind of relationship building necessary to make the SNCC Digital Gateway or similar digital history platforms directly relevant to students and people engaged in social justice work? Are digital platforms best used as jumping off points for further conversation, strategizing, and organizing?

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NCPH Working Group Case Statement

Meeting in the Middle: Community Engagement in a Digital World

Hannah Hethmon

As I see one fascinating digital history project and repositories after another making history accessible in new and exciting ways, I am struck by the conspicuous lack of social media integration. Though this is a systemic problem, and case studies could be made on any number of projects, I am particularly interested in the lack of any social media integration in the *Preserve the Baltimore Uprising 2015 Archive Project*.

This fantastic digital repository was created to "preserve and make accessible original content that was captured and created by individual community members, grassroots organizations, and witnesses" during the Uprising. Much of the Uprising was organized and documented through new technology, including smart phones and social media, particularly Twitter. One of the most iconic images from those days, the black and white image by Devin Allen that would become a *Time* cover, was first shared on his Instagram account, where he continues to document life in inner-city Baltimore.

Thousands and thousands of photos, emails, audio recordings, and other content has been shared with the archive, which has a convenient form on its website where anyone can submit content. But for an archive that specifically seeks to preserve content shared on social media about an event for which social media was an important medium, it's interesting to see almost social media integration whatsoever, not even buttons to allow the site's visitors to share items

in the collection on social media (there is what looks like an official Twitter account with a small following that, at first glance, is largely public history professionals).

Admittedly, the project was put together quickly and with likely, as is the case in so many projects, with volunteered time, and the organizers have applied for grants that will in part, help "improve the design to make it inviting and attractive to the people we hope to serve" [1]. But the fact that social media was not part of the initial project phase could reflect a widespread dismissal or neglect of the medium by field due to a perception of social media as a trivial or less-authoritative platform.

Social media is one of the most powerful examples of Web 2.0, and the best example we have of a egalitarian, participatory internet. Yet so many digital projects still end up being just slightly more dynamic versions of Web 1.0's static pages. If visitors to cultural institutions expect, as Nina Simon writes in *The Participatory Museum*, "the ability to discuss, share, and remix what they consume," how much more striking is the absence of these functions in digital projects attempting to leverage the communal nature of the Internet for a more participatory experience [2]?

If the creators of projects like the *Preserve the Baltimore Uprising 2015 Archive Project* aim to make their resources engaging and available and welcoming to the people whose history they are preserving, then we must consider what platforms for online expression, collaboration, and participation these audiences are using. Pew statistics on social media show that online adults in urban areas show a preference for Instagram and Twitter, with 30% of online urban adults using each platform (versus 28% and 23% of all online adults, respectively). These platforms

are also significantly more popular with African American and Hispanic online adults. 47% of all online African American adults use Instagram and 28% use Twitter[3] In this case, it would be simple enough to integrate these platforms into the archive to create a small bridge from the authoritative space of the archive to the individual- and community-controlled spaces on social media sites.

Of course, even incredible and well-done projects like the Uprising Archive must prioritize where they spend their time and effort, so this is not so much a criticism as one example out of many of a general neglect and underestimation of social media's potential to engage new and diverse audiences in digital history projects that aim to inform and include the public.

What can we do to integrate social media and encourage users to extend the impact of project content outside the semi-static project website into the more participatory and already "populated" realm of social media? In other words, how can we enable and empower online users to meaningfully connect these digital projects to their very real digital lives, which are increasingly an significant and interdependent part of their offline lives?

How can we avoid creating online spaces that are fascinating and meaningful but disconnected from the complex and dynamic online presences of our audiences and the communities we are trying to serve, represent, and record? How can we use social media to create truly participatory projects, rather than creating online versions of the physical institutions who are failing to reach and engage new and young audiences? Is requiring users to visit our new platforms to learn and participate creating barriers to those very activities?

Ultimately, if digital history projects want to include the public, they must start by looking at where and how those people already engage with ideas and content online instead of factoring in other digital communities only after creating new online spaces.

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NCPH Working Group Case Statement

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Meeting in the Middle: Community Engagement in a Digital World
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The Project

How can you tell a story of an organization when the tale is dispersed across dozens of individuals throughout the country? At the Old Hemlock Foundation, utilizing the digital middle proved to offer the solution to such a unique problem. Home of noted artist, outdoor writer, and dog breeder George Bird Evans, Old Hemlock (the frontier era home and surrounding acreage Evans bought in the 1930's in Bruceton Mills WV) itself is a powerful tool to carry out the foundation's mission of preserving the historical memory of George and his work, but is, arguably, not the heart of the story. In the decades of dog breeding, George and his wife Kay touched many lives in the relationships they formed with the owners of their line of English Setters. Going beyond a simple transaction, the owners became valued friends over the years and formed a sort of family spread out over the country based not of blood, but of common interest in the line of dogs. To really get at the tale and share the historical narrative their memories, impressions, and reminisces had to be included and provide the primary voice in any narrative.

During my eight months spent as an AmeriCorps member at the foundation, this unique situation struck me as the most intriguing and complicated interpretative challenge. The volumes written on how effective oral history can be were clearly evident after I had talked to many members of the "family," be it on the interviews completed before my arrival or ones I conducted in person. The challenge was how to share these stories with the public in order to deliver the same intimate, personal, picture I had come to understand myself. Thankfully, the digital world came to my recue after I received some inspiration from the world of YouTube. Long before I started at the foundation, I had been following several history themed channels (The Great War and the Extra Credits gaming channel "Extra History" specials) that were managing to present well researched and captivating history--and gather large dedicated audiences in the process. Once the preverbal light bulb went off, the solution to my conundrum

was clear--I would try my hand at crafting my own channel to share the story of George and Kay thru the voices of those who knew it best.

Thankfully, I found the process to surprisingly user friendly and intuitive for even the most entrenched troglodyte. While we lacked the perks of dedicated production crews that my inspirations enjoyed or access to professional grade design work via contractors a larger museum has, the low thrills Windows Movie Maker (the armature's best friend) proved to be capable of meeting our needs to edit footage into short clips with a title and credits that were suitable for uploading. Once uploaded, clips were ordered into playlists covering major subjects of George and Kay's life (George's writings, the line of hunting dogs, first visits to Old Hemlock, etc) for viewing. After a short excerpt from a recently completed documentary on the line of hunting dogs was selected to serve as the introductory clip to the page and overall astetchis were finalized, the experiment was ready to launch.

The Retrospective

Initially and overall, the experiment was a success. Response to the channel was overwhelming and exceeded our most hopefully expectations. Over a two month period, the initial batch of videos was unveiled followed by three successive playlists. In total, the page hosts thirty two videos, five playlists (four of the "family" telling the history and one covering the dating of the house) and over 2,300 views. With the "family" consisting of only around seventy dogs and owners, it was clear the channel was reaching far beyond the inner circle. However, no project is perfect. In hindsight, the experience taught me just as much about the limits of the digital realm--particularly its unique divides, as it did the potential.

In short, the digital realm can be a fickle mistress with some sudden mood swings. After the initial jubilation at the traffic the page was generating, I started to notice the somewhat ominous pattern of peaks and valleys in viewership. Upon the release of a new video or playlist there would be a sudden surge in traffic with an equally sudden drop off as viewers finished ingesting the latest uploads. Until new content was added, usually about a two week interlude, the site became as barren as the Dust Bowl until the next batch of clips was ready for unveiling. The pattern continued until the last batch of clips had been uploaded and the project came to its

conclusion. The possibility of more content being added in the future remained, but the heat of summer was giving way to the cool breeze of fall and the focus turned to other projects as I prepared for the transition to the next AmeriCorps member who would fill the position. By the time the group meets, it will be a full eight months since I completed my experience at the foundation and moved on to another institution. The YouTube page will still be active, but likely not have received any large increase in views. While a worthwhile and successful endeavor, the frustration of the digital divide still remains.   Fortunately, the divide is not impassable--as successful history channels have shown--and even if my small experiment lent insight on how digital endeavors can fade, the insight was still a valuable one for myself, and hopefully the group, to learn.

The cause of the divide was rather obvious and any first year marketing major can tell you. In the fast pace digital world competition for attention is fierce and if you are not producing new content regularly you will fade to the background. The cause of the drop off was not a lack of professional polish, but that content stopped coming and people had seen everything there was to view. For our small organization with a staff of two, the return on investment in viewership and attention for the cost of free were fantastic results, but this hurdle can be a serious matter for larger scale projects with some very real dollars behind them. How then, when faced with such a seemingly certain drop off in interest can institutions or historical endeavors make a lasting and sustainable impact in the digital realm and not get stuck at this digital divide?

The easiest way is to plan ahead for a lengthy project with enough content to last far longer than the two month blitz I undertook. For example, my inspirations have over four years of bloody carnage (played out week by week) and the whole of history to explore guaranteeing gargantuan amounts of potential content. Unfortunately, this was not an option for my own foray into the digital sphere. Only around twenty hours of interviews existed and the uploads stopped coming not just because my time at the organization was coming to a close, but because I was running out of quality content to work with. While this can be seen as an old problem playing out in a new sphere (after all, we don't rotate museum exhibits just to keep ourselves busy), it still reminds us going digital does not automatically mean unlimited reach.

A second way, and what I think is most relevant to this working group, is branching out to and crossing generational and other demographic divides utilizing the digital sphere thru partnerships with non-historical or non-traditional sources and groups. A prime example is inspiration I took from Extra Credits. The most important thing to know is the channel was established to cover one thing, video games. After a game company supplied funds for a special series on the Punic Wars, the channel established a annual history series that comes out every Saturday (and is powered by Patreon supporters). During one of these episodes, a crossover was done with The Great War which introduced me (and likely a large amount of pure "gamers") to an entirely new source for historical entertainment. This, perhaps more than any other example, shows the true power of the digital realm and a potential solution to crossing those digital divides. A traditional documentary style setup managed to use new technology and expand beyond the typical audience thru means that were only available on the digital sphere. Unfortunately, I never strongly pursued active partnerships beyond contemplating reaching out to outdoor themed channels such as Field & Stream magazine, but I have always wondered what may have come (or could come in the future with subsequent AmeriCorps members) if a serious effort was made.

While a small scale exercise, I hope my thoughts and reflections can spur on discussion of how public historians can use inherently non-historical spaces like YouTube to share the stories and narratives we are all so passionate about. The digital divides I encountered were indeed discouraging at times, but have been demonstrated to be surmountable by resourceful individuals and efforts. Hopefully, discussing these ideas at NCPH can encourage further work in these traditionally non-historic digital mediums and help bridge the divides that still persist in the digital middle.

Meeting in the Middle: Community Engagement in a Digital World Working Group

Case Statement: Federal Reserve Digital Library, FRASER

Jane Davis
Vice President of Acces and Digital Services, Linda Hall Library, Kansas City, MO

The Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis created the digital library FRASER (https://fraser.stlouisfed.org) in 2004. It was initially designed to serve as a supplement to the historical economic data captured in the flagship economic data aggregator, FRED. Over the last decade, FRASER has evolved into an amalgamation of a digital library, online archive, and institutional repository. One of the biggest challenges of managing FRASER is the lack of a physical collection and the lack of a clearly defined user group. As a result, we were typically designing, collecting, and promoting based on our interests or critical areas as identified by the other stakeholders. In reality, we didn't completely know who our users were, what they wanted us to be collecting, and how they used our resources.

To that end, we made many decisions throughout the life of the project that proved to be unhelpful or even a dead end. Examples include inconsistent metadata schemas throughout the collection, changing focus on specific types of materials to collect, and the DPLA (Digital Public Library of America) experiment.

One of the most surprising thing that I learned out of the project is that it is very easy to decide you have one group of users and they have one set of needs when in reality, it may be something completely different. As we started going to conferences and making presentations on the kinds of information we had available in FRASER; our audience broadened to include more historians and the general public rather than just economic historians and data nerds. We discovered, through online reference questions that academic libraries were using many of our presumably low-value collections as online replacements for the print. We also found that our most popular titles were from collections that we assumed would get little traffic because they were of less obvious value to economists. Finally, through Google Analytics, we discovered that some the collections we thought would be very valuable, were underutilized. I'd like to see how others track their usage and evaluate how their digital projects reach the intended or unintended audiences.

Meeting in the Middle: Community Engagement in a Digital World
Kristen Baldwin Deathridge, Appalachian State University
Case Statement

I was drawn to work with this group because it seems like the more digital project work that I do,

the more questions I have. Questions in themselves don't disturb me, and I'm eager to have the

opportunity to discuss and work through some things with the group this winter and then with

the wider NCPH community at the annual meeting.

Specifically, in the past couple of years, I've been asked by community partners to create or

re-design websites for them. I teach at Appalachian State University and work with graduate

students in our public history programs. In Spring 2016, I taught a graduate digital history

course and we took on a couple of these projects. The students worked really hard, were

concerned with meeting community needs, and fought through the problems that inevitably

come up when doing this kind of work for the first time. I'm proud of them. When we presented

the work to the community partners at the end of the semester, they were very enthusiastic.

Each group had a few minor revisions, which the students made, but they were generally thrilled

and began sharing their new sites. (The students also created detailed webmaster's guides for

each group, so that the groups can run them themselves, although I continue to make myself

available as a resource.)

By many accounts, these projects were successful. The websites were completed, the

community partners were pleased with the work, and the students fulfilled their pedagogical

goals. The two projects: junaluskaheritage.org and lincolnheightsrosenwald.org were incredibly

similar, though the details were different--both involved researching and presenting the history

of African American communities in Western North Carolina/Southern Appalachia. Each site

also was also set up to encourage crowd contributions--both community groups wanted to gather information, stories, and digital images from members who had moved away (or who are too infirm to really leave their homes for wider community gatherings).

One thing that was important throughout was talking with folks about what they wanted their websites to do and what was actually possible for my students to create using free (omeka, in this case) platforms and plugins. We also had to talk a bit about effective website design and usage patterns. Some members of one community group wanted to put every single item they'd collected up on the site. There seems to be a few disconnects here:

> *different members of a group could not agree on the main purpose of the site--was it to inform others about their community or to be a complete digital archive? It is rarely possible for a single site to serve both of those purposes well.

> *it proved difficult for some folks to understand that something that may look simple that they see on another website actually took quite a bit of time and/or funds to complete.

> *just because something is possible with a website, doesn't mean that it is a good idea, for various reasons. For example, one person in one of these groups was adamant that we use the website to fundraise, but there was not a particular goal in mind. The idea was simply "people will give us money."

In the end, most of these things were (sort of) resolved through good communication, but at times was difficult for me not to just dictate some of the specifics that arose. In the timeline of these projects--just a bit more than a single semester--there just wasn't the time to do these conversations justice. I'm looking for any ideas you all have on how to improve these experiences for everyone involved.

I am also left with several questions:

*Will members of the group maintain their sites? The students did really great work on the webmaster's guides. They gave detailed instructions, included screenshots and links to further information, avoided jargon and defined terms when necessary, and took the time to review their work. The sites went live in May and so far, I've been the only person to make any changes or additions. There hasn't been too much activity for either community group, for various reasons, so I'm not sure that these 7 months are truly representative, but it is a concern. Is there a way that I can help these groups keep up with their sites without becoming the only person who can do this for them? I'm thinking about a check-in with them, but I'm not sure how to frame it, particularly since we're working with both groups on continuing, only tangentially related projects.

*Are people actually visiting these websites and using them? So far, no one has contributed a memory to either site. Group members have shared the websites around their email lists and on Facebook, and folks have gone to look at them. But there are few return visits and none of the story-gathering that the community groups wanted so much. Is this simply poor marketing? If so, what is a more effective way that we can encourage people to share and contribute? Is this a failure to meet the needs of the folks who would use the site, if it were different?

Lara Kelland
University of Louisville
Meeting in the Middle: Community Engagement in the Digital World
Case Statement

For the past three years, I have been directing a digital history project in the Parkland neighborhood of west Louisville. More racially segregated now than it was mid-twentieth century, contemporary west Louisville suffers from government neglect, limited resources, crime, and poverty. The Parkland neighborhood was the site of the 1968 uprising, a complicated urban unrest story that is both like and unlike other post-King rebellions. For the past three years, I and my students have embarked on research projects covering topics like racial change and white flight, business and commercial district history, and civil rights activism. We have combined archival research with oral history interviews, and have produced podcasts, maps, and digital and case-based exhibits. We have relied on interpretive observations in our oral histories to engage lived memory and to share authority, but beyond that we have failed to solicit meaningful input from community members as the interpretive projects have developed.

Somewhat regrettably, the origins of this project did not provide for easy community input. Although the initial suggestion for the focus of this project came from a few passionate local activists/legislators who recognized the importance of the neighborhood's history to its rebirth, their input throughout the project has been limited due in part to the constraints of their schedules. Conversations with volunteers who work with the neighborhood council elicited support and enthusiasm for the project, but little in the way of sustained input. Similarly, an email and paper survey campaign received only a handful of responses, and these too were supportive, if rather light in substantive feedback.

During the oral history interviews in 2014, narrators responded in a wide variety of ways to the question of whether the events of May 1968 ought to be remembered as a "riot," "uprising," or "disturbance," sometimes providing their own terms. As students in my public history courses at the University of Louisville have worked with the oral histories as raw material for interpretive projects, they have extended this terminology debate into their work in an effort to honor the lived experiences of residents. In most cases, they have handled the matter with sensitivity and have managed to represent multiple viewpoints. To this end, we feel that the project has successfully shared authority at the level of co-creating oral histories.

Yet our attempts at gaining community input into the final projects have generated little constructive criticism. A community survey asking for responses to the project website that features various student projects garnered few responses, as have similar invitations we have issued on social media. Those who have contacted us have been supportive of the digital work we have done, but our hopes for engaged and sustained dialogue about the neighborhood's past, present, and future have yet to materialize. The project maintains a social media presence, but little interaction has emerged from facebook posts.

As I move forward with the final interpretive effort for this project, I hope to cultivate better shared authority within the project, but am struggling to imagine the best possible path for such. Over the next few months I plan to engage multiple mapping platforms and am explicitly interested in the opportunities for crowdsourced information. But lacking a formal institutional partner (I have found no evidence of a local historical group, for example), I am at a loss as to how to do so.

In the future I intend to only embark on projects that have an organized group who will provide structure for community engagement, but this requirement limits the kinds of projects I can undertake, and will unfortunately skew project selection towards better resourced communities. I also believe in the mobilizing power of the past, and hope that the projects I undertake with my students can catalyze civic engagement in the neighborhood or community. So this approach doesn't seem like an ideal answer either.

Last year I was asked to comment on Andrew Hurley's thoughtful TPH piece entitled "[Chasing the Frontiers of Digital Technology: Public History Meets the Digital Divide](#)" In it he tracks how his project deployed an innovative strategy for crossing a digital divide (which Hurley insightfully points out is as much about culturally specific digital behavior as it is access to hardware) involved docent-led explorations in a community space. I think his insights about the ways in which people use digital tools is an important one, and i'm hopeful that our conversations will begin to address this concern.

Working Group: Digital Middle
Melissa Barthelemy, **UC Santa Barbara, Case Statement**
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For the past two and a half years I have been serving as project manager for a memorial project at my University that documents the campus and community response to the public tragedy that occurred on May 23, 2014, when six UCSB students were killed and another 14 individuals were injured during a violent crime spree committed by a dangerously mentally ill 22-year old man. I convened a memorial preservation committee and we collected the items left at the four spontaneous memorial sites, and the condolence materials received by our University through the mail. Now those artifacts are contained in the May 23, 2014, University of California, Santa Barbara and Isla Vista Memorial Archive which is housed in the Department of Special Research Collections at the UCSB Library. In Spring and Summer 2015 I served as curator and project manager for the one year-memorial anniversary exhibit *We Remember Them: Acts of Love and Compassion in Isla Vista*. Many of the condolence artifacts were featured in this 6,000 square foot exhibit that we mounted at UCSB. We are in the process of creating a more elaborate digital/virtual tour of the exhibit, and we are now also working on the Digital Collection. The Head of Special Research Collections has agreed to have me curate 100 digital images drawn from the Collection, to be housed in our online repository called Alexandria Digital Research Library (ADRL).

A handful of university administrators from Student Affairs, and Humanities and Fine Arts, are eager for this online collection, and so are some of the families and friends of the victims. The Head of Special Research Collections is willing to have these digital images placed in ADRL, and she understands how much this means to the stakeholders, but she also has

questioned the purpose of having an online collection at all. I explained the importance of an online collection for people to be able to access digital representations remotely, such as scholars who have contacted me with questions about the contents of our collection. As well as friends, family, and community members who live outside of the area but would like to "see" the artifacts by viewing their online representations. In reading through all of your case statements, I have come to better understand the basis of her questions about who the intended audience or users would be, and how they might be using the collection (for what purposes). What has resonated with me is what Jane Davis said in her case statement "…it is very easy to decide you have one group of users and they have one set of needs when in reality, it may be something completely different." As I am now tasked with choosing 100 digital images out of a collection of digital images that numbers over a thousand I am trying to figure out what parameters I should create to help influence my selection process. It is difficult to predict who will be using the collection and in what ways.

Additionally, I am also left grappling with some of the larger questions all of this raises. Such as:

1) As libraries and museums are increasingly digitizing their collections and making them available on-line how do the virtual/digital interact with the physical artifacts?

2) Is there a necessity to have both the physical and digital record? If Special Collections is dedicated to caring for one-of-a-kind, or at least rare objects, that bring scholars to come see them in-person, what will it mean to have images of those same artifacts available online? Might this create duplicity or even eventual obsolescence for Special Collections to move in this direction?

3) Just as some museum administrators have expressed concerns about younger generations increasingly consuming information through their computer screens, rather than visiting "brick-and-mortar" museums in-person, might digitizing the holdings in Special Collections Departments also lead to less utilization of the physical artifacts?

4) Might digitization efforts in some ways contribute to the risk of museums and libraries selling off artifacts to raise money and reduce storage costs if they deem a digital representation to be "good enough"?

5) Might the increase of digital representations on-line contribute to a more digital egalitarian community in which scholars with limited financial resources or who are dealing with disability/mobility issues might be able to access the materials they need more easily?

Meeting In The Middle: Community Engagement In A Digital World

Case Statement: David Trowbridge, Marshall University

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Meeting the Audience in the Middle and Creating a Space for Collaboration

Clio www.theclio.com is an educational website and mobile application developed at Marshall University that uses GPS to connect users to the history that surrounds them. This website and mobile application guides the public to nearby historic sites—both individual sites as well as customizable walking/driving tours. Clio is non-profit and built to facilitate collaboration. In the past two years, we created special accounts to facilitate collaboration. For example, there are classroom accounts that allow professors to review and publish entries with their students, complete with instructor and peer review and multiple levels of review. There are also special accounts for historical societies and other institutions that allow them to create, review, and publish entries with members.

This recent piece by the American Historical Association describes our goal of connecting people to the history that surrounds them via our website and mobile app. http://blog.historians.org/2016/05/clio-app/

Given the need to "pin" each entry to a physical space, one of my leading concerns is that Clio will replicate the exclusion of women and minorities manifest in the creation of historic markers and monuments. I also fear Clio's emphasis on historic buildings will reinforce the idea that those who financed, designed, and managed structures constitute a starting place or "master narrative."

I recognize that many of the people who use Clio are hoping for a concise narrative that starts with the role of political, military, and economic leaders. If Clio does not tell the story the public wants to hear, historians in my field and others will not have the opportunity to tell the story we believe the public needs to hear. Digital markers have the potential to include people and perspectives that are seldom included in physical markers. How do we find the middle—the narrative that includes race, class, and gender without neglecting the dominant narrative?

My second question is how we might better demonstrate the benefit of a website and mobile application like Clio to those who fear that their jobs might be endangered by digital tools. I believe that digital entries for historic sites will drive physical traffic to museums and demonstrate the value of libraries. I also believe that digital walking tours will lead to an increase in the number of people wishing to take group tours. However, some of our peers have responded with fear because they believe that Clio might replace physical museums, eliminate the need for CVBs and welcome centers, and reduce the public's interest in taking

guided tours with other humans. How can I better demonstrate the potential benefit of a digital public history project like Clio? How can we show that digital tools can be the "middleman" that connects the public with the work of historians in ways that demonstrates the value of the people and institutions that preserve and share our history?

The third question I have is how a digital platform might encourage collaboration beyond a singular classroom or institution. How can we unlock the potential of a digital space to facilitate collaboration and contributions from scholars, libraries, local organizations, and local historians who each have something to share? Not only does this support the ethos of public history, such a system would recognize that many have something to contribute. And here is the best part… I think this can be done without relying on open queries and email chains?

In the coming year, I hope to build a system that could encourage and facilitate collaboration between scholars, local residents, and organizations without relying on correspondence. This system would start with a database of volunteers who agree to share their expertise as needed by local historians, archivists, and others who each may have information, historic images, oral histories, or other primary sources to contribute. For example, a graduate student working for Clio might edit an entry on the ballpark that was home to the Kansas City Monarchs. After the entry was complete, they could add the entry to a database that would "ping" related library collections, a local historian, and a scholar who specializes on the topic. Rather than receive an email each time this occurred, each party might receive one email a month that included a link to each new Clio entry related to their collections and/or interests.

If successful, I believe that this would offer tremendous benefit to other public history projects. One of the keys to this prototype is its ability to reach participants who not only have expertise. There also needs to be some measure of incentive for participation. The system needs to be operated by humans on one end so that participants are always matched with topics that are related to their expertise and interests. Ideally, the system would be automated on the user's end so that participants can say "no" without needing to justify their response in a way that creates more email chains.

The system would seek to identify:
1. The scholar who helps to make the connection between local history and the larger narrative and benefits by having a link to her book in the entry
2. The local historical society that knows all the unique details and benefits by adding links to their page and a link to information about their walking tours
3. The librarian/archivist who knows where to find images and related oral histories and primary/secondary sources and benefits by creating links to their collections

It seems a system like this would be of great value to our discipline and could benefit projects long after we stop using terms like digital humanities. My questions are how we might build and utilize such a database and system, how we might create mutual self-interest, and how we might devise a system that allows people to contribute information in just a few minutes without requiring multiple email threads.

Treva Hodges – Meeting in the Middle Case Statement – Intent vs. Use

My personal interest in public history lies in the ways that communities interpret and structure historical narratives that address trauma or conflict. When I consider the ability of digital history projects to engage broad audiences I wonder about how people on the receiving end of the projects make use of them. Specifically, what happens when members of the intended audience ascribe meaning to a project that contrasts with the original intent of the project? I experienced this with a digital project I completed in Spring of 2016 when a class assignment that I imagined would be used to help foster community pride was used by a group of residents to advance their personal political goals.

The experience I draw from was a short documentary film I created about community change in Charlestown, Indiana. As the primary site of the Indiana Army Ammunition Plant which was constructed in 1941, Charlestown experienced unprecedented growth followed by dramatic decline once the plant ceased operations. The remnants of the plant created a scarred landscape, a depressed economy, and long-lasting infrastructure problems. Recently the land formally reserved for the ammunition plant was returned to the city. Industrial development in the River Ridge Commerce Center and completion of the new Lewis and Clark Bridge that connects eastern Clark County, Indiana, to Prospect, Kentucky has prompted a revision of Charlestown's city planning as residents and leaders anticipate growth and increased interest in the community. To explore the impact of the plant, the community trauma it produced, and current strategies for improvement, I filmed a short documentary and published the resulting film publicly on my personal YouTube channel.

Though originally planned as a requirement for a graduate course in public history, I hoped that the city would make use of the video to promote a sense of community pride. I included local residents in the development and filming processes and involved city administration throughout the project. Initial interest from community leaders led me to believe that the film would be one of many tools the city would draw from to help prepare residents for change. I proceeded under the impression that making an easily sharable, digital historical narrative of the plant that addressed both the benefits and lasting trials of its construction would inform the community planning process. Once made available, the film was shared extensively across social media platforms, but not by city leaders as I originally anticipated.

Amid discussions of change and future community development, Charlestown has also become the sight of an intense political battle over areas in need of revitalization. The Pleasant Ridge neighborhood lies at the heart of these discussions. Pleasant Ridge consists of approximately 300 prefabricated duplex houses constructed in the wake of the population boom generated by the ammunition plant. The city named the neighborhood as an area in need of redevelopment due to substandard housing, high crime rates, and a high percentage of low-income rental units. Individual homeowners and city leaders have clashed frequently in the past two years as the city encourages developers to purchase and redesign the lots in Pleasant Ridge. Instead of city leaders using the video I produced, several residents of Pleasant Ridge used the video to support their argument that the homes constructed to house the workers of the ammunition plant should be designated as historically significant and not redeveloped.

I think digital media can offer communities fresh ways of documenting and sharing local history in formats that people find engaging and attractive. The film I produced was easily

sharable on social media, which increased the size of the audience. Additionally, such projects can liberate community histories from dusty file cabinets in local public libraries and put them into formats that increase ease of access. Though much of the information obtained for my film was available in the local public library archives, most residents are unlikely to access such sources. The visual stimulation and brevity offered by my film engaged viewers in a way that was both aesthetically pleasing and sensitive to short attention spans.

What surprised me about my project was the shift in use from my original intent. I believe that such examples raise questions about the democratizing potential for digital history projects. Though this experience does not inherently indicate a problem, I believe it is worth exploring questions related to intent vs. use of public history products.