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In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, we as historians knew that we witnessed a major set of events and that we would not be able to fully assess the implications for many years. We knew previous weather disasters, such as the 1927 Mississippi River Flood, had profound consequences that compounded existing racial and economic inequalities, and further fueled African American migration to northern industrial cities. Late-public historian, Michael Mizell-Nelson (University of New Orleans), understood the need to document eyewitness accounts of those most impacted by Katrina, the levee failures, and then the second hurricane, Rita. To do so, he contacted the late-Roy Rosenzweig to discuss the possibilities of creating a community-centered online collecting project based on the successful *September 11 Digital Archive*, which collected 150,000 items and was the first digital collection accessioned by the Library of Congress. Mizell-Nelson felt an urgency to respond as many African American and poor residents were left to die in flooded neighborhoods while simultaneously millions flocked in all directions out of the saturated Crescent City and Gulf Coast. Mizell-Nelson wished to collect these voices and evidence of governmental failure at all levels to survive as counternarratives to official law enforcement records and media coverage that criminalized and blamed residents of color for acts not committed nor under their control. As an oral historian, Mizell-Nelson understood the power of first-person accounts but a traditional oral history project would be too challenging to mount with many residents leaving and many first responders and volunteers cycling in and out. Using the web would allow historians to collect written eyewitness accounts, cell phone photographs, text messages, and recordings. For nearly two decades, community-sourced digital archives such as the resulting *Hurricane Digital Memory Bank* provided a space for individuals often overlooked in traditional archival and museum collections to share their experiences and trust that their stories would be saved as part of the historical record.¹

¹ I had the privilege of working at the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media (RRCHNM) from 2005-2018 in several roles, including as the Project Manager for the *Hurricane Digital Memory Bank*, a Co-Director of the *September 11th Digital Archive* in 2008, and as a founding member of the *Omeka* software team. Seeds for this essay were planted following, “20 Years of Online Collecting: What Comes Next?,” a virtual roundtable organized for the 2021 National Council on Public History conference when I had the pleasure of discussing lessons learned across five projects with Shaneé Yvette Murrain, Catherine O’Donnell, and former colleagues, Sharon M. Leon and

Using the Web to collect individual memories and reflections emerged in the late 1990s as the Sloan Foundation launched *Exploring and Collecting History Online* that supported research in history of science and technology using new Internet browsers. Using a simple online form, (predating Google products), historians like Jim Sparrow and Heather Prescott solicited personal stories from individuals that often led to oral histories on a wide variety of topics and informed books they wrote on birth control and the New York City blackouts of 1965 and 1977. The *September 11 Digital Archive* was another example, debuting in 2002, and invited anyone with a web connection to “share your story,” about their experiences and aftermath of the attacks on September 11, 2001, without a follow-up interview. Powered by a database, the project’s web form included a few text boxes to collect basic information about the contributor, a written reflection or caption, and a button for uploading a file.²

The *September 11 Digital Archive* and *Hurricane Digital Memory Bank* launched on the cusp of Web 2.0, Wikipedia, and social media, when websites and platforms began inviting users to comment, tag, write, and publish. This capacity appealed to historians, archivists, and technologists for doing historical work more openly, more accessibly, and more democratically. The projects and the free and open-source software that emerged from the online collecting mania in the early twenty-first century remain relevant today and stand as important examples of values-driven historical practice that could be a branch emerging from the “radical roots” of public history in US. This history emerged from generations of oral history practice that created a shared authority to listen and record the stories not found in traditional archives and to make their voices available for others to understand the past, as well as to empower individuals in the present by recognizing that their history and their lives matter. Not surprising, the founding directors of the *September 11 Digital Archive* were rooted in a tradition of activism, using their expertise and skills as historians to work for social, political, and racial justice.³

Tom Scheinfeldt. Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media and American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning, *September 11 Digital Archive* (2002-present), <http://911digitalarchive.org>; Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media and University of New Orleans, *Hurricane Digital Memory Bank* (2006), <http://hurricanearchive.org>; Jared Drake, “Insurgent Citizens: The Manufacture of Police Records in Post-Katrina New Orleans and Its Implications for Human Rights,” *Archival Science* 14 (2014): 365–80.

² For a good history of online collecting efforts that predate the *September 11th Digital Archive*, see, “Collecting History Online,” in Dan Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig, *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web*, <https://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/>. Jesse Ausubel, former Program Manager at the Sloan Foundation, spearheaded this critical intervention and early experimentation through the *Exploring and Collecting History Online* project <https://web.archive.org/web/20050512013412/http://echo.gmu.edu/>.

³ Denise D. Meringolo, *Radical Roots: Public History and a Tradition of Social Justice Activism* (Amherst: Amherst College Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.12366495>; Michael H. Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); A good history of the *September 11 Digital Archive* and their project leaders can be found in, Stephen Brier and Joshua Brown, “The *September 11 Digital Archive* Saving the Histories of September 11, 2001.” *Radical History Review* 2011, no. 111 (2011): 101–9 and Stephen Robertson, “CHNM’s Histories: Collaboration in Digital History,” *Dr Stephen*

Today, when it is possible for anyone to react and circulate content online and in private chat groups at breakneck speed—including hate speech and falsehoods—do historians still want to launch online collecting projects open to anyone with an internet connection in the style of the early 2000s? Yes, some clearly do. Historians and memory workers remain motivated to create meaningful community-centered projects that respond to current events and to address silences in museum and archival collections through imperfect and messy processes of decolonialization, “slow archiving,” enacting “liberatory archival worlds,” and building post-custodial and “active museum collections.”⁴

In 2023, the new Smithsonian American Women's History Museum appealed to their growing audiences to record a video or write a short story about a woman in their lives who inspired them in an effort to expand “the story of America through often-untold accounts and accomplishments of women.” Using a simple web form titled, “Share Your Story,” anyone may upload a reflection that the museum may publish online, incorporate into an exhibition, and archive in their collections. They followed the example of their colleagues at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture who jumpstarted their curatorial efforts in 2007 by launching the online *Memory Book* to collect personal memories and stories of Black Americans.⁵

The Covid-19 pandemic prompted cultural heritage professionals worldwide to launch thousands of projects in 2020 to document the complex social, cultural, and political impacts, including *A Journal of the Plague Year: An Archive of Covid-19 (JOTPY)* based at Arizona State University with partner institutions across the globe. Again, leading with the simple prompt to “Share Your Story,” the website asks for any type of contribution describing impacts of the pandemic that “future historians might need to write about and understand this historical

Robertson (blog), October 14, 2014, <https://drstephenrobertson.com/blog-post/chnms-histories-collaboration-in-digital-history/>.

⁴ I use the term “memory worker” to refer to the many professionals working in museums, libraries, archives, and non-profit institutions who are committed to saving, preserving, curating, and engaging with the past. Amy Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Kimberly Christen and Jane Anderson, “Toward Slow Archives,” *Archival Science* 19, no. 2 (June 1, 2019): 87–116, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-019-09307-x>; Michelle Caswell, *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work*, Routledge Studies in Archives (London: Routledge, 2023). Elizabeth Jane Wood, Rainey Tisdale, and Trevor Jones, eds., *Active Collections* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018).

⁵ Smithsonian American Women's History Museum, “Share Your Story,” <https://womenshistory.si.edu/story>; National Museum of African American History and Culture asked visitors to share their stories, family photos, and traditions through the “Memory Book.” These early contributions influenced how curators shaped their interpretative priorities and helped them build their physical and digital collections. This practice also informed their digital strategy from the institution's earliest stages. Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of African American History and Culture, *Memory Book, 2007-2011*, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/initiatives/memory-book>; Laura Coyle, “Right from the Start: The Digitization Program at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History & Culture,” *The Public Historian* 40, no. 3 (August 2018): 292-318, <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2018.40.3.292>.

moment.” More than three years in, Kathleen Kole de Peralta and Marissa C. Rhodes wrote about the challenges of documenting this “slow disaster” and how the project team elongated its timeline by shifting from rapid response to a “rolling-response” to better understand the changing and long-term impacts of Covid and to address gaps of experiences represented in their collections. Their team discovered much of the work required was non-digital: building relationships, refining outreach strategies, and designing easier pathways for contributors. Earlier collecting efforts following tragedy were also labor intensive and required more effort than initially planned, because building trust and collaborative relationships within communities takes time. Additionally, some people are not ready to share, reflect, or revisit traumatic experiences with a collecting project, even though the digital infrastructure can now be installed, configured, and launched in the matter of days.⁶

Requests for help from organizations and historians to build their own online collecting projects in the 2000s influenced the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University to develop free and open-source software that would become *Omeka*. Designed to publish collections and standards-based metadata, *Omeka* allowed a project team to document or commemorate events they found significant and give them confidence that digital items could be preserved.⁷ For example, the *Hurricane Digital Memory Bank* tested early versions of the software and shaped the development of *Omeka*’s Contribution plugin. The project team and their partners debated ethical questions about usability, access, privacy, and authority. Building upon lessons learned from the *September 11 Digital Archive*, they knew the web form needed to be light and load quickly, which was particularly important for individuals without broadband or accessing the site from primitive mobile web browsers. Contributing needed to be simple, without requiring registration or responses to multiple questions. Contributors also needed to control the use of their personal stories. Each contributor would also receive a copy of their stories by email and the website made it clear that contributors owned their submissions. Options built into the system asked each user if they wished to share their name, be anonymous, and if they wanted to share their contribution publicly. Including

⁶ Arizona State University, et al, *A Journal of a Plague Year: An Archive of Covid-19*, <https://covid-19archive.org>. Kathleen Kole de Peralta and Marissa C. Rhodes, “Slow Disasters and Adaptive Archiving: COVID-19 and the Rolling-Response Model,” *The Public Historian* 45, no. 4 (November 1, 2023): 7–25, <https://doi.org/10.1525/tpb.2023.45.4.7>; Initiative for Critical Disaster Studies, *Covid Collections Project*, <http://wp.nyu.edu/disasters/covid-19-adaptation-under-uncertainty/>. Jordan Meyerl Peralta Katy Kole de, “Identifying and Filling Silences in a Covid-19 Archive,” *National Council on Public History* (blog), September 30, 2020, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/identifying-and-filling-silences-in-a-covid-19-archive/>; An extended discussion of these challenges are detailed in Sheila A. Brennan and T. Mills Kelly, “Why Collecting History Online Is Web 1.5 – Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media” (Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, March 2009), <https://rrchnm.org/essays/why-collecting-history-online-is-web-1-5/>.

⁷ *September 11 Digital Archive* was built in a bespoke system and was migrated to *Omeka*, 2011-13. *Omeka* officially began at RRCHNM in 2007 and since 2016 is a project of the non-profit corporation, Digital Scholar, <http://omeka.org>.

privacy controls was important for building trust, particularly with vulnerable individuals and anyone who considered sharing raw stories of exploitation and feared retribution. Individuals could share a personal story with the project that was not discoverable on the open web, and internal controls provided the flexibility to change an item's visibility if someone changed their mind about its status. The software provided different levels of user access so that researchers who requested permission from the project could receive credentials for reading all public and private items. Contributors also needed to check a box affirming that they created their submission in an effort to stop resharing of copyrighted materials or media of unknown origins. Since each contribution was private by default, the project team developed assessment criteria for curatorial review and how to identify irrelevant or inappropriate materials. The *Hurricane Digital Memory Bank* team pledged not to edit submissions, nor allow other users to tag an individual's contribution to reassure contributors that no one would change their words or mis-categorize their personal experiences and built trust with the project. These ethical considerations were built into the plugin's configuration options, which were then available for all users of *Omeka*.⁸

Of course, one of the greatest strengths of community-sourced collections can be one its greatest challenges, as projects open to all share "democracy's messiness, contradictions, and disorganization," and have been derided as "critically vacuous."⁹ Any collection of sources demands that historians and researchers approach each artifact critically. The radical inclusivity of many online collecting projects means that the quality of individual contributions and descriptive metadata varies. Sometimes the smallest contributions, however, carry tremendous meaning in bringing to light undertold histories. For example, Rosa Hernandez shared a copy of her father's passport photo with the *Bracero History Archive* carrying a short description: "I would like to contribute a picture of my father who was a Bracero in 1944. He recently passed away and his stories were many." We do not know his full name or his many stories, but we see him. By sharing the photograph with the *Bracero History Archive*, his family ensured that his image will be discoverable, preserved, and connected with other records available within the collections from the National Museum of American History, Brown University, and Oral History Institute at the University of Texas, El Paso. The project's invitation in English and Spanish to former Braceros and their families to tell and preserve their stories was an important way of recognizing the existence of people whose identities were unknown and whose critical role in

⁸ Brennan and Kelly, "Why Collecting History Online Is Web 1.5." *Omeka* has grown since 2007 and offers different versions of the software and add-ons.

⁹ Cohen and Rosenzweig, *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web*. Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America*, (University of Chicago Press, 2012), pp 73-74. In this section, Doss is referring to the September 11 Digital Archive and other online collecting projects that invite contributions from wide audiences without also creating a narrative interpretive layer.

labor history is not understood by most Americans or acknowledged in current political debates over immigration.¹⁰

Concurrently, the thriving field of critical archival studies emerged in the last two decades to critique dominant modes of archival practice and research, while presenting practical approaches to topple structural white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. In some cases, this led to the creation of new digital archives.¹¹ Not surprising to some, historian and activist Howard Zinn is often cited as a pivotal figure in pushing the field of predominately white professional archivists to stop perpetuating historical prejudices and biases found in historical records and to seek out voices of the oppressed.¹² One of the most successful examples is the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) created by Michelle Caswell and Samip Mallick as an independent community archive in 2008 designed to address major gaps they found within physical collections. It has grown to be the major repository for representing the diversity of South Asian American history by supporting a post-custodial model of collecting where individuals bring artifacts to gatherings where they can be digitized and described by the contributor, then returned that day. Individuals may also participate in this process at home by photographing, describing, and uploading digital items online. This process is not extractive, like donating an artifact to an archives or a museum that will not be returned, and potentially never seen. History Harvests also adopted post-custodial practices for documenting the histories of local communities.¹³

SAADA created multiple online collecting projects, including, *First Days* (2013), which prompted immigrants to record or write a short memory describing their first days in the US. Initially focused on recording the diversity of South Asian American immigrant experiences, they opened the project to anyone with an arrival story. Caswell and Mallick introduced a new term

¹⁰ Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, National Museum of American History, Brown University, and Oral History Institute at the University of Texas, El Paso, *Bracero History Archive*, <https://braceroarchive.org/> (2009). The Bracero guest worker program brought millions of Mexicans to the US to work from 1942 to 1964 in low-paying jobs, primarily serving the agriculture industry. Rosa Hernandez, "Passport Picture of My Father- A Bracero," *Bracero History Archive*, accessed January 9, 2024, <https://braceroarchive.org/items/show/3255>.

¹¹ Michelle Caswell, Ricardo Punzalan, and T.-Kay Sangwand, "Critical Archival Studies: An Introduction," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (June 27, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v1i2.50>; Caswell, *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work*. During this time, professional archivists pushed back on the term "digital archive." For a good overview of these discussions and definitions related to archives and digital preservation, see Trevor Owens, "What Do You Mean by Archive? Genres of Usage for Digital Preservers," *The Signal, the Library of Congress* (blog), February 27, 2014. <https://blogs.loc.gov/thesignal/2014/02/what-do-you-mean-by-archive-genres-of-usage-for-digital-preservers>.

¹² Howard Zinn, "Secrecy, Archives, and the Public Interest," 1977, <https://minds.wisconsin.edu/handle/1793/44118>.

¹³Michelle Caswell, "Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives and the Fight Against Symbolic Annihilation," *The Public Historian* 36, no. 4 (2014): 26–37, <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2014.36.4.26>; South Asian American Digital Archive, <https://www.saada.org/>; Francis X. Blouin Jr and William G. Rosenberg, *Processing the Past: Contesting Authorities in History and the Archives*, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, USA, 2011). Patrick D. Jones and William G. Thomas, III, "History Harvest," (2010) <https://historyharvest.unl.edu/>.

for projects like *First Days* as "digital participatory microhistories," which use interactive digital technologies; facilitate the generation of new records directly by contributors; document past or ongoing events; commit to assessing and preserving records; and are made publicly accessible. Similar to the earliest online collecting projects, these also seek to "validate the historical importance of the lived experience of everyday people."¹⁴

Memory workers continued to pursue opportunities to build digital participatory microhistories in the 2010s, such as archivists Stacie Williams and Jared Drake who called for activism within the archival profession to intentionally collect reactions to events in their communities as alternative narratives to official records, so as not "to uphold the status quo version of events without challenging them." They collaboratively built, *A People's Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland*, an independent community-based archive in response to rampant anti-Black police violence across the city, and the United States.¹⁵ Other projects launched, similarly motivated to document responses to police violence in other American cities, including after the death of Freddie Gray in the hands of Baltimore police in 2015. Denise Meringolo collaborated with institutions and individuals throughout the city using a practice she calls "community-centered public history." While typically practiced slowly, she acknowledged that when events impact "the people we serve," a community-centered public historian must work quickly. This action resulted in the launching of the crowdsourced collecting project, *Preserve the Baltimore Uprising Archive*. As Drake found in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Meringolo asserted "histories of social and political disruption often originate in official records that emphasize the perspectives of police officers, government leaders, and media figures. These records become collections, held in archives and museums. The stature of these institutions lends them a false sense of objectivity." This project, like many digital participatory microhistories, created a trusted space for saving the voices and responses of those historically marginalized by these institutions. As Meringolo pressed, "collecting is only a first, necessary step in a community-centered public history process," and that these collections can be "activated" through dialogue and as touchpoints for teaching and learning about broader historical themes.¹⁶ Similarly, the collaborators of the *Antioch A.M.E. History* project acknowledged that the items collected

¹⁴ Michelle Caswell and Samip Mallick, "Collecting the Easily Missed Stories: Digital Participatory Microhistory and the South Asian American Digital Archive," *Archives and Manuscripts* 42, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 73–86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2014.880931>; South Asian American Digital Archive, *First Days Project* (2013-present), <https://firstdays.saada.org/>.

¹⁵ Stacie M. Williams and Jarrett Drake, "Power to the People: Documenting Police Violence in Cleveland," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (April 23, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v1i2.33>. *A People's Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland* (2015) <https://www.archivingpoliceviolence.org/>.

¹⁶ Denise D. Meringolo et al., "Creating Knowledge with the Public: Disrupting the Expert/Audience Hierarchy," *Daedalus*, Summer 2022, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/creating-knowledge-public-disrupting-expertaudience-hierarchy>; Drake, "Insurgent Citizens: The Manufacture of Police Records in Post-Katrina New Orleans and Its Implications for Human Rights;" Denise Meringolo, *Preserve the Baltimore Uprising Archive* (2015), <https://baltimoreuprising2015.org/>.

related to the church's history were not necessarily the most valued result of their efforts. Rather, they asserted, the process of collecting led to profound discussions of uncovered pasts that were then examined together as a community.¹⁷

We see more projects articulating and publishing their community-based practices and values on their websites alongside the collections, such as *Archivo de Respuestas Emergencias de Puerto Rico*, focused on recent disaster and recovery stories pertaining to Hurricane María (2017), Guayanilla earthquakes (2020), and COVID-19 (2020). According to the bilingual site, the project “embodies decolonial practice by rejecting extractive notions of knowledge production, upending colonial notions of power and expertise, and refusing the erasure of the lived experiences of Puerto Ricans.” In reviewing the history of online collecting projects, we can see how memory workers are committed to making space for diverse voices and helping specific communities decide how and in what ways they want their experiences to be represented in archives and collections. Sadly, it is also striking to see tragedy as a primary motivator for launching online projects this century following mass shootings and terrorist attacks, police brutality, climate disasters, and the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁸

For many years, historians interested in starting their own collecting projects found few publications to consult outside of Dan Cohen's and Roy Rosenzweig's, *Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web*. *Digital History* remains an excellent resource to help memory workers understand the history of web technologies and learn basic methods for designing an online collecting project. By the mid-2010s, editors and publishers became more receptive to this style of intellectual output and an increased interest in digital public history drove demand for additional literature to advise individuals pursuing this type of community-sourced digital project from its earliest stages to long-term stewardship. Today, one might begin by reading case studies found in edited collections, white papers, reports, and tutorials. The multi-authored *Collective Wisdom Handbook: Perspectives*

¹⁷ Julia Brock et al., “‘Sending Out a Little Light’: The Antioch A.M.E Digital Archive,” in *Digital Community Engagement*, ed. Rebecca Wingo, Jason Heppler, and Paul Schadewald (Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati Press, 2020), <https://ucincinnati.press.manifoldapp.org/read/digital-community-engagement/section/1c3ae830-f43b-48f0-b822-601c3a0c81ee>; *Antioch A.M.E. Digital Archive*, (2016) <https://antiochamehistory.org/archive/>.

¹⁸ Michigan State University, University of Puerto Rico at Río Piedras, and University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez, *Archivo de Respuestas Emergencias de Puerto Rico* (2020), <https://arepr.org/s/es/page/index>. Fittingly, the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and Media launched a digital memory bank in honor of its founder following his death in 2007, *Thanks, Roy*, <https://thanksroy.org>. This is not meant to be a comprehensive list: Virginia Tech, *April 16th Archive* (2008), <https://www.april16archive.org/>; Northeastern University (2013), *Our Marathon: Boston Bombing Digital Archive*, <https://marathon.library.northeastern.edu/>; Washington University, St. Louis, *Documenting Ferguson* (2014), <http://digital.wustl.edu/ferguson/index.html>; *A People's Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland* (2015), <https://www.archivingpoliceviolence.org/>; *Preserve the Baltimore Uprising Archive* (2015), <https://baltimoreuprising2015.org/>; *Hurricane Digital Memory Bank* (2006), <http://hurricanearchive.org>; *Archivo de Respuestas Emergencias de Puerto Rico* (2020), <https://arepr.org/s/es/page/index>; *A Journal of the Plague Year* (2020), <https://covid-19archive.org/>.

on *Crowdsourcing in Cultural Heritage*, serves as a practice guide to planning and implementing different types of crowdsourcing projects that also shares lessons learned from different memory institutions and professionals. Academics aspiring to work closely with community partners, should consult essays in *Digital Community Engagement: Partnering Communities with the Academy*, edited by Rebecca Wingo, Jason Heppler, and Paul Schadewald, for advice on establishing equitable, respectful, and productive collaborations. It is important to consider the lifecycle of any digital project during its planning stages, and “The Socio-Technical Sustainability Roadmap,” developed by the Visual Media Workshop at the University of Pittsburgh, helps project teams to identify the technologies, people, and resources needed to produce, support, and maintain an online collecting initiative. Importantly, these publications are freely available online making this advice more accessible while supporting inclusive historical practices.¹⁹

One rationale for collecting digitally has always been to facilitate computational analysis of the submissions through bulk access to the data, which requires careful consideration from project planners and maintainers. The “Vancouver Statement on Collections as Data” encourages projects to establish ethical policies regarding access in their earliest stages, when possible, and commit to making collections widely available while balancing issues of privacy, copyright, and cultural norms. It also recommends that projects and institutions regularly revisit and reconsider these questions as their audiences and technologies change, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) software.²⁰ Of course, cultural heritage institutions have been experimenting with AI software for many years to increase discoverability and the accessibility of their digitized collections, such as recommendation-based browsing interfaces, speech-to-text transcriptions of audio and video, and keywords describing images through techniques using machine learning, natural language processing, and computer vision.²¹ This type of work

¹⁹Cohen and Rosenzweig, *Digital History*; Mia Ridge, Samantha Blickhan, and Meghan Ferriter, *Collective Wisdom Handbook: Perspectives on Crowdsourcing in Cultural Heritage*, 2021,

<https://doi.org/10.21428/a5d7554f.1b80974b>; Wingo, Heppler, and Schadewald, eds., *Digital Community Engagement: Partnering Communities with the Academy*; The Visual Media Workshop, University of Pittsburgh, “The Socio-Technical Sustainability Roadmap,” 2018, <https://sites.haa.pitt.edu/sustainabilityroadmap/>.

²⁰ Thomas Padilla, Hannah Scates Kettler, Stewart Varner, and Yasmeen Shorish, “Vancouver Statement on Collections as Data,” Zenodo, September 13, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8342171>. Although designed for documenting social media, the white paper published by *Documenting the Now* also offers excellent advice for creating policies governing ethical collection practices. See Bergis Jules, Ed Summers, and Vernon Mitchell, Jr, “Documenting The Now White Paper | Ethical Considerations for Archiving Social Media Content Generated by Contemporary Social Movements: Challenges, Opportunities, and Recommendations,” Shift Collective, 2018. <https://www.docnow.io/docs/docnow-whitepaper-2018.pdf>.

²¹ Elizabeth Merritt, “Exploring the Explosion of Museum AI,” *American Alliance of Museums* (blog), October 2, 2018, <https://www.aam-us.org/2018/10/02/exploring-the-explosion-of-museum-ai/>. David C Brock, “A Museum’s Experience With AI,” *CHM* (blog), February 3, 2022, <https://computerhistory.org/blog/a-museums-experience-with-ai/>; Maria Kessler and Sofie Andersen, “Scenes from a Salon on Artificial Intelligence,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (blog), accessed January 2, 2024, <https://www3.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/2020/digital-salon-artificial-intelligence-open-access>. For more context on history and AI, see the special

typically occurs within closed systems, meaning the data is not necessarily used to train commercial large language models, such as those feeding ChatGPT. Technology, we know, is never neutral and is only as good as the people using it and the quality of the data, which may amplify existing racial, gendered, and cultural biases in collections. The Library of Congress and Smithsonian Institution have developed frameworks governing future work using AI. The Smithsonian pledges to “implement tools and algorithms that are respectful to the individuals and communities that are represented by the information in our museum, library, and archival collections,” and that cause no harm. Meanwhile, the new platform *Latimer* is designed to fight bias in large language models that power chatbots by training its data set on sources representing the “cultural and history of black and brown people,” including community-based oral histories, local archives, and Indigenous folk tales. It is possible that some materials found in these community-sourced collections could be used to fight bias in AI training models. This work requires that humans stay in the loop to review and remove potentially harmful materials. As we can see from these resources, policies do not need to be crafted from scratch. The Library of Congress encourages working openly, iteratively, and in collaboration with other cultural heritage institutions, and with data and computer scientists, because “no single organization can navigate the change and impact of AI alone.”²²

Luckily for interested project teams, they do not need to build their own digital infrastructure because there are free, non-commercial, platforms designed for online collecting projects. *Omeka* is one of the most popular software choices for the projects discussed in this essay. Detailed documentation on the project’s website walks users through installing and configuring necessary plugins. Many academic libraries publish tutorials as *LibGuides* and offer in-person consultations to assist with the technical setup. For historians seeking to collect conversations and oral histories but not interested in hosting their own project, they can download the *StoryCorps* mobile application and record with their phones. Each recording can be shared with *StoryCorps* to be saved at the Library of Congress. Although not explicitly designed for collecting projects, other open-source software can be configured to support this work, including *Collection Builder*, *WordPress*, and *Drupal*.²³

section edited by R. Darrell Meadows and Joshua Sternfeld, “Artificial Intelligence and the Practice of History Special Forum,” *American Historical Review*, 128, 3 (September 2023): 1349-89.

²²*Latimer*, named for African American inventor, Lewis Latimer, <http://latimer.ai>; Abigail Potter, “Introducing the LC Labs Artificial Intelligence Planning Framework, *The Signal Blog*, the Library of Congress,” November 15, 2023, <https://blogs.loc.gov/thesignal/2023/11/introducing-the-lc-labs-artificial-intelligence-planning-framework>; Smithsonian Institution, “AI Values Statement,” <https://datascience.si.edu/ai-values-statement>.

²³ For help using, configuring, and installing *Omeka S* and the Collecting module, see: <https://omeka.org/s/docs/user-manual/modules/collecting/>. *StoryCorps* offers multiple ways for individuals and organizations to record and share conversations that will be archived at the Library of Congress: <https://storycorps.org/participate/>. *Collection Builder*, <https://collectionbuilder.github.io>, *WordPress*, <https://wordpress.org>, and *Drupal* <https://drupal.org>.

With standards-based software installed, strong ethical access policies in place, roles and responsibilities defined, and lines of communications open among all stakeholders, online collecting projects, or digital participatory microhistories, should be engaged in an ongoing multi-step process of digital preservation, which librarian and technologist Trevor Owens describes as a “craft.” Owens asserts there always will be new formats, new techniques, and new demands from researchers and contributors for using these sources that require attention and care, because “there is no end for digital preservation.”²⁴ The Library of Congress committed to preserving the *September 11th Digital Archive* in 2003 as its first born-digital acquisition and data was transferred on hard drives in 2005, which are still not easily accessible by researchers in LC’s digital collections. Challenges remain for institutions and groups stewarding these collections from early 2000s, in particular, to provide ongoing access to these websites and the contributions held within while consulting with the communities who shared their experiences. Project teams must regularly review and balance the benefits and challenges of serving as custodians of these collections.

As with most digital projects, I worry that important community-sourced collections remain difficult to discover by the researchers seeking out these voices and perspectives. Without major institutional commitments to maintain their web presence and interfaces, and lacking entries in federated library catalogs like WorldCat, these carefully curated and planned collections may be underused. Community-sourced digital collections can, however, result in the telling of more inclusive histories, but only if researchers can find these projects and work with the sources. For more than twenty years, *JAH*’s Digital History Reviews section reserved space to surface and peer review these projects and remains an excellent source for discovering digital history projects. Historians seeking online collecting efforts can also check newer resources such as *Reviews in Digital Humanities*, edited by Jennifer Guiliano and Roopika Risam and the National Council on Public History’s online directory.²⁵ I am pleased that historians still want to collect digital evidence online with and from communities responding to events important to them, and that there is stable open-source software that supports this type of community-sourced digital public history.

²⁴ Trevor Owens, *The Theory and Craft of Digital Preservation* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), pp. 72, 178, 200.

²⁵ Jennifer Guiliano and Roopika Risam, editors, *Reviews in Digital Humanities*, <https://reviewsindh.pubpub.org/> and National Council on Public History, Digital Projects Archive, <https://ncph.org/digital-public-history-directory/>.