

January 2010

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## Scholar Commons Citation

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## **Connecting to Marginalized Groups through Web 2.0**

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(28 May 2010)

### **Introduction**

There was a period in the history of traditional archival repositories when select groups of people outside of the white, male, scholarly elite were restricted from the use of special collections materials. Exclusion, often based on once common social practices, as well as academic affiliations and prestige, increasingly added to the perception that chosen members of the majority population alone used special collections and archives. Times and affiliations change, but perceptions are slow to change. Though social and professional circles may have expanded to include once marginalized groups and scholarly and community research may have grown exponentially over the years, there is still the need to ensure significant representation of and continuous utilization by individuals and groups previously underrepresented in archival repositories. One way to foster these relationships is through the implementation and use of Web 2.0 technologies. This article will explore the methods by which archival repositories can use Web 2.0 to engage users from historically underrepresented groups while also exploring, capturing, and presenting those collections most representative of diverse cultures, lifestyles, and ideas.

## Understanding Diversity

When we think of diversity, the focus typically falls on ethnic or racial minorities who comprise a small percentage of the overall United States population.<sup>1</sup> Today, as more emphasis is being placed on issues related to gender, sexuality, and abilities, the definitions of what and who constitutes “diverseness” and “diversity” are evolving, and our ideas about underrepresentation and marginalization are changing with them. It almost goes without saying that these changing perceptions should usher in a new era of sensitivity towards a better understanding of diverse issues, but that may not always be the case. According to Lorna Peterson, “Critics of the diversity movement commonly point out that the concept of diversity includes so many groups that the terminology is rendered meaningless. Others criticize diversity because of its dehumanizing aspects of reductionism and essentialism.”<sup>2</sup> Yet, there are still others who continuously embrace and address issues of diversity through their service and work, professional and personal encounters, and, often, by their very being. As such, these biases carry over and inform their perceptions of the objects and individuals with whom they interact, thereby shaping and possibly creating new ideologies about many of the existing paradigms surrounding diversity and privilege.

In the field of archives and special collections, extant and emerging paradigms are especially important when considering the role—or lack thereof—of diversity in connecting to

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey (ACS) Demographic and Housing Estimates: 2008,” [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?\\_bm=y&-qr\\_name=ACS\\_2008\\_1YR\\_G00\\_DP5&-geo\\_id=01000US&-ds\\_name=ACS\\_2008\\_1YR\\_G00\\_&-\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?_bm=y&-qr_name=ACS_2008_1YR_G00_DP5&-geo_id=01000US&-ds_name=ACS_2008_1YR_G00_&-_lang=en) (accessed October 9, 2009). The survey suggests that nearly 35 percent of the U.S. population surveyed self-identifies as a member of a non-White racial or ethnic group. This means that more than one-third of Americans consider themselves part of the minority collective.

<sup>2</sup> Lorna Peterson, “The Definition of Diversity: Two Views. A More Specific Definition,” *Journal of Library Administration* 27 (1999): 20.

underrepresented groups and individuals and in acquiring and providing access to their collections. Racial and ethnic minorities, gender and sexual identities perceived as being outside of the “mainstream,” and the differently abled historically have been sidelined from the archival core. Sue McKemmish, Anne Gilliland-Swetland, and Eric Ketelaar state: “Societies institutionalize their collective archives according to their own evidence and memory paradigms...[which] influence what is remembered and what is forgotten, what is preserved and what is destroyed, how archival knowledge is defined, what forms archives take, how archives are described and indexed, and who has ownership, custodial and access rights relating to them. They also shape archival notions of reliability, authenticity, and trustworthiness.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is imperative that archival institutions proactively accept the challenges and responsibilities that come with encouraging the use of special collections materials by populations disproportionately affected by real or implied impediments to access. Increasing access to materials via non-traditional means (i.e., the Internet) may break down both tangible and intangible barriers to special collections that have been superimposed by existing social mores. The availability of resources, especially those regarded as representative of diverse perspectives, also may bridge special collections and archives with decidedly distinct user groups than they have served in the past.

## **Modern Computing**

Survey data released by the Pew Internet and American Life Project indicates that 79 percent of American adults use the Internet. Of this percentage, 32 percent read blogs, 35

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<sup>3</sup> Sue McKemmish, Anne Lilliland-Swetland and Eric Ketelaar, “‘Communities of Memory’: Pluralising Archival Research and Education Agendas,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 33 (2005): 146.

percent visit social networking sites, 52 percent look at video-sharing sites, 19 percent download podcasts, and 2 percent visit virtual worlds.<sup>4</sup> A related survey by the same organization—based also on the same percentage of adult Internet users—reports that 70 percent of non-Hispanic Blacks and 64 percent of English-speaking Hispanics accessed the Internet “at least occasionally.”<sup>5</sup> Does this mean that the "digital divide" is dead? Not necessarily. Although the number of people using the Internet, and subsequently accessing the World Wide Web, has increased substantially over the past few years,<sup>6</sup> these statistics are not reflective of citizens' use of specific information resources. Generally speaking, if Internet users cannot "Google" it or do not know what to "Google," they may not be getting it, especially if "getting it" means accessing seemingly unattainable or restricted data such as special collections materials. Logging on to the Web and using developing technologies does not mean equal access to the resources available, and content developers, particularly those working with research materials, must be cognizant of this disconnect. Our digital divide—partially created by archives' somewhat limited use of the World Wide Web as well as their reliance on conventional collections for promotional use—has become entangled with the "knowledge divide,"<sup>7</sup> whereby individuals' access to or use of specialized knowledge and information resources disintegrates. The knowledge divide will

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<sup>4</sup> Pew Research Center, “Generational Differences in Online Activities,” Infographic (Pew Internet and American Life Project: January 28, 2009), <http://www.pewinternet.org/Infographics/Generational-differences-in-online-activities.aspx> (accessed May 21, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Pew Research Center, “Demographics of Internet Users,” Trend Data (Pew Internet and American Life Project: January 6, 2010), <http://www.pewinternet.org/Static-Pages/Trend-Data/Whos-Online.aspx> (accessed May 21, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> See: ITU (International Telecommunications Union) World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database, "Internet users per 100 inhabitants 1997 - 2007," ICT Statistics, <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/ict/graphs/internet.jpg> (accessed May 25, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> See: “Towards Knowledge Societies,” UNESCO World Report (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization, 2005), <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001418/141843e.pdf> (accessed May 21, 2010), and Francisco Sagasti, “The Knowledge Explosion and the Knowledge Divide,” Occasional Papers: Topical Background Research for the HDR, (United Nations Development Programme, 2001), <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2001/papers/sagasti-1-1.pdf> (accessed May 21, 2010).

continue to exist in special collections and archives unless repositories develop activities that actively target and engage non-traditional users.

### **Outreach in Repositories**

To eliminate perceived restrictions to access, some institutions may implement outreach activities to effectuate positive change. Successful outreach activities usually stem from a repository's mission statement to ensure feasibility and viability of planned projects. Projects, especially those requiring significant staff and monetary resources, often are supported institutionally when their development is based on existing policies. But what happens when an institution's outreach objectives do not align with their stated goals? Typically, archivists are faced with one of two options: revising the repository's strategic plans or making the project fit into the goals previously identified. Although neither option may seem ideal, they are real considerations when addressing issues related to diversity. Such concerns as appropriate representation of holdings, increased accessibility to resources through cultural- or gender-specific access points (i.e., subject headings and the use of appropriate terminologies to describe materials), and the availability of staff who have the skills and willingness to engage in open dialogues with non-traditional users, are raised. As such, merging stated or planned initiatives with appropriate actions requires that in-house and community stakeholders are able to identify with and understand each other's needs. Outreach activities that provide opportunities for archivists and researchers to communicate their respective objectives may afford the "buy in" needed to support both new and continuing projects.

Additionally, outreach activities should be developed with clear rationale. Although some collections may be highlighted to foster or stimulate existing donor relations, promoting

collections solely for political appeasement or simply because they are there is no longer enough; institutions must find ways to make their collections and related promotion relevant and timely to the research needs of *all* users. Special collections and archives can conduct environmental scans as well as formal and informal surveys to determine how and why patrons are using certain collections. With this information institutions can begin to encourage use of specific resources by ensuring that collections are endorsed similarly and that their promotion becomes integrated into the archives' outreach, reference and instruction plans. An example of how to ensure applicability across user groups is to create materials with educational components. Interesting and informational educational materials about specific cultural collections may be decidedly more entertaining than blanket presentations of recent acquisitions or standard, rotating highlights that always seem to feature the same collections. These materials can be developed with core user groups in mind, targeting specific constituencies of both current and potential researchers. For instance, the author of this text created bilingual podcasts of select materials available at her institution in order to reach a larger and, possibly, more global audience.<sup>8</sup> Two audio and video web features—one in Spanish, the other in English—were designed to focus on the monographs and serials of Cuban publishing house Ediciones Vigía. Of the more than 50 works maintained by the University of South Florida Libraries' Special & Digital Collections at that time, fewer than ten were used as examples of Ediciones Vigía's book-making artistry. The three-minute-long segments not only provided an overview of the publisher and their works but also of Special Collections, its initiatives in Latin American and Caribbean studies, and the various means by which potential users could access the collection. The podcasts increased awareness of the Libraries' holdings and encouraged collection use by striving to engage a

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<sup>8</sup> The English- and Spanish-languages podcasts, both of which are entitled "Ediciones Vigía," were developed in 2007. Each of the podcasts can be accessed individually through iTunesU.

community (Spanish-speakers/hispanohablantes) that had not been recognized by the department as active researchers. Using the Web and the basic tool of language to increase one collection's accessibility created opportunities for introducing related collections to an underserved population that had been needlessly rendered invisible. Relative to the USF Libraries' use of podcasts to reach potentially underserved populations is the recent implementation of LibGuides by a number of primarily academic institutions. LibGuides, the Web 2.0 version of the modern bibliography, allow users to fully integrate basic textual information (such as collection descriptions) with digital content. Many users upload video and audio content as well as scanned images and documents. The SJSU Special Collections & Archives LibGuide<sup>9</sup> includes tabs highlighting specific aspects of the collection. Two tabs in particular, LGBTQ and Women's Collections link to finding aids that have been included as part of the OAC: Online Archive of California. While not specifically developed as an outreach tool, the use of LibGuides to provide reference and instruction services and detail holdings and acquisitions has been adopted by this and other institutions to provide enhanced access to collection information. Like podcasts, LibGuides afford a new and somewhat creative means for reaching out to constituents and making collection content more easily available. These days, however, it is not enough simply to show or to teach – there must be some level of engagement that occurs for the interaction to be meaningful and the information imparted to be retained. To be engaged—with an idea, an item, or an identity presented through a collection—is to be drawn into special collections and archives. Once they are drawn in, users, especially those who have felt excluded before, must be

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<sup>9</sup> San Jose Public Libraries and San Jose State University Library, "SJSU Special Collections & Archives: Historical Research Topics and Collections," (March 19, 2010), <http://libguides.sjsu.edu/specialcollections> (accessed May 24, 2010).

received in open, non-threatening, and inclusive ways. As Daniel Traister states, "The welcome must be real."<sup>10</sup>

## **What is Web 2.0?**

Presently, it is easier to invite users to a virtual world than it is to a tangible one. With one click of the mouse, Internet users have the ability to access resources without setting foot in a physical environment or, for that matter, even knowing where it is. In this basic regard, all Internet users are created equally and all must begin their searches the same way: computer ready, Internet-access set, and an openness to discovery on its mark. What each researcher finds, though, is as dependent on their own investigative skills and prior knowledge of available resources as it is on the materials available and the ways in which they have been made accessible. When Kären Mason and Tanya Zanish-Belcher suggested that "[o]nline access democratizes the process of locating archival sources,"<sup>11</sup> they left out some very important points: Web 2.0 particularly democratizes online access to archival materials by increasing repositories' options for promoting collections, connecting to users, and engaging users with collections that match their research needs, all of which can be accomplished with simple clicks, pushes, downloads, or transfers to and from parties, individually or within group or collaborative environs.

The term *Web 2.0* has been attributed to Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty, who coined the phrase in reference to developments occurring in the world of Web computing after the dot-

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel Traister, "Public Services and Outreach in Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Libraries," *Library Trends* 52 (2003): 89.

<sup>11</sup> Kären M. Mason and Tanya Zanish-Belcher, "Raising the Archival Consciousness: How Women's Archives Challenge Traditional Approaches to Collecting and Use, Or, What's in a Name?" *Library Trends* 56 (2007): 355.

com disaster. However, the concept of Web 2.0 originated in the 1960s with J. C. R. Licklider's promotion of "networked computing" to enable forms of information sharing that would result in collaborative learning processes.<sup>12</sup> This concept of bidirectional instruction and discovery has woven itself into the modern technologies commonly associated with and utilized to create the "2.0-ness" of Web functionality and serves as the basis for most defining characteristics of Web 2.0. The term also implies that certain applications of Web-based content have been developed or included to allow users to contribute such values as informational content (e.g., tags and folksonomies) to enhance the data presented and encourage active engagement with its changing state. O'Reilly stated that some of the functions tied into Web 2.0 were "not Web applications per se, but they leverage the power of the Web platform, making it a seamless, almost inevitable part of their infrastructure."<sup>13</sup> Other explanations of Web 2.0 have included the following:

- Web 2.0 presages a freeing of data allowing it to be exposed, discovered and manipulated in a variety of ways distinct from the purpose of the application originally used to gain access.<sup>14</sup>
- Web 2.0 is a mindset that is: user-focused, participatory, centered on appropriate technologies, adaptable and open to new challenges and opportunities as well as collaborations.<sup>15</sup>
- Web 2.0 refers to both a set of technologies and a set of principles about how visitors should be able to utilize the Web. Those principles include the ability to integrate information in new ways, the desire to harness distributed knowledge, and the need to engage users as co-developers.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Bryan Alexander, "Web 2.0: A New Wave of Innovation for Teaching and Learning?" *EDUCAUSE Review* 41.2 (2006), <http://www.educause.edu/EDUCAUSE+Review/EDUCAUSEReviewMagazineVolume41/Web20ANewWaveofInnovationforTe/158042> (accessed October 9, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Tim O'Reilly, "What is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software," O'Reilly, <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html?page=4> (accessed May 21, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Paul Miller, "Web 2.0: Building the New Library," *Ariadne* 45 (October 2005), <http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/issue45/miller> (accessed May 25, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> J. Gordon Daines III and Cory L. Nimer, "Web 2.0 and Archives," *The Interactive Archivist* (2009), <http://lib.byu.edu/sites/interactivearchivist/> (accessed May 25, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Yakel, "Inviting the User into the Virtual Archives," *OCLC Systems & Services: International Digital Library Perspectives* 22 (2006): 160.

Obviously, clear-cut, hard-and-fast definitions of Web 2.0 do not exist. Instead, an array of ideas and descriptions formulated upon the unique design and functionality of these products has emerged just as rapidly and randomly as the products themselves. At the core of Web 2.0, terminology and features alike, rests the same purposes upon which special collections and archives should function: reaching a broad constituency to increase awareness about the information available, encouraging its use, and ensuring that its users, both new and established, keep coming back for more.

### **What Does Web 2.0 Mean for Archives?**

The adoption of Internet and Web technologies among archival repositories and special collections is seemingly slow yet steady. Elizabeth Yakel suggests that archivists have been reluctant to utilize emerging technologies for two possible reasons: the likely changes that will occur as part of the archivist-researcher interaction and the "demands" that may be placed on archivists and archives by making accessible a larger number of collections.<sup>17</sup> Once fiscal and human resources are factored into this equation, these concerns cannot be dismissed easily. And, when coupled with the increased expectation that many institutions with parent organizations may face to promote collections more representative of a broader range of experiences, ideas and individuals, small challenges that come with implementing a new technology may seem insurmountable.

A small, informal survey conducted by the author revealed that social networking sites (e.g., MySpace, Facebook, and LinkedIn) led the introduction of Web 2.0 products used as

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 159.

promotional tools in the majority of the institutions with which respondents were affiliated.<sup>18</sup>

The implementation of blogs for outreach purposes came in a very close second, with RSS feeds, Twitter, Wikis and Podcasts following sequentially. It is interesting to note that the Web 2.0 product of choice, at least in this instance, is the one that allows users to engage with others in what can become personally meaningful ways. Social networking sites "encourage" user participation by having potential members register with the site, create a Web persona (real or imagined) and establish and maintain personal connections in order for the membership to be worthwhile. Specific membership perks may include access to "members only" features and the ability to "friend" or "like" other individuals and organizations based on rather basic levels of connectivity. For example, "friends" may share the same interests, live in the same city or have established additional bonds that may be perceived as mutually beneficial. As such, users must create their own sense of community, which, in these types of environments, must be seemingly tangible realities that overshadow the virtual worlds in which all of these activities have occurred. Furthermore, users also must have some motivation for entering into and remaining active in these blended worlds. Consequently, it is not unreasonable to suggest that an individual's perceived identification with the constructed community often may be an incentive for continued engagement. All people, especially those from underrepresented or marginalized groups, need to have a sense of belonging—a sense of place—to connect with others. In the past, archives and special collections have not been that place, but, over time, they have

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<sup>18</sup> In mid-October 2009, the author conducted an informal survey entitled "Institutional Use of Web 2.0 in Special Collections and Archives" to ascertain whether special collections, archives, or related institutions utilized Web 2.0 technologies to connect to users, particularly those from minority or underrepresented populations. Sixty-six individuals completed the nine-question, multiple-choice survey which asked respondents to identify the Web 2.0 products utilized by their institution; the approximate percentage of collections related to minority, underrepresented or marginalized populations that were maintained by their institution; and whether the technologies and collections referenced had been combined for promotional purposes.

attempted to find some common ground. Their convergence with Web 2.0 has presented new opportunities for developing inclusive environments where people can feel safe and accepted.

In accordance with the author's "Institutional Use of Web 2.0 in Special Collections and Archives" survey results, a random assessment of the web presences of 22 archival repositories and institutions with special collections materials found that even though the majority promote themselves and their collections through social networking and media sites, there appeared to be a lack of interconnectivity between the static website and the social tool.<sup>19</sup> Many repositories employing such popular tools as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Second Life failed to provide readily discernible links even if they had implemented these products as a means of promoting resources and connecting to users. Not finding immediate linkages to some, the author chose to select one tool (Facebook) and pair that with the institution's name in a Google search. The search revealed that only seven of the institutions either did not actively participate in Facebook or did not have an easily accessible presence. Surprisingly, select few of the Facebook accounts reviewed employed such features as photo and video pages to highlight collections, especially diverse collections. If this informal review is generically extended to other social networking tools, it may be surmised that those tools also may not be used effectively—if at all—for

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<sup>19</sup> In no particular order – except that which popped in her head during a plane ride - the author reviewed the following institutional: Yale University Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library; Harvard University Library Open Collections Program; Library of Congress; Denver Public Library: Western History and Genealogy; Santa Fe (New Mexico) Community College Library; University of California, Davis Peter J. Shields Library Special Collections; Stanford University Libraries and Academic Information Resources Special Collections & University Archives; University of South Florida Libraries; Ball State University Libraries Archives and Special Collections; Brigham Young University Harold B. Lee Library L. Tom Perry Special Collections; University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries Special and Area Studies Collections; Georgia Tech Library and Information Center; University of Miami – Cuban Heritage Collection; Carter Godwin Woodson Library at Emory University; Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian; The National Archives at Atlanta; University of Wisconsin –Eau Claire McIntyre Library Special Collections & Archives; Dalhousie University Libraries - Archives and Special Collections; Kansas State Historical Society; Stonewall Library; University of Central Florida Libraries Special Collections & University Archives; and the University of California, Irvine Special Collections & Archives Southeast Asian Archive.

promoting specialized resources and encouraging both researchers and casual visitors to actively engage with the institutions or its collection.

When the author surveyed members of the archival profession to determine their implementation and use of Web 2.0 institutionally to engage members of underrepresented groups, she was surprised to learn that of the archival collections about or related to minority or underrepresented populations, less than 10 percent were regularly featured or highlighted through Web 2.0 applications. Even more surprising was the fact that the overwhelming majority of respondents were unsure whether featuring these collections had increased their usage (71 percent) or encouraged more site visits by non-traditional users (59 percent) even though nearly 38 percent of responses indicated that Web 2.0 was being used to connect with both users and donors. Apparently, our means of "connecting" have a long way to go.

An institution's static webpage, possibly the first point of virtual contact for most potential users, should prominently feature links to other, supported web features that readily provide access to both organizational information and collected resources. When utilized to their fullest extent, Web 2.0 products can afford researchers a sense of ownership or responsibility over the materials at hand. Interacting with a site, such as Flickr, by posting comments and adding tags provides incentives for further exploration and use of available materials. In the case of collection items pertaining to underrepresented groups, such interactivity may afford an identity with or connection to the items presented. This somewhat holistic approach to bringing an individual into a collection through active, virtual engagement may, in turn, lead to their active, physical engagement with the archives proper. By creating an open, virtual environment, the researcher may presuppose that the archives, too, is an open and easily accessible place.

The Smithsonian provides two examples of institutions that have incorporated social networking as a means for promoting collections, encouraging their use and interacting with current and potential clients: the “Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture”<sup>20</sup> and the “National Museum of the American Indian”<sup>21</sup> Facebook pages.<sup>22</sup> As of May 24, 2010, nearly 5,000 Facebook users indicated their interest in and support of the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) by becoming fans and giving the site Facebook’s ubiquitous thumbs-up (“like”). As a point of engagement, site administrators have utilized the available Photo feature to create an online exhibit of recently acquired artifacts. Select individuals have chosen to comment on the exhibit, which includes a concise description of the collection, its provenance, and a quote indicating its potential research value. This use is in line with the NMAAHC’s “Community Rules” (posted under the “Extended Info” tab) that states the purpose of the Facebook page as encouraging “visitors like you [to] connect with one another, discuss, explore, and celebrate the African American community’s triumphs, contributions, stories and struggles.”<sup>23</sup> The phrase “visitors like you” personalizes the NMAAHC experience. Individuals visiting the site, who may have been discouraged by a lack of content relative to their needs, are encouraged to stick around and get involved, because there are others—just like them—who may have felt or perceived the very same thing. A look at the National Museum of the American Indian’s Facebook page indicates a different level of involvement – nearly 23,000 fans [as of May 24, 2010]. In addition to highlighting photographic

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<sup>20</sup> “Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture,” Facebook, [http://www.facebook.com/NMAAHC?v=app\\_2374336051&ref=sgm#!/NMAAHC?v=wall&ref=sgm](http://www.facebook.com/NMAAHC?v=app_2374336051&ref=sgm#!/NMAAHC?v=wall&ref=sgm) (accessed May 24, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> “National Museum of the American Indian,” Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/NationalMuseumoftheAmericanIndianinDC?ref=ts> (accessed May 24, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Due to the inherent fluidity and flexibility of Web 2.0 products, content referenced is subject to change.

<sup>23</sup> “Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture,” [http://www.facebook.com/NMAAHC?v=app\\_2374336051&ref=sgm](http://www.facebook.com/NMAAHC?v=app_2374336051&ref=sgm) (accessed May 24, 2010).

items relative to or representative of indigenous cultures, site administrators have chosen to feature photographs of past events in order to demonstrate community engagement. This can be an effective tool for encouraging potential visitors and researchers to not only interact with the museum's virtual content but to consider participating in their "live" programs as well.

As Web 2.0 is composed of tools, certain considerations must be made before its applications are accepted as practical or useful for the archival environment and appropriate for connecting to marginalized groups. MySpace, Ning, and other social networking sites work well for establishing further web presences outside of the institutional setting, but debates about their professionalism, relevance, and security have arisen. Additionally, many people may not be quick to friend organizations with which they have no prior affiliation, thereby self-segregating themselves from these somewhat open communities. Relatedly, some managers or monitors of member-driven Web 2.0 products may inadvertently limit access or membership to known individuals. Again, a possible bridge between the repository and the people to whom they might endeavor to connect falls short as individuals question their acceptance and archivists wonder about the effectiveness of such tools for reaching out to and attracting members of historically underrepresented users. All 2.0 technologies present their own challenges and advantages. Their effectiveness lies in their utilization at just the right time by just the right individuals.

### **Bringing it all Together**

Web 2.0 technologies were developed to deliver creator- and user-modified content in inventive, dynamic, and multi-sensory ways, affording interactivity with and transparency of living, breathing, and evolving information sources. The technologies, though, are only as good

as their content, and the content is only as expansive as the technology. Archivists can break this seemingly vicious cycle by ensuring equal representation of collections created by people from varying backgrounds and using their promotion to reach a wider range of individuals who can identify with the materials presented. Static blogs and feed-less tweets are not going to draw in information consumers; relevant materials are the key to enticing users, substantive content is the means for engaging them, and items with which they relate are the answer to keeping them around. On the other hand, connecting with and learning to embrace an extensive and inclusive body of resources as well as the means by which they are made available are some of the challenges faced by users. When organizations that, traditionally, have neglected certain groups and individuals from their acquaintance begin to extend their services and resources more broadly, it is not unwarranted for users to have some trepidation. Members of underrepresented user populations may question the reasons behind these not-so-subtle shifts or experience uncertainty or feelings of distrust in relation to their perception of a repository's motivations. In situations like these, Web 2.0 can provide hopeful solutions.

If Web 2.0 technologies are envisioned as the proverbial red carpet, archival repositories may be able to consider their utility in ways previously unimaginable for connecting to diverse groups. In that regard, most Web 2.0 instances that proliferate currently are basically the same: eye-catching, alluring, recognizable, and clearly defined by a beginning [start date] and end [last update]. Just like red carpets, Web 2.0 products may not be all things to all people and definitely will not appear the same at all institutions, but, in the end, anyone who decides to tread about them eventually will arrive at the same destination as those who tread before. For example, those stumbling upon one of the more interesting special collections blogs currently

available, cool@hoole,<sup>24</sup> may spend their time perusing blog postings and embedded links and reading through numerous navigational tags and labels. Eventually, though, there may be something—if no more than curiosity—that takes the reader to the Hoole library’s website and, just maybe, to the library itself. Rolling out such metaphorical red carpets as Web 2.0 technologies allows archives and special collections to encourage individuals to take that first step. Once someone ventures on (or, in), they must be allowed and encouraged to explore and experience all that is being offered. This is the make it or break it point when a connection between user and archives/archivist must be generated. This also is the point where the knowledge divide either begins to shrink or continues to grow dependent upon the type and level of connection made between user and archive. In the few seconds that it takes to stumble upon or deliberately tap into a promising resource, an identification with the materials either is formulated or dissolved. It is the responsibility of the archives to create an environment, electronic or otherwise, that will openly welcome, actively attend to, and sustain the interests of growing constituencies that more aptly represent the changing faces of the population.

## **Conclusion**

The Internet and World Wide Web have expanded the realm in which archival repositories operate, affording greater access to resources and always-on availability for researchers. Moving content into the virtual or digital world may have seemed challenging and unnecessary to some, but it has proven to be a worthwhile undertaking that has opened the archives to many non-traditional users. Web 2.0 is the next step in the further eradication of created or perceived boundaries that have led to the dispossession of some people. The effective

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<sup>24</sup> “What’s Cool @ Hoole: Highlighting the collections, events, items, happening, ideas, new acquisitions, discoveries, initiatives, & everything else that’s Cool @ the W. S. Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama.” W. S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, <http://coolathoole.blogspot.com/> (accessed May 24, 2010).

use of Web 2.0 can encourage open and continuous dialogues between the user and the archives, establishing a sense of community and familiarity upon which both entities can launch and build relationships. Web 2.0 is not the “end all, be all” for archives, but it does provide viable means for addressing real and ongoing concerns regarding how repositories promote and support use of their collections. Although it may be difficult for some archival repositories to accept the responsibilities of embracing Web 2.0 and using it to establish linkages with underrepresented populations, it ought not to be unreasonable to expect that archives and special collections work towards creating more inclusive environments where all people are and feel welcomed and respected. Invariably, this alone will break down the barriers among archivists, archives, and historically underrepresented groups and, Web 2.0-enabled or not, will lead to the rectification of previous indifferences or outright disregard that has marginalized many users.