The Center for History and New Media: An Overview

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Since 1994, the Center for History and New Media (CHNM) at George Mason University has used digital media and computer technology to democratize history to incorporate multiple voices, reach diverse audiences, and encourage popular participation in presenting and preserving the past. CHNM combines cutting edge digital media with the latest and best historical scholarship to promote an inclusive and democratic understanding of the past as well as a broad historical literacy. CHNM's work has been recognized with major awards and grants from the American Historical Association, the National Humanities Center, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the Department of Education, the Library of Congress, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), and the Sloan, Hewlett, Rockefeller, Gould, Delmas, and Kellogg foundations. CHNM's work over the past decade has fallen largely into five main areas: teaching and learning through digital resources; collecting and preserving history online; digital tools and resources; scholarship; and public outreach.

Teaching and Learning with Digital Resources: CHNM has been particularly active in using digital media to improve teaching and learning in history at the high school and college level. Many of our earliest projects were organized in partnership with the American Social History Project (ASHP) at the City University of New York. For example, *History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course* on the Web is an award-winning site directed at teachers of the U.S. History survey course. It offers resources for survey instructors including: primary documents in text, image, and audio; an annotated guide to relevant websites; guides for analyzing primary sources with interactive exercises; model teaching assignments; sample syllabi; and moderated discussions about teaching. More than one million people visit *History Matters* each year.

Another partnership with ASHP is *Liberty , Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*, which presents an extraordinary archive of some of the most important documentary evidence from the Revolution, including 338 texts, 245 images, and a number of maps and songs. Lynn Hunt of UCLA and Jack Censer of Mason both renowned scholars of the Revolution served as principal authors and editors.

Whereas *History Matters* and *Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity* provide broad overviews of resources on large areas of historical study, *The Lost Museum* for which production centered at ASHP offers a highly focused look at a specific topic (P.T. Barnum's American Museum). *The Lost Museum* uses this narrow subject as a window into the

broader subject of antebellum life and culture. It recreates the space of Barnum's museum and allows you to experience what it may have been like to enter it in 1865. Students entering the space are asked to solve a mystery who burned down the museum? Solving the mystery requires students to develop a more sophisticated understanding of society, culture, and politics in the era of the Civil War.

In the past few years, CHNM has been particularly active in exploring ways to improve teaching and learning in world history. *World History Matters* offers an online resource center to help world history teachers and students locate, analyze, and learn from online primary sources and further their understanding of the complex nature of world history, especially the issues of cross-cultural contact and globalization. Our world history efforts include *World History Sources* and *Women and World History*. Both offer guides to locating high quality world history sources online as well as models and strategies for using them in the classroom.

In all of our education projects, we have been especially interested in these projects in promoting active historical inquiry and teaching students to think like historians. Two new projects make that approach their central focus. *Historical Thinking Matters*, a partnership with Stanford University's Graduate School of Education funded by the Hewlett Foundation, focuses on key topics in U.S. history, and is designed to teach students how to critically read primary sources and how to critique and construct historical narratives. Similarly, the *Object of History*, a partnership with the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History funded by IMLS, focuses on teaching students how to make sense of a particular kind of historical evidence namely, the material culture artifacts that fill museums like the Smithsonian.

Even the best digital resources are of limited value without being supported by professional development for classroom teachers. Aided by funding from the U.S. Department of Education, CHNM has been working with hundreds of Virginia teachers through the *Teaching American History* program. These projects were created by Virginia school districts (Loudon, Alexandria , Fairfax , Clarke, Culpeper, Fauquier, Frederick , Manassas City , Orange , and Winchester) in collaboration with CHNM and the Department of History and Art History at Mason. The projects provide extensive and in-depth professional development opportunities for teachers to improve their content knowledge of history by working with professional historians and museum educators.

Collecting and Preserving History Online: For the past decade, through *ECHO: Exploring and Collecting History Online Science, Technology, Industry* its progeny, the *September 11 Digital Archive*, and other projects, CHNM has explored methods, tools, and technologies for transferring information, data, and documents not just from historians to an audience, but also in the other direction, from an audience or set of historical subjects to the scholars who wish to document their recollections and gather from them important historical materials. In particular, with the active encouragement and support of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, CHNM has taken a central role in fostering the use of the Internet to collect the history of science and technology a response to the dilemma that the output of scientists and engineers is growing at a much

faster rate than the means of collecting and documenting that work.

Echo was launched in 2001 to pioneer and promote strategies for collecting historical primary sources online. *Echo* hosts free workshops and consultation services for historians, provides tools to find and manage digital materials. *Echo* has also run a set of topical experiments in online collecting. Finally, *Echo* provides a popular centralized guide and portal to history of science and technology on the web.

The *September 11 Digital Archive* has similarly used electronic media to collect, preserve, and present the past in this case focusing on the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York, Virginia, and Pennsylvania and the public responses to them. It has become the leading digital repository of material related to the events of 9/11/2001 and includes more than 150,000 first-hand accounts, emails, images, and other digital materials. This project has inspired a new project, the *[Hurricane Digital Memory Bank](#)*, which will collect the stories and digital artifacts related to the Katrina, Rita, and Wilma hurricanes of 2005.

The creation of these digital collecting projects has inevitably involved us in issues of digital preservation. We have worked with the Library of Congress, for example, to create a permanent repository of the *September 11 Digital Archive.* The Library of Congress is also supporting our partnership with the University of Maryland to preserve the records on the birth of the dot com era. In addition, the *[Critical Infrastructure Protection Oral History Project](#)* documents the history of critical infrastructure through a digital archive, an online bibliography, historical interviews, personal narratives, and an interactive timeline.

Digital Tools and Resources: CHNM has developed a number of online databases and other resources for historians and history teachers, including a listing of 1,200 history departments worldwide; a practical guide to Digital History (a book by Dan Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig that is published in print by University of Pennsylvania Press and available free online at http://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory); a collection of essays on history and new media; and a popular set of free digital tools for historians and teachers, including *[Web Scrapbook](#)*, *[Survey Builder](#)*, *[Scribe](#)* (a note taking application designed with historians in mind), *[Poll Builder](#)*, *[H-Bot](#)* (an automated historical fact finder), and *[Syllabus Finder](#)*, which allows you to find and compare syllabi from thousands of universities and colleges on any topic. We are building on some of these earlier efforts to create digital tools specifically for teachers and students as part of a project called *The Lessons of History*, which is funded by the NEH Edsitement program.

Our newest and most ambitious digital tools project is *[Firefox Scholar](#)*, a collaboration with the Virtual Library of Virginia. It will offer a set of free, open source web browser tools, which will enhance scholars' access to and use of digital library and museum collections. *Firefox Scholar* will operate within the browser window and allow users to recognize and capture metadata from online objects, and collect documents, images, and citations from the web. *Firefox Scholar* will relieve libraries and museums of the need to build personal collection tools for their users and greatly leverage the substantial investment they have already made in digitizing collection materials. Like the Firefox

browser, *Firefox Scholar* will be open and extensible, allowing others who are building digital tools for researchers to expand on the platform.

Scholarship: Projects like *Firefox Scholar* provide tools for historians to research and analyze the past. But will digital media change the nature of scholarly argument, communication, and publication? In order to encourage experimentation in this arena, *American Quarterly* in collaboration with the American Studies Crossroads Project and the CHNM organized an experiment in hypertext publishing. Four essays covering such diverse topics as photos as legal evidence, the Spanish-American War in film, early comic strips, and Arnold Schwarzenegger offer contrasting approaches to using digital media for scholarly presentations.

Imaging the French Revolution is another ambitious experiment in digital scholarship. In a series of essays, seven scholars analyze forty-two images of crowds and crowd violence in the French Revolution. Offering the most relevant examples and comments from an on-line forum, those same scholars consider issues of interpretation, methodology, and the impact of digital media on scholarship.

Finally, *Interpreting the Declaration of Independence by Translation* is a roundtable of historians brought together to discuss the translation and reception of the Declaration of Independence in Japan, Mexico, Russia, China, Poland, Italy, Germany, Spain, and Israel. In addition to these reflections, the site includes actual translations of the Declaration into several different languages and "retranslations" back into English to illustrate the effects of translation on how a key historical document has been understood.

Public Outreach: Scholarly projects like these find a more non-academic audience when placed in the free space of the web. But CHNM has also developed some projects with an explicit focus on broad, public audiences. *Gulag: Many Days, Many Lives*, a web-based exhibit funded by NEH and being developed in collaboration with the Gulag Museum in Perm, Russia, will provide a multifaceted consideration of the human struggle for survival in the Gulag, the brutal and often lethal Soviet system of forced labor concentration camps. For *Crossroads of War: Civil War and Homefront in Mid-Atlantic Border Region Crossroads*, CHNM will assist in the design, production, and hosting of a online exhibition and archive on the Civil War in the mid-Atlantic border region for the Catoctin Center for Regional Studies at Frederick Community College. Lastly, *History News Network* features articles by historians of all political persuasions. The site places current events in historical perspective. Edited by Rick Shenkman, *History News Network* is frequently read by tens of thousands of historians and people interested in the intersection of the past and the present.

For more information, please write us at chnm@gmu.edu or visit our website (http://chnm.gmu.edu) to check out our new and continuing projects and tools.